PERCEPTIONS OF SENIOR INTERNATIONAL OFFICERS' EFFORTS REGARDING THE

ACCULTURATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A

TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Ann-Margaret J. Themistocleous

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe Senior International Officers' lived experiences regarding attitudes and beliefs about the adjustment of international students in private and public universities in the Southeast region of the United States. The theory guiding this study is Berry's theory of acculturation as it relates to a person's adjustment to a new culture as they either assimilate, separate, integrate, or marginalize. The central research question focuses on the experiences of Senior International Officers regarding the acculturation process of international students on their respective college campuses. The methodology included a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological approach. The participants were 10 Senior International Officers who work at a university in the United States for at least three years and are members of the Association for International Educators or the Association of International Education Administrators. Participants were from settings that included universities that enroll at least 50 or more international students and have the approval to enroll international students on F1 visas from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Data collection included interviews, focus groups, and letter writing. Data was analyzed with coding and theme delineation. The themes presented from the data were understanding social support, understanding campus resources, understanding acculturation as an outcome, understanding international student assessment, and understanding professional networking resources.

Keywords: international students, acculturation, higher education, adjustment

Copyright Page

Dedication

For my daughter Annie who is my best friend and an incredible human being. I am so proud of the woman you have become.

To my husband Anthony for his love and support. I could not have done this without you.

My parents Catherine and John Stegeman: They raised me to be patient, kind, caring, and an all-around good person.

To all the international students who take the challenge of studying abroad in another country: You are an inspiration to me.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my chair, Dr. Woodbridge for her support, wisdom, compassion, and support through the dissertation process. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Hernandez for being a cheerleader for doctoral students and Christian education.

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List of Abbreviations

Association for International Education Administrators (AIEA)

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD)

Foreign Student Advisor (FSA)

Institute for International Education (IIE)

National Association of International Educators (NAFSA)

Principal Designated School Official (PDSO)

Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)

Senior International Officer (SIO)

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Internationalization is one of the most prominent aspects of contemporary higher education in the 21st century (Rumbley et al., 2021). Therefore, many colleges in the United States focused on increasing the number of international students on campus to assist with their internationalization efforts (Di Maria, 2019; NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2019). Most research focused on international students' adjustment to college campuses and American culture. Studies have shown that international students have a broad range of adjustment issues, including cultural, social, and psychological concerns (Koo et al., 2021a; Ma, 2020; Ma, 2020; Mukminin, 2019; Xing & Bolden, 2019). Additional research has shown that social interaction with peers, staff, and university faculty helped international students with their adjustment positively (Li et al., 2021; Sadewo et al., 2020; Sarmiento et al., 2019; Shu et al., 2020). Those in higher education leadership positions, including senior international officers, are responsible for implementing supportive programming for international students and assisting in their acculturation. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of senior international officers to understand perceptions of the acculturation of international students on their campus, which could improve the awareness of higher education administrators working directly with international students. In addition, the purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the research study, including a discussion on the historical, social, and theoretical background of the problem. This chapter also describes the study's problem, purpose statement, and significance. The research question and sub-questions are explained, definitions related to the study, and a summary are provided.

Background

The background regarding international students' adjustment and acculturation must include a historical background examining the growth and evolution of international education in the United States. Therefore, this section summarizes the relevant historical literature on international student enrollment and the growth of support within higher education for this specific population. Social background concepts on international student acculturation within higher education are also addressed, and a summary of the key theoretical concepts of acculturation is examined.

Historical Context

Before the 1900s, very few international students were enrolled in colleges compared to the larger society (Bevin & Lucas, 2007). In the nineteenth century, missionaries from America traveled around the globe and assisted with increasing the number of international students in the U.S. by supporting people from other lands coming to the U.S. for Christian education (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). A Christian support group, in which local groups and units were formed in colleges where at least five students or more took part in the association, was one of the first organized, supportive groups for international students.

Before World War I, international student enrollment was low compared to domestic enrollment (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). In 1912, less than five thousand international students were studying in U.S. colleges (Bevin & Lucas, 2007). Within ten years, that number increased to 8,357 because educators and legislators began to see the need for services involving international students, called foreign students, at the time. Before World War II, organizations designed to promote international higher education, future peace, and mutual understanding were founded, including the following: in 1919, the Institute of International Education was created in the

United States; in 1934, the British Council; and in 1925, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdeienst in Germany (Bevin & Lucas, 2007; de Wit & Merkx, 2021). The Institute for International Education is an organization supported by government grants and philanthropic Americans and was designed to support student mobility and international education in the U.S. (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). After World War II, the Fulbright program was created to prevent future conflicts by sharing knowledge and cultural understanding (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; de Wit & Merkx, 2021). The Fulbright program was introduced as part of a U.S. Congress bill that called for the sale of surplus war property to fund the exchange of ideas worldwide to promote peace (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Initially, the bill only covered students traveling abroad for study and research; however, years later, the bill was amended to include support for bringing international students and scholars to America. While scholars initially considered the Fulbright program to support peaceful cultural exchange, some academics, determined that the Fulbright program was based upon power dynamics; there were hopes that the international or visiting students to be transformed once they had encounters with American society (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). The students selected would return home and share their experiences abroad, including spreading U.S. practices and policies abroad; therefore, the educational system, with the federal government's support, was an instrument of U.S. power on a national and global scale.

The Institute for International Education started a yearly census of international students, and in 1949, it was found that there were 26,759 international students from 151 countries studying in American colleges (Institute for International Education [IIE], 1949). After World War II, international student enrollment in the U.S. began to grow slowly and later exponentially (de Wit & Merkx, 2021). Many international students were provided discounted tuition with housing supplied by grants, scholarships from rotary clubs, or charitable contributions from

Christian churches (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Assisting international students became a new profession, and a few campuses had officials to support international students at that time. The original college support units began with the faculty given the title of foreign student advisors. A new professional organization was developed to meet the foreign student advisors' needs. In 1948, a new organization called the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA) was implemented with a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to help professionals meet the growing need for foreign student support (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). NAFSA later changed its name to the Association for International Educators to avoid calling international students' foreigners.

International student enrollments in the United States were historically impacted by America's immigration policies (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). After World War II, when the U.S. entered the Cold War with the Soviet Union, most people were concerned with communism, which impacted international enrollment, and immigration regulations were designed ensure that international students were questioned when they entered the U.S. and make a pledge not to join the Communist Party while studying in America. Typically, when immigration policies change, they shift to reflect the country's current social and political climate.

However, international student enrollment continued to grow steadily, and in 1953, approximately 34,000 international students were studying in colleges within the U.S. (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). In the mid-1950s, a study of American students from over fifty colleges in the U.S. showed that interaction on campus was more impactful to them than international travel, military service, engagement in student activities, or interactions with faculty (Bevin & Lucas, 2007). Educators and administrators noticed these reports and started realizing the need to increase the international student population and support the international students' unique needs. More importantly, in the 1950s, the international students' adjustment needs were starting to be

addressed by colleges in America (Bevin & Lucas, 2007). International students showed a range of problems, like trouble with American food and homesickness, and colleges that understood the necessity of having programs to help these students adjust to American culture, not simply their college dorm or the English language. Research on international student adjustment and acculturation began at this time. Before this time, research on foreign visitors to another culture was mainly focused on the adjustment and acculturation processes.

During the 1960s and 1970s, international enrollments expanded because the U.S. established the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson supported international exchanges to improve cultural exchanges and promote American values (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Oberg, 1960). At this time, the critical feature of colleges enrolling international students was the orientation of incoming international students, and international enrollment grew to 135,00 international students (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; IIE, 1969). Research on international students focused on adjustment to U.S. culture, and Hull (1978) found that many international students in U.S. colleges were loyal to their cultural or religious beliefs and held onto them. Sjogren and Shearer (1973) found that international students had hostility toward the dominant culture and issues with depression, social withdrawal, loss of self-esteem, and difficulty in communication. Many international students felt marginalized or were selecting marginalization due to the challenges the new culture presented. Researchers found that problems with international students varied depending upon their country of origin (Spaulding & Flack, 1976).

During the 1980s, 286,340 international students from 185 countries were enrolled in U.S. colleges (Bevin & Lucas, 2007; IIE, 1979). Around this time, Iran was the top country sending students to study in the U.S. (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). While political events impacted

international enrollment from certain countries, enrollment continued to grow. Near the end of the twentieth century, America competed with universities from Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada for international student enrollment (Maslan, 1995). Recruitment of international students was something that colleges were usually taking part in before the 1980s; however, during this time, colleges began to work on developing international recruitment strategies (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). As the population of international students grew nationwide, administrators started to research the international students' needs, including their adjustment to a new culture, making friendships, and the impact of faculty support systems. Additional studies on international students showed that it took varying amounts of time and approaches for students to adjust to college life and that the acculturation process was influenced by a variety of factors, such as English language ability, previous international travel, country or culture of origin, and socio-economic background (Marion, 1986).

The 1999-2000 Open Doors report showed that 514,723 international students were studying in the U.S (Bevin & Lucas, 2007; IIE, 1999). However, since the person responsible for the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 was an international student from Kuwait attending a school for engineering in Kansas, there was an impetus for tracking international students (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). President Clinton signed the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 into law, which impacted every international student in the U.S. and every college with international students because colleges were mandated to report on international students, including tracking and obtaining necessary information to protect the U.S. citizens (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Rubin, 1997; Ward, 1996). After the 9/11 attacks on America, there was a demand for increased support of strategies to monitor and limit immigration and international student enrollment; the enrollment of international students dropped for a few years

and after that continued to rise (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Jaeger & Burnett, 2005). Jaeger and

Burnett (2005) suggested that changes, like those imposed after the World Trade Bombing and

the 9/11 attacks, negatively impact international students and actively constrain U.S. academics.

However, it was believed that the organization of reporting on international students also led to

colleges requiring at least one person to have contact in a university with the international

student reporting to the federal government; therefore, most colleges took the opportunity to

grow their international students' support services to meet this requirement (Bevis & Lucas,

2007).

Social Context

As universities continued their internationalization efforts, they focused on recruiting

international students to meet this goal (Martel, 2021). International students bring a broad range

of skills and knowledge that adds to the U.S.'s workforce and intellectual capital (Di Maria,

2021). International students help diversify colleges and universities and add to the U.S.

economy (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2019). The increase in international

students at American colleges and universities allows the campus community to learn about

other countries and develop cross-cultural engagement abilities (Contreras Aguirre, 2019).

In the 2019-2020 academic year, U.S.'s international student enrollment was 1,075,885,

with anticipated continued growth (Bevin & Lucas, 2007; Martel, 2021). However, this figure

dropped by 15% in one year, primarily due to the coronavirus disease (COVID) pandemic. The

number of international students in the U.S. has recently surpassed 914,095 (Israel & Batalova,

2021; Martel, 2021). International students come from over 200 countries and a broad range of

cultures, including various languages and religions (Martel, 2021).

International students entering the United States to study face challenges, including problems adjusting to a new culture (Koo et al., 2021a). International students studying in U.S. higher education institutions encountered difficulties with adjustments to the American educational system, social customs and norms, language barriers, finances, and homesickness (J. Ma, 2020; Mukminin, 2019; Xing & Bolden, 2019). Higher education administrators focused on developing strategies to assist international students with transitioning to the higher education system in America and the acculturation process (Krsmanovic, 2020). The acculturation process is a way to frame the psychological and sociocultural adjustment process of international students (Li et al., 2021). However, little attention has been given to the senior international officers who work on recommending and implementing programs to support international students with acculturation.

Charles and Heyl (2021) suggested that leadership is crucial to advancing internationalization priorities on university and college campuses. In addition, while the term senior international officer (SIO) is commonly used in the U.S., the leadership position does not exist on many campuses worldwide. Di Maria (2019) suggested that the term SIO is more common at well-known and prominent colleges than in previous years (R. M. Helms & Brajkovic, 2017). In the past 20 years, the senior international officer's role has become increasingly popular in the United States, and female SIOs have increased in this administrative role from 28% in 2006 to 48% in 2017 (Di Maria, 2019; R. M. Helms & Brajkovic, 2017). While many studies focused on the adjustment of international students and their acculturation process, scant research has been completed on the SIO's role as an administrative leader and their perceptions of the acculturation process regarding the growing number of international students on U.S. campuses. Those who might be impacted by and benefit from this research on this topic

include SIOs, higher education leaders, international educators, university faculty, and international students.

Theoretical Context

International students enter a new culture and environment when they leave their home countries to study at an American university. The study of these students' adjustment to a new environment and culture was named culture shock by Oberg (1960); culture shock examines the process a person goes through when visiting a new country or experiencing a new culture. The author's theory suggests that the four stages of culture shock include the honeymoon phase; irritation phase, also known as hostility and aggression; adjustment phase; and adaptation. Pedersen (1995) built upon Oberg's theory to include two additional phases: re-entry and reverse culture shock. While the term culture shock has been given a negative connotation, it is understood as a process that sojourners go through while living in another culture, and the stages can assist in understanding the process.

Berry's (1974, 1980) theory of acculturation viewed the adjustment process as the sojourner selecting a coping strategy when faced with a new society and culture. The acculturation theory incorporates four strategies that sojourners select when adjusting to a new culture, including assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1974, 1997, 1980). Acculturation is not always a static condition, and there are times when they are not making adjustment strategy decisions because they are discriminated against by the dominant society, such as marginalization (Berry, 1980).

According to Furnham (2019), Lysgaand (1955) developed the u-curve theory to explain the adjustment people go through in a new culture, including initial adjustment, crisis, and regained adjustment. The sojourner's level of adaptation over time includes satisfaction with the

new environment, culture declines, and culture increases. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) added to Lysgaand's u-curve theory to include the additional process of the w-curve to account for re-acculturation experienced upon return to their home country (Furnham, 2019). Furnham and Bochner (1986) suggested that a sojourner with a positive adjustment to the new culture should display a u-curve and a w-curve after re-entry. In addition, Bochner (1982) suggested that those unsuccessful in adjusting to a new culture would have a flat and declining curve upon re-entry.

Hofstede's (1980) theory of cultural dimensions includes four dimensions of culture: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and uncertainty. By grading a culture on each of these dimensions, one can measure the complexity of the culture and its society, which can assist the sojourner in understanding the society and culture so that they can factor in if it will be harder to acculturate due to these graded dimensions. Minkov (2007) added two additional dimensions to the theory, including long-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint. Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions allows researchers to gain additional information about individual international student's cultures, which can improve understanding regarding which cultures might have a more challenging time adjusting to the new society based on cultural norms.

Problem Statement

The problem is that international students may struggle to adjust and need assistance with acculturation. Research demonstrated that international students encounter different issues when adjusting to life in a foreign country, such as problems with language barriers, cultural and societal norms, finances, and a different educational system (Koo et al., 2021a; Ma, 2020; Xing & Bolden, 2019). Studying and living in another country can lead to experiences of acculturative stress because of the life changes occurring during the acculturation process (Koo et al., 2021a;

Luo et al., 2019). While much of the existing research focused on the international students' adjustment and acculturation, there has not been much research on how those in leadership positions within higher education understand the acculturation process of international students or how to interpret it when making decisions regarding supporting international students during their adjustment process. Most related literature on international students' acculturation examined sociocultural adaptation (Rivas et al., 2019; Sarmiento et al., 2019). Research also focused on the psychological adaptation of international students to a new culture and the impact on their self-esteem (Li et al., 2021). Koo et al.'s (2021a) research explored how insufficient English language proficiency impacts international student acculturation. Law and Liu (2021) and Kalebasi (2021) found that college support systems, like staff, faculty, and peers, assist international students with adjustment. However, the gap in the literature is how administrators, specifically senior international officers responsible for international student adjustment and the implementation of supportive programming, assist with the acculturation process.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the perception of Senior International Officers regarding efforts to support international student acculturation at higher educational institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. At this stage in the research, international student acculturation will be generally defined as an adjustment to a new culture.

Significance of the Study

This research's significance is based on diversity initiatives within higher education, including supporting international students with acculturation. It will also extend the research on higher education leadership as it relates to senior international officers within colleges in the

United States and their efforts to assist international students' adjustment to the college campus and foreign culture.

Theoretical Significance

This research study will add to the current knowledge and research completed by Berry (1974, 1980, 1997, 2005) on acculturation and adjustment to a new culture. Berry focused on how foreigners adapted to a new culture and suggested that the sojourner can select from four coping strategies. International students, like sojourners to a new country and culture, face adjustment issues. This study will add to Berry's acculturation theory by discovering the senior international officers' perceptions of international students' acculturation. This study extends the understanding of the international student's acculturation process and adds new perceptions regarding acculturation for university leadership.

Empirical Significance

This study will add to the growing body of literature on the acculturation of international students, which has shown that international student acculturation is supported when faculty, staff, and peers are included in students' social networks (Ballo et al., 2019; Bui et al., 2021a; Girmay, 2019; Lau et al., 2019; Luo et al., 2019; Whisted et al., 2021). The empirical significance will add to the relatively new research on senior international officers' role in supporting international students' acculturation. This research may also add to R. Wang and BrckaLorenz's (2018) research on higher education leadership and how campuses can support international students.

Practical Significance

This study has practical significance because it supports Charles and Heyl's (2021) and Di Maria's (2019) research on international students' acculturation and conceptualizes the views

of higher education leaders who spearhead internationalization efforts on college campuses. Therefore, a better understanding of the perceptions of those who implement programs for international students can support adjustment to university campuses across the nation (R. Wang & BrckaLorenz, 2018). Focusing on the acculturation of international students and how the senior international officers perceive the acculturation process can help campus leaders understand the decision-making and implementation of supportive programming for students. Assisting higher education leaders in identifying strengths and weaknesses within their experiences can help other senior international officers assist international students' acculturation (Charles & Heyl, 2021; Di Maria, 2019).

Research Questions

Research questions explore the central phenomenon studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2024). The research questions that the researcher selected have been designed from an understanding and analysis of the study's purpose statement and problem statement. Creswell and Poth recommended that researchers reduce studies to a single central research question with several sub-questions. Therefore, this transcendental phenomenological study includes one central research question and three sub-questions.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and experiences of Senior International Officers regarding the acculturation process of the international students on their college campuses?

Sub-Question One

How do Senior International Officers foster and support international students during the acculturation process?

Sub-Question Two

What do Senior International Officers use to assess the international students' acculturation process and how do they utilize the data?

Sub-Question Three

How do Senior International Officers describe their professional development experiences which help them to better understand the acculturation process of international students?

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Definitions

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1. *Acculturation* – The process of transferring one culture from one collection or group of people to another group or person, which occurs through direct contact and is considered a response to that interaction (Koo et al., 2021a).

2. *Acculturative stress* – Acculturative stress is a form of stress resulting from the acculturation process, including symptoms of anxiety, anger, depression, confusion regarding identity, physical ailments, substance abuse, and family issues or conflicts (Koo et al., 2021a).

3. *International student* – An international student is an admitted and matriculated non-immigrant student from a country outside of the United States who attends the college in-person or hybrid via an F1 student visa. The F1 student must be enrolled in an accredited college or university, pursuing a degree, diploma, or certificate approved and authorized by U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (Fodnocht, 2022; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2022).

4. *Senior International Officer* – The term is primarily used in the United States with varying titles to indicate an institution's lead international administrator (Charles & Heyl,

2021). This position does not exist on university campuses worldwide, and international leadership might be divided among different campuses or individuals.

Summary

This chapter gives an overview of the study. The problem examined is international students having difficulty adjusting to US culture and needing assistance with acculturation. There is a lack of research regarding the perceptions of senior international officers on the adjustment and acculturation of international students attending college in the southeast region of the United States. This transcendental phenomenological study aims to describe senior international officers' lived experiences regarding the adjustment of international students to private and public universities in the United States. This chapter also briefly reviews the background of international student enrollment and theories of acculturation. The central research and sub-questions were given. By understanding senior international officers' lived experiences, universities' leadership might be able to support their needs and the measures designed to assist international students with acculturation more effectively, thereby promoting the diversity and culture that international students bring to a college campus.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The researcher conducted a systematic review of the literature to explore the problem of international student acculturation and the senior international officers' perceptions of understanding the acculturation process. The first section of the literature review includes the study's theoretical framework of theories relevant to international students' adjustment to a foreign culture. It will be followed by a synthesis of the recent literature regarding international student acculturation and adaptative strategies that international students use to adjust to life in a new culture. Then, literature will be presented regarding international students' support systems, including social aspects and those implemented by universities focused on how they assist in acculturation and support the educational goal of obtaining a degree in the United States. The literature surrounding the factors indicating administrative support from international advisors will also be presented. In conclusion, a gap in the literature is identified as how higher education administrators who advise international students perceive international students' acculturation and how they use that information in their recommendations for supportive programming.

Theoretical Framework

When international students enter the United States to attend educational institutions, they face various issues, including adjusting to a new environment and culture. Berry (1974, 1997) described this process as acculturation and developed a model to illustrate the adjustment experience known as culture shock. Pedersen (1995) suggested that culture shock has been used to explain adjusting to a new culture and environment. Berry's acculturation model provided a framework for understanding the phenomena that occur when individuals adjust to a new culture. Acculturation is the process of cultural change that transpires after an individual is subject to a

new cultural group (Berry, 1974; Sam & Berry, 2010; Ward, 1996). In addition, acculturation usually is defined by the alterations that result from continuous, direct contact between two or more different cultural or individual members of a society (Berry, 1974, 1997). Therefore, Berry's model of acculturation allows the framing of how individuals manage changes when they encounter a new and unfamiliar culture (Sam & Berry, 2010). Berry's model suggested that adaptation is a consequence of acculturation and is linked to the individual on a sociocultural level.

International students within the United States higher education system encounter many factors that impact acculturation. There is also a distinction between each person's experience because every person changes or participates differently during acculturation (Berry, 1997). The changes can vary and include biological, physical, and social factors (Berry, 1980). Acculturative stress can ensue due to an individual's attempt to adapt to the new environment and culture, especially if they need to learn a new language (Berry, 1980; Ward, 1996).

Berry's (1974, 1980) framework outlined ways that individuals and groups acculturate using two main issues. The first issue is the degree to which people wish to keep their cultural heritage and identity and the second issue is the level of contact people wish to have with those considered outside of their group and their daily interaction with them (Sam & Berry, 2010). The individual's preference regarding these two issues directs them toward one of the four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization (Berry, 1980). During assimilation, individuals adopt the dominant culture's practices and avoid aspects of their original culture (Berry, 1974). Assimilation includes not wishing to maintain their familial or home country's values, traditions, or norms but instead adopting those within the new society (Sam & Berry, 2010). The individuals who fall into the separation category normally reject the

dominant culture so they may preserve their cultural heritage (Berry, 1974; Krsmanovic, 2020).

These individuals usually place importance on their culture and have little interaction with the

dominant society; therefore, they maintain their cultural traditions (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Integration is a strategy used when the individual embraces the new culture while valuing their

original cultural identity; they also try to integrate and pursue interactions within the new culture

(Berry, 1974). The integration allows individuals to maintain their culture while engaging in the

dominant society (Berry, 1974; Sam & Berry, 2010). Marginalization occurs when there is no

success in maintaining one's culture or being able to develop relationships within the new culture

(Berry, 1974; Krsmanovic, 2020). The marginalization strategy can also be used when

discrimination or other types of exclusion are present, like a lack of interest in cultural

maintenance (Berry, 1974; Sam & Berry, 2010). The acculturation strategies are not complete

outcomes since the process is continual and can change depending upon the individual and

circumstances (Berry, 1974, 1980; Sam & Berry, 2010). For example, when the September 11,

2001, attacks occurred in the United States, many people in the Muslim faith had to renegotiate

their identities (Bevin & Lucas, 2007; Sam & Berry, 2010).

National policies and programs may also be reviewed and analyzed in terms of Berry's

(1997) four approaches: assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization. For example,

some cultures might prefer people to assimilate rather than integrate. However, not every group

or individual changes similarly during acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010). A broad range of

differences in acculturation exists; even those with similar origins who live in the same place can

have vastly different experiences regarding acculturation (Nauck, 2008). Berry (1997, 1980)

offered an acculturation framework that includes how individual variables combine with group

variables to create a framework for acculturation research. The framework includes a broad

range of factors within one's society of origin, the new culture, and the individual's age, gender, education, status, religion, and other demographics, which all play a role in the acculturation process (Berry, 1997). Therefore, acculturation is not necessarily only about the individual but includes many other factors.

Related Literature

Understanding the influences impacting the various outcomes within Berry's (1974, 1997) acculturation model could assist senior international officers in supporting international students' adjustment to a new culture. Knowledge about how international students acculturate can assist with the higher educational leadership's implementation of supportive university policies and procedures, thereby supporting diversity efforts on college campuses that help promote higher education institutions' internationalization. There are many aspects to the international students' adjustment process which include social-cultural adaptation, psychological acculturation, academic acculturation, current events like COVID-19, as well as the services provided by the university services, including the support of senior international officers.

Social-Cultural Adaptation

Shu et al. (2020) found that specific sources of social support, such as friends and institutional support, were strongly related to adjustment. In addition, the authors found that the host nations' involvement within international student support networks was a significant predictor of cross-cultural adjustment. In addition, the sense of belonging has greatly benefited international students and assisted with their academic achievement on campus (Larcombe et al., 2022). International students who experience a sense of belonging at college, including engagement with students and faculty and social activities on campus, are more likely to

graduate (Shu et al., 2020). Social networks, which include college friendships and academic units, have been found to influence the outcome of the international students' acculturation process (Larcombe et al., 2022; Marangell & Baik, 2022; Naylor, 2022; Sadewo et al., 2020; Shu et al., 2020).

