

International Indian Graduate Students' Experiences with Academic Advising at a Public
Research University in Texas

By

Vandana Nandakumar

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Supervising Committee:

Dr. Yi Leaf Zhang, Ph.D., Chair

Dr. Maria Adamuti-Trache, Ph.D.

Dr. Ambra L. Green, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

INTERNATIONAL INDIAN GRADUATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH ACADEMIC
ADVISING AT A PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITY IN TEXAS

Vandana Nandakumar

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Supervising Professor: Yi Leaf Zhang

A missing component in the current international student literature is how international Indian graduate students adjust academically and socially to a new learning environment and how academic advising influences international Indian graduate students' academic success and social adjustment. This qualitative study addresses this gap in the literature by using Rendón's (1994) validation theory and by drawing upon 11 students' lived experiences at a four-year public research university in the state of Texas. Four distinct themes emerged from the study's findings, such as international Indian graduate students' lack of understanding of academic advising, their perceptions of academic advising, supportive academic advising experiences, and challenging academic advising experiences. The study revealed that international Indian graduate students' understanding and perceptions of academic advising were different from their lived experiences. The results also highlight the role of an academic advisor in students' adjustment process as well as the importance of an academic advisor in making informed decisions related to academics. More importantly, guided by Rendón's validation theory, it was determined that participants' believed their supportive experiences with academic advising validates their academic success and social adjustment, while their challenging experiences with academic advising (in)validate their academic success and social adjustment. The larger international

student experience research must continue to delve into ways in which colleges and universities across the United States can play a substantive role in better preparing and supporting international students prior to and after their arrival. To that end, colleges and universities must also better prepare academic advisors when serving international students and provide for increased support and infrastructure in the field of academic advising.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all international students. You are heard. You are valued. When presented with an opportunity, take it and don't be afraid to speak up. It is my hope that things change for the better in the near future.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The population of international students in American colleges and universities has grown significantly over the past decade, and about 34.8% of them are pursuing graduate degrees (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2020). During the 2019-2020 academic year, 374,435 international graduate students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States (U.S.; IIE, 2020). Of this population, 22% are international Indian students pursuing graduate degrees in various fields (IIE, 2020). Research shows that international students studying in the U.S. contribute to enriching classroom perspectives (Bevis, 2002; Mamiseishvili, 2012), are critical stakeholders in research projects (Park et al., 2018), increase cultural awareness among communities (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Rao, 2017), and benefit the U.S. economy financially (Sato & Hodge, 2015; Sherry et al., 2010).

Despite the contributions international graduate students bring to U.S. higher education, they face significant challenges when adapting to a new environment in the U.S. For instance, researchers have noted that international students are more likely than their domestic peers to experience difficulties in building social relationships (Mamiseishvili, 2012), adjusting to academic practices (Bai, 2016), comprehending the English language (Leong, 2015), and persisting in a degree program (Sherry et al., 2010). Additionally, international students often feel lonely and experience a sense of culture shock when they first arrive in the U.S. (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

An effective strategy to help international students overcome the aforementioned challenges is to rely on academic advising. Academic advising has a significant influence on international students' academic and social adjustment (Lee & Metcalf, 2017). More specifically, academic advising is positively associated with students' well-being, sense of belonging, and is

noted as a source of support for academic success (Lee & Metcalf, 2017; Lynch & Lungrin, 2018; Thomas & McFarlane, 2018). The first staff members to interact with international students upon their arrival are academic advisors (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017). Research shows that they are among the most important sources of support during students' transition (Omar et al., 2016; Rice et al., 2009; Rice et al., 2016; Zhang & Dinh, 2017). Perhaps most importantly, academic advisors are vital postsecondary supports that help international students overcome barriers critical to student retention and graduation (National Academic Advising Association [NACADA], 2017; Omar et al., 2016; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

However, despite the potential benefits, the literature demonstrates that international students also encounter challenges during academic advising due to differences in culture, mismatch with former educational systems, ability to communicate, and language barriers (Bista, 2019; Rice et al., 2016; Zhang & Dinh, 2017). U.S. colleges and universities must understand that international students come from varied cultural and academic backgrounds and that academic advising is critical to their adjustment and retention in a graduate program. However, most research studies focus only on undergraduate student advising or consider all Asian international students as a homogenous population (e.g., Pan et al., 2007; Park et al., 2017).