Wang et al. (2018) noted that sociocultural adaptation increases over time and without significant decline, and psychological adaptation is impacted by time as the length of residency in a new culture may influence international students' lives. Krsmanovic (2020) found that international students' acculturation progression of separation was voluntary and involuntary, and the acculturation model outcome of assimilation was found to be unwillingly and willingly motivated by international students. Antoniadou and Quinlan (2020) indicated that international students adapting to a new culture used emotional regulation to adjust and fit into an academic setting. Social support plays a critical role in international student adjustment, and international students who experienced less social support and higher acculturative stress had difficulties with sociocultural adjustment and depressive symptoms (Tausova et al., 2019).

International and Domestic Students

International students have more sociocultural adaptation difficulties than domestic students (Guzel & Glazer, 2019; Lau et al., 2019). Domestic students better understand the services available within colleges compared to international students, which can impact their acculturation (Lau et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2020). Domestic student support has been related to international student satisfaction and overall well-being (Kiang et al., 2020; Lau et al., 2019). International students who feel a sense of belonging or connectedness to their domestic college peers reported a higher sense of well-being (Kiang et al., 2020; Lau et al., 2019; Ristić et al., 2019).

Quality contact with domestic peers significantly positively affected international students' attitudes toward America in general (Ristić et al., 2019). Slantcheva-Durst and Knaggs (2019) found that most international students' college socialization included time spent with students, faculty, and campus members; however, many international students do not spend much time with American students outside the classroom. Tucker King and Bailey (2021) suggested that international students spend time with their peers in the classroom, but they do not always build solid relationships because domestic students engage with them less in the classroom.

International students tend to cluster around their culture or language, making them feel more comfortable since people tend to link to those who are more like themselves (Hampton et al., 2019; Sadewo et al., 2020; Tucker King & Bailey, 2021). Sadewo et al. (2020) found that international students tend to form friendships with peers from the same or similar cultures. International students choose separation when allowed to spend time with culturally similar peers. In addition, they tend to integrate into a new culture whenever they have a social network that can support such initiatives.

Haverila et al. (2020) indicated significant differences between domestic and international students regarding adjustment to college life. For international students, adjusting to college life was more critical than for their American peers. Szabo et al. (2020) found that compared to domestic students, international students who made cultural connections through social organizations that reflect their culture of origin have a better acculturation rate. International students who experienced rejection by domestic students preferred making friends with other international students rather than domestic students (Yan & Pei, 2018). Making

domestic or international friends with peers on campus was shown to help international students with their sense of belonging (Van Horne et al., 2018; Wekullo, 2019).

Sato et al. (2018) found that international students who did not make friends and lacked a social support network on campus were more negatively affected than their domestic peers. International students were shown to have greater loneliness during college than their domestic peers; however, it was not a factor in their feelings of satisfaction with their college experience as opposed to domestic students (Van Horne et al., 2018). International students' engagement level showed that they were either less engaged or were behind their domestic peers (Van Horne et al., 2018; Wekullo, 2019).

Cultural differences also impact international students' responses to peers and faculty in the classroom. For example, while American students might be more direct with faculty and their peers, it has been reported that Chinese international students prefer to express their emotions and feelings more indirectly than their peers (Wang et al., 2022).

Cultural Transitions and Integration

International students utilize acculturation, an ongoing process that varies in intensity, to develop strategies for daily life within a new culture; the strategies are based on previous experiences, skill sets, expectations, attitudes, and time in the new country (Antoniadou & Quinlan, 2020; Hasnain & Hajek, 2022; Nghia, 2019). Antoniadou and Quinlan (2020) reported that acculturation is a primarily ongoing nonlinear process. Wang et al. (2018) found that international students experienced a two-phase process of adaption, with significant adjustment occurring during the first nine to twenty-four months of residence and sociocultural adjustment increasing consistently over time.

Krsmanovic (2020) found that most international students voluntarily integrate into the dominant society to adapt and acclimate to their surroundings. However, Rivas et al. (2019) noted that the degree that international students build social connectedness and belonging in the new culture influences how they connect with the dominant society. Integration within the academic and local community assists international students with adjustment (Ballo et al., 2019; Li & Peng, 2019). However, relationships among international students helped them acculturate to their new environments without feeling the need to assimilate or marginalization (Bjork et al., 2020).

Acculturation has been a prominent factor in international students' adjustment to college life and a predictor variable in future career development (Li & Lindo, 2022). International students encounter cross-cultural learning challenges and difficulties due to acculturation (Li & Ai, 2020; Li & Liu, 2020). Gebregergis et al. (2020) indicated that international students with previous travel experience reported having better acculturation to a new culture than those without intercultural exposure. During the acculturation and adjustment process, international students found it challenging to keep in contact with family and friends from their home country (Campos et al., 2022). Qin and Mc Naughtan (2023) found that international students who took attended high school in the United States had less adjustment issues and benefited by a positive college integration process.

*Language Barrier*s

Factors other than strictly cultural one's impact international students' abilities to adjust to the dominant society. One major issue that impacts acculturation is the lack of English language proficiency. English language skills significantly influence international students' abilities to acculturate to society (Bastien et al., 2018; Koo et al., 2021a; Krsmanovic, 2020;

Rivas et al., 2019). Wolf and Phung (2019) found that international students had difficulty understanding professors in class, native speakers, and webinars because of vocabulary, speed, and different regional accents. Sullivan (2018) indicated that the southern dialect created additional English language difficulty for international students.

In addition, Chinese international students are not accustomed to academic writing as well as the different educational systems and struggle with writing and their language problems hindered ability their to write papers (Jiang et al., 2022). English language barriers also were shown to cause anxiety for international students due to trepidation over language proficiency and trouble pronouncing words (Wolf & Phung, 2019). In addition, international students were often less likely to speak up in class if they had English language concerns (Wolf & Phung, 2019). Garrison et al. (2023) found that Chinese international students in the United States were also impacted by social class while attending college and found that not only was cultural adjustment a factor, but they also found the social class of domestic students as well as other international students as important in their socialization efforts. They wanted to seem hard working and self-reliant to avoid as being seen by American students as spoiled (Garrison et al., 2023).

International students are less likely to speak within the dominant culture if they are not proficient in English, which prohibits them from expanding the number of friends they have on campus (Koo et al., 2021a; Krsmanovic, 2020). Despite this, conversation programs in higher education that include international students and their peers have been shown to help the development of long-term friendships (Park et al., 2022). International students with accents felt marginalized for their accents and lack of English proficiency (Park et al., 2022). International

students also have found to have a high level of anxiety and stress to fit into their environment when their English language is not proficient as compared to their peers.

Ennser-Kananen et al. (2021) found that international students with accents were seen by their peers as foreign or others, highlighting that an accent was a way to racialize language proficiency. Language is a factor that can impact international students' acculturation or marginalization in a new society since they might feel discriminated against or outside the expected culture and, therefore, not accepted when they are not English language proficient. The language ability of the host country is a positive predictor of international students' cross-cultural adjustment (Campos et al., 2022).

International students expressed concerns about English language proficiency and its impact on adjustment (Hunter-Johnson, 2022). The language barrier is a significant issue for international students since they have trouble in classes, when seeking resources on campus, and in social situations (Park et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2018). Faculty often unknowingly marginalize international students due to their language deficiencies and need for additional support within and outside the classroom (Park et al., 2023). International students who were supported with language proficiency issues by faculty had a stronger sense of satisfaction with their adjustment to college life than those who were not supported (Mabkhot et al., 2023; Wilczewski & Alon, 2023).

International Student Attachment

Most theoretical frameworks on international students' adaptation revolve around sociocultural adaptation. While a broad range of factors influence the acculturation of international students to a new culture, a significant factor is an attachment in the form of social support (Sarmiento et al., 2019). Li et al. (2021) found that the international students'

acculturation process was positively influenced by adult attachment in the new culture to psychological adaptation to a new culture since the adult attachment seemed to increase self-esteem.

Bender et al. (2019) suggested that social support benefits international students' psychological adjustment to a new culture. Teegan and Conrad-Popova (2023) found that the adjustment of international students could be enhanced by social support, including groups, counseling, and outreach services. Social networks, which include college friendships and academic units, have been found to influence the outcome of the acculturation process of international students (Sadewo et al., 2020; Shu et al., 2020). Specific sources of social support, such as friends and institutional support, were strongly related to adjustment. In addition, the host country's national involvement within the international student support network was a significant predictor of cross-cultural adjustment (Shu et al., 2020). International students reported that while attending university in the United States, they felt very lonely and turned to international social networks for additional social support (Manu et al., 2023). Therefore, acculturation is impacted by the attachment an international student develops to the host culture. If they do not attach to the host culture, international students can choose separation, where they do not interact with the dominant culture and maintain the home country's culture as an acculturation strategy. In addition, they can feel marginalized if the host culture does not accept them, and they maintain their culture and feel unwelcome in the host culture. Lack of attachment from their home culture can also impact acculturation, and in some cases, those who build attachment in the new culture acculturate with either a strategy of assimilation or integration.

Social Media

International students have used social networking sites to help with their homesickness and to stay in contact with their families and friends at home (Billedo et al., 2020; Pang, 2020). Social network use, including Facebook, has assisted international students with homesickness, but it was also shown to lower sociocultural adjustment in the short term (Billedo et al., 2020). Social networking with family and friends at home has helped students overcome additional academic pressure and provided support during their experiences while studying in another country (Billedo et al., 2020; Pang, 2020). Since they were attending an institution of higher education in the United States, an individualist society, those international students from more collective cultures felt that social media was an easy way to reach out for social support (Baines et al., 2022).

Social media can impact the acculturation process when international students can select the integration strategy if they have support from the new culture and their home culture. Therefore, many international students use social media to balance the experiences of both cultures while studying in the United States; however, Li and Liu (2021) found a significant relationship between international students addicted to the internet and the experience of acculturative stress. Acculturative stress might even be a predictor of internet addiction for international students who use the internet and social media to meet their cultural and social needs and select to separate or feel marginalized by the dominant society. International students use social networking sites to stay in touch with family and friends at home, and Baines et al. (2022) found that they also seek social support from their colleagues and distant friends. In addition, international students do not always feel comfortable posting on social media sites because they fear that they might be judged. While international students look to their host

families for support on social network sites, they also do not want to concern their families back home by bringing up challenging issues with college.

Paez et al. (2021) suggest that there are differences in social media use between international students and their domestic peers. They found international students are more likely to use university social media sites than domestic students (Pasez et al., 2021). Chinese students were found to use WeChat more often as a social media platform than other international students, which suggests that international students from various countries have unique social media outlet preferences and that international student offices can leverage social media to foster engagement opportunities within the local campus community (Cao, et al., 2023; Luyao & Huang, 2021). Social media can impact the acculturation process when international students can select the integration strategy if they have support from the new culture and their home culture; therefore, providing a balance of both cultures for the international students studying in the U.S.

Psychological Acculturation

International students who believed they had social support were satisfied with the support and reported an excellent psychological adjustment to the dominant society (Bender et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2018). Bastien et al. (2018) found that international students' length of stay in the United States and help-seeking within academic settings predicted psychological adjustment. The adjustment cycle is impacted by the international student's time in the United States and is most challenging at the beginning of their ninth month in the new culture (Bastien et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018). The international students' acculturation strategies aligned with their psychological state, and the decision to assimilate or segregate was a critical factor in their adjustment (Bastien et al., 2018). International students who integrated into society showed high self-esteem, and those who were separated from their dominant society were more depressed and

anxious (Bastien et al., 2018; Billedo et al., 2020; Fox et al., 2013; Li & Peng, 2019; Pang, 2020). A psychological adjustment was positively associated with alignment between international students' needs and universities' academic and facility support (Bui et al., 2021a; Shadowen et al., 2019). Research suggests that that negative predictors of acculturative stress included English language proficiency (Bastien et al., 2018; Koo et al., 2021a; Krsmanovic, 2020; Rivas et al., 2019; Wolf & Phung, 2019). Therefore, international students who select integration as an acculturation strategy have a better chance of being psychologically adjusted to the host culture. Those international students who choose acculturation strategies of separation or marginalization will be less integrated and connected to the dominant culture.

Culture Shock and Acculturative Stress

International experiences of culture shock have been widely studied by researchers and used synonymously with intercultural adjustment, adaptation, transition, and acculturation (Berry, 2005). International students who experienced culture shock were found to have a higher rate of acculturative stress (Berry, 2005). Koo et al. (2021a) found that male international students from low socioeconomic families showed a higher acculturate stress rate and decreased college satisfaction rates than their female peers. It was found that there was a decrease in homesickness and acculturative stress with increased social connections and English language skills (Bastien et al., 2018; Billedo et al., 2020; Fox et al., 2013; Koo et al., 2021a). Luo et al. (2019) suggested that students with a solid social network experienced lower levels of acculturative stress than their peers. Aljaberi et al. (2021) noted a negative relationship between acculturative stress and personal communication, academic performance, community involvement, adaptation, personal interests, and language proficiency. Therefore, international

students who are engaged and have a higher English language ability choose to assimilate or integrate over selecting separation or marginalization as their acculturation strategy.

Single international students often felt homesick from their inability to participate in family events and cultural activities at home (Campbell, 2015; Young & Snead, 2017). In addition, female international students have a higher rate of depression, anxiety, and eating disorders and use more formal and informal help-seeking for mental illness than their male counterparts (Zhou et al., 2022).

International students rated financial stressors, academic worries, and career issues as their top stressors (Yee & Smith, 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). International graduate students had a higher level of acculturative stress in comparison to international undergraduate students (Rai et al., 2021). International graduate students also faced more stress from finances, academic progress, and immigration status than international undergraduate students. However, Oyeniyi et al. (2021) reported no differences in predictor variables between first-year undergraduate and graduate international students regarding relational skills and acculturative stress.

Stressors and adjustment to the dominant society can vary based on the students' culture instead of their academic level of education. For example, international students from Saudi Arabia had cultural shock issues, including adjusting to the time, culture, and unfamiliarity with drinks and the food of the dominant culture (Young & Snead, 2017). Most international students who live on a college campus purchase a meal plan and must eat the American foods available in the cafeteria; therefore, students who have been in the United States for longer than two years reported changes to their regular eating habits (Alakaam & Willyard, 2020). Many international students also mentioned that adjusting to the food in the U.S. was part of the struggle, including missing foods from their home countries (Tsevi, 2018).

International students experience frustration resulting from differences in religious and political beliefs (Young & Snead, 2017). However, international students with the opportunity to actively engage with their faith on campus feel more satisfied with their college experience and have reported less culture shock (Philip et al., 2019; Young & Snead, 2017). International students require additional support services, including college counseling services, to prevent loneliness and acculturative stress whenever necessary to help with cultural shock and adjustment issues (Y. Zhang & Garcia-Murillo, 2018). Significant factors causing acculturative stress include the adjustment to a new country or environment, discrimination, cultural differences within the dominant society, and discomfort with those differences (Shadowen et al., 2019; Zhang & Garcia-Murillo, 2018).

International students feeling discomfort with food, religion, homesickness, or acculturative stress might select the acculturation strategy of separation or marginalization and try to maintain their cultural norms and traditions by disengaging with the host culture. Yun and Greenwood (2022) found that although international students were facing acculturative stress, they had better sleep quality than domestic students because of a lack of desirable entertainment or their decision to separate from activities and events available within the dominant culture, thereby experiencing a reduction of interaction time with the dominant culture. Marangell and Baik (2022) found that international students reported more psychological distress than their domestic peers and suggested that clarity of explanations and proper feedback to international students in college classrooms might improve their well-being.

International students felt a need for additional mental health support services on campus, including making their location known and reducing the stigma about mental illness (Marangell & Baik, 2022). Sponsoring activities and events supporting international student well-being and

lectures about stress, anxiety, and acculturation can reduce the stigma associated with international students' psychological stressors. International students with a sense of community have a support system of local friends, which elevates international students' sense of well-being (Marangell & Baik, 2022; Shadowen et al., 2019). Multiple studies have shown a strong connection between academic course experience and international student well-being, emphasizing the role of faculty and peers in the campus community (Larcombe et al., 2022; Marangell & Baik, 2022; Naylor, 2022).

Motivation and self-determination are substantial contributors to international students' success in the classroom (Cho et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2018). While researching Asian international students in the United States, Cho et al. (2020) reported that international students' self-determined motivation regarding academic tasks shaped their beliefs within the classroom during their transition process. International students' positive beliefs and self-determination motivation about classroom assessment provided beneficial learning experiences in the classroom.

International students are new to the United States educational system and need to adjust to the dominant culture and the structures within the system, including variations of faculty engagement, class participation, grading, and working in teams (Jabeen et al., 2019). Girmay (2019) found that international students feel stress related to academic factors, including academic loneliness. Teegan and Conrad-Popova (2023) suggest that social support, including group counseling and outreach services, can enhance international students' adjustment. In addition, studies have found that while counseling can support international students, for those students who are LGBTQIA+ were less likely to reach out for assistance or socioemotional support for fear that their family would find out (Herridge et al., 2023). International students can

be supported in the acculturation process with supportive programs and events to target their unique needs, thereby helping students through the acculturation process by selecting integration as a strategy and being able to share with the local host culture while maintaining their own culture at the same time.

Academic Acculturation

Recent literature noted that international students were satisfied with their relationships with the faculty (Tucker King & Bailey, 2021; Wang & BrckaLorenz, 2018). International students can develop and maintain faculty relationships more easily than peer relationships (Ammigan & Jones, 2018). Support from the entire university accelerates the international students' acculturation process, suggesting that support from the college is not simply a friendly environment on campus but extends to and includes relationships with peers, faculty, and staff (Kaya, 2020). However, faculty support was among the most critical factors in helping international students adjust to college (Tucker King & Bailey, 2021; Wang & BrckaLorenz, 2018). For example, it was found that faculty, who have a supervisory role or a chair relationship with international doctoral candidates, play a crucial role in helping students with academic adjustment and acculturation to the discipline (Elliot & Kobayashi, 2019; Singh, 2021). International students noted that the academic differences in the United States include campus resources, experienced professors, and overall diversity (Kaya, 2020). Therefore, academically adjusted international students will likely select integration or assimilation as an acculturation strategy instead of separation or marginalization.

Faculty* S*upport

Marinenko (2021) found that faculty tried to create friendly classroom environments for international students and incorporated enhanced learning outcomes for students, such as

encouraging international students to reach out for additional support services, including tutoring. The faculty also clarified assignments and avoided slang and colloquial expressions when international students were present in the classroom. Stojanovic and Robinson (2021) indicated that being aware of the cultural differences within intercultural communication can shift the view of differences from being a challenge to accepting cultural uniqueness, which is essential when faculty develop syllabi and related materials from a broad range of multicultural and diverse contexts.

Faculty should help initiate communication outside the classroom to support international students (Tucker King & Bailey, 2021). Jin and Schneider (2019) indicated that most faculty within higher education appreciate the global views and contributions international students make in the classroom during discussions and on their assignments. Faculty can assist international students in the classroom by allowing time to ask questions after class to promote social engagement (Tucker King & Bailey, 2021). Schneider and Jin (2022) developed three categories regarding types of faculty relations: explicit language socializers, who understand the importance of socialization; implicit socializers, who understand the importance of socialization but are less likely to adjust their practices to support their role; and resistant language socializers, who show little awareness of language socialization for the international students in their classroom. Most faculty who were resistant language socializers had less work and study abroad experience than those who were implicit or explicit socializers (Schneider & Jin, 2022). International students expressed satisfaction when they saw international faculty on campus and as role models (Jean-Francois, 2019). Therefore, faculty can help international students improve their English skills by enhancing language through socialization.

Most faculty perceive that international students lack a clear understanding about aspects of higher education in the United States, including the professor-student relationship, class participation requirements, and the impact or seriousness of plagiarism (Jin & Schneider, 2019; Tucker King & Bailey, 2021). Matsunaga et al. (2020) noted that international students are under pressure in the dominant society's classroom because they feel the need to meet cultural norms and institutional conventions to which they might not be accustomed. Faculty's perceptions of international students include understanding the sociocultural issues faced, but many faculty do not comprehend the other concerns and challenges, like financial, maintaining their legal status, or career aspirations, that international students have (Jin & Schneider, 2019). When surveyed, faculty expressed concern about international students' lack of social connection due to being far from family and the cultural differences between the dominant culture and their home culture.

Learning Atmosphere

A supportive learning environment is crucial to international students' acculturation and proactive pedagogical efforts during their transition to U.S. academic environments (Kaya, 2020; Tsevi, 2018). When faculty encourage students to use additional learning strategies and collaborate with their domestic peers, the international students benefit less from their faculty's interventional efforts (Wang & BrckaLorenz, 2018). Stenberg et al. (2019) denoted that faculty-initiated group work in the classroom positively impacted the first-year international students' grades compared to their overall individual assessments. Yu and Peters (2019) indicated that when it comes to international students, faculty learning outcomes and priorities are not generally aligned with the international students' learning needs. International students face language barriers when they arrive at college, and some have difficulties speaking in class,

including classroom discussions, presentations, or using proper academic vocabulary and resources.

Academic Support Services

Support of academic-related services, such as computing services, information technology, library services, and course development, can influence the academic environment where international students learn and promote academic integration (Schmidt, 2020). Research indicated that writing centers and writing tutors were available at top colleges; however, they were for the entire campus community, not just international students (Martirosyan et al., 2019; Wang & Sun, 2022). In addition, Tsevi (2018) noted that many international students were not pleased with the services available at their college's writing center because the staff did not assist them with the content of the paper, simply the editing. A study of 45,000 international students using the International Student Barometer showed that most international students were least satisfied with colleges' support services (Ammigan & Jones, 2018).

Marijanovic et al. (2021) found that most international doctoral students were satisfied with the advising relationship with their faculty advisor. Trust grows for administration, staff, and faculty who develop robust learning environments for international students by giving them enough time to answer questions and present their ideas in the classroom or an office setting (Yeh et al., 2022).

Peer Mentoring Programs

Academically-oriented peer mentoring programs positively impact undergraduate students (Hall et al., 2020; Jean-Francois, 2019). These programs are typically designed by colleges allowing peer mentoring to support student engagement and help mentees make positive transitions to the college campus (Hall et al., 2020). While developed for a broad range of

undergraduate programs, peer mentoring has assisted international and at-risk domestic students (Pekerti et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021). U.S. college peer mentoring programs help international students increase their communication, cultural adjustment, and life skills (Pekerti et al., 2021). Yu et al. (2021) indicated that a peer mentoring program for international students in China designed for Indian students increased social support, improved adjustments to college, and alleviated their level of acculturative stress. Peer mentoring programs are not at every college within the United States and are facilitated by schools within the university, faculty, or international departments on campus.

Global Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated international students' acculturative stress levels (Koo, 2021; Neuwirth et al., 2021). COVID-19 disrupted higher education worldwide; however, international students have faced a wider variety of hardships during the pandemic compared to their domestic peers. For example, in addition to the unique challenges international students already face when studying in the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic added additional hardships due to lockdowns, travel bans, and economic stressors (Neuwirth et al., 2021; Sustarsic & Zhang, 2022). International student advisors and faculty advisors in higher education helped students during that time. Moscaritolo et al. (2022) surveyed international students during the coronavirus and found that most indicated that student affairs divisions, including international student services, spearheaded the decision-making for COVID-19 policies on campus and were the most supportive during the pandemic. Due to travel restrictions during the pandemic, international students were impacted more than any other student group, including students from lower economic statuses (Moscaritolo et al., 2022; Sustarsic & Zhang, 2022).

Mental Distress

Moscaritolo et al. (2022) found that higher education administrators suggest that the most pressing challenges that international students encountered during the early days of the pandemic were emotional stress, including the challenges related to travel and the decision to stay in the United States or return home (Moscaritolo et al., 2022; Sustarsic & Zhang, 2022). The isolation of the pandemic lockdowns, limited mobility, and lack of social interaction impacted international students' well-being during COVID-19, whether they lived on or off campus (Sustarsic & Zhang, 2022).

Financial Impact

Financial hardships were another concern for international students because many financial sponsors were seriously impacted by the lockdowns. It was suggested that international student enrollment drops in higher education institutions during COVID-19 would substantially impact tuition revenue since changes in enrollment were likely to result in reduced revenue and resources for colleges and would impact local economies (Bound et al., 2021). The authors suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic caused universities in the United States to experience dramatic financial shortfalls. This economic impact was due to the travel restrictions and enrollment drop from foreign enrollments. Many US universities rely on international enrollments, and their financial stability is impacted when these enrollments drop; however, most colleges and universities switched to online learning with new technologies to support their international student population's unique needs.

Travel Restrictions

International students' concerns during COVID-19 included visa issues, the uncertainty of where to stay, and the seemingly ever-changing travel restrictions (Thorson et al., 2022; Toner, 2020; West, 2020). During the COVID-19 travel bans, university personnel assisted

international students in navigating immigration issues and ensured accommodations and additional support (Moscaritolo et al., 2022). International students had to adjust to a new culture, acculturation, and the hardships and pressures of COVID-19 (Moscaritolo et al., 2022: Toner, 2020; West, 2020). Some campuses closed housing and only supported international students to remain in the dormitories since some students, like those from China, had no option to go home because of travel restrictions (Toner, 2020; West, 2020). Some universities closed their dorms, creating the need to find new housing for international students in the local area. Colleges that allowed students to remain in their dorms needed the assistance of the international students' office to coordinate campus support for international students who were left on campus while the campus was on lockdown. Thorson et al. (2022) elicited that international students were worried about their families abroad during the pandemic. Most international students increased their communication with family and friends abroad while in lockdown (Sustarsic & Zhang, 2022).

Online Learning

Sustarsic and Zhang (2022) indicated that international graduate students in the United States in online classes during the lockdown in the spring of 2020 encountered limited professional development opportunities, compromised academic progress, and uncertainty with their funding. First-year graduate students who were still adapting to a new culture and educational system. They also faced the hurdle of online instruction, which impacted their cultural adjustment and academic progress in class. However, Fass-Holmes (2022) noted that international students succeeded academically despite the pandemic's impact, partly due to more time to study or use other coping strategies.

Changes to Support Systems

The structure of higher education support systems, like the International Student Services Office, which houses international advisors, faced dramatic transitions during COVID-19. While faced with stay-at-home orders, these administrators were required to maintain organizational operations for international students regarding their immigration status, cultural support, and assistance during the pandemic (Toner, 2020). International student support services within higher education had to transform how they advised students, including using new technologies like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, to support online meetings and appointments (Toner, 2020; Veerasamy & Ammigan, 2022). International student services offices had to adjust campus programming and outreach because it was harder to connect and engage international students, family members, and international visitors to campus. While the pandemic allowed administrators in higher education to adapt and reimage the delivery of support services to international students, many international educators felt that when they were required to work from home, they were able to meet most of the needs of the international students even though they were not physically present (Toner, 2020; Veerasamy & Ammigan, 2022). However, international students felt isolated and lonely during COVID-19 even though they had access to support services provided online through their colleges (Koo, 2021; Moscaritolo et al., 2022).

Racism

The pandemic impacted international students mentally and increased anti-Asian racism in the U.S. due to political tensions with China (Koo et al., 2021b; Ma, 2020; Yu, 2021). Some Chinese international students studying in the United States during COVID-19 experienced discrimination and xenophobic assaults (Koo et al., 2021b; Yu, 2021). Mask-wearing Chinese international students were harassed, stigmatized, and bullied (Koo et al., 2021b; Ma, 2020). Chinese international students reported being insulted, told to return to their home country, and

that the pandemic was caused by China (Koo et al., 2021b). International students forced to go to online learning while still living in the United States indicated that they experienced virtual comments that were discriminatory and racist on social media. Many international students who had to remain in the United States during the global pandemic claimed that when college campuses stopped in-person courses, they felt this would protect them from additional racist threats, including physical harm. Literature indicated that international students faced racism and discrimination prior to COVID-19; however, the global pandemic heightened international students' awareness of discrimination and racism in the U.S (Koo et al., 2021b; Yao et al., 2019; Yao et al., 2021).

University Support Services

Due to the growth of international enrollments, additional support services for international students were designed to support the obstacles they face. Many colleges in the US have targeted the needs of international students. They have implemented centralized resources to assist with support systems critical to their success, including orientation, immigration advising, academic assistance, language support, and cross-cultural events and programs (Di Maria, 2020). Research on higher education institutions found that most colleges offered international students additional support services, including orientation, advising, academic support, workshops on U.S. academic life, tutoring, and faculty office hours (Martirosyan et al., 2019; Wang & Sun, 2022). Most colleges in the U.S. provide international students with U.S. cultural workshops upon arrival during orientation (Madden-Dent et al., 2019; Martirosyan et al., 2019; Wang & Sun, 2022, Zhang & Garcia-Murillo, 2018). Support for cultural adjustment is an essential aspect of the services of any international student services division on a college campus; however, international students also face concerns regarding their legal immigration

status. International student advisors are hired within colleges to assist international students with immigration regulations, which is part of a changing legal environment where their actions can seriously impact the students' lives (Di Maria, 2020).

Career Services Support

International students' satisfaction increased when their colleges helped with career planning and job search strategies for international students (Martirosyan et al., 2019; Wang & Sun, 2022). Career services professionals were more concerned with international students' cultural adjustment and language proficiency, while employers and international students were less concerned about cultural issues impacting the internship or job application process (Wang & Sun, 2022). Employers noted that hiring international students helped them to enhance diversity in their workplace and was a way to showcase their dedication to inclusivity. International students who connect with career services have better career opportunities than those who do not (Bowman, 2023).

Website Information

Madden-Dent et al. (2019) studied 200 colleges in the U.S. regarding the support services offered to international students. They found that while colleges listed support services on their websites, many had generic information which did not include direct staff member contact information and a generic office email. Most colleges also list information regarding support services for the entire campus. These campuses do not indicate special services or list support services for the unique needs of international students on their websites.

Campus Activities

University departments have increased international students' adjustment and acculturation. For example, one study found reported that international students involved with

athletic departments and involved in sports, were found to be better acculturated than those international students who did not participate in such activities (Kim et al., 2022). Researchers have found that international students engaged in campus activities and involved in out-of-the-classroom events have an easier time acculturating and integrating into the larger campus community (Slantcheva-Durst & Knaggs, 2019; Tsevi, 2018). Most of these events and activities are promoted by student affairs within U.S. higher education institutions; however, there is not a substantial amount of research done on student affairs' role in the internationalization of higher education or their work with international students (Zenner & Squire, 2020). Even though colleges promote events to their international student it was found that international graduate students who were married, were less likely to attend campus events, or interact with their peers than international students who were single (Soylemez-Karakoc et al., 2024).

International Services Support

Sullivan (2018) noted that programming targeted to international students by the international students' office was an essential part of the campus experience for international students. The international office was the main office with programming events responsive to international students' needs. The programs developed by the international office were vital because they provided events or supplemental workshops designed to help international students with the acculturation process on campus. The international office was usually the department that assisted with international students' transportation since college campuses are not always in urban areas, and international students have trouble accessing local transportation. International students indicated that the international office helped students adjust to campus and the local community, with their visa application, official documents for immigration, and other government forms, like obtaining a US social security number.

Remaining in the United States

Literature offers contradictory findings about international students' decisions to remain in the United States. Faculty support has been among the best positive predictors of international students' acculturation and decisions to remain in the United States after graduation (Kaul & Renzulli, 2022). When international students feel like they belong or acculturate academically, they are more likely to remain in the United States and are less likely to feel undecided about their future career plans. Belle et al. (2022) noted that many international students' motivations to remain in the United States after obtaining a degree were related to economic factors, including a lack of job opportunities and lower salaries if they returned home. Netierman et al. (2022) reported similar results when studying international students' decisions to remain in Canada, focusing on better employment opportunities and prospects for future permanent residency in the country. Almost half of the international students who study in the United States return to their home country after graduation due to immigration and work-related visa issues (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019).

International Student Satisfaction

Ammigan and Jones (2018) listed four vital dimensions of international students' satisfaction for on-campus students: the arrival on campus, the learning atmosphere, the living environment, and available support services. Cong and Glass (2019) researched international student satisfaction with campus life, academic services, and colleges' support services in the U.S. and found a statistically significant relationship between these areas and international students' adjustment. Therefore, international students who were satisfied with the services provided by these campus departments had a better acculturation process. Brunsting et al. (2018) suggested that international students enrolled in university transition courses during their first

academic year reported higher perceived senses of campus belonging and social support than those not enrolled in such courses. Ammigan (2019) found that international students' satisfaction with a college leads to a higher rate of future recommendations for the college and helps with diversity and internationalization.

While higher education institutions in the U.S. try to support international students, many implement high-impact academic practices, like first-year seminars aligned with cultural and additional adjustment issues that international students need to navigate (Katsumoto & Bowman, 2021). Strategic programming is essential on college campuses so international students' unique needs can be met, but students' satisfaction with university services is not merely based on programming. For example, Darawong and Sandmaung (2019) reported that international students were most satisfied with timely responses from faculty and staff members. Empathy from faculty and staff was also found to play a crucial role in international students' satisfaction (Darawong & Sandmaung, 2019).

Staff and Faculty Training

With the growth of international enrollments, many institutions of higher education in the United States increased their academic support for international students' engagement opportunities, including staff and faculty training, workshops, new faculty orientations, and learning communities where educators can exchange concerns and ideas on supporting international students (Van Horne et al., 2018). However, even with the changes being made within higher education to support international students, Krsmanovic (2021) found that most research completed within the past decade on international students was focused on the acculturation process and acculturative stress rather than campus support or international advisors specifically. Wilczewski et al. (2022) suggests that staff and faculty with a high rate of

cultural intelligence positively influences students' adjustment and level of satisfaction. Therefore, staff and faculty who are further trained in cultural diversity have a positive impact on international students.

Senior International Officers

While faculty, staff, and peers impact the acculturation of international students, the role of senior leadership within higher educational institutions is significant. The role of a senior international officer is a relatively emerging field of study regarding international education in university and college settings (Di Maria, 2019). The responsibilities of a senior international officer include oversight of more than one program or activity designed to internationalize a college. Tran et al. (2020) noted that SIOs come from various degrees and career paths. Gallagher (2019) suggested that the focus of the SIO is to collaborate with other main offices on the campus to reach the university's internationalization goals; however, they also play a crucial role in the oversight and approval of programs that help support international students with the acculturation process on a college campus.

Garcia et al. (2021) indicated that international student directors, also called senior international officers on some campuses, felt comfortable carrying out their responsibilities and that the superior they reported to empowered them. University support for international school administrators also included attending conferences and meetings with peers from other institutions and budgetary support measures. Most international administrators in leadership positions felt they could work in an autonomous environment at their university with their superiors. The majority of international directors found their role meaningful and had a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in working with international students. Most of the SIOs felt they had the appropriate resources to perform their job responsibilities, like support staff,

funding, and physical space. In addition, the SIOs designated school officials or principal designated school officials for US Homeland Security were supported with the specialized training required for the immigration advising role and reporting requirements. Many international student directors utilize a triage approach within their work supporting international students and serve as counselors, administrators, advisors, and members of campus-wide committees to support internationalization efforts. Internationalization looks differently at each institution of higher education in the United States, and what policies might be implemented at a large research university might be very different from that of a smaller, private university (Toner, 2019).

Al-Sharif et al. (2021) and Tran and Nghia (2020) reported that those within the international leadership positions at colleges faced professional development needs, budgetary constraints, and policy tensions. Conversely, Garcia et al. (2021) found that those in international leadership positions felt supported by their superiors and were empowered to adjust international students' budgets.

Toner (2019) recommended that SIOs focus on external and internal partnerships and become entrepreneurial. SIOs are tasked with the university's internationalization mission and are responsible for shifting the proposition of global learning if the institution adjusts its mission or changes its international activities and goals. Institutional mission statements typically focus on global learning, recognizing multiple cultures, and incorporating various perspectives. The international officers must find ways to represent their department within the broader context of the institution.

Di Maria (2020) reported that international student services should be considered a critical role within the higher education curriculum because it includes learning outcomes that

assist international students with acculturation. Therefore, the senior international officer on a college campus has a valuable role in the acculturation process of international students, regardless, if they function in-person and tangible to the student or through their actions as a manager with recommending or proposing a supportive program to assist the international student community, such as building a proper orientation program, first-year student course, or cultural adjustment program.

Summary

International students attending college in the United States face various adjustment issues and concerns. From culture shock to learning to integrate into a new culture, international students encounter additional struggles in college due to acculturation. Because international students have additional factors impacting their adjustment to a new culture, researchers have sought to understand each factor that impacts their acculturation process. Factors that help international students with their adjustment and acculturation to life and college in the United States can give leaders in higher education the tools necessary to design programs to support international students' unique needs. Higher education program administrators recommend and initiate support services to assist international students in becoming more socially engaged. Additionally, researchers have recently examined the role social support from peers and within academia has in helping international students with acculturation and achieving academic success. Many colleges within the higher education system in the United States have support services to support students with adjustment to student life, however together with immigration concerns, employment restrictions, and cultural adjustment concerns, international students face additional hardships that domestic students do not.

Research has demonstrated that international students face many factors impacting their ability to acculturate appropriately to a new society. The adjustment process that international students go through while attending college in a foreign country has been studied; however, scant research has been focused on how higher education leadership or senior international officers view the international students' acculturation process and use their perceptions when implementing supportive programming. Therefore, this study will focus on senior international officers to gain their perceptions of the international students' acculturation process and their efforts at supporting diversity.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the senior international officers' efforts to support international students' acculturation at higher educational institutions in the southeastern United States. At this stage in the research, international student acculturation is defined as an adjustment to a new culture. This study uses Berry's (1974, 1980, 1997) theory of acculturation as it applies to foreigners in another country; each person handles a new society and culture differently, so each person acculturates differently. Berry designed an acculturation model that helps categorize adaptation strategies into assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. This chapter also discloses the research method, study parameters, and why the researcher selected this design. In addition, the chapter details the site description, participant selection process, procedures to be used for data collection, and how the data types were analyzed. The researcher also elaborates on how the study demonstrated trustworthiness, addressed any ethical considerations, and includes a summary at the end of this chapter.

Research Design

The research method chosen for this dissertation is a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach. Creswell & Poth (2024) suggested that this approach be used when a researcher wants to understand the essence of the experience and would like to study several individuals who have similar, shared experiences. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), quantitative studies focus on the generalization of data collected. A quantitative research design was not used for this study because the researcher did not seek to generalize information and data collected but rather to understand the perspectives and experiences of the senior international officers regarding international students' acculturation. Qualitative research is flexible and

adapts to new information based on the data collected while providing a comprehensive perspective on the issue, allowing the researcher to thoroughly investigate the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Van Manen (1990) suggested that phenomenology reduces individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the essence. The researcher collected data from participants who experienced the same phenomenon and developed a description of the experience from all the participants, including how they experienced the phenomenon and what they experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Since Creswell & Poth (2024) and Moustakas (1994) advised that qualitative phenomenological study focuses on understanding a phenomenon's features, the researcher has chosen this approach. A case study would not be helpful because it does not reflect the essence of a lived phenomenon; instead, it provides an in-depth understanding of a case or cases, and a narrative study would only focus on the stories of individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

A transcendental phenomenological paradigm was used for this study because it focuses more on the experiences of the participants and less on the researcher's interpretation (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutical phenomenology examines lived experiences with the researcher describing the research and offering their interpretations of the experiences (Van Manen, 1990). The transcendental phenomenological approach followed Moustakas's bracketing with the researcher identifying the phenomenon to research, collecting data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon, and an analysis of the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes combined into themes. Since Van Manen suggested that the phenomenon being studied is inseparable from the practice of writing, the researcher presented the understanding of the experience in written form, including feedback on how the phenomenon was experienced with significant quotations from the participants.

Research Questions

The research questions ask for an exploration of the primary phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2024). The research questions were designed from an understanding and analysis of the study's purpose and problem statements. Creswell and Poth (2024) recommended that researchers reduce the study to a single central research question with several sub-questions. Therefore, this transcendental phenomenological study included one central research question and three sub-questions.

Central Research Question

What are the senior international officers' perceptions regarding the international students' acculturation process on college campuses?

Sub-Question One

How do senior international officers foster and support international students during acculturation?

Sub-Question Two

What do senior international officers use to assess the international students' acculturation process, and how do they conceptualize the data?

Sub-Question Three

How do senior international officers describe the professional development experiences that help them better understand the international students' acculturation process?

Setting and Participants

The participants are senior international officers with full-time employment at colleges in the southeastern region of the United States. Each college and university enroll international students in their academic programs. Each participant comes from a unique university setting in

the United States to allow for diversity in feedback in data collection. Participants in this study was 10 administrators within universities and colleges in the United States who lead internationalization on their campuses.

Setting

The setting was colleges and universities in the United States which enroll international students in their academic programs. The sites are where the study's participants are employed and vary in location, size, and state affiliation. Both private and public universities are sites for the study. While there are internationalization efforts in colleges around the world, this study only focused on colleges and universities in the United States. Creswell & Poth (2024) suggested that the researcher should anticipate any cultural, religious, gender, or other differences regarding the setting. The institutions accepted as sites were regionally accredited within the southeastern United States. The accreditation ensures that the college or university meets standards of academic integrity. Universities and participants were selected on criteria established to ensure a university with adequate international enrollment. The institutions were approved to issue I-20s by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for F1 international students. The institution has an international student enrollment of at least 50 international students in F1 status, indicating that the setting has a reasonable number of international students within its campus community. The setting of colleges throughout the U.S. was selected because the study focuses on the adjustment of international students in a higher educational setting.

The leadership within American higher education institutions typically includes senior-level administrators with such roles as president, provost, vice presidents, chief information officer, chief financial officer, faculty committees, board of trust, and board of visitors (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Many schools have a senior international officer, but not all schools title the role

similarly; therefore, this administrative role might be a dean or director. Universities usually have administrative officers and trustees manage campus affairs while the faculty make decisions regarding colleagues' curriculum and employment status, like tenure and promotion. Bok (2013) suggested that the board of trustees assists with hiring university presidents, budget approval, and budget oversight. Most universities are hierarchical and decentralized, and each unit or department makes its internal allocations and decisions (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Typically, the senior international officer would report to the provost, vice provost, dean of students, or vice president. Each university varies in its hierarchical organizational structure. The researcher had access to the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA), and SECUSS-L listservs, which will be used to solicit participants for the research study.

Participants

Participants in this study was 10 administrators within universities and colleges in the southeast United States who lead internationalization on their campuses. Their age, ethnicity, and gender vary based on the participants who volunteer for the study. There were 10 participants in the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that researchers interview 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. The participants were required to meet the criteria for participation in the study. Criteria for inclusion in this study include either an SIO or administrative leadership position with the title of dean, director, or any executive level of international leadership within the college's organizational chart responsible for international programs involving international students. The participants have at least three years of professional work experience and work full-time, allowing adequate experience and knowledge about working with international students. The SIO has a professional affiliation with the

NAFSA or the AIEA, which indicates professional development and experience in the field related to international students and the larger field of international higher education. Moustakas (1994) suggested that the essential criterion for a phenomenological study is that participants have experienced the phenomenon and are willing to participate.

<div align="center">**Researcher Positionality**</div>

This section presents my interpretive framework and assumptions. I recognized I was an instrument of the research study and appropriately documented data collection in this study regarding these concepts. My interpretive framework is described. My philosophical assumptions, ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions, and axiological assumptions are detailed. This section also includes my role as researcher's role in the study and explains any biases that I might have which could possibly have impacted the research study.

Interpretive Framework

As the researcher, I adopted a social constructivist approach. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the social constructivist approach is used when the research goal is to seek an understanding of the world. In this approach, I relied on the participants' views of the experience and situation (Mertens, 2010). Moustakas (1994) suggested that the constructivist worldview manifests in phenomenological studies wherein individuals describe their experiences. Creswell & Poth (2024) noted that social constructivism is often used with transcendental phenomenological research.

Philosophical Assumptions

Qualitative research studies must address three philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemological, and axiological (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Philosophical assumptions must be set aside when conducting a transcendental phenomenological study and require the researchers to

engage in the bracketing process (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, as the researcher, I will elaborate on my assumptions in the following sections.

Ontological Assumption

As the research instrument, I believe that the nature of reality is based on different experiences and viewpoints. Therefore, in this research study, my study's findings are reported following Moustakas's (1994) example of a phenomenological study, including how each participant in the study viewed the experience differently. Since the participants in this study might have different realities, multiple realities are noted (Creswell & Poth, 2024). According to Creswell & Poth (2024) and Denzin & Lincoln (2011), researchers can report on these multiple realities by using themes and the experiences of different participants in the study. I reported on the realities by using the detailed experiences of the participants as well as by using themes as they developed.

Epistemological Assumption

My epistemological assumption is that knowledge consists of subjective evidence from participants in the study. The relationship between the researcher and participants included a level of comfort with the research process, and participants were able to share their experiences without judgment (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Moustakas, 1994). I attempted to build a supportive environment for participants and minimize things between those participating and the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). In addition, I spent time with the participants to become an insider (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Within qualitative research, the participants' experiences are critical to the knowledge gleaned, and I utilized the participants' quotations to add rich, detailed descriptions to the study.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions are the beliefs that a researcher brings to a qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Moustakas (1994) and Patton (2014) suggested that qualitative researchers should make their values known and actively report biases to position themselves within a qualitative research study by including their personal experiences and other personal information, such as age and gender. My values and beliefs were molded by my Christian upbringing. In addition, my experience is as a female leader within higher education, including working with international students for over 20 years. As a research scholar, I will use epoché and the bracketing process to ensure that her biases and vices are set aside regarding the phenomenon so that she can focus on the participants' experiences.

Researcher's Role

Creswell & Poth (2024) suggest that the researcher is the study's human instrument. Therefore, documenting information about this instrument helps promote transparency within this study. As the researcher, I am a full-time senior international officer in a university located in the southeastern United States. I have worked with international students and implemented supportive programs addressing their unique cultural needs in this role. Therefore, I have experienced implementing programs designed to help students adjust to the campus community, connect with students and faculty, integrate into the large campus community, and interact with the local community. My interest in this study is to learn about the experiences of higher education administration leadership within an international educational context, specifically regarding how these higher educational leaders use their experience with international students and the acculturation process to design, implement, and monitor supportive programs. International students add diversity to college campuses nationwide; by supporting their adjustment to campus culture, SIOs also support the intersection between internationalization

and diversity efforts on college campuses as university leaders.

Procedures

The procedures section includes an outline of steps required to conduct the study to allow replication of the research study (Patton, 2014). Procedures for this research study include approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study (Appendix A). After that, the researcher solicited the participants for the study, obtained their permission to participate, collected data, and conducted a detailed analysis of each data source. Research studies with at least three forms of data collection and analysis can be triangulated (Creswell & Poth, 2024). A recruitment email explaining the study's purpose and requesting participation from those who meet the study criteria were sent to members of the Association of International Educators and the Association of International Education Administrators to recruit participants.

Permissions

Permission to conduct research was obtained from Liberty University's IRB, and the researcher obtained permission from the NAFSA and the AIEA to email the organizations' list-serves to request participants for the study. Permission from the SECUSS-L list serve, which is not affiliated with any international organization but is a list designed to support international educators, was also requested. The researcher did not access the email of NAFSA and AIEA members directly or the members of the SECUSS-L's list serve. As a member of NAFSA and AIEA, the researcher had access to the listserv and had the approval to post. The NAFSA, the AIEA, and SECUSS-L listserv, allow researchers to solicit members for research within the international education field. Appendix A contains a copy of the IRB's approval to conduct research. Permission was obtained from each participant after they were informed about the

study, the study's requirements, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell & Poth, 2024). While each participant is working in an institution of higher education, permission from the university was not required because the study is to gain insight into the individuals' unique and personal experiences. No additional IRB site approvals were required for this study. Permission to access the list-serves from SECUSS-L, the NAFSA, and the AIEA will be requested; a copy of this request is in Appendix B. The researcher is a member and these three list-serves, and their policy allows members to solicit participants for international education research opportunities.

Recruitment Plan

A purposeful sampling strategy for participant selection was used so that the sample includes only individuals whom the researcher is trying to understand (Cozby, 2009). Creswell and Creswell (2018) advised that research designs following criterion sampling ensure that data will be collected from participants who meet similar criteria. The authors recommended a specific sample size for studies with a phenomenological approach. Therefore, the sample size for this study was 12 to 15 senior international officers working in higher education who are members of the Association of International Educators or the Association for International Education Administrators. The participant works in a university with at least 50 international students in F1 status enrolled. The focus included those working in public and private institutions. The study focused only on administrators working at bachelor's degree-granting institutions or higher. Programs offering nonacademic training and issuing M1 or technical visas, were not considered for this study.

The researcher posted on the SECUSS-L, NAFSA, and the AIEA list serves to recruit international educators who meet the requirements for the study; a copy of the post can be found

in Appendix C. Posts were made every week until the specified number of participants was reached. No gifts or incentives were given other than an increased understanding of the field of international education and related research. The researcher ensured that the participant meets the requirements of the study by asking questions related to the study's criterion; a copy of these questions is in Appendix D. The researcher had the participants sign the informed consent prior to beginning the interview process; a copy of the informed consent is in Appendix E.

Data Collection Plan

Patton (2014) suggested that studies using only one method of data collection are more vulnerable to errors linked to that method and that triangulation assists with cross-data validity checks. Creswell & Poth (2024) suggested that within qualitative research, there should be at least three forms of data collection to ensure triangulation and the study's validity. This study utilized three qualitative methods to collect data: one-on-one interviews with each participant, focus group interviews, and a letter from each participant to their former self. Before the researcher collected the data, IRB approval was requested; once granted, each participant reviewed and signed an informed consent form.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

The participants' individual experiences of the phenomenon are the focus of qualitative research (Patton, 2014). Creswell & Poth (2024) suggested that interviews serve as a data collection method for a qualitative research study. Schwandt (2015) suggested that elicitation of structured interviews is appropriate for phenomenological research purposes and allows the researcher to design and ask the participants specific questions to obtain data regarding personal experiences. Therefore, this study used one-on-one interviews as a data collection approach.

The first data collection method included interviews with 10 senior international officers. Patton (2014) suggested that researchers interview people to find out things that generally cannot be directly observed and to understand the participants' perspectives. In transcendental phenomenological research, individual interviews involving open-ended questions are the most efficient (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher set aside any prejudgments by opening the interviews with an unbiased and receptive presence to build rapport with the participants. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. The researcher also had a voice recorder available in case of technical issues with the Zoom recording.