As the second-largest group of international students in the U.S., international Indian students account for 23% of the graduate student population, and their experiences have not been thoroughly investigated. Given the educational, cultural, and language background, this population may not experience the same challenges as international students from other Asian countries. Hence, it is critical to understand these students' experiences, especially how their academic advising experiences promote or hinder their transition to the U.S. Therefore, the current study focused on international Indian graduate students and explored their academic

advising experiences. This study intended to provide a deeper understanding of these students' experiences and needs, and better inform researchers, practitioners, and administrators to enhance this unique yet understudied population's adjustment and transition. Specifically, through the lens of validation theory, I investigated students' perceptions of academic advising, lived experiences of academic advising, and the influence of academic advising on international Indian graduate students' adjustment.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous researchers (e.g., Bevis, 2002; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Smith & Khawaja, 2011) have studied international students' adjustment in the U.S. higher education learning environment and the role of advisors in their adjustment process. However, most of these studies considered international students a homogenous population (e.g., Gaulee, 2019; Leong, 2015; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Among the studies that focused on graduate Asian students, most were conducted on East Asian students (e.g., Han et al., 2013; Pan et al., 2007; Park et al., 2017). Comparatively, international Indian students pursuing graduate degrees at four-year universities are often overlooked. As of 2020, India ranked second in the category of "top places of origin of international students," with 85,160 graduates studying in the U.S. (IIE, 2020), but the college experiences of this student population have not been thoroughly investigated. Researchers (e.g., Lee & Metcalfe, 2017; Omar et al., 2016; Zhang & Dinh, 2017) have studied international students' advising experiences, but none of the studies focused particularly on international Indian graduate students. Despite a large number of international Indian graduate students (22%) that the U.S. attracts (IIE, 2020), these students continue to face various challenges in academic and social adjustment, and there is hardly any research to support the needs of this population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of international Indian graduate students' lived experiences at a large four-year public research university. Because a significant population of international students comes from India, it is pivotal to expand the research base regarding the experiences of international Indian students studying in the U.S. As a result, to address the literature gap, the current dissertation study explored international Indian graduate students' perceptions and experiences with academic advising and the influence of academic advising on students' academic success and social adjustment.

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored:

1. How do international Indian graduate students at a four-year public research university in Texas perceive academic advising and academic advisors' role in their academic and social adjustment?
2. How does international Indian graduate students' experience with academic advising validate or invalidate their academic adjustment?
3. How does international Indian graduate students' experience with academic advising validate or invalidate their social adjustment?

Theoretical Framework

The current research study was guided by Rendón's (1994) theory of validation, which is defined as "an enabling, confirming and the supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (p.44). As Rendón (1994) stated, "Faculty, administrators, and counselors need to fully engage in the validation of students and to recognize that not all students can be expected to learn or get involved in institutional life the

same way” (p. 51). Extensive research shows that validating students’ experiences using encouragement, affirmation, and support has a significant impact on their development in and out of college (Rendón, 1994). For these reasons, faculty, administrators, and counselors strive to serve as guides to support students and help them succeed in all their academic endeavors (e.g., Bai, 2016; Isbell et al., 2018). Thus, validation implements an affirmation.

Rendón (1994) theorized that validation manifests through academic and interpersonal validation. *Academic validations* are students trusting their innate capacity to learn, acquiring confidence in being a college student, and contributing to the institution’s learning environment. *Interpersonal validations* promote students’ personal development and adjustment to life as a college student. As Rendón-Linares and Muñoz (2011) posits, validation emphasizes students engagement and the institution’s active role in recognizing students as capable, valuable, and experts of their own experiences. Thus, through the lens of validation theory (Rendón, 1994; Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011), this qualitative study intended to obtain an understanding of international students’ lived academic and social adjustment experiences, perceptions of academic advising, and the influence of academic advising on their academic success and social adjustment.

Previously, the theory of validation was applied to understand student development in college, student success strategies, to improve students’ learning experiences (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011), and to understand experiences of underrepresented students in community colleges (Barnett, 2011; Suarez, 2003; Zhang, 2016). In this study, validation theory was used to provide insight into the academic and social challenges that international Indian graduate students face in U.S. higher education. Additionally, this theory also provides an understanding of how academic advising helps these students transition into a new learning environment.

Methodology

This study employed a phenomenological (Creswell & Poth, 2018) approach. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain the phenomenological approach as one that describes participants' "personal experiences with the phenomenon under study" (p. 201). Therefore, this is an appropriate approach to draw data from international Indian graduate students' lived experiences while interacting with their academic advisors and their perceived influence of the student-advisor relationship on their social adjustment and academic success.

Research Site

This study was conducted at a large Texas public university (TPU). In addition to working and studying at TPU, I chose this research site because it houses one of the largest international Indian student population in Texas. This university is ranked as one of the top 10 national universities for ethnic diversity among students, with 25.3% that makes up for the international graduate student body (U.S. News & World Report, 2020). In 2019, TPU housed nearly 2,000 international Indian graduate students (IIE, 2019), making it one among the top 10 universities in Texas that host international Indian graduate students. Besides, having all participants at one site is appropriate for a phenomenological study, because of the participants' shared lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, a point of contact at the Indian Cultural Council (ICC) agreed to send out an email invite to members of ICC; a local cultural organization at TPU. I invited students who satisfied the following criteria to participate in my study: 1) a graduate student of Indian origin on an F1 or J1 visa, 2) a current member of the ICC student organization, and 3) has completed at least one semester in his/her graduate

degree program. All correspondence with students (invites and those who show interest) was via their student email account. To protect the students' identities, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant.