Moustakas (1994) suggested that the researchers develop a set of open-ended questions or topics to guide the interview process. The researcher used follow-up questions whenever clarification was required. Each interview took approximately 80-minutes and included a 10-minute introduction, 50-minutes for the researcher's questions, 10-minutes for the participant's comments, and a 10-minute conclusion. The researcher followed the interview questions but allowed for additional questions, including follow-up questions and those to clarify experiences. Creswell & Poth (2024) advised researchers to note any new questions in a reflexive journal.

Individual Interview Prompts

1. Please describe your education and career journey to becoming a senior international officer. CRQ

2. Describe the relationship that you have with the international students on your campus. CRQ & SQ1

3. What experiences have prepared you to work with international students on your campus? CRQ & SQ3

4. Describe the programs you have implemented to support international students' adjustment to your campus. SQ1

5. How do you support international students through acculturation to help them with integration and ensure they do not feel marginalized? SQ1

6. How would you describe your experience with international students with acculturation issues and select separating from the culture instead of integrating with it? CRQ

7. How would you describe your experiences regarding international students' integration into the new culture instead of assimilation into it? SQ1

8. How do you describe campus stakeholders' experiences and their role in the international students' acculturation process? CRQ & SQ2

9. How do you measure the programs implemented to support international students' acculturation? SQ2

10. What are your experiences with the processes you use to measure international students' acculturation? SQ2

11. How do you believe faculty and student support impacts the international students' acculturation to your college campus and American culture? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

12. What role do you believe the local community plays in the international students' acculturation? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

13. What programs do you currently have or plan on implementing to assist international students with community support? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

14. How do you measure the effectiveness of the programs implemented to support international students' acculturation? SQ2 & SQ3

15. What are your experiences measuring the effectiveness of the programs implemented to support international students' acculturation within the community? SQ2 & SQ3

16. How do you describe the challenges you have faced regarding the international students' acculturation process on your campus? CRQ & SQ1

17. COVID has dramatically impacted the world and the international student community regarding mobility. What was your experience with international students and their adjustment and acculturation to your campus during COVID? CRQ & SQ1

18. As a senior international officer, what new policies or procedures were implemented to assist international students during COVID? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

19. In your opinion, how did the new policies and procedures help international students' adjustment during COVID? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

20. What else would you like to add regarding how you perceive international students' adjustment to your college's campus? CRQ

The interview questions aim to understand the senior international officers' unique perceptions of their experiences. The interviews took place via Zoom at a time convenient to the SIO. A small sample of SIOs not participating in the research study clarified the wording of each question. The researcher piloted the study and the test questions with SIOs in the field to get feedback on the questions, relevance, and implications of each question. Changes in the questions and order were considered based upon the pilot study.

The first three prompts are used to gain information regarding the central research question and descriptive data regarding the SIOs, their relationship with international students on their campuses, and experiences that supported their careers in working with international students. Prompts four, five, six, and seven review the programs the SIOs have implemented on

campus to help international students with acculturation. Questions six, seven, and eight describe how SIOs support integration into the culture rather than having international students assimilate, take on their new culture, and leave much of their culture behind. Question eight asks how SIOs measure the acculturation of international students. Questions nine and 10 review the importance of stakeholders and ask the SIO to describe their impact on the acculturative process of international students. Questions 11, 12, and 13 ask about stakeholders' influence. Questions 12, 13, and 14 examine how the SIOs measure local community support of international students. Questions 14 and 15 ask about measuring programs for international students' interaction within the community. Question 16 asks the SIO about challenges faced regarding the acculturation process for international students on campus. Questions 17, 18, and 19 focus on the acculturation process during COVID. Question 20 is the final question which offered the SIO an opportunity to express any additional information regarding their experiences with the acculturation of international students that were not yet expressed.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis includes organizing, reducing, describing, and interpreting the data (Schwandt, 2015). In this study, the researcher followed Moustakas's (1994) interpretation of Husserl's transcendental phenomenological approach for data analysis since phenomenology attempts to describe the participants' experiences. Patton (2014) suggested that phenomenological analysis presents the essence of the lived experience of a group of people or a person. Giorgi (2009) suggested that the researcher should describe the experience in phenomenological research and stay close to the facts presented by the participants. The transcendental phenomenological approach also attempts to eliminate prejudgment, so the researcher can study the phenomena as they appear (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl suggested that one can achieve a transcendental ego without preconceptions when the analysis is explained in terms of the experience rather than the object of the experience and is an interpretive process (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the researcher began the epoché process by self-reflection to identify and extract any existing bias about the phenomenon studied. The researcher wrote an essay explaining their experience with the phenomenon and used it to put aside all preconceived biases. This essay detailed any assumptions held and assisted the researcher with ensuring validation in the data collection and the analysis of the data collected from the participants.

The epoché process allowed for the meaning of the phenomenon to naturally emerge through data with its own identity so that the researcher accurately described the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher also partook in journaling and taking reflexive field notes while collecting data so that data analysis began as soon as possible. After epoché and opening the research interview with a receptive presence, the researcher engaged in phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of composite textural and structural descriptions.

After epoché or setting aside prejudgments and opening the interview with a receptive presence, researchers can engage in phenomenological reduction, including bracketing the topic and question, when interviewing the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher also used horizontalization, which includes significant statements and clusters of meaning while analyzing data to compile a complete description of the phenomenon's essence. When the data collection process began, the researcher also began the analysis of the data.

Interviews were transcribed, and the researcher allowed member checking to ensure accuracy within the data collected in Appendix I. According to Creswell & Poth (2024), the

horizontalization process should include significant statements regarding the participants' experience. Moustakas (1994) advised that researchers can take reflexive notes during the individual data collection process to note emerging themes. Creswell and Poth (2024) also noted that the reflexive field notes would help the researcher with the audit trail if any new interview questions are added.

The data was transcribed and coded from the original interviews and the researcher's field notes, and themes were developed based on the coding (Saldaña, 2021). After the data coding, themes were developed via the Qualitative Data Analysis Software. The researcher used this software for axial coding; however, the scholar selected initial subject codes.

The first step in the horizontalization process is giving participants' statements equal value when reading the transcripts, which will help the researcher obtain a sense of significant statements (Moustakas, 1994). Second, the researcher composed a description of the phenomenon's essence. Third, the researcher removed repeated or irrelevant statements, including the reduction of experiences.

Researchers' application of imagination variation included using a system to develop the possible meanings and constructing a list of qualities for the experience and themes (Moustakas, 1994). The coding process constructs individual structural descriptions and composition structural descriptions. The synthesis shows the texture and structure of the experiences as a description and expression of what Moustakas (1994) called "essence" (p. 100). Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher engaged in the epoché process so that any biases or reactions to the data were put aside and were documented in the field notes. Creswell & Poth (2024) and Moustakas (1994) advised that a synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon should be provided upon analysis of the interviews.

Focus Groups Data Collection Approach

As part of qualitative research, focus groups of participants who have experienced the same phenomenon allow discussion on the area that has shared interest (Patton, 2014). This study included two focus groups with participants split into two groups of four and six after the one-on-one interviews. Focus groups were used to get a diverse perspective and to facilitate consensus from the participants in the study. Qualitative inquiry within groups makes data collection a social experience, increasing the meaning and validity of findings.

These focus groups took place and were recorded via Zoom. The focus groups were also audio recorded on a separate recording device in case of any technical issues with the original recording or transcription for future data analysis. Each focus group took approximately 90 minutes and had four main parts: 10 minutes for the introduction, 50 minutes for the researcher's questions, 20 minutes for the group's comments, and 10 minutes for the conclusion.

Focus Group Prompts

1. Please tell us how you became a senior international officer. CRQ &SQ3

2. Please share your first interactions with the international student community on a college campus. CRQ &SQ3

3. As a senior international officer, how do you view your responsibility and role in helping international students adjust to your campus community? CRQ & SQ1

4. What role do you believe the community plays in the acculturation process with international students? CRQ, SQ2, & SQ3

5. How did you first glean knowledge about the community's role in the international students' acculturation process? CRQ, SQ2, & SQ3

6. How do you perceive the international students' acculturation process? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ3

7. What are your experiences with international students' acculturation on your campus? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ3

8. What programs, policies, and procedures have you implemented on campus due to your perceptions about international acculturation? SQ1 & SQ2

9. How do you think international students feel about assimilating to the cultural values and norms of the dominant society? CRQ & SQ1

10. Describe your experiences with international students who feel marginalized and decide to separate from the dominant community instead of integrating. CRQ & SQ1

11. How do you measure the programs you have implemented at your college campus to promote acculturation of the international student community within the student community? SQ3

12. How do you measure the programs you have implemented at your college campus to promote programs for integrating faculty and staff regarding international students' acculturation? SQ3.

13. Describe the programs you implemented to ensure that international students do not feel marginalized on campus. CRQ & SQ1

14. What are your perceptions regarding COVID's impact on international students' adjustment to campus and US culture? CRQ

15. What else do you want to share about your experiences as a senior international officer supporting international students with their adjustment process? CRQ

The SIO reviewers were international educators not participating in the research study who were asked to evaluate each question to ensure the question and wording are clear. The researcher also piloted the focus group questions with SIOs in the field to evaluate their relevance and to gain feedback. Adjustments were made based upon the pilot study to the questions and if required, the order of the questions.

Questions one, two, and three are designed to gain data from the participants regarding their experiences of being SIOs and their responsibilities regarding acculturation. Questions four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine are to gain information regarding SIOs' experiences related to the acculturation of international students and the larger campus community. Question 10 asks SIOs what they are doing to prevent the marginalization of international students. Questions 11 and 12 ask about how SIOs measure the acculturation process related to programming implemented on a college campus with faculty and students. Question 13 attempts to describe SIOs' experiences in assisting international students with preventing feelings of marginalization on their college campuses. Question 14 seeks to understand and describe the impact of COVID on the international students' acculturation process on college campuses in the United States. Finally, question 15 offers the SIOs a chance to mention anything not yet covered within the focus group related to the international students' acculturation.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

As suggested by Moustakas (1994), during analysis of the focus group interviews, the researcher engages in epoché and begins with a description of their experiences with the phenomenon. The focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were given to each focus group participant so that member checking can occur. The researcher developed a list of significant statements from data obtained in the focus groups, and

horizontalization, which treats all statements as equal, was used. The researcher used coding to assist with the development of themes. Researchers used *Nvivo* codes or phrases from the participants that were substantial to the participants' experiences (Saldaña, 2021). The researcher looked for patterns to evaluate, including repetitive or consistent occurrences within the data. The researcher's field notes were also be used to detail the interview dynamics. The researcher grouped the significant statements into broader information units or clusters, as Moustakas (1994) recommended. The researcher then developed themes within the data, representing a cluster of codes (Saldaña, 2021).

According to Creswell & Poth (2024), researchers can describe the phenomenon by using the data to create textural descriptions of the experiences by highlighting verbatim examples and using structural descriptions to explain how the experience happened. The researcher wrote a composite description of the phenomenon based on the data, incorporating the textural and structural descriptions so that the essence of the phenomenon experienced could be presented (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Moustakas, 1994).

Letter-Writing Data Collection Approach

The third source of data collected for this study was letters the participants wrote to their younger selves about what they wished they had known earlier in their careers. Letter writing is another data collection approach which is appropriate for a phenomenological research study (Creswell & Poth, 2024: Patton, 2014). The prompt for the letter was: As a senior international officer in higher education today, what experiences would you share to prepare your younger self for assisting international students with acculturation? This letter addresses aspects of their career related to their experiences with the international students' acculturation on campus and advice they would offer based upon knowledge gained as an executive in a higher education

leadership position. Each participant was asked to write one letter of at least two pages. This data collection method is typically limited to one instance per participant and should be substantive (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Patton, 2014). The participants had two weeks after their initial interviews to create the letter and submit it to the researcher.

Letter-Writing Data Analysis Plan

The researcher reviewed and coded each letter like the individual interview and focus group analysis processes. Creswell & Poth (2024) advised researchers to develop a list of significant statements and engage in the horizontalization process to consider each statement equal. The researcher used a coding system as part of the data analysis process. The same coding process were used for the letter writing exercise as with the individual and focus group interviews, adding new or *in vivo* codes whenever necessary. Saldaña (2021) suggested that the researcher use codes to translate and attribute meaning to the data so that categorization and pattern detection can occur. The significant statements were then grouped into themes, which are broader information units, to create clusters and to displace redundant data (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The analysis of the letters was completed when data saturation was reached and no new insights were discovered (Patton, 2014). Both textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon were created. In addition, a composite description of the phenomenon was drafted so that the essence of the phenomenon, as detailed in the letters, was expressed (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Data Synthesis

Gall et al. (2007) advised that researchers use multiple data forms to allow for triangulation. Therefore, in this research study, the researcher used three data collection methods to triangulate and validate the findings. After the data analysis of the interviews, focus groups,

and letters to the participants' younger selves, the researcher synthesized the data. Using narrative and axial coding, researchers can review and code the data across the data collection methods to find categories and subcategories (Saldaña, 2021). Phenomenological reduction allows researchers evaluation of the dominant themes arising from the participants' experiences and groups them together while eliminating the redundant ones. The analysis stopped when data saturation was reached, and there were no new dimensions or categories to be discovered (Patton, 2014).

The researcher used imagination variation to describe the participants' experience regarding the phenomenon. The researcher presented structural and textual meanings and completed a composite description of the experience, a process Moustakas (1994) called synthesis. The researcher also engaged in reflection to arrive at the essence of the phenomenon which was formerly concealed. Creswell & Poth (2024) advised researchers to integrate results into a detailed and in-depth description of the phenomenon. At this final stage, the researcher needed to return to the participants to validate the study's findings by member-checking the data and themes presented.

Trustworthiness

This researcher demonstrates trustworthiness in the data collection, findings, and analysis processes. Lincoln and Guba (1988) noted that qualitative researchers could show trustworthiness by adhering to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Schwandt (2015) suggested that trustworthiness is the investigative quality of a study that makes it "noteworthy" to the reader (p. 308). The terms used to support trustworthiness in a qualitative research study are comparable to quantitative terms, such as internal and external validity, objectivity, and reliability; the trustworthiness of credibility aligns with internal validity,

transferability to external validity, dependability to reliability, and confirmability to objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

Credibility

For a research study to be credible, it must present or describe the constructs or experiences being studied truthfully (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Lincoln and Guba (2007) suggested that the qualitative techniques appropriate to increase credibility include triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Both member checking from the participants and peer review helps to keep researchers honest. This researcher used all three techniques for this study to achieve credibility.

Triangulation

Triangulation is the implementation of at least three data collection techniques to improve validity (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Triangulation of the data contributes to the credibility of the study. This study triangulated the data from the three data collection techniques, including individual interviews, focus groups, and personal letters to participants' former selves. Triangulation of data also contributed to the themes found within this study.

Member Checking

Member checking denotes the solicitation of feedback from respondents regarding the researcher's findings, with the researcher showing participants the final themes to evaluate and confirm the information provided (Schwandt, 2015). Therefore, participants were asked to review the data and themes developed from their interviews, the focus groups, and the letter-writing exercise, which were incorporated into the study to enhance credibility and showed that the results accurately depict the participants' experiences with the phenomenon.

Peer Debriefing

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested peer debriefing so that a peer can review the study to see if it resonates with another researcher. The strategy of having a colleague or researcher review the study adds validity to an account. The chair and dissertation committee members reviewed the study to achieve peer debriefing. In addition, peers with experience in qualitative research and no connection to international education were asked to review the qualitative study. The researcher may wish to review dilemmas encountered in the field and solicit colleagues' reactions or to have them be available to listen to concerns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability includes the application of the study's findings into other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If sufficient detail is obtained within the study, the reader can reasonably speculate whether the findings are applicable to other cases with similar circumstances (Schwandt, 2015). For transferability to be achieved, as Lincoln and Guba (2007) suggested, thick, descriptive data from the participants who have shared the experience is included in the final report. The detailed description should meet the desired outcomes of transcendental phenomenology: to determine what an experience means for the participants who have lived it and provide a description of it to the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher used a variety of participants to ensure diversity. Creswell & Poth (2024) suggested that variation in sampling assists the study reach a broad range, including a variety of participants regarding age, gender, and demographic information, so the study does not have a narrow focus.

Dependability

Dependability focuses on the inquiry process and the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the study is traceable, documented, and logical (Schwandt, 2015). The study was completed so that details regarding the methodological processes are clear to allow replication by other scholars. Researchers can note dependability by showing that the research study findings could be repeated with a clear description of the steps, processes, and procedures the researcher has taken during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also kept a document log to collect the data, as suggested by Creswell & Poth (2024), which detailed the researcher's thoughts while they collect and code the data. The researcher kept an audit trail when collecting data as reflexive notes and memos to preserve the original data.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the study's findings are shaped by the participants and data and not the researcher's bias, interest, or motivation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability helps the researcher ensure that the study is logical and consistent, and that the data is reliable (Patton, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (2007) suggested that when confirmability is established with data and the ability for reconstructions and dependability, an outside researcher audits the data. Therefore, the researcher included the researcher's memos comprised of reflexive note-taking as part of the audit trail. According to Creswell & Poth (2024) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), researchers can implement triangulation, reflexivity notes, confirmability audits, and audit trails to support confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an essential part of any research study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that permission to implement the study should be received before any research is conducted. Therefore, the researcher obtained approval from Liberty University's Institutional

Review Board before collecting any data. The participants were informed about the study and asked to sign a consent form without pressure from the researcher. Creswell & Poth (2024) elaborated that researchers should not use deception or manipulation during participant recruitment or data collection. Participants for this study were informed regarding the nature of the study, including that it is voluntary and their right to withdraw from it at any time. To ensure that the participants' experiences are accurately detailed, researchers used member checking of the data and the bracketing process so that any biases were not incorporated into the study (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Moustakas, 1994).

As Moustakas (1994) suggested, confidentiality is an ethical consideration to be addressed while conducting a transcendental phenomenological study. Participants' confidentialities were maintained using pseudonyms instead of real names (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Patton, 2014). Data collected will be stored in a password-protected and secured drive. Physical notes will be secured in a locked file. Data will be stored for at least three years; then, if no additional research is performed, the data will be destroyed. Physical paper and notes will be shredded, and electronic files will be erased.

Summary

This chapter overviewed the researcher's methods for this transcendental phenomenological study. A primary research question and three sub-questions focused on senior international officers' experiences related to their support of international students' adjustment to their campus were provided. The senior international officers selected for the research study had pseudonyms assigned in place of their real names to protect their privacy. Ten senior international officers were recruited via a criterion sampling technique, ensuring that all participants have the experience the researcher would like to study. Procedures on how the study

were conducted were provided, including Liberty University's IRB approval process, the recruitment process for participants, data collection techniques, recording of data, and how the data was analyzed. Data collection techniques were detailed, including individual interviews, focus groups, and letters from the participants to their younger selves. Moustakas' (1994) data analysis process was identified as the proper tool to use for the study's data; it includes the epoché, horizontalization, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesizing process. This chapter also noted how the researcher ensured credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Finally, the researcher also noted ethical considerations for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe SIOs' lived experiences regarding attitudes and beliefs about the adjustment of international students in private and public universities in the southeast region of the United States. This chapter provides a summary of the participants, the results of the study including the themes which were created and developed from the data collected from the participants. The chapter also includes responses to the research questions, themes which were developed out of codes, and concludes with a summary. The results contain five themes and multiple subthemes. This chapter includes data regarding participants' responses to the research questions and descriptions of their experience. The data in this research study incorporates themes and subthemes that emerged from thorough transcendental data analysis. Themes include understanding social support networks, understanding campus resources, understanding acculturation as an outcome, understanding international student assessment, and understanding professional networking resources.

Participants

The participants included ten SIOs who work within higher education. Responsibilities and titles of the SIOs vary between colleges; however, for this study's participants, the job responsibilities were similar in nature with them fully leading or facilitating the leading of internationalization on their campus along with responsibility for the oversight and leadership of the international advising on their campus. The participants' titles included: coordinator (2), regional director (1), assistant director (2), director (2), executive director (1), advisor (1), and vice president of global education (1). The range of positions held indicates the variety in titles within the roles and responsibilities of SIOs in higher education today. The participants consisted

of six females and four males. The participants were employed by a broad range of colleges, which included community colleges, nonprofit universities, private colleges, and public universities. A summary of the participants can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Senior International Officer Participants

SIO Participant	Years As SIO	Highest Degree Earned	Participant Title	International Enrollment
Elizabeth	7	Masters	Assistant Director	55
Catherine	25	Ph.D. Candidate	Coordinator	85
Anthony	7	Masters	Regional Director	200
Victoria	19	Ph.D. Candidate	Director	250
John	8	Masters	Director	450
Andrew	3	Ph.D.	Vice President	65
Joseph	9	Masters	Coordinator	1,100
Margaret	8	Masters	Executive Director	150
Caroline	10	Masters	Assistant Director	470
Melissa	4	Undergraduate	Advisor	75

Elizabeth

Elizabeth has seven years of work experience in the field as an assistant director. She works at a private, mid-size, non-profit university. The university where she works has approximately 55 F-1 international students. She works with international enrollment and immigration advising and advises on study abroad. Elizabeth has a master's degree and began her career in international education after graduating college. She originally began her career as a

coordinator in the International Student and Scholars Office with her alma mater. She was promoted to assistant director after a few years working in the field. The private university where she works has a small international office which assists with study abroad and international student advising. They also help with international admissions and enrollment. She has always been supportive of diversity and inclusion measures and volunteered with international students as an undergraduate student. She is a member of NAFSA.

Catherine

Catherine has been working in the international education field for over 25 years. She works at a public community college in a rural community. At the community college where she works, she is the main administrative leader and support system for international students. In her role, she oversees additional satellite campuses in other cities. She has 85 international students in the F1 non-immigrant status studying at her college. She began working with international students after she completed her graduate degree. She currently serves as the SIO at the college where she works. Her title is coordinator; however, she handles academic advising, admissions for international students, and immigration advising and compliance. She has a master's degree and is working on the dissertation phase of her Ph.D. While supporting international students is her main function, she also has oversight of global education on her campuses. Catherine is the only administrator who leads internationalization on her campus; however, she has the support of faculty and staff. She is a member of NAFSA and is very active in her state consortium.

Anthony

Anthony has worked in international education as an SIO for seven years and within higher education for 10 years. He works in a private university that enrolls 200 international students on F1 visas. He works at a public mid-size university. The highest level of education he

has received is a master's degree. He has worked in higher education for most of his career; while working in enrollment, he was promoted to assist with international admissions. Thereafter, he was promoted to regional director where he oversees international student support services, international student admissions, events, and activities that support the international community as well as international students. He is a member of NAFSA.

Victoria

Victoria's title is director, and she has 19 years of experience in the field of international education. Victoria works at a private, non-profit university where she oversees study abroad, national scholarship advising, international admissions, immigration advising, and international student engagement. The university she works at has approximately 250 F1 international students enrolled, of which approximately 50 are undergraduates and over 200 are graduate students. She has a master's degree and is working on a Ph.D. She began her career working in higher education in various administrative departments. She has worked at three different colleges in the role of Director. She has oversight for two campuses that enroll international students. She is a member of NAFSA and AIEA.

John

John has worked in the field of higher education for eight years. He works at a public university that enrolls over 450 F1 international students. He worked in international admissions as an assistant director where he gained experience with international recruitment and enrollment and then was promoted to director of a new division within his university that combines international admissions, recruitment, students support and engagement, and immigration advising. He has worked in the international education field as an SIO for eight years. He is considered the SIO on his campus. His department has a full-time administrator who works on

international student engagement and activities that support global engagement. He works at a large public research university. He is a member of NAFSA.

Andrew

Andrew has worked in the field of international education for over 20 years. He has been in the role of SIO at three different universities. In his current role, he is the vice president at a private university that enrolls 64 international students in F1 status. Fifty percent of the international students are athletes. In his three positions, he has always had a leadership position as a SIO, but in his current position, he has the highest position he has reached as a vice president. In this role, he has oversight of all aspects of global engagement at his university. While international student service is under his purview, he has a strong focus on study abroad programs. He is not a PDSO at his university but understands immigration regulations relating to F1 international students; however, he is not fully trained in the regulations. He has departments who report to him on study abroad, international student immigration advising, international student programming, and international partnerships, including exchange programs. He attended the NAFSA leadership workshop for SIOs many years ago and is a member of NAFSA.

Joseph

Joseph has worked as an immigration advisor for over 17 years. He has been an SIO in previous roles for over nine years. He currently works as a coordinator in a large, division four, research university with over 1,100 international students. In his current role, he is an advisor to approximately 450 international students; this number can range from 250 to 450 because currently he is assisting with advising due to staff changes. At his current university, each division is separated by cultural support division for international students called the International House. In the past, he has been an SIO at smaller colleges where he had more

connection and contact with international students. He is active in NAFSA and has been very active in the state consortiums. He has attended many local and national conferences with NAFSA over his career.

Margaret

Margaret has eight years of experience as a SIO at a private college with oversight of international student immigration advising, study abroad, national scholarship advising, international recruitment, international activities, and the English language program. Her school enrolls over 150 international students. Her title is executive director with previous experience as a missionary. She has her master's degree. She is active with her international student community and is normally the point of contact for the college when international issues arise. As her responsibilities as the SIO on campus increase, she is working on having her staff take on more of the international student advising and support so that she can work on larger internationalization projects. She is a member of NAFSA and is active in her state consortium and works with immigration agencies.

Caroline

Caroline has worked in the field as an SIO for ten years. Caroline started in the field by supporting the international students at her local college. After many years of supporting international students, she was hired by the International Office to be an advisor and promoted to assistant director. She spearheads all international student advising on campus. Caroline's department also supports study abroad; however, her main focus is immigration advising and support for the university's international student population. She has approximately 470 undergraduate international students on her campus. Most of the students she advises are in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics field. She is solely responsible for

coordinating their orientation and additional support services to help them adjust to the campus community. She has a master's degree. She is a member of NAFSA and her local state consortium.

Melissa

As a relatively new SIO, Melissa has worked in the field for four years. She works at a small private college. She assists all international students with immigration advising, orientation, and helps arrange activities for the international students. She also oversees study abroad; however, the college she works at has a small study abroad population, which gives her time to focus on her international students. She has an undergraduate degree. She worked in higher education before in admissions and then in residential life. She was promoted to the position working within international education from her combined experiences. Working at a small college, she has limited resources; however, her role is considered as an SIO because she has leadership within international education at her school. She is a member of NAFSA.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the SIOs' experiences regarding the acculturation process for international students within the higher educational system in southeast United States. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological study can capture the unique experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Moustakas, 1994). Because the SIOs lead the programs that support the international students on college campuses, they have experiences with how international students acculturate to the campus and community at large. The study's central research question and sub questions focused on the SIOs' perceptions regarding the acculturation process of F1 international students on their campuses. The research

questions used were considered within the context and framework of Berry's theory of acculturation.

Theme Development

The study's participants were gathered via purposeful sampling and included 10 SIOs who work at universities in southeast United States with at least three years of experience in the field of international education at colleges that had at least 50 F1 international students and were either members of NAFSA or AIEA. To ensure the participants met these criteria, upon confirmation of participation, the researcher completed the Participant Screening Survey (see Appendix D). The study was completely voluntary, and each participant completed an Informed Consent (see Appendix E) before data collection. The data collection took place via Zoom interviews with each participant. The interviews consisted of 20 questions (see Appendix F), which included an initial question to find out more about how the SIO entered the field of international education, which served to help create and establish rapport with the participants to provide the researcher with some context about their work experience in the field. The next 15 questions were about their experiences with acculturation of international students on their campus. The last three interview questions focused on COVID's impact on the international students' acculturation process and SIOs' advising and policies in their department(s). The last question was to request if the participants had anything else to add regarding how they perceive international students' adjustment to college campus. The ten interviews spanned an hour to an hour and twenty minutes in length. The researcher recorded and transcribed each interview. The researcher had each participant review the transcription to ensure member checking of the data presented. Upon review, none of the participants had any issues, noted errors, or made any changes to their transcripts.

The second data collection method was a letter to the participants' former selves (see Appendix H). The participants were given the of what experience they should share to prepare their younger self for assisting international students with acculturation. Each participant was asked to write at least two pages. The participants each submitted a letter of at least one and a half to two-full pages of data.

The third data collection method utilized was focus groups. Two focus groups were held, which were divided into groups of four and six participants. The researcher sent a Doodle poll to the participants to determine a convenient time when they could meet. Each focus group was one hour long. The researcher asked fifteen questions to the group (Appendix G). The researcher recorded each session. The first question was how they became a SIO, which helped the participants get to know each other and build rapport. The questions were asked to the group, and each participant had a chance to answer the questions. The focus group was more of a conversation around each question, which allowed participants to comment upon each member's feedback. The focus groups were on Zoom, which allowed recording and transcription of the sessions. After the sessions, the researcher sent each member the Interview Transcript Approval Letter (see Appendix I) along with the transcription so that they had time to review their comments, promoting member checking.

To code the data collected, the researcher entered the transcriptions into NVivo software. The researcher began to code the transcripts using an open coding method. The research questions were listed in the software, and when new codes were created, the researcher determined what question that data might answer. However, as the coding process continued, the researcher realized that many of the codes created were used for other participants' data. During data analysis, themes were developed using participant data through several interpretations of the

data using Moustakas's (1994) imaginative variation. While new codes did emerge, patterns in the data emerged; therefore, themes in the data developed quite early. As Creswell & Poth (2024) suggested, the researcher examined the codes as a whole and then classified the codes through clusters of meaning. Upon analysis of the coding, the researcher ranked the data based upon the number of times the code was used by participants. During the data analysis, five distinct themes emerged from the data collected: understanding social support networks, understanding campus resources, understanding acculturation as an outcome, understanding international student assessment, and understanding professional networking resources (see Table 2).

Table 2

Theme Development

Theme	Sub-Theme
Understanding Social Support Networks	International Advisor
	Friends
	Faculty
	Community
Understanding Campus Resources	Orientation
	Activities
	Departmental
Understanding Acculturation as an Outcome	Integration as Positive
	Assimilation as Immersive
	Separation as Differentiation
	Marginalization as Disadvantage
Understanding of International Student Assessment	Surveys
	Direct Observation
	Student Feedback
Understanding Professional Networking Resources	NAFSA
	State Consortium

Theme 1: Understanding Social Support Networks

The study participants valued understanding international students' social support networks, which are critical to international student acculturation and utilized to support the

adjustment process. Most of the study's participants valued strong social support networks through relationships with their international advisors, friends, faculty, and community. The participants mentioned that they understand they cannot be the sole provider of support for the international students on their campus and the value of expanding the social support network, which leads to better acculturative outcomes, benefiting the international student.

International Advisor

International students with F1 status have many immigration regulations to adhere to maintain their legal status in the United States. Immigration advisors help international students understand these regulations and aid in the legal application process to work on campus or in internships. Assistance with legal work after graduation in the United States is optional practical training. They also help with travel approval on the students' I-20 immigration documents and obtain advice on travel requirements for re-entry and visa renewals. Immigration advisors are critical in international students' education because they facilitate compliance with federal immigration regulations.

Most of the participants were immigration advisors or had some connection to international student advising and support through their role as SIOs. When asked about the role of international advisors, their responses demonstrated a passion for assisting international students through direct connection or building the policies, procedures, or programs to support students on campus. Even when SIOs have other responsibilities regarding international education on campus, including study abroad, national scholarship advising, English language programs, or international recruitment, it was clear that they had a heightened passion when they discussed working with international students. When asked about her relationship with

international students in their advising role, Margaret stated: "it is why I do what I do. So, it's probably the reason that I do what I do…it's pretty strong." Margaret continued:

> They are part of my children's lives. They're part of our life. We have them over at our house. Sometimes, they stay with me between semesters…if the campus has to close, but they need a place to stay. So, it is my mission, and it's…what makes work fulfilling. But, at the same time, right now, it is a transition because I have to start to…depart from that, [I] have these other projects too in my role that I have to do.

As Margaret was given more tasks to internationalize her campus, she found that she needed to delegate the responsibilities and connection to her staff. When talking about her need to pull away from the closeness to her international students slowly, she explained:

> I taught a course for all incoming international students up until…this last semester. So, [the] Fall of 2023 is the first time I didn't teach it. So, I've done the orientation, and then this course follows new international students through their whole first semester…we talk about cross-cultural adjustment. So, for the first time, the incoming class feels a little bit more removed from me. So, it's a good progression, and…it's not a bad thing. I have a competent person that's doing that role now. But honestly, my heart is a little bit like (sad face) because that is my favorite thing about the job. I'm still the advisor for the International Club. So, we still do a lot of things together. But that course is too time-consuming for me to do now. So, I needed to give it away because my role is increasing in different ways.

John explained how he assisted new international students upon arrival:

> My wife and I…we've been a host family for students for a few years now, and…we will help a weekend here and weekend there and stuff, but I have a good relationship with the

new international students during [their] first semester, but it hasn't been as consistent throughout, and as time passes, I see them less as they become more well…adjusted to campus. But that only means that they are adjusting…and…that is a good thing for them.

Catherine mentioned how being the primary contact for immigration plays a critical role in how international students respond and react to her:

Being the only one who understands immigration and is helping to or trying to lead it…at …[a]smaller community college…I have help but for the most part…I am the…one that deals with all their immigration woes or whatever their daily needs are…we don't have dorms, so our kids usually live off campus in some capacity. But I am that person that takes them places. So, I have a strong connection to them all…they know me…and they trust me.

Joseph has experience as an SIO, leading two colleges' internationalization efforts. In those previous roles, he had time to help students directly. However, he currently helps with the immigration advisement of hundreds of students within an entirely different organizational culture of the campuses. He stated:

The relationship is not as personal in the sense that it would have been at my former institutions because I did more programming support beyond immigration, and I had contact throughout their lifecycle as a student. Most of the time, I knew my students very well.

This statement implied that when he had fewer international students, he knew them better and was more active in their personal lives and student activities.

The role of an international advisor is vital to international students in many ways. However, the students' necessity for proper immigration advising and support services must be balanced. For example, Catherine wrote:

> Being an immigration advisor, sometimes you have challenges to deal with a balance between the institutional needs, governmental edicts, and the needs of the student. Stay strong in your knowledge of policy, law, [and] guidance so you can make fair and balanced decisions. Keeping your ethical standards and protecting the students is critical; even when they make mistakes, always keep a door open for them to get help, no matter the situation. Maintaining the care of duty standards while balancing the law is tough sometimes, but maintaining that human connection is critical. These are not just numbers; they are people, and helping others understand their needs should be a huge part of your personal advocacy.

SIOs recognize the importance that international advisors play in the international students' adjustment on campus, whether helping with immigration or directing students to the appropriate department for assistance. SIOs who are international advisors show a solid connection to their students.

Friends

Participants suggested that making friends is essential in the acculturation process for international students because it expands their social support networks. SIOs understand that connection with one's peer group is vital. The participants explained the importance of peer-support programs to help international students with their on-campus arrival and cultural adjustment. Some of the participants were responsible for implementing programming to nurture

relationship-building. For example, John mentioned that his college has implemented an international buddy system:

> We pair students with host families and students on campus. They have a buddy for all semester, and the second semester…they are paired with. We have buddy dinners as well; this is designed to help the new incoming students feel connected and have an immediate resource for support.

Caroline talked about her university's program, much like the one John's school offers. She stated:

> I use a lot of the team…called the navigators. They are current students, and those are our cultural ambassadors…some of them will ride the bus to the airport…and have the little fun. It is important because they normally become their friends on campus. They need the help, too.

> Victoria explained how the development of international student friendships can be supported. She stated:

> When international students arrive in America, they are often nervous or shy…It isn't always easy…Not all are here for the first time. They might have visited or went to high school in the USA. Those [who] have a stronger understanding or the ones who went to high school or have family in the USA…[They] have…a network…[of] people they know built already. But, for those coming for the first time…they may even feel that their English isn't good or fear that they won't fit in. Hosting pizza parties, breakfasts, or any sort of get-together allows your international students to have a built-in form of support that isn't you. All your international students are often going through similar situations

and feelings. These students will often stick together…and as their confidence builds, they begin to become friends with American students.

Elizabeth spoke about the importance of social support and friendships:

> Students who have strong relationships with their peers and faculty tend to integrate more into American culture. I think that's because these people in their lives are able to tell them what the cultural norms are and aren't. Also, by having these relationships, it is easier for our international students to appreciate American culture and even adopt some of it.

Elizabeth continued:

> One program is our international student club on campus…Everyone's an immediate member if they're an international student. So, they not only immediately connect with international students from all around the globe that's facing the same problems…they are, but they're also connecting with Americans or domestic students who want to assist and embrace international students and support and help them integrate into the larger campus culture community and also just to support them and make friends. Their connection makes our job easier.

Connection to peers, whether American or international students, is essential. Friendship and its development are integral parts of the acculturative process of international students on a college campus, whether with other international students going through the same transitions or American students who want to meet international students and become friends. All participants had some program to help students connect with peers, whether structured or unstructured. SIOs noted that building a peer network was incredibly important to international adjustment, as seen in the number of peer-to-peer programs offered on each campus.

Faculty

Most participants stated that faculty are vital in the acculturation of international students. SIOs indicated that faculty support and interaction assisted the international students in the classroom and during outside events and activities. For the most part, faculty are in the classroom daily and interact more with students than staff or administrators.

Elizabeth and Victoria shared their experiences regarding faculty support. Victoria noted, "I feel…that the majority of faculty on our campus wish to support international students and understand the amount of adjustment they face. They are willing to help them…and our department…and the student with support." Elizabeth agreed with the comment, nodding:

> Yes, yes…most faculty on my campus are supportive as well. However, you always have one or two…you know what they say, that apple…(laughter) who ruins the bunch. Maybe they are not culturally aware or prepared to help, while some are strict…in order to be fair in their classroom.

When asked about working with faculty who seem to act this way, a pause and then laughter is in the room. Brian stated, "it can be tough." There was another pause, and then Elizabeth indicated, "but that is our role, to help understand those instances and work on how to bridge them and fix them." Victoria agreed:

> Sometimes, it is just the campus culture…how important are the international students' enrollment to the administration? If they are valued, faculty normally learn that it is important to help them...Sometimes, they are new faculty who don't understand that we have recruitment and retention work to do…we all play a role in their success.

Victoria explained how international students perceive faculty. She stated:

Faculty are important, not only because they are held in high esteem normally by international students but they're giving them grades. So, I mean, they're in class with them. They see them more than anyone else, other than…a coach…[or] maybe an immigration advisor...So, faculty play a critical role in my job. If faculty have an issue with a student, they're contacting me as a senior international officer. Now, if I'm not available, I'll delegate that to my staff. But I'm seeing the faculty communication in my university. I play a key role because we know that [it] could hurt their immigration status if they're not doing well in their classes. So, it's a key component for F1 international students to stay in compliance. So, the faculty on my campus are aware of that and communicate with my office, and we do work together for them.

Melissa felt the same about faculty support and working collaboratively with the SIO and international advisors. For example, Melissa wrote, "partner with faculty to help students in the classroom so that if something happens and you are aware, you can fix it before it impacts their legal status." Therefore, the role of faculty in international student acculturation is essential in the international student experience.

John's university has a college predominately composed of international students. Their college has a class designed to help international students with adjustment. Faculty with experience teaching international students are more aware of international concerns. John stated:

They do a great job of understanding just because…they're doing some of that themselves like they teach them in class. It's a one-credit-hour class the students take every semester, and they go over a lot of these things…[such as] co-cultural differences. They go through academic integrity…inside [and] outside the classroom…They get it.

But, then other colleges that don't enroll a large number of international students don't

get it as much.

John continued his discussion about the faculty who have less interaction with the international

students on his campus:

I think other colleges see us as the federal regulators, and we're just the ones that are

gonna tell the students they can't work more than 20 hours a week, or we're just going to

be the ones that they go to get a signature to travel...It's kind of [varies] across the board,

depending on the different academic areas.

John elaborated on the importance of training faculty working with international students. He

stated:

International students enrolled at the institution will benefit both directly and indirectly

from a culturally aware and educated faculty and staff. Students will feel a greater level

of care and support from a community that understands their culture, their holidays, their

political system, their unique food preferences, their religion, and a host of other pieces

of the particular culture.

Whether in the classroom or within an organized committee, faculty support was essential to the

SIOs. Joseph mentioned the value of faculty support through an organized committee on campus:

So, [at] both…schools, we had a committee…We had faculty on those. They had input,

and they wanted to help; they were supportive. So, we had regular meetings, and we

would often talk about ways to support international students…there are individual cases

where faculty would contact us. Overall, they are helpful. They use us as a resource, and

we work with them as best we can.

He continued, "I think, at smaller institutions, people wind up wearing more hats, and so you get involved in more of those situations."

Victoria mentioned that collaboration with faculty can help students with a broad range of issues. She stated:

> You wouldn't think about it too much, but it is pertinent that you reach out to faculty and staff, informing them of any language or cultural barriers that may hinder a student's success. Letting them take tests in another room or even giving [them] extra time can help…a lot of students are translating their words while writing in English, and allowing them more time can drastically impact their grades as well as their confidence.

Therefore, whenever she can, she partners with faculty to allow international students with English language difficulties additional testing time to support their academic success.

Conversely, Andrew, who works at a large research university, indicated:

> We try to leverage as many of our resources as we can to help our students, like a faculty having issues in class with an international student. So, they might say, maybe it would help them to use…a dictionary or a translator on an assignment, and we always say that's not our office's responsibility and refer them appropriately. But we do partner with faculty in that way. We work together to support the student.

SIOs see faculty as integral in the international students' social support network. Faculty provide on-campus support for international students.

Community

When asked about the community's support, SIOs expressed that the local community, including churches, has a vital role in the social support network of international students on

their campus. The support of community and local churches came up as a sub-theme because SIOs stated that it helped international students with adjustment and belonging. John stated:

> We have an international friendship program. So, in that program, students could sign up for a host family they could stay with for one, two, three, or four nights upon arrival, which would hopefully grow into bigger relationships. Churches would almost like adopt a student. So, they might stay with one family. But it was really the community that was supporting that one student. It is helpful because it takes a lot of work to find a host family, and you need the community to support your efforts.

Andrew brought up the importance of community to the international students' adjustment:

> Relationships like this are incredibly important for students first arriving in the United States. As you consider opportunities to serve and build immersion programs for new students at the university, connections with local families should be very high on the priority list. There are a lot of moving parts to figure out, but a family connection program is imperative. The institution alone cannot provide some of these items, and a program with families from the community can fill these needs.

Margaret explained how churches in the local area assist her college with international students:

> Here's what that looks like, we've had churches…adopt our international students, and they bring cards [and] welcome packets. When we have new students or when new students arrive on campus, they do beach days, Thanksgiving parties for them, and barbeques!

Margaret continued:

Sometimes, individual families take part. Usually, these are mission groups inside

churches that kind of adopt us. However, it's very dependent on the leadership that the

church has. But they help us a lot, and the connections and friendships that develop last a

long time.

Caroline agreed with the importance of the support their college receives from the

community and churches: "We have lots of people that enjoy our international, that volunteer on

campus through the years we've had an international program…trying to connect families."

Caroline explained:

A large support of the community comes from the local churches and the local

ministries…and they just wanna help…So, they open one of their buildings once a month

for Game Day. The students really enjoy it. They miss their own family, so it is nice for

them to be with other families.

Catherine mentioned the success of their community friendship program:

We also have our Friendship Partners program with our community…it's open to any of

the international students in universities run by churches. But they don't proselytize. It's

a friendship program, not a housing, or host family. It's like once a month you all get

together…Sometimes, students show up, and it can be hit or miss… but we have it

available for our international community.

Jerry commented on how international students also impact and internationalize the

community:

When I first got here, our community hated our Chinese students. They were calling 9-1-

1…on a regular basis. They didn't know what was happening and where are these kids

coming from? All they do is drive nice cars. We realized…we needed to build

connection. We got them (the international students) out in the community, and… it

changed, and it was great. They made friends. They were ever-present in our community,

and when COVID hit, the community reached out to me and said, are you students doing

okay? Do you have any problems? Let me know.

Victoria answered a question about international students and community support:

We see the community coming to our events. We see them donating items for them. We

have them interacting with our students…they come to events. It is funny…at first

international students are like… why are they here? It can be hard to understand that they

just want to…meet them and help. But they talk, and it is nice.

SIOs appreciate that their community has a role in international students' adjustment.

This role includes helping international students with social support. The community's role leads

to increased community engagement with diverse populations and cultures they might not

usually have contact with. SIOs express the importance of social support from community

members to help the cultural adjustment of international students on their campus.

Theme 2: Understanding Campus Resources

SIOs expressed that they utilize campus resources so that the students have a strong

support network on their campus. SIOs show that university programs, such as orientation,

student activities, and departmental support, are essential in helping international students with

acculturation. The number of campus resources available to international students ranges

broadly. Anthony stated that he relies heavily on campus resources and support for his students:

"We invite offices…to speak with our students. We want staff to get to know the students from

the moment they arrive at orientation." Catherine noted:

> [While] working with international students, you tend to be protective, but that can also lead to siloing them and yourself. Make sure you are educating others on their concerns and needs, as you will not always be available, and they need a village, not an individual only. Help create a supportive culture by this advocacy. Your own work has taught you this, so take that to heart.

The most frequently used codes to help track international student support were put in a word cloud in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Word Cloud of Campus Resources

Orientation

In higher education, orientation has a unique role in new students' adjustment to the campus community and to being college students. Orientation programs help new students learn about campus culture, and some programs include learning technology used as part of the academic programs.

International students have a unique situation because they have to adjust to college life along with adjustment to the dominant culture in the United States, including the unique culture of the region and local community. Therefore, orientation programs for international students are critical in their adjustment. As Catherine mentioned:

So, you know you never do enough. We have an orientation. I talk to them. I tell them about the multicultural student group…these are ready-made individuals that want to be your friend; you don't have to work hard to connect with them because they love all things global…That group is like insta-friends if you want them.

Elizabeth suggested that the orientation helps students make friends since they often meet their first friends on campus during international orientation at her college. Elizabeth noted:

The challenges are always when the students first arrive. Many are introverted and scared to make friends, while others are extroverted and cannot wait. Despite this, friendships take time to build, so it can be disheartening for students who don't find friends right off the bat. That's why we have our international orientation and supportive events; it shows them that they aren't alone and gives a good foundation for friendships. These students have a very different culture than us. They are adjusting. It is normal…and we have to remind them of that.

John suggested that changing international students' orientation so that they could participate in the domestic student orientation can be helpful for the international community. As an SIO, he recently changed orientation so that the international students participate in the same celebrations for new student orientation as the domestic students, ensuring that they do not miss events that allow them to interact with the domestic students. John stated:

When new student orientation takes place, we have a big thing called preview every year; it's for…all the new freshmen students [to] go to, so like 2,000 students are going to this big preview event…In the past, international students have their little one-day orientation right in the middle of that, so…they were doing this immigration lecture, and all the other students were out doing lots of crazy fun things, and that's something that we tried really

hard to change. To make sure that we were setting up our orientation, our programming in such a way that would let the international students [have] the opportunity to go to everything else and…take part in what all the other students were doing. I think that's important.

From Margaret's perspective, orientation is crucial in her international students' adjustment and helps them understand practical issues, like campus platforms used for their courses and general cultural adjustment. Margaret stated:

We have a three-day international orientation prior to the domestic orientation that they also attend, and during that time, we get them logged into every platform, help them…with Blackboard, and to understand where their virtual books are. We do a series of advising. We do a writing workshop with the writing center that really goes over plagiarism and expectations.

Margaret continued about the importance of faculty expectations:

We talk about the professor and student relationship and then the expectations of the American classroom. That is what orientation is…it is also fun. We do kayaking and take them to our downtown, so they have a mixture of bonding moments as well as instructional seminar-type material.

Caroline stated, "We invite student affairs and they…do all of the school resources that are offered like counseling student conduct. Orientation is one of the most important events for the student and our office." She continued, "It is a chance for them to meet us and for us to get to know them."

Melissa discussed the importance of international students understanding the resources and staff in other departments. Melissa wrote:

Develop an orientation that allows student time to meet with the domestic students, so

they don't feel left out. At the same time, it is important they have time to discuss cultural

adjustment, immigration regulations, and also learn about the other departments and

offices on campus that can help them in the future. Make sure to have them meet the staff

and understand where to go for assistance on your campus.

Most SIOs highlighted the importance of proper orientation for supporting international student

adjustment because the students have a chance to learn about services their office provides, as

well as from other departments.

Activities

In addition to orientation, the acculturation process can be supported by student activities

and events implemented by the college. Joseph mentioned that he supports international students

on his campus through a network of support systems run through the International House. Joseph

stated:

The International House.have airport pick-ups. So, we don't coordinate that, but the

International House does…these friendship programs, partnering students with an

American student. They have different programs on different cultural topics. So, in some

ways, the International House is supporting international students, and in other ways

they're supporting the university by providing cultural programs for the campus as a

whole. For example, they'll have…global showcase each month. month and…feature a

different country, [which] mean[s] that if it's Iran, then the Iranian Student Association

will participate in putting on that program. So that's good for them, but it also is for the

campus.

Activities for international students vary by campus. However, most of the activities are focused on allowing students to become engaged. John stated that on his campus, they support international students with events spearheaded by student groups to help support the international population. John noted, "It's always fun…they have a lot of fun anytime food involved…We're having a Halloween thing next week. In the past, like the Thanksgiving Christmas, Easter, they've been done by other organizations on campus that we've supported." These events are essential for international students because they allow them to share and learn about American culture.

Andrew indicated that his college has activities integrated with the domestic community to support international students. For example, Andrew stated, "We have different cultural events around the year. We just had the mid-autumn festival, and during this festival, we'll have our Chinese students sharing their culture with the American students." In addition, when discussing International Education Week activities, he mentioned allowing international students to share what it is like to see the United States through their lens. Andrew stated:

> For International Education Week, we want to make sure we have study-abroad-themed events and international student-teamed events…[such as] our photo contest, which…we display all the photos in our hall on campus, and we invite international students to participate, too, because…we [want] to see the US through their eyes…So, we allow them to submit photos.

Activities help international students connect with their campus peers, faculty, and staff; therefore, these events are valuable in the acculturative process. These activities vary by the organization implementing them, ranging from the international student and scholars office, diversity office, international organization, student activities, or community.