Data Collection

I conducted the current study using two data collection forms: 1) a demographic survey and 2) a semi-structured interview. Before conducting interviews, I collected demographic information from the participants. Subsequently, I conducted interviews via an internet-based video communication platform such as Zoom, Skype, or Teams. Therefore, I conducted 11 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with international Indian graduate students until I reached data saturation (Charmaz, 2014). Each interview lasted about 45 minutes and was audio-recorded using a handheld recorder.

Data Analysis

After data collection was complete, I transcribed all audio recorded interviews using Temi – a transcription service. Then, using Creswell and Poth's (2018) approach to phenomenological analysis, I employed: (a) horizontalization of data (b) forming themes (c) textural description of statements (d) structural description of statements (e) creating the essence of participants' experiences.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, I employed three procedures. First, using the researcher's lens – clarifying researcher bias (Weiner-Levy & Popper-Giveon, 2013). Second, using the participant's lens – member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Third, using the reader's lens, I used a peer reviewer to go over my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher's Positionality

As an international student from India, I experienced cultural shock when I first came to the U.S. Specifically, I struggled to adjust to a new environment and to build social networks. Before starting my Master's program, I had several advising sessions with international advisors and academic advisors that led me astray (i.e., I was given incorrect and incomplete information regarding courses, my degree plan was unclear and did not align with my career goals, and I was unaware of several on-campus services). My prior experience with advising, in particular, was extremely challenging and delineated my career in the field of education in the United States. Additionally, I felt that advising sessions could have helped me acclimate to a new culture (i.e., physical and mental health services, organizations/clubs, and transportation). However, throughout my two-year Master's degree program, I did not receive the support and guidance that I believed I would receive from my advisors.

The process of academic advising was new to me and I had learned about it during my orientation. From what was explained during orientation, I expected an academic advisor to help me design my course plan according to my needs, provide me an understanding of the American education system, and direct me to clubs and associations I could join. However, that was not the case. Instead, my academic advisor provided me a list of required core courses and a list of electives that I could choose. When I asked my advisor to explain what each course entailed and if she could help me select courses that suited my needs, she referred me to an online guide that provided a brief overview of each course. Due to limited time, I was not able to ask her other questions I had in mind. I found this challenging because everything was new to me, and I did not quite understand the process of selecting courses and the requirements of my degree. Following my first academic advising session, I never had an opportunity to meet with my

advisor in person again. My communication with her via email and minimal because I hardly received a response. Personally, these challenges created confusion, stress, and fear of disappointing my family and society.

Having mentioned the aforementioned challenges, I acknowledge my biases concerning personal relevance to this research topic. I understand that as a researcher, I need to bracket my experiences and opinions to obtain a complete understanding of students' adjustment experiences and the academic advising spectrum (i.e., international Indian graduate students adjustment challenges, the benefits, and challenges of academic advising, as well as their stance on academic advising). Ultimately, this research aims to bridge the gap in research on international Indian students' adjustment challenges and inform the field of advising to be better able to serve the needs of students from India.

Significance of the Study

First, this research study fills the existing literature gap and extends knowledge on international Indian graduate students' adjustment in the United States. Additionally, researchers can examine the levels of social adjustment and its influence on students' well-being. Future research can also compare academic advising practices between immigrant and non-immigrant students in the United States. Additionally, the same study can be viewed through a different theoretical lens, such as Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), or conducted using a quantitative methodology.

Second, by gaining insight into international Indian graduate students' needs, the university can reevaluate services provided to this population of students. One way to achieve this is to integrate academic and career advising to promote student success. Also, offer tips to advisors and administrators to encourage students' academic and social adjustment (i.e.,

attending and recruiting at welcome events, a platform where they can interact with international students).

Finally, this research could inform international Indian graduate students of the nuances of studying in the U.S. Students can better understand what is required to adjust in the U.S. academically and socially. They can also comprehend the role of academic advisors and the requisites of academic advising.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions indicate the meaning of the terms employed in this study.

Please note that the following definitions are concerning international students:

Academic Adjustment: Academic adjustment “refers to the degree of a student’s success in coping with various educational demands such as motivation, application, performance and satisfaction with the academic environment” (Rienties et al., 2011, p. 687).