Departmental

SIOs refer international students to other departments on campus when they need assistance with something outside of their purview. Knowing who and where to send international students for assistance on their campus is essential. Having additional support resources available to international students helps with the acculturation and adjustment of international students to a college campus. Elizabeth stated:

> We cannot do it alone. My colleagues and staff in other departments…we work together to support the (international) students. I refer them to each office based upon the concerns that pop up…we do not know the answers to all question, but I can find you the right person…[or] office, to help.

Joseph stated:

> For a number of years, I was just accepting that that was part of the job…You might end up going and visiting people in the hospital…I can remember personally walking someone from my office to the counseling office to make sure that they got…introduced to the counselor...Now, as I progress in my career, I need to refer them to the proper department.

Joseph continued about the academic department's support of the international students' academic success:

> We have an academic support unit…especially designed for athletes, but it really goes beyond academic support. It's kind of like life skills or life management support. It's kind of like everything…other than… your athletic stuff and your medical stuff…They do everything else…But I work closely with two advisors from that unit, and…we

coordinate and communicate a lot about international athletes. It helps to have other

departments help you as an administrator with the students' problems or needs.

Joseph explained that working with other departments can help international students maintain

their immigration status. He stated:

There is an academic support center on campus called the Student Success Center, and if

a student is on probation or dismissed…we will be notified…they can appeal, but almost

always, the the appeal isn't granted. They're basically dismissed. And so then we're

talking to them about okay, what are your options now?

Joseph continued:

In the case of probation, we will follow up with the students individually, and we'll say:

Hey, you're on probation. This isn't good. Here's what we would advise you to do and

reach out for tutoring and extra help if possible.

Supporting international students' understanding of which departments to go to upon

arrival for assistance is seen as critically important to helping them adjust to campus and is

mainly addressed through orientation. However, SIOs see numerous departments having critical

roles in the acculturation and support of international student adjustment.

Theme 3: Understanding Acculturation as an Outcome

Several participants stated that international students have a unique adjustment process to

higher education in the United States since they also bring their cultural beliefs and values.

While college study is a significant change for domestic students, international students must

also learn about the dominant culture. Victoria said:

I find that international students seem to want to fit in so bad when they arrive to campus,

and there is a culture shock. I believe that most…do go through it when they first arrive,

and after they adjust they want to fit in. However, from my experience, it is a unique

process.

The participants suggested that cultural adjustment is unique for international students. However, SIOs experienced that students in the dominant culture do not face or have to process the additional challenges of learning an entirely new culture, which includes embracing new food, music, language, social norms, weather, and societal structures. This adjustment is seen from different points of view when looking through the integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization process. When SIOs were asked about international student adjustment and this lens, they saw integration as positive, assimilation as immersive, separation as differentiation, and marginalization as a disadvantage.

Integration as Positive

Participants indicated that integration into the culture was helpful for international students since they could interact with the dominant culture flexibly. Victoria said, "from my experience, the international students who make a variety of connections on campus get integrated into the culture faster, and they are more successful in the classroom and outside of it." Melissa indicated the need for international students to be engaged on campus with:

Make the students feel welcomed and are active on campus. If you haven't seen a student

in a while, make sure to follow up with them because it can be a sign that something is

not right, whether they are home sick, depressed, or aren't around because they aren't

engaged, it is a sign that something can be wrong.

When asked how they would describe their experience regarding international students' integration into the new culture instead of assimilation to it, Elizabeth stated:

It is a…very fine line between the two. A lot of students find themselves…engrossed in the new culture so much so that they neglect their previous culture, or they don't call their family that much. On the other hand, there are plenty of students who are able to find that healthy balance. I've found that students who have strong relationships with people in their home country and…America… are the ones who end up integrating and finding a balance.

Based on the participants' feedback, integration was seen as a positive aspect of the acculturation process for international students on their campus.

Assimilation as Immersive

Participants mentioned that assimilation was unique to each international student. In some cases, international students attempted to assimilate into the dominant culture so that they were welcomed on campus and in the classroom. Elizabeth stated:

It is a fine line between integrating to a new culture and assimilation…a lot of international students find themselves engrossed in the new culture so much that they don't manage to keep their own culture…like they neglect it in a sense. I have noticed that international students who have a stronger relationship with their American peers tend to assimilate.

Catherine wrote:

Acculturation is important to help students adjust to the environment they are in, but there must also be a value and consideration for their own values and identity. Acculturation, not assimilation, and work collaboratively with them as an ally not as a person advocating for international students to not claim their identity. Their identity can

get lost in the new culture. It is easy to get overwhelmed when you are in a new culture

and environment. Everything is new.

The participants experienced international students' adjustment, including those who assimilated

into the dominant culture when the students were immersed in the new culture.

Separation as Differentiation

The SIOs showed concern for students separating from the dominant culture and

maintaining their culture to such an extent that they do not embrace American culture.

Participants try to implement activities to support the students. However, this is not always

successful. The participants try to help prevent international students from separating from their

culture by creating support systems to celebrate their native culture, which helps international

students feel integrated. Victoria stated:

> It is important that the international students do not separate from their own culture, so
>
> what we like to do is embrace their own culture. So, we do have cultural celebrations. We
>
> have an international festival where students can celebrate their culture and share it,
>
> whether that be to talk and share their belief system, their country, [or] their religion, and
>
> give them an opportunity to connect with the students.

Caroline explained why students might want to separate from their peers. She shared her

experience of international students having English language difficulty and felt like this impacted

their interaction with their peers, impacting international students' abilities to integrate and

forcing separation due to feeling different. Caroline mentioned helping an international student

who only communicated with other students from the same country. When the student asked

about making American friends on campus, Caroline stated:

I tell them, "just introduce yourself to the people in your class." And she (international student) said, "Why?" And she said, "well, what if they reject me?" So, I think there's fear on both sides…the Americans not knowing what to say. And then the…the international also being…or feeling like, what if I use the wrong word, or whatever? It makes them feel uncomfortable and want to avoid their American peers.

John wrote about his personal experience with how language impacts acculturation and separation:

I start my thinking about assisting international students with acculturation back to my study abroad time in Germany and later my internship in Austria. In both of those places, I couldn't make friends with locals. My friends were other international students, typically English-speaking ones, whose friendship kept me from learning and using German as much as I would have liked. I never felt like I was anything more than a foreigner having an adventure in a strange place with other people in a similar situation.

SIOs exert efforts to help students on their college campuses by supporting international students who separate. The importance of not separating can be helped by showing them that they are not different than Americans. SIOs' efforts with events and activities are attempts to integrate them into the culture.

Marginalization as Disadvantage

Several participants noted that students feel marginalized due to programs, policies, or experiences with the stakeholders who support them. Participants also stated that international students can also feel marginalized due to discrimination from within the community. Elizabeth stated:

We try to help our international students forge relations so that our students can come to us if they feel as though they are marginalized, so we can find the reasons and work to mitigate those negative experiences. Sometimes, it is outside of the scope of our reach, like if it is negative reactions from locals at the mall, for example.

Caroline explained discrimination from her local community toward international students: "We are southerners, and so there always will be people that…[think] if you're different or look different or speak different, that you should go home, and you know, speak English." Participants in these cases understand that they can support international students, but protecting them from discrimination in the local community can be difficult. However, they can help by implementing support services on their campus and within the community to prevent marginalization by allowing the community to meet the students. For example, Andrew mentioned the importance of the student-led groups to prevent marginalization:

The Global Student Association helps our international students make connections to other international students and the larger campus community. They share their experiences with adjusting to campus. When it is functioning well, it is such an asset to the institution and to the international students. It really… helps them fit in and make some connections.

When speaking about marginalization, Margaret mentioned that during COVID, her university indirectly marginalized the international student community by making them self-isolate and quarantine in their dorm rooms after the lock-downs were over. Margaret stated:

COVID was a disaster. The [international] students had to quarantine when the domestic students were not required to do so when they came back to campus. They were kept alone in their dorm rooms for two weeks. They were alone and scared. I had one

international student who had just arrived, and I had to bring her to my house and take
care of her because she was so scared.

The university's policy to quarantine only the international students and not the domestic students to protect the community was an example of marginalizing university policy.

SIOs' understanding of the international student adjustment process can be viewed as what they believe are successful acculturation outcomes. The perceptions that integration is positive, assimilation is over-immersion in the dominant culture, separation a different from the dominant culture, and marginalization as an outcome may lead to international students being disadvantaged in the larger societal structure.

Theme 4: Understanding International Student Assessment

When SIOs implement programs to support and assess international students' acculturation, they often use surveys, direct observation, and student feedback as the most popular measurement tools. Most participants agreed that assessment was essential to understand and support international students' success. Figure 2 is a word cloud of assessment typology coding.

Figure 2

Word Cloud of Assessment

Surveys

SIOs understood the importance of trying to collect data to help with assessment of their programs to support the international community. However, it was noted that while surveys were the most common form of assessment, that during some programs, events, or activities, it was not seen as appropriate to survey international students in order to obtain their feedback. For example, they found it hard to survey international students during events that were designed to support them culturally. Whether that be American holiday celebrations or when honoring their culture. Feedback after events was a common survey mention. For example, Anthony stated when asked if they track and assess the acculturation process:

> I mean, like any other office, we take surveys and data.…We just do like a departmental one. Yeah, we'll do it after certain events. We sent out…[requesting students to] tell us how you thought of the event. We do that for the individual events we have.

> However, when discussing the assessment of acculturation, Victoria stated that she uses multiple ways to track acculturation and programming:

> We measure by outcomes and surveys. We're looking at it as we can't survey every event they have. We look at it as attendance, the outcomes of the students on the board who run the ISO, and the outcomes, such as was that event successful for the students that attended…We try to have a post-survey. Students don't always complete that, but we do try and do it, but it's very difficult.

Victoria continued:

> If it's a student-led event, we can't really demand them to take surveys, and when domestic students or any students come to the international lead or run events, it's up to

the board of the ISO or international students or organization to lead that survey.

Sometimes, we don't get good results. So, it's hit or miss.

Regarding feedback on events, Victoria shared:

Sometimes, it's very off-putting to ask someone to complete a survey after they had a

Thanksgiving dinner or attended a cultural event. It's like, I thought this was supposed to

be warm and welcoming. So, we try not to be off-putting. These events are meant to

support the international community, and in some cases, the surveys should be secondary.

Some SIOs see the need to work on assessments since they might only track orientation.

For example, John does have a survey for his international students after orientation. However,

regarding international events and programming to help track acculturation, John stated:

Honestly…one of the tasks that I have…is developing…our strategic plan…which we

don't have yet, and so just over the past two weeks, we've been having conversations

on…student engagement and support. What are our goals, what are the metrics we're

looking at, [and] what are we trying to measure...I had a meeting on Tuesday with the

staff member to really start digging into that to say…we can start measuring and

collecting data. We gotta know what we're collecting. What are we aiming for?

Direct Observation

Another assessment tool used is direct observation of events and activities that support

international students. Anthony offered his perspective on direct observation:

When we had a community barbeque, 99.9% of our students have never grilled…so we

show them how to hook up a propane tank. The purpose of how to clean a grill…When

do you turn to hamburger over at the process of setting up a line? You can tell how

students are progressing. It's very hands-on…we measure success by watching them

engage with the community members, and part of that success is also the

internationalization of the community.

In some cases, where there are fun events, at minimum, they mention that observation,

their personal, from their staff, or the international students themselves, is the minimum they use.

For example, Catherine stated: "We're a community college, so it is different. If I get six

students showing up, we made it, and we'll repeat it…[If] we get more than five showing up, we

will repeat it."

Student Feedback

SIOs also used data collected from international students directly after programs to assess

their activities. Unlike surveys, feedback from international students was seen as richer and more

valuable since the SIO is getting the information directly from the students themselves either

immediately after the event or during. Student feedback includes asking the international

students about their experiences with the event or activity. When asked how she assesses

acculturation, Elizabeth stated:

> The students tell us what they need or don't need [and] what they like and don't like
>
> about an event. For example, when we have international dinners and game nights, they
>
> tell us how they felt about it afterward, so we know what they like…We ask them, and
>
> most of the time, they are open to tell us how they feel. Let's just say, if they don't like it,
>
> we kind of get the feeling and pick up on it anyway. Whether it is attendance not being as
>
> strong or them leaving the event early.

Margaret stated:

> Student feedback, yes, and the church feedback, so here's what that looks like: we've had
>
> churches, kind of adopt, our international students, and they bring cards [and] welcome

packets. When we have new students…arrive on campus, they do beach days [and] Thanksgiving parties for them. So, we can tell by the way the students engage with the community at the event and how they respond afterward if…it was a success or not.

Anthony uses written and video reflection in his SIO role to help students assess their acculturation. Anthony stated:

We always have them do a written reflection and a video reflection…some of these [international students] are kids that are born wealthy…I had one girl that…had at least $100,000 worth of clothing, bags, and shoes, right? My students would regularly wear minimum thousand-dollar sneakers, and we're going into local neighborhoods where kids don't have jackets. They've never had a new pair of shoes. So that's reflected when they write about that, right? I recognize that I grew up in a blessed environment that other people don't have. I used to think America was this rich country. I didn't know America also had poor people. So that's one measurement of success during the events. It's quite beautiful.

Whether SIOs perform assessments via surveys, direct observation, or student feedback, the majority try to collect data to assist them with tracking the acculturation of international students. The assessments are completed during events and activities that international students on their campus attend and when attending events off-campus within the community.

Theme 5: Understanding Professional Networking Resources

The SIO role requires connection and networking to stay abreast of national and international issues that impact immigrants and international students. Therefore, the theme of networking resources was developed with two sub-themes: NAFSA and state consortium. These sub-themes are professional resources SIOs use to learn about their role, develop skills and

proficiencies, and support their staff. While each participant's college has unique resources, membership in NAFSA helps the SIOs with the latest updates in international education and networking opportunities in their professional field. All participants were active members of NAFSA, but only two were members of AIEA. Most SIOs found the NAFSA membership as a necessary component of the position. A summary of the most popular codes can be found in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Word Cloud of Professional Networking Resources

National Association of International Educators

All participants were NAFSA members. While most colleges have different resources for national and local conferences, most participants have attended at least one national conference. Victoria stated:

> NAFSA plays a critical role in keeping up with the most current trends in international education. They also allow us the opportunity to learn from colleagues in the field. As an experienced SIO, I can also mentor and assist the upcoming international educators in the field, which gives me a chance to give back to the field.

NAFSA's training also plays a critical role in helping SIOs train their staff. Anthony mentioned:

I have the most cross-trained team in America. I invest the most in my people. Without question, they will go through the NAFSA academy and take every online [training] course. They will also go to…all the conferences. I invest this way in my team because I don't have that much time to do so myself.

Andrew mentioned:

In this role, you will need to be well-versed in a broad range of immigration policies and regulations that impact international students. If you don't understand them well, you will not be able to support the international students appropriately. Cultural adjustment is important for international students, but you will learn that making sure they are compliant with immigration is just as important to them and to your institution.

State Consortium

A few participants were also members of their international state consortium for support with their roles. Joseph mentioned, "I was part of the state consortium. I was chair of that a few years ago. Lately, I have not been involved; however, I do attend state meetings here and there." State consortiums are unique since the members are all international educators in a state. The consortiums allow international educators a place to network and connect international education and local issues within the state. Catherine mentioned:

We work with our state consortium, and that has given us some recruitment opportunities to participate and…some visibility, and we have definitely seen an uptick in our international applications. Through their partnership, we have taken part in virtual events, which…really helps to…level the playing ground when it comes to international

recruitment…we don't have brand recognition like some schools. This event helps us meet students we normally would not have the chance to.

Outlier Data and Findings

There were two unexpected findings from the collected research data, including findings that do not align with the specific research themes presented. Outlying cases that are extreme are not unusual to find in research studies (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this study, there were two outliers: one participant viewed his position as entirely professional with international students, and another participant said that faculty were not supportive of the international student community on campus when conversely all other participants mentioned their importance in supporting the international community in a supportive and friendly manner on their campus.

Outlier Finding #1

One participant was clear that the SIO and international advisor roles were not to be international students' friends. These roles were to lead the college with managerial functions to support the students and maintain compliance. While most SIOs interviewed felt some connection with the students and almost a responsibility for their adjustment and overall experience at their colleges, this participant did not see it that way and was clear that his role was not their friend. This position conflicted with most SIOs who felt either a solid connection to their international student community or were at least supportive. Anthony stated:

> Whether…I'm teaching domestic students or international [students], I make it very clear: I'm not here to be your friend. I think this [being a friend] is a mistake…When I first got here, I had a much larger team, but I interviewed all of them…and I said…you want to be their friend and that's not our job…these international students are paying an enormous amount of money to come here, and we have one job…[which] is to prepare

them academically, socially, and [with a]college skillset to be successful in the

classroom, on campus, in the community, and eventually in the global workforce.

Outlier Finding #2

While most SIOs highlighted the value of the faculty as a support system to the

international community, one participant suggested that faculty do help; however, they do not

significantly support international students with acculturation and adjustment processes. She

mentioned:

> I participate in the faculty retreat, and then I will present at the Center for Teaching
>
> Excellence. They'll have me come in and speak at those gatherings to help faculty
>
> understand some of the basics about international students and the way they interact with
>
> them. I wouldn't say that they [the faculty] have a significant role in their [international
>
> students] cultural adjustment. No, not really on my campus.

However, she did mention that they know to contact her if they fail. The participant continued,

"Faculty know who to call when they have problems [with international students]."

Research Question Responses

The data collection methods utilized to answer the research question responses were

interviews, focus groups, and letters written to one's former self. The researcher obtained rich

descriptions of participants' unique experiences, contextualizing the SIOs' understanding of the

acculturation process of international students. Although the participants worked at different

types of institutions and had unique experiences, they had some shared experiences. The

researcher developed the themes that answered the research questions from these shared

experiences. Table 3 indicates the research themes that answered the researcher's questions.

Table 3

Research Questions Answered with Themes

Research Question Summary	Theme	Sub-Themes
CRQ: Experiences with Acculturation	Understanding Acculturation as an Outcome	Integration as Positive
		Assimilation as Immersive
		Separation as Differentiation
		Marginalization as Disadvantage
SQ1: Support for International Students	Understanding Campus Resources	Orientation
		Activities
		Departmental
	Understanding Social Support Networks	International Advisor
		Friends
		Faculty
		Community
SQ2: Assess Acculturation	Understanding International Student Assessment	Surveys
		Direct Observation
		Student Feedback
SQ3: SIO Professional Development	Understanding Professional Networking Resources	NAFSA
		State Consortium

Central Research Question

This study's central research question was: What are the Senior International Officers' perceptions regarding the international students' acculturation process on college campuses? The participants' perspective was that working on their campuses with the international student community offers them unique views of international students' adjustment to the campus community. The study's participants indicated awareness that their position alone or their department as a team could not be the sole support system for international students on campus. Instead, many stakeholders are necessary to support international students' adjustment to campus life, college life, and American culture.

The theme that answered the central research question was viewing acculturation as an outcome with four sub-themes explaining that an international student might select

independently or due to influences based upon the dominant culture. The four sub-themes that help answer the central research question are as follows: integration as a positive, assimilation as immersive, separation as differentiation, and marginalization as a disadvantage.

The SIOs saw integration as positive because they believe that this is when international students are more balanced with their own culture and the dominant culture. Integrated students also do well in class. Assimilation is seen as being selected by international students when they are immersed in the dominant culture and feel more comfortable with it, so they decide to take on more aspects of the dominant culture over their own. They do not keep critical aspects of their culture and value their new environment so that it becomes comfortable.

Regarding viewing separation as differentiation, SIOs see international students negatively departing from their culture and feeling different because of their culture. In addition, they indicated international students are disadvantaged when they are marginalized and do not try to adapt or adjust to the dominant culture, that they have been discriminated against, have been forced into this from their environment, or there might be campus policies or community rules that make them feel this way. When they do not learn how to acculturate healthily, they have more issues in school, and SIOs view acculturation as an outcome in these ways that can help others understand their perception of supporting these students' transformation into integrated students.

Sub-Question One

Sub-question one was: How do senior international officers foster and support international students during acculturation? This question was answered with the participants' perceptions regarding campus resources and social support networks that international students utilize during acculturation.

The first theme that answered this question was understanding social support networks with four sub-themes: international advisor, friends, faculty, and community. Each theme represents a support network that aids international students with the acculturation process. Community members volunteer with social and emotional support directly or through programs spearheaded by the college. In an interview, John stated, "churches would almost like adopt a student. So, they might stay with one family. But it was really a community that was supporting that one student. It is very helpful to their adjustment."

SIOs view friends as impacting the international student's adjustment and overall well-being. Friends offer a support network that builds connections and helps international students integrate into the campus community and dominant culture. Melissa stated, "Yes… it is important for students to make friends with their peers. It helps them learn about the campus, the culture…and they have fun. (Laugh.) They need their peer group and I, well… I think our American students can also learn a lot from them, their language, their country…their culture… it goes both ways."

The SIOs expressed that faculty were essential in supporting international students in the classroom and on campus. Faculty have daily contact with international students. Supportive faculty and staff are crucial in international students' acculturation.

Understanding campus resources, including orientation, activities, and departmental sub-themes, was another category that answered this question. Most SIOs experienced orientation as critical in the support system for international student adjustment to the campus community and American culture. When discussing the most critical aspect of programs that assist international students with adjustment, Andrew stated, "The big thing is international orientation. We fought

the university to allow us to have a separate orientation from the regular university orientation, and that took some convincing…They felt like we were singling out the international students."

Sub-Question Two

The study's second sub-question was: What do senior international officers use to assess the international students' acculturation process, and how do they conceptualize the data? The theme that emerged to help answer this question was understanding international students' feedback with the sub-themes of surveys, direct observations, and student feedback. Most SIOs try to assess acculturation and activities supporting international students on campus. This assessment results from obtaining international students' feedback regarding on-campus experiences. Anthony stated, "Surveys are important…however, we look, we observe, we can tell what is working and what isn't. What programs have a large number of students, and…those which don't. But we try to survey after events if we can."

SIOs understand that assessment is essential. When the data is used, it can support international students on campus. Data can show what events or support systems are working to support students on their campuses and with integration into the community.

Sub-Question Three

The third sub-question was: How do senior international officers describe the professional development experiences that help them better understand the international students' acculturation process? The theme developed to answer this question was understanding professional networking resources with two sub-themes of NAFSA and state consortiums. The SIOs experienced assistance with immigration training, professional development opportunities, and other learning opportunities with their membership in NAFSA and by attending national and regional conferences. In addition, the SIOs detailed various student activities that they promote

or implement to help international students with acculturation. These activities can include the faculty, staff, students, and community. SIOs also indicated that international advisors who help with immigration are essential because they help the students maintain their legal status and give advice on immigration. Andrew stated: "I have attended NAFSA workshops whenever I could. Everyone there speaks the same language…if I have questions, my colleagues…are willing to help. No matter what, they have experts available in all the areas (of international higher education)."

SIOs stated that they were active in their state consortium, which gave them resources for their role. Catherine stated: "The (state consortium) comped our membership and webinars…So, they are really trying to help, and they are a great resource for training." The networking developed through these two organizations helped SIOs answer questions about international student immigration, acculturation, and other ways to promote the international community on their campuses.

Summary

This chapter includes the data collection analysis results. Three data collection methods were used for triangulation: individual interviews, letters to one's former self, and focus groups. Responses were entered into NVivo and coded. The researcher categorized codes and sorted the data to create themes. The researcher answered the research questions using themes from the collected data. This study aimed to explore the SIOs' experiences regarding the acculturation process of international students. The coded data were organized into five themes: (a) understanding social support network with the sub-themes of international advisor, friends, faculty, and community; (b) understanding campus resources with sub-themes of orientation, activities, and departmental; (c) understanding acculturation as an outcome with sub-themes of

integration as positive, assimilation as immersive, separation as differentiation, and marginalization as disadvantage; (d) understanding international student assessment with sub-themes of survey and observations; and (e) understanding professional networking resources with sub-themes of NAFSA and state consortium. The themes reflect the importance of a strong support network to assist with the acculturation process, including the critical roles of staff, faculty, and international advisor in international students' acculturation and educational success in the United States.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

International students have an integral role in the internationalization of college campuses in the United States because they diversify the student population and bring in additional financial resources (Di Maria, 2019; NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2019). International students have a broad range of adjustment issues, including social, cultural, and psychological concerns (Koo et al., 2021a; Ma, 2020; Mukminin, 2019; Xing & Bolden, 2019). Social interaction with staff, faculty, and other students within the university system helps international students adjust (Li et al., 2021; Sadewo et al., 2020; Sarmiento et al., 2019; Shu et al., 2020). SIOs, as leaders within the higher educational system, support international students with programs for their educational journeys. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of SIOs to understand perceptions of the acculturation of international students they support on their campuses. This researcher was guided by Berry's (1980, 1997) theory of acculturation, which applies to how a person perceives a new culture, including assimilation, integration, marginalization, and separation.

The researcher chose a qualitative methodology to explore the SIOs' experiences supporting international students through acculturation. According to Creswell & Poth (2024), a transcendental phenomenological study design can be used to describe the common meaning of the experiences of individuals who experience the same phenomenon. The phenomenological design allows researchers to focus on what the participants experienced to obtain rich data (Moustakas, 1994). Data was collected through individual interviews, letters of advice to a former self, and focus groups. The researcher coded the data and developed themes through horizontalization (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Moustakas, 1994). This chapter presents the

interpretation of findings, discusses implications for policy and practice, reviews theoretical and methodological implications, defines the study's limitations and delimitations, and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Five themes emerged within this study: (a) understanding acculturation as an outcome, (b) understanding campus resources, (c) understanding social support networks, (d) understanding international student assessment, and (e) understanding professional networking resources. Each theme tells a story of the SIOs' experiences with international students and their views on acculturation. This section includes the following: interpretation of findings, implications for policy or practice, theoretical and empirical implications. Finally, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed in this chapter.

Interpretation of Findings

Data was collected, analyzed, and derived from interviews, letters to one's former self, and focus groups. This section includes a summary of the thematic findings. The thematic findings are followed by a series of significant interpretations by the researcher. The five themes were understanding social support, understanding campus resources, understanding acculturation as an outcome, understanding international student assessment, and understanding professional networking resources.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The researcher conducted a thematic analysis with the data collected from the interviews, focus groups, and letters to a former self. The researcher coded the transcripts and letters and organized the data to answer the research questions. Theme 1 provided data on the need for understanding social support networks and included the SIOs' views on the importance of a

social support system in the international students' cultural adjustment to the dominant culture. The subthemes identified included examples of the type of social support SIOs deemed essential for social adjustment. International student advisors are vital in communicating with students about their immigration status. Another subtheme was the importance of friends in international students' acculturation, including how SIOs implement programming to help international students make friends on campus. The subtheme of faculty was discovered because the SIOs mentioned the value of faculty in the international student acculturative process. Faculty control students' grades and see them in class regularly. The last subtheme was community. The SIOs expressed the importance of including the local community in helping international students adjust to life in the United States and building friendships outside the campus community.

Theme 2 indicated SIOs needed an understanding of campus resources. SIOs indicated that international students rely on campus resources for their acculturative process and adjustment to the larger campus. The first subtheme was the critical nature of orientation to the international student adjustment process. The second subtheme was the importance of activities geared toward the international student community. These events help support adjustment by allowing international students to engage with the campus and local community. The third subtheme was departmental and reflected the importance of relying on various resources on campus to assist students on their educational journeys. SIOs understand that neither they alone nor their staff can be the sole campus resource to help international students with the acculturation process.

Theme 3 was understanding acculturation as an outcome, including how SIOs view the adjustment process that international students go through, which has specific outcomes based on their current state, whether that be integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization. Four

subthemes were developed from the data. The first subtheme was integration as positive. This subtheme explained that SIOs believe that integration into the dominant culture is seen as a positive outcome of the adjustment process. Subtheme two was assimilation as immersive. In this subtheme, SIOs found that international students assimilate when immersed in the dominant society. The third subtheme was separation as differentiation, demonstrating that SIOs view those international students who separate from the dominant culture because they feel different or like outsiders to the societal norm. The last subtheme was marginalization as a disadvantage, where SIOs believe that marginalized international students are at a disadvantage to their peers and the larger community.

Theme 4 was understanding international student assessment, which indicated the importance of assessing international students' adjustment. The first subtheme was surveys, a tool that SIOs found easy and convenient to assess acculturation. The second subtheme was direct observation, where he SIOs gauged the success of events or activities to support international students by viewing the events' outcomes. The third subtheme was student feedback collected from conversations with international students about their helpful experiences with the SIOs.

Theme 5 was understanding professional networking resources, which indicated that SIOs rely on their colleagues in the field to keep them updated on international education trends. The first subtheme was NAFSA, which demonstrated the importance of having a supportive network of colleagues in the field who can assist one professionally via networking or with best practices. The second subtheme was state consortiums, and SIOs detailed the importance of networking with colleagues in their state to develop professionally, which helps them support international students on their college campuses.

Social Support. The SIOs elaborated on how social support helps international students with their cultural adjustment and expressed the necessity of relying on international advisor relationships to help international students by addressing questions and referring them to departments on campus for assistance with other questions or concerns. The data aligns with other research that also shows adjustment programs in colleges help international students with adaptation to the new culture (Al-Khatib & Kagnici, 2023). SIOs expressed that the connection international students had with their advisor played an integral part in their acculturation process. This aligns with studies that also support how international students' satisfaction with advising influences their sense of belonging (Yuan et al., 2024). SIOs also implement programs that support acculturation by fostering friendship, including events or activities on campus with domestic students, other international students, or within the community. SIOs have an expectation that international students will have adjustment issues including graduate students. This supports other research for example, Chennamsetti (2020) found that graduate internationals students experienced loneliness and homesickness due to living away from family and friends which were a form of strong social support. Knowing international students need to build strong social support, SIOs expressed implementing programming to support these social networks through their peer groups as well as within the campus community, including the local community. This is reflected in the research by Law and Liu (2021) and Kalbesai (2021) who conclude that international students' acculturation to their college increased due to the programs which were implemented on the campus to support them (Al-Khatib & Kagnici, 2023).

In addition, SIOs understand that international students who have been in the United States for an extended amount of time and have a better understanding of the college and campus

culture can serve as mentors to other international students and help them learn the culture and unwritten rules; and this is seen in research by Seithers et al., 2022.

While SIOs mention the use of technology in the classroom, they did not focus on how it can assist with helping socially or with their adjustment. However, research has found that technology can also assist international students with their engagement in school activities since research has shown a positive link between international students' use of social media and a positive impact on their adjustment (Manu et al., 2023).

SIOs understand the importance of faculty support in international student adjustment because faculty see students in the classroom and can positively impact the international students' feelings of belonging to campuses. This supports data that shows faculty support significantly influenced the outcomes of a study abroad experience for international students (Bhatti & Juhari, 2023). Unlike domestic students, international students are not always familiar with the educational system or assessment approaches and might encounter initial challenges; therefore, it is helpful to have support from faculty at the earliest stages of their educational career (Dangeni, 2023). SIOs understand that faculty who understand cultural differences can positively impact international students' lives and help them reach their educational goals. The data supports Trimpe's (2022) findings of how a college's awareness of the international students' unique experiences and backgrounds helps them with adjustment.

SIOs demonstrated appreciation of the local community's role in supporting international students with acculturation and trying to foster opportunities for international students to connect to the local community, whether in churches, volunteer organizations, or connecting with those who support the college in the region. This data supports Szobo's (2020) study that shows international students have a better adjustment when they have frequent contact with people from

the local community. The events and activities that SIOs design are to support international students' abilities to integrate with the campus community because they understand the importance of developing relationships to facilitate the adjustment process. International students who take part in activities, such as service learning within the community, develop an understanding of the community members' culture (Indrus & Halim, 2024). SIOs implement programming to support the integration of international students into the campus and the community because they do not want students to feel isolated; therefore, SIOs try to foster a feeling of belonging so that international students do not separate from the dominant culture or feel marginalized. The data aligns with findings that show that social resources were found to be useful for adjustment for international students and contact with locals play an important role in developing these form of resources (Pekerti et al., 2020; Zhang & Zeng, 2023).

Campus Resources. SIOs use campus resources to assist international students with acculturation and integration into the campus community and overall culture of the American higher education system. University support for international students before and after their arrival, including orientation, is considered instrumental and aids international students in facilitating friendships (Aladegbaiye et al., 2023). The support may include orientation for international students, activities to help with international students' engagement, and support from departments on campus. As leaders in higher education, SIOs understand the need to use various resources to help international students adjust. This data aligns with Tausaova et al. (2019) findings that show an orientation to the dominant culture supports international student acculturation.

One example of departmental support is within athletics and intercollegiate sports. Studies show that by partnering with athletics, an international students' office can assist

international students with adapting to campus culture and life in the United States because the connection builds a sense of community and social capital (Kim et al., 2023). Creating a broad support network throughout the university enables international students to connect with resources and people that expand the reach of the SIOs departments' offerings (Castiello-Gutierrez et al., 2021). The data support findings that show on campus support services, such as the counseling services can provide additional support for international students by offering them opportunities for involvement, guidance, and professional assistance in their adjustment (Alshammari et al., 2023; Teegan & Popova, 2023).

Acculturation. SIOs' experience with international student acculturation shows that they view integration into the culture as a positive outcome for students, which is why all participants mentioned the programs available on their campus to support engagement on campus. The data supports the research findings that international student adjustment as a predictor of student overall satisfaction (Bui et al., 2021b). Programs to support integration include activities and cultural events to smaller group gatherings, varying by campus. However, institutions must continue to develop programs to integrate international students on campus, indicating a need for growth in this kind of support (Aggarwal & Ciftci, 2021). International students who integrate into the culture and develop strong feelings for social and academic belonging have a propensity to stay in the United States after graduation (Kaul & Renzulli, 2022). Mohamad and Manning (2024) found that most colleges have a proactive approach to student integration, and it is a common thread in international education adjustment research. Chennamsetti and Khawaja (2023) found that international students who had an adjustment coping mechanism of open-mindedness help them to have a better social life and adjust to their academic life.

The SIOs indicated that acculturated students who were marginalized were at a disadvantage because they did not have the same kind of social support as other students who chose to integrate. For example, discriminated international students marginalized by society may experience low positive emotions and decreased social support (Zhang et al., 2024). SIOs shared how marginalization can be caused by discrimination or negative experiences, and international students can select marginalization on their own because they choose not to engage in society's functionality. This aligns with Bahtti and Juhari (2023) findings that show discrimination at a university negatively impacted an international student's experience.

SIOs experienced the impact of COVID-19 on international students and the loneliness that social distancing caused, along with the immigration changes. This aligns with findings of Park and Shimada (2022) who found that international students studying in the U.S. faced concerns not only due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but stress due to the changing nonimmigrant visa policies. These changing policies had a negative psychological and adjustment impact on international students (Park & Shimada, 2022). SIOs agreed that the pandemic had a negative impact on the international students on their campus. This aligns with findings that show the pandemic marginalized international students because some had to quarantine upon arrival to the United States, while American students did not have to do so at most colleges (Hou, 2024). In addition, travel restrictions imposed in the United States caused international students stress because they could not return home (Hou, 2024; Mbous et al., 2022).

SIOs spoke of trying to help international students from separating from the dominant culture by celebrating their home culture. SIOs detail trying to celebrate the culture of international students with events and activities. This supports data in one study regarding refugees in a resettlement which showed that helping maintain cultural ties to native culture

promoted them in maintaining their native culture upon being integrated into a new country (Guler & Berman, 2019). However, this study showed that SIOs believe that international students might choose to separate from the dominant culture because they do not want to lose their religious or cultural beliefs. This aligns with research that shows that when international students choose to separate from the dominant society, it might be psychologically easier than integrating (Muthuswamy, 2023). Therefore, while SIOs' experience with separation was seen as being different and isolating, for international students, it might be a coping mechanism that gives them a sense of psychological comfort that the dominant culture is not providing. This aligns with Al-Krenawi et al. (2019) who found that international students from Saudi Arabia studying in the United States found that the importance of religion had an impact of their acculturation to the larger society. Therefore, each student's individual culture, religion, and personal beliefs have some part to play in their adjustment. As SIOs detailed from their experience, international students who have strong social bonds seem to have less of an adjustment issue. This supports research such as Jin et al. (2022) who found that international students have difficulties in the process of adjusting to new foods of the dominant culture, but for those who have strong social connections to the dominant country lessens the adjustment.

SIOs experienced international students assimilating when immersed with their peers, the larger campus, and the community. SIOs found that international students who assimilated likely had more American friends than those who integrated. SIOs thought of assimilation as an adjustment outcome that did support the international students' culture; therefore, they were less optimistic when they noticed students assimilating instead of integrating. This data supports Lorenzetti et al. (2023) findings that show relationships with peers were viewed as an important

means that international students use to help with adjustment which helps students to adjust to the cultural environment.

Assessment. SIOs attempted to track student engagement and acculturation through surveys, direct observation, and student feedback. However, some participants mentioned that it was not always appropriate to measure feedback, or, at times, it was difficult because of the nature of events. For example, while it might be easy to pre- and post-survey students before and after orientation, it can be more problematic to survey them after a service learning or cultural celebration. SIOs are fully aware of the importance of assessment, even if they are still working on collecting data from international students. In a recent study using this scale, Campos et al. (2022) found that social interaction and self-reported host connectedness positively predict international students' adjustment to the dominant culture. In addition, the data from SIOs support research that shows assessment can be effective by getting student feedback through narratives (Tarch et al., 2021).

The assessment of international students' engagement and acculturation assists higher education institutions in supporting events and programs to meet international students' needs. While SIOs currently obtain data from surveys, student feedback on events, and direct observation of the outcome of activities, data must be collected to support outreach and the engagement of the international student community.

Professional Networking. Networking was important in SIOs' training, and it aided in remaining abreast of new policies, programs, and regulations that impact international students. SIOs interviewed discussed the importance of networking in international higher education. While some SIOs were members of AIEA, all participants interviewed were members of NAFSA. SIOs use the professional resources available as NAFSA members to help them in their

roles. For example, NAFSA supports SIOs in their role by offering workshops and research to help them work with international students, their adjustment process, and leadership responsibilities, including fundraising. Many SIOs look for additional resources to support their budgets within the university, and they explore applying for grants and donations to manage their growing area of responsibilities (Gallagher, 2023). Hendley (2024b) recommended that SIOs review the return on investment for any tool they use to analyze impact. For example, if a program is not successful or profitable, cutting it out altogether might be in the university's best interest. While most international educators and SIOs are administrators, not all have extensive accounting or budgetary experience. Toner (2024b) suggested that SIOs must think strategically about resources within international higher education because it can be helpful to demonstrate international students' connection to the campus, such as their events and activities that impact the larger community. NAFSA is one organization that helps bring these opportunities to SIOs through membership and list serves. In addition, SIOs use NAFSA membership for ideas on supporting their international students in various ways. Wilkie (2024) suggested that a university emergency fund should be set up to assist international students in need, for example, when a family member gets ill or dies and when natural or economic disasters occur worldwide.

After membership in the NAFSA, state consortium membership was the second most crucial professional resource SIOs used to learn about international student issues, immigration regulations, cultural differences, and networking opportunities. SIOs understand the need to network with other international educators to remain current on trends in international higher education and international students' concerns. NAFSA and the state consortiums offer SIOs and international educators a place to learn about the field and to present, which is also a benefit of building a professional development network. SIOs mentioned other resources, such as

Education USA and agent partnerships, that they use to support their role in international education. However, only two participants mentioned Education USA during data collection, and one mentioned agent partnerships in learning more about international student adjustment and acculturation.

Implications for Policy & Practice

Based on this research, it is essential to note that SIOs can make decisions when colleges work on support systems for international students. College administrators must ensure that the SIO or team member on their campus is taking part in the critical decisions impacting international students' acculturation, such as orientation, activities, classroom support, and immigration. Implications in policy allow changes in the college and university settings. Implications for practice provides a roadmap of best practices for SIOs at their colleges or universities. This section will discuss implications for policy and practice in-depth.

Implications for Policy

The theme of understanding social support networks and the subtheme of community reflect the SIOs' experiences regarding the value of community support in the acculturation of international students. However, federal immigration regulations indirectly negatively impact F1 international students because they legally limit their ability to work off campus. SIOs understand that social support networks are essential in the acculturation process. Currently, international students cannot legally work off campus without approval. SIOs indicated that students' ability to work on campus hinders their acculturation because, many times, there are not enough jobs on campus for the students. In addition, the hours they can work on an F1 visa are limited to 20 hours a week. To support F1 international students with acculturation to the campus and larger community, they should be able to work off campus legally, which requires a

change of federal regulation. Limiting the students to work only on campus impedes their connections with the community. This freedom does not mean that international students who just arrived in the United States should work immediately, but after at least one semester of adjustment, they should be employable off campus. This change can benefit the student with acculturation since the SIOs' experience is that acculturation is supported by community support. It would also support diversity efforts within the local community and businesses.

Immigration policy can make international students feel marginalized because they do not have the same opportunities as domestic students. For example, the experiences of SIOs with understanding immigration and making sure they are compliant as an institution and that the international students do not fall out of their legal status is a significant factor. As SIOs experienced, immigration regulations for F1 international students can be challenging to interpret or understand. Another implication for policy based on the experiences shared with participants is changing federal immigration regulations regarding F1 work after graduation. For example, international students must follow strict regulations for immigration compliance that domestic students do not have to, which can make international students feel disadvantaged or marginalized. Instead of schools reporting on international students with strict regulations, they should phase out some of the regulations that hurt international students, such as being more flexible with opportunities for future employment. SIOs mentioned that international students can only work one year on optional practical training, which, in some cases, is extended for two years based on whether their major is in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field. According to the SIOs, additional legal employment opportunities after graduation may ease international students' worry or concern about the possibility of staying in the USA, which falls

under the theme of understanding acculturation as an outcome and the subtheme of marginalization as a disadvantage.

Implications for Practice

SIOs' understanding of social support networks indicated that building supportive frameworks for international students to connect with peers, faculty, staff, and the local community benefits international students' acculturation. The practice of having student organizations that support international students along with the community has been shown to aid international students with adjustment to American culture and the campus community. Within higher education, the social support network provides international students with opportunities for connection. While the events and activities that universities use to support students vary, the SIOs' experiences of understanding this value can lead to practices of building relationships with stakeholders on campus. Implementing social support systems within the university should be a best practice in international higher education for schools that enroll F1 international students.

SIOs' understanding of campus resources and how they can support international students with acculturation is critically essential; therefore, training staff and faculty regarding international concerns benefits their connections. This understanding provides faculty and staff with information regarding their role in the international students' acculturative process. Training is not provided within every campus. While some SIOs received training, it was not throughout the entire campus; it was generally only for those academic majors with the large majority of international students enrolled. In addition to training on international student concerns, creating policies and procedures within the campus that support their needs can help them with acculturative stress. For example, it can be stressful when a wire transfer comes into the bursar to

pay a balance. Sometimes, currency exchange can be complicated due to the exchange rates. A flexible and supportive billing staff can assist international students with a system on campus that promotes success. A combination of training and supportive university policies should be practiced.

SIOs understand the practice of international student assessment and use surveys, direct observation, and student feedback to obtain it. Data from these tools can assist SIOs in determining what activities and events benefit international students. One strategy is to create assessments before and after each semester to obtain data on activities, events, and campus resources. SIOs can also use this data to develop their programs to support the international student community on their campuses. Working together to combine this data offers additional data on a national level to support the international students in America.

SIOs also understand the value of professional networking resources. The SIOs mentioned the training and support that NAFSA and their state consortiums offer. A strategy for practice is the requirement of certification or training to be an SIO, which ensures that the professional hired will meet the professional guidelines and criteria for established goals. NAFSA has a chart of professional competencies for international educators, and most SIOs have a broad range of responsibilities on campus, so titles can vary substantially. The certification of SIOs in practice might help the field with experts trained to support international students. SIOs with terminal degrees might not think it is required; however, some formal certification processes might help track additional data from SIOs and their experiences to benefit the field of international education.

Understanding acculturation as an outcome and the four subthemes detailing the SIOs' efforts within the acculturation process of international students reveals acculturation as an

outcome, which allows for creating strategies to support policies and procedures on campus and

when implementing activities, events, and programs that support integration. The listing of

strategies for practice and a description can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Implications for Practice: Higher Education Strategies

Strategy	Description
Building Support Networks	Higher education officials should understand the importance of support networks and help SIOs foster connections between domestic students, international students, and the local community, which should be a best practice in the field.
Training for Campus Staff and Faculty	Higher education institutions should cross-train their staff and faculty on international student adjustment and the challenges these students face, which includes developing policies and procedures to support them during their education in the United States.
Develop Nationwide Assessment	Universities should have a robust assessment of international students, including combined assessments of international students for a nationwide review of data to support the development of innovative programs and policies to support enrollment, not just the tracking of data for enrollment.
Certifications of SIOs	SIOs should be certified and trained by a professional agency for the role, which would help standardize the role and responsibilities of helping international students with various issues they face.
Support Integration	SIOs should require events and activities on the campus to support integration, which allows international students to have a positive acculturative process while supporting diversity.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This section will detail both the theoretical and empirical implications of the study. The theoretical implications will include ways in which this research study helps to further Berry's acculturation theory and expands it to include how SIOs perceive international students' acculturation through viewing the strategies as outcomes. The empirical implications of the study help to explain the findings and experiences of SIOs regarding their perceptions of acculturation of international students and help to gain further knowledge to help expand the research on SIOs and their perceptions of how international students acculturate.

Theoretical Implications

Berry's (1997) acculturation theory is a widely known framework educators use to understand how people from different cultural backgrounds adjust to life in a new country or culture. The theory incorporates four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. This study's theoretical implications imply that each strategy can be seen as an outcome when data is reviewed from interviews, focus groups, and letters to a former self by SIOs. There was a preference for integration as something SIOs feel is a positive strategy that leads to a well-balanced international student experience. The events and activities held are to promote this as an outcome. The data supports Berry's acculturation and the extension of it as can be found in Fox et al. (2013) study who furthered Berry's model and found that integrated groups had greater self-esteem and coping mechanisms, separated group had more anxiety and depression, while the assimilated group reported lower levels of depressive and anxious compared to the separated group. This aligns with SIOs perception and experiences that international students who integrated was seen as a more positive outcome.

Most SIOs develop events and activities to support international student engagement with the campus and local community. Peer support and networking events were opportunities to help international students engage with their peers to promote integration into the dominant culture. This helps prevent culture shock and supports the student with learning the new culture in a supportive manner and Pacheco (2020) views adjustment as reflective of culture learning. It furthers the theory to include numerous factors that influence acculturation such as social networks, campus resources, SIO experience due to networking, as well as the programs and activities they implement to support adjustment for international students. This supports findings that show that campus programming and support can have a positive of increasing social networks, as well as adjustment for international students (Shu et al., 2020).

SIOs viewed assimilation as an outcome when international students were immersed in the environment and saw it as leaving their home culture behind. While SIOs supported events and opportunities for international students to engage with domestic students, faculty, and the local community, assimilation was not an outcome they intentionally fostered, as most felt that students should hold onto their culture to share with the larger community in a celebration of diversity.

SIOs perceived separation as international students feeling different from the dominant society, which the researcher called differentiation. Differentiation caused international students to fail to engage with the dominant society or their peers to protect their values and culture, whether for their protection or their family or friends back in their home country.

The SIOs described marginalization as when international students were not given the same advantages or opportunities as their peers because of policies and procedures within their campus or the local community. The SIOs indicated that they try to prevent this by supporting

international students' adjustment and promoting policies and procedures that are fair and equitable to all international students.

Extension of Berry's Strategy Regarding International Student Adjustment

The theoretical impact of this study on Berry's model is an extension of the strategies used by international students to one of how SIOs perceive the strategies as an outcome of the international students' experience. SIOs who better understand the acculturation process can use it to frame their events and activities to support international students. The theory strategies seen as outcomes of the experience of international students are extensions of the theory, and the outcomes can be seen as favorable or adverse. Each has implications or outcomes that impact the student to help or hinder their adjustment process to the dominant culture. On college campuses, the SIOs impact this process, and their programming or events can influence international students' responses to the dominant culture and their peers and adjustment to the local community. In addition to programming, as this study shows, time within the US can assist students with adjustment (Hua et al., 2020). SIOs who do not have the time or funding to support acculturation can indirectly impede international students' acculturation processes because they are not given opportunities to develop strong supportive relationships to help them through the adjustment process and prevent acculturative stress. Law and Liu (2023) found that international students' adjustment to their college campus increased due to events, activities, and programs implemented by the university. While Ammigan et al. (2022) found that higher educational institutions can support international students by developing student-centered programs and services that help meet the needs of students through a broad range of cultural contents.

This research expands Berry's model to accommodate outcome models that can be developed to track acculturation in the international student population. While much of the

research is on international student adjustment, the role of the SIO and higher education leadership in this process was the gap. The knowledge of their ability to impact change within higher educational structures that can support international student adjustment moves the theory from the student using the strategy to the administrator using the framework to build programs and policies preventing marginalization or separation, supporting integration, and limiting assimilation. While the student is using the strategy to adjust, they would be participating in programs, events, and activities designed to promote integration and, therefore, their success in reaching their educational goal of obtaining a degree in another country. Most of the SIOs in this study understood the challenges international students face with adjustment and were able to recommend support programs that assist them with acculturation. Knowing that SIOs view acculturation as a supportive measure of outcomes can help higher education institutions when they measure student success outcomes on their college campus. The summary of this study's theoretical implications is listed in Table 5. Much like the finding in this study, when SIOs suggest that programming it can help to support international students with the acculturation process. This aligns with Ammigan et al. (2022) who found that campus programming can help to address and negate racism, xenophobia, and discrimination on college campuses to help support the international student's emotional well-being and help increase an inclusive climate on campus.

Table 5

Summary of Theoretical Implications

Berry's (1997) Acculturation Strategies	Theoretical Implication of Study
Integration	Integration as Positive
Assimilation	Assimilation as Immersive
Separation	Separation as Differentiation
Marginalization	Marginalization as Disadvantage

Empirical Implications

Based upon data obtained by the SIOs this study indicated that intergroup relations and socio-cultural adaptation programs assist international students with acculturation. This data aligns with findings that show international students have less acculturative stress with increased socialization (Billedo et al., 2020; Koo et al., 2021a). SIOs viewing acculturation as an outcome suggests that the programs the design are to help with integrating international students instead of having them select other acculturation outcomes such as assimilation, separation, and marginalization. This data is supported by research that shows international students draw on resources from their personal culture as well as campus which helps with their adjustment (Sadoudi & Holiday, 2023). The SIOs shared that friends, faculty, the international student advisor, and the local community are essential parts of the adjustment process for international students. This is also reflected in research on international student adjustment that found that adjustment was positively influenced by social support due to programs which were designed to support them (Al-Khatib & Kagnici, 2023; Aljaberi et al., 2021; Kalbesai, 2021; Law & Liu, 2021). SIOs understand that international students need to connect with their peers, whether with other international or domestic students. This finding supports research that found international

students' adjustment was positively influenced by peer relationships within the new culture (M. Li et al. (2021). This data also confirms current research which shows that international student sense of belonging is positively impacted by advising and social support (Li & Yu, 2021; Yuan et al., 2024).