Academic Advising: Advising is a student-centered process where the advisor serves as a guide and teacher, and the advisor-advisee relationship is respectful and an “interactive partnership that is aimed at enhancing the student’s self-awareness and fulfillment.” (O’Banion, 1972). In addition to O’Banion’s (1972) definition of advising, Hunter and White (2004) defined academic advising as a process that helps shape students’ learning experiences, thereby encouraging students to achieve “educational, career, and life goals.”

Academic Success: A process wherein international students acclimate to a new curriculum and teaching procedures (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007), there is evidence of learning, and allows for students to remain in satisfactory standing and retention (Andrade, 2006). Additionally, success is noted as the accomplishment of learning, gaining knowledge, and

developing employability skills (Cachia et al., 2018).

Adjustment: According to Ramsay et al. (1999), adjustment is described as the fit between students and their surrounding environment. Andrade (2006) adds that adjustment also examines “issues such as learning styles, study habits, educational background, culture and learning proficiency.” (p. 134).

Challenges: For the purpose of this study, the term ‘challenges’ is defined as the struggle that international students face in terms of academics, social adjustment, finances, and language barriers.

International students: For the purpose of this study, a student who was born outside of the United States and has lived for a significant duration of their life in another country and holds an ‘F1’ status visa.

Social Adjustment: Social adjustment refers to international students’ ability to build social networks, develop a sense of belonging in a new environment, and allows for students to succeed in university life (Sherry et al., 2010).

Outline of the Dissertation

This study sought to explore international Indian graduate students’ academic and social adjustment in the United States and the influence of academic advising on their adjustment. The study adopted Rendón’s (1994) and Rendón-Linares & Muñoz (2011) theory of validation and intended to provide policymakers, administrators, faculty, and staff at four-year institutions with practices to promote international Indian graduate students’ academic and social adjustment in the United States. This dissertation comprises five chapters.

Chapter 1 covered an introduction, overview of the study, and a theoretical framework that guided the study. It outlined the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research

questions, introduction to the theoretical framework and study methodology, researcher's positionality, the significance of the study, and definition of terms adopted throughout the study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature relevant to the study. This includes, 1) literature pertaining to the international students' challenges in the United States will be introduced. 2) research regarding international students' academic adjustment, social adjustment, and academic advising will be described. 3) this study's theoretical framework and a synthesis of the literature on adjustment and advising of international students will be detailed.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological design, sample and recruitment procedures, data collection and analysis approach, and an overview of the data collected. Further, this chapter will also provide limitations to the study.

Chapter 4 presents detailed introductions of the participants and the thematic findings from the analysis of Chapter 3.

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with a discussion of the findings, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This research aims to better understand the perceptions and lived experiences of international Indian graduate students at a four-year public research university and the influence of academic advising on students' academic success and social adjustment. Although this study focuses on graduate students, the literature on this population is scarce. Therefore, the relevant literature on undergraduate students was also reviewed, analyzed, and discussed in the proposal. The following literature review focuses on international students as a homogenous population. Topics such as academic adjustment and success, social adjustment, and academic advising are considered.

International students add diversity and richness to learning institutions globally. The most common reason for this group of students to move to foreign countries is to pursue higher education and promising career opportunities (Andrade, 2010). Most of them have temporary student visas (F1 or J1) and learn English as a secondary linguistic tool. In an online survey to comprehend the difficulties international students face, Rao (2017) notes that the highest representation came from China, South Korea, India, and Saudi Arabia. Notably, some of these students were sponsored by U.S. universities to advance knowledge, innovation, or technology in their expertise fields (Rao, 2017). Today, the International Institute of Education (IIE, 2020) documents more than a million international students enrolled in the U.S. alone. Besides, they contributed about \$46 billion to the nation's economy in 2019 (U.S. Embassy, 2020) and enhanced its cultural and intellectual vibrancy (Ammigan & Jones, 2018). Given the susceptibility and vulnerability to varied academic and social experiences amongst international students, this literature review evaluates how they academically and socially adjust to a new environment and assesses how academic advising impacts their educational journey.

International Students' Academic Adjustment

The academic adjustment refers to the degree to which learners successfully cope with different demands, such as satisfaction, performance, application, and motivation in academic achievement (Andrade, 2006; Park et al., 2017; Sato & Hodge, 2015). In this case, academic adjustment is an involving process that demands behavioral and psychological changes as international students attempt to regulate themselves in balancing between their new educational setting and meeting the unique learning requirements in a higher learning environment (Andrade, 2006; Pan et al. 2007). Presumably, Rice et al. (2016) opine that many international students experience culture shock upon entering a new culture, let alone a country. Some students report feeling frustrated, fearful, sad, and homesick, which results in tremendous difficulties in integrating themselves into a new academic environment (Isbell et al., 2018; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Thompson, 2018). Like most learning environments, they are evaluated