SIOs realize that social support cannot be directed from their department and must be a campus-wide effort. This data supports current research that shows international departments need to have a campus wide strategy to help support international students and internationalization efforts in the university (Di Maria, 2021). In addition, SIOs realize the need for international students to use campus resources as part of their acculturation strategy. Intentional communication and outreach to international students is required to ensure that international students are aware of the support systems and resources, as well as how to access them in a time of crisis (Ammigan et al., 2022; Bender et al., 2019). This aligns with findings that show adjustment programs implemented in universities help international students adjust to the new culture (Al-Khatib & Kagnici, 2023). Data collected indicated the importance of setting goals and designing measures to track acculturation or adjustment activities that promote integration, such as surveys, direct observation, and student feedback. This data supports Di Maria's (2021) findings that international student offices need to continually track and monitor international data to help streamline administrative processes that impact international students. Additionally, these findings indicate that SIOs rely heavily on professional networking resources to improve their knowledge and develop connections to build a strong network of colleagues in the field they can rely on for information and support, which supports their efforts regarding international student acculturation. This data supports findings by Toner (2019) and Bodine Al-

Sharif (2021) that show SIOs have strong professional development needs in order to perform their role successfully.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

Ten participants for a phenomenological study are an acceptable number. However, a limitation of the study was that while the study explored participants' lived experiences, it cannot be generalized to larger populations because of the small research sample it included. While not generalizable, the findings are still valuable because they improve understanding regarding the perception of the efforts of SIOs on the acculturation of international students and explore the data to find ways to support the acculturative process of international students on a college campus.

Another limitation was that while all participants were considered SIOs, the job descriptions varied across higher education institutions. In theory, all SIOs are over internationalization efforts, but at the time of this research study, the field and use of SIOs are still developing. The participants' roles varied, and while some were leaders in all internationalization efforts, some were only over international students and services. However, they considered themselves an SIO on their college campus because they did not have such a position or leader with that title. They all had leadership responsibilities on their campus for international students.

Delimitation

A delimitation of this study was that it focused on SIOs in the southeast United States. Initially, the researcher would be open to the entire country but decided it might be appropriate to make this for a specified region to gather data from a specific region. A second delimitation of

the study was the variety of institutions included within higher education. The experiences of an SIO from a community college can vary from those of an SIO from a large research university. Helms (2023) suggested that community colleges are designed to model civic engagement and help international students build strong skills after graduation. Another delimitation was that artificial intelligence is evolving at universities, and using such new technologies with international students was not incorporated into the study. For example, will international students find this technology helpful with their adjustment to campus? Can it help them quickly access information to understand the dominant culture better? Will college campuses be open and willing to use it to support international students? The researcher did not address these questions about artificial intelligence in this study.

Toner (2024a) suggested that SIOs must develop an explicit use of artificial intelligence within the international office and on their campuses while creating opportunities with campus stakeholders to discuss its impact on the international student population. Hendley (2024a) indicated that SIOs need to prepare students to enter an environment with artificial intelligence and teach skills that will not limit them to a single profession or industry. The importance of this new technology and how it could benefit, or harm international students' adjustment process was not considered. Therefore, while the researcher understands the growing importance of artificial intelligence on college campuses, the researcher did not include the possible impact of artificial on international student acculturation while attending college in another country.

Recommendations for Future Research

This researcher recommends expanding the study to include SIOs from all states. Limitations include the fact that the study allowed SIOs with titles that ranged broadly but whose role was that of an SIO in a college. Expanding the study to SIOs with additional work

responsibilities and titles might be helpful because the SIO role is still developing within college campuses. After all, not every college campus in the United States has a SIO.

This study was broad and had research questions limited to acculturation to focus the study. Therefore, this researcher suggests that future research include how SIOs use data in policy and program implementation. While this study focused solely on international student acculturation, future research can also include the acculturation of other students, including undocumented and students who fall outside the immigration purview of F1 international students.

Additional research could focus on the impact of community support and the organization of these programs. While this study touched upon the impact that community has in the adjustment process of international students, it did not explore the nature of the programs and ways in which these initiatives can mutually support the diversity and international efforts of the local and regional communities. As Brustein (2023) suggested, international educators should not only lead cross-national initiatives, but in the future, they should also promote the support of globalization in the local region where they work.

This study was viewing international students as an almost heterogenous body. However, international students come to the United States from a broad range of cultures and countries. Therefore, additional research could also focus on the experiences of SIOs within cultural contents or with groups of international students from certain countries. Lou (2023) suggests that research stop viewing the international experience as a conglomerate which can be generalized, and that each international student has their own unique experiences.

Considering the study findings, limitations, and delimitations, future research could involve participants around the United States. Additionally, perhaps selecting only community

colleges would enrich the sample with participants from the same type of university instead of a broad range, including community colleges, small private universities, and large public research universities. R. Helms (2023) suggested that an internationally oriented community college with global academic content and intercultural programs is attractive to international and domestic students in the region.

Conclusion

This research study seeks to explore the problem of international students who struggle with their adjustment to American culture while studying at colleges in the United States. Research has shown that international students struggle with acculturation to the dominant culture (Koo et al., 2021a; Ma, 2020; Xing & Bolden, 2019). This study sought to explore how administrators within higher education, specifically SIOs who are responsible for international student adjustment and help to implement policies and programs to support them, view acculturation. The purpose of this study was to describe the perception of Senior International Officers regarding efforts to support international student acculturation at higher education institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. The sample was ten SIOs who worked at a college in the southeast of the United States with 50 or more F1 international students. The participants were members of either NAFSA or AIEA and also held the responsibilities as a SIO in their university. This was a qualitative study that used the data collection techniques of interviews, focus groups, and a letter written to their former self. Before the data collection, the researcher took part in phenomenological reduction or bracketing to help remove biases and to help keep their own experiences aside from the data. Member checking of the data was performed to help ensure accuracy. Data analysis was done by coding in NVivo software. The researcher coded data and reviewed patterns in the data to develop themes. The

themes were developed and then broken down into sub-themes to highlight those experiences that supported and helped to answer the research questions within the study.

This research study has shown that SIO's have a strong understanding of the acculturation struggles that international students on their campus go through on their journey to adjust to the local campus community as well as American culture. SIOs implement specific programming designed to help international students adjust to U.S. culture as well as to the regional culture. This study found that SIOs found that integration was found as a more positive aspect of adjustment compared to Berry's other model outcomes. The research also found that providing a strong social network was their major focus in supporting international students whether that be within the campus, other departments, or the local community. This study also found that SIOs also used strong networks to help them in their role of understanding the cultural adjustment of international students and valued their networks within NAFSA and the state consortiums that they were a part of. In addition, this study also found areas of improvement for SIOs in policy and practice within international education. Including the possibility of changing federal laws to be more supportive to international students. This includes helping them to have more opportunities to work legally off campus so they can integrate with the local population. The study also extended Berry's theory of acculturation by finding that SIOs view the adjustment process as more of an outcome of the acculturation process.

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Appendix A: Approval to Conduct Research/IRB Approval

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-539
Title: Perceptions of Senior International Officers Efforts' Regarding the Acculturation of International Students in Higher Education: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study
Creation Date: 11-15-2022
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Ann Themistocleous
Review Board: Research Ethics Office
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Limited	Decision	Exempt - Limited IRB

Key Study Contacts

Member	Ann Themistocleous	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	
Member	Ann Themistocleous	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	
Member	Jerry Woodbridge	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	

Appendix B: Site Permission Request and Approval

Site Permission Request and Approcal: NAFSA List-serve

From: editormailbox <XXXX>
Date: Tuesday, October 25, 2022 at 2:36 PM
To: Ann-Margaret Themistocleous <XXXX>
Subject: Re: Site Permission - NAFSA List-serve

Hi Ann,

Thanks for getting in touch about this. We don't share our membership list, but you're welcome to post to different communities in Network NAFSA at network.nafsa.org—there are many active groups on Network NAFSA and I'm sure you'll get some good responses.

Thank you,
XXXX
--
| Editor in Chief and Director, Publishing Services
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
| nafsa.org/ie

From: Ann Themistocleous <XXXX>
Sent: Tuesday, October 25, 2022 2:32 PM
To: editormailbox <XXXX>
Subject: Site Permission - NAFSA List-serve

Dear NAFSA,

I hope all is well.

I am a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, and I am conducting research as a part of the requirements for a PhD. The title of my research study is *Perceptions of International Officers' Efforts Regarding the Acculturation of International Students in Higher Education: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study* and the purpose of my research is to explore the efforts of Senior International Officers on the acculturation of international students in higher education.

I am writing to request your permission to utilize your membership list serve to recruit participants for my research.

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond to my email.

Sincerely,
Ann

Ann-Margaret J. Themistocleous, M.Ed., PDSO
XXX-XXX-XXXX
XXXX

Site Permission Request and Approval: SECUSS-L

From: comanager secussl <.XXXX>
Date: Thursday, October 27, 2022 at 8:50 AM
To: Ann-Margaret Themistocleous <XXXX >
Cc: XXXX<XXXX>, <XXXX>
Subject: Re: Site Permission for SECUSS-L

Ann

Your request to post a message regarding your IRB reviewed research project is acceptable for posting to SECUSS-L. That said SECUSS-L is a moderated listserv therefore we always reserve the right to review, approve, or suggest edits to any submitted messages received during the moderation step. Based on the information provided your post request would appear to be consistent with the DISC: topic which must appear first in the subject line of the message to be posted, for example

DISC: Research study participants needed - Efforts of Senior International Officers regarding the acculturation of international students in higher education.

The above is only an example and we do suggest you consider wording the subject line to be as brief as possible within the parameters of your IRB and study requirements.

As a reminder all messages must be posted in plain text format. Hyperlinks to web links re the study, instruments, consent forms, study pages, etc.. should not be embedded in text rather they should be typed out - for example: XXXX and same for email addresses such as XXXX. Additionally, be aware that no attachments (pdf, images, etc.) are allowed in postings. Be sure to include any signature as well as contact information in plain text format as well.

Also, as the list is an open subscription/no fee and global list you should clearly define who your participant audience is. SECUSS-L members' responsibilities cross the range of positions from faculty to administrators to advisors, staff, students, and retirees' field of IE that is defined broadly - study abroad, program providers, international study advisors, immigration compliance, risk management, media, professional organizations, etc. We make no guarantees as to response rates and if you need to post any follow-up messages in your quest for participants, we encourage a minimum separation of posting of three weeks.

If you have any questions you are welcome to submit those to our SECUSS-L help email address at: SECUSS-L-XXXXX so that the moderators/managers of the list can respond to questions depending on who is moderating at the time. There are three of us: Soren, Ari are primary moderators on a daily basis, and I assist as needed.

Again, we look forward to your posting and learning more about your research.

Best
XXXX

XXXX
Co Moderator SECUSS-L

On Wed, Oct 26, 2022 at 12:27 PM Ann Themistocleous <XXXX > wrote:

Dear SECUSS-L Manager,

I hope all is well.

I am a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, and I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD. The title of my research study is *Perceptions of Senior International Officers' Efforts Regarding the Acculturation of International Students in Higher Education: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study.*

The purpose of my research is to explore the efforts of Senior International Officers regarding the acculturation of international students in higher education.

I am writing this to request your permission to utilize your membership list serve to recruit participants for my research.

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in the study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, response to my email.

Sincerely,
Ann

Ann-Margaret J. Themistocleous, M.Ed., PDSO
XXX-XXX-XXXX
XXX

Site Permission Request and Approval: AIEA List-serve

From: <XXXX>
Date: Monday, October 17, 2022 at 9:03 AM
To: Ann-Margaret Themistocleous <XXXX>
Cc: AIEA Secretariat <XXXX>
Subject: Re: Site Permission - AIEA List Serve

Dear Ann,

Thank you for your email! Since you are an AIEA member, you are able to use the AIEA Listserv to send this post.

How to Post

Send the message from the email address affiliated with your AIEA account to **XXXX@XXXX.com**. If you are looking for a response, please include your email address in the body of your email, as it will not appear in the post once it has been sent out. Additionally, if you would like to receive the original message, please copy yourself on to the email as it may not automatically send you a copy.

Do not include a message to the Secretariat or instructions, such as "Please forward this to the listserv," as the messages will go directly to the membership as-is and there is no option to edit posts.

The listserv is on moderated status, which means it could take 2-3 business days for the message to go out. Many thanks for your patience.

If I can answer any further questions, let me know!

Many thanks,

XXXX
Communications and Outreach Coordinator
Association of International Education Administrators
XXXX

From: Ann Themistocleous <XXXX>
Date: Friday, October 14, 2022 at 8:43 AM
To: AIEA Secretariat <XXXX>
Subject: Site Permission - AIEA List Serve

Dear AIEA,

I hope all is well.

I am a AIEA member and currently a PhD candidate. I would like to know if I could use the AIEA list serve to recruit candidates for a research study that I will be conducting. My study is, "The Perceptions of Senior international Officers Efforts on the Acculturation of International Students."

I will need to recruit about 12 to 15 SIOs in the southeast region of the USA.

Thank you and I appreciate your feedback.

Sincerely,
Ann

Ann-Margaret J. Themistocleous, M.Ed., PDSO
XXX-XXX-XXXX
xxxx

Appendix C: Recruitment Email

Recruitment Email

Dear [Recipient]:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. degree. The purpose of my research is to evaluate the perceptions of the efforts of Senior International Officers' efforts at supporting international student acculturation and adjustment to college life in the United States, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be working in a college in the capacity as a Senior International Officer at a university in the southeast that has at least 50 international students on an F1 visa. In addition, they must be a member of NAFSA or AIEA.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to take part in 1-hour interviews online, focus groups with fellow Senior International Officers for no more than 1 hour, as well as write a letter to their former self of two pages, which should not take more than 1 hour. Participants will be able to review a transcript of their interviews to check the validity and make any corrections. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or XXXX@liberty.edu for more information.

A consent document will be given to one week before the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Ann Margaret J. Themistocleous
Ph.D. Candidate Liberty University
(XXX) XXX-XXXX
XXXX@liberty.edu

Appendix D: Participant Screening Survey

Participant Screening Survey

Participant Name (First and Last) _____

Participant Phone Number_____

Participant Email_____

Have you been in the role of an SIO for three or more years? _____

If your title is not SIO but you perform most (or all) of the functions of an SIO, what is your

title?_____

Do you work at a college or university in the southeast of the United States? _____

Does your college enroll 50 or more international students on an F1 visa? _____

Are you a member of NAFSA?_____

Are you a member of AIEA?_____

Appendix E: Informed Consent

Consent

Title of the Project: Perceptions of Senior International Officers' Efforts Regarding the Acculturation of International Students in Higher Education: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study.
Principal Investigator: Ann Margaret J. Themistocleous, Ph.D. Candidate in Higher Education Leadership within the School of Education at Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a Senior International Officer with at least three years of experience working in a college that enrolls at least 50 or more international students on F1 visas. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to research Senior International Officers perceptions surrounding their efforts at assisting international students with the acculturation and adjustment process within higher education.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Participate in an online (Zoom or Teams), audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Participate in one online (Zoom or Teams), audio-recorded focus group that will take no more than 1 hour.
3. Write a letter to your former self indicating what advice you would give to your current self as a Senior International Officer. This letter will be two pages and should not take more than 1 hour to write.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include gathering additional research on the role of Senior International Officers as well as furthering research on the acculturative process of international students who enroll in higher educational institutions in the United States.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous and will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer/in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted/erased. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

To participate in the research, you will need to pay for no costs.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be

included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Ann Margaret J. Themistocleous. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXX@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jerry Woodbridge at XXXX@Liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix F: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your education and career journey to becoming a senior international officer. CRQ

2. Describe the relationship that you have with the international students on your campus. CRQ & SQ1

3. What experiences have prepared you to work with international students on your campus? CRQ & SQ3

4. Describe the programs you have implemented to support international students' adjustment to your campus. SQ1

5. How do you support international students through acculturation to help them with integration and ensure they do not feel marginalized? SQ1

6. How would you describe your experience with international students with acculturation issues and select separating from the culture instead of integrating with it? CRQ

7. How would you describe your experiences regarding international students' integration into the new culture instead of assimilation into it? SQ1

8. How do you describe campus stakeholders' experiences and their role in the international students' acculturation process? CRQ & SQ2

9. How do you measure the programs implemented to support international students' acculturation? SQ2

10. What are your experiences with the processes you use to measure international students' acculturation? SQ2

11. How do you believe faculty and student support impacts the international students' acculturation to your college campus and American culture? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

12. What role do you believe the local community plays in the international students' acculturation? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

13. What programs do you currently have or plan on implementing to assist international students with community support? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

14. How do you measure the effectiveness of the programs implemented to support international students' acculturation? SQ2 & SQ3

15. What are your experiences measuring the effectiveness of the programs implemented to support international students' acculturation within the community? SQ2 & SQ3

16. How do you describe the challenges you have faced regarding the international students' acculturation process on your campus? CRQ & SQ1

17. COVID has dramatically impacted the world and the international student community regarding mobility. What was your experience with international students and their adjustment and acculturation to your campus during COVID? CRQ & SQ1

18. As a senior international officer, what new policies or procedures were implemented to assist international students during COVID? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

19. In your opinion, how did the new policies and procedures help international students' adjustment during COVID? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ2

20. What else would you like to add regarding how you perceive international students' adjustment to your college's campus? CRQ

Appendix G: Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Please tell us how you became a senior international officer. CRQ &SQ3

2. Please share your first interactions with the international student community on a college campus. CRQ &SQ3

3. As a senior international officer, how do you view your responsibility and role in helping international students adjust to your campus community? CRQ & SQ1

4. What role do you believe the community plays in the acculturation process with international students? CRQ, SQ2, & SQ3

5. How did you first glean knowledge about the community's role in the international students' acculturation process? CRQ, SQ2, & SQ3

6. How do you perceive the international students' acculturation process? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ3

7. What are your experiences with international students' acculturation on your campus? CRQ, SQ1, & SQ3

8. What programs, policies, and procedures have you implemented on campus due to your perceptions about international acculturation? SQ1 & SQ2

9. How do you think international students feel about assimilating to the cultural values and norms of the dominant society? CRQ & SQ1

10. Describe your experiences with international students who feel marginalized and decide to separate from the dominant community instead of integrating. CRQ & SQ1

11. How do you measure the programs you have implemented at your college campus to promote acculturation of the international student community within the student community? SQ3

12. How do you measure the programs you have implemented at your college campus to promote programs for integrating faculty and staff regarding international students' acculturation? SQ3.

13. Describe the programs you implemented to ensure that international students do not feel marginalized on campus. CRQ & SQ1

14. What are your perceptions regarding COVID's impact on international students' adjustment to campus and US culture? CRQ

15. What else do you want to share about your experiences as a senior international officer supporting international students with their adjustment process? CRQ

Appendix H: Letter Writing Prompt for Participants

Letter Writing Prompt

As a senior international officer in higher education today, what experiences would you share to prepare your younger self for assisting international students with acculturation? Each participant will be asked to write one letter of at least two pages.

Appendix I: Interview Transcript Approval Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

I would like to take the time to thank you for taking part in my research study on the perception of Senior International Officers. I am sending you a copy of the transcription of our individual interview and ask that you please review it in the next two weeks. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to email me at XXXX@liberty.edu. I will assume that after two weeks if I do not hear from you, that you are satisfied with the transcription.

Thank you again for taking part in my research study and I appreciate your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Ann Margaret J. Themistocleous

Ph.D. Candidate Liberty University

Appendix J: Codes

Experiences with acculturation (CRQ)
>**Acculturation experiences**
>>**Positive experience**
>
>**Assimilation experiences**
>>**Immersion with US friends**
>
>COVID adjustment
>Cultural difference
>>Cultural differences male/female
>
>English language
>Immigration experiences
>Integration to culture - friends
>>Making friends
>>International students staying together
>>American friends
>
>**Marginalization experiences**
>>**Negative**
>
>Relationship with international students
>>Fulfilling
>>Main contact
>>Professional relationship
>>Welcoming
>
>**Separation**
>>**Feeling different**
>
>Training faculty and staff culture

How to support international students (RQ1)
>**International Office/Advisor Impact**
>>Activities for international students
>>Cultural events
>>Faculty dinners
>>International student organization/group
>>Trips to experience American culture
>
>Advocacy for students
>**Community Support**
>>Church
>>Local community
>
>**Departmental support**
>>Athletics
>>Colleagues
>>Housing
>>Misc departments
>
>**Faculty Support**
>>Connection
>>Support

Room to grow
Graduate Students
International as financial impact
More time to spend with students
Orientation
Cultural adjustment class for international
Prepare for the workforce
Supporting in an emergency
Transportation
Workshops on immigration

Assess acculturation process and data (RQ2)
Student feedback
Survey after events
Direct observation
Video reflection
Written reflection

Professional Development/Networking Experiences (RQ3)
Agents
State consortia
Education USA
Fulbright
NAFSA
Networking

Appendix K: Example Letter to a Former Self

Letter Writing Prompt

As a senior international officer in higher education today, what experience would you share to prepare your younger self for the role and with assisting international students with acculturation?

Each participant will be asked to write one letter of at least two pages.

I start my thinking about assisting international students with acculturation back to my study abroad time in Germany, and later my internship in Austria. In both of those places, I couldn't make friends with locals. My friends were other international students, typically English-speaking ones whose friendship kept me from learning and using German as much as I would have liked. I never felt like I was anything more than a foreigner having an adventure in a strange place with other people in a similar situation.

Fast forward six years to when I went to XXXX as a Fulbright Scholar and things were very different. Thanks to a fellow U.S. Fulbright'er who was moonlighting as a Spanish instructor at the local university, I became part of a community of XXXX university students. Although they were a good five years younger than I was, we become friends, and when my Spanish instructor friend left to return to Seattle, these local students become my primary social network. I remember a profound moment when one of the XXXX students, with whom I share a lasting friendship with her entire family to this day, told me that I was no longer American XXXX, but Simply XXXX. My XXXX friends invited me to their countryside villages, introduced me to their extended family, and to their way of life. They trusted me not to judge them for not having the consumer products and home amenities familiar to middle class U.S. American households.

Back to the question at hand, what can we do as international educators to help, say, Vietnamese Thu, become "Simply Thu" while attending our universities?

Some of this must come intentionally through our direct interactions with our students, but much of it must also come organically through the programs we create on campus.

In terms of direct interactions, Younger Self, remember that the international students are here to complete their studies, but also to experience the United States. My most memorable interactions with international students almost always came outside of the traditional office/classroom setting.

I think they'd say the same thing.

I think they'd also say these interactions helped them feel welcome and assisted in their acculturation.

Off the top of my head, I remember McDonald's and a baseball game with the Taiwanese dancers, karaoke and baseball with the Indian engineering students, football tailgates with various international students and scholars, and the cookout at my house in XXXX with the XXXX Beyond Borders program (the Nepali students liked those spicy frozen veggie patties on

the grill!). There are certain social boundaries that younger international education professionals need to set during these off-campus, out-of-the-office settings (that I was admittedly not great about as a 20-something professional, although those exchange students from my first few years on the job remain some of my closest friends today).

The common link between all the above is that those events were facilitated internally by my office, but the quality of the individual interactions was created organically through those who loosened their ties a bit and got to know the international students as people.

That brings us to the next point: learn how to hire. My dream international office would feature at least one staff member responsible for day-to-day advisement and cultural programming and a separate staff member, likely the PDSO, responsible for the tough conversations surrounding work authorization, visa status, etc. [note: that staff member has such a tough job, support their professional development (and salary) at every turn possible!]. Asking for someone to be both the friendly, approachable energy behind campus programming and also the one serving as the person who has to firmly explain visa compliance issues, and heaven forbid terminate a visa, is a tough juxtaposition. I think back to how well the XXXX/XXXX/XXXX conglomerate worked in XXXX and how effective XXXX was in her job with XXXX in XXXX. XXXX/XXXX and XXXX were able to connect with students informally and had the time in their workload to build programs that helped with acculturation. It's an awful lot to ask a DSO/PDSO to wear both hats.

In addition to the ISS staff member involved with programming, hiring the right support team to help facilitate acculturation is also important. Utilize graduate assistants, student workers, and/or peer mentors! Younger Self, do you remember how student worker XXXX took students (on her own time) to the rodeo? Do you remember how XXXX helped you bring students to stock up on supplies at Market Basket before Hurricane Harvey hit? And, before that, remember how the GAs took students (this time on the clock!) to the XXXX International Leadership Conference? We full-time staff can only do so much. Hire smart and responsible students, delegate, and empower them to play a role in the acculturation of international students.

As I close, let me remind Former Self how Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories I read more than a decade ago still resonate with me today. They are a useful read to understand the challenges faced in the international student acculturation process.

Also, Former Self, spend some time on yourself, ok? Boundaries are necessary. I'm modeling good behavior by leaving at 5pm on this Friday night in your honor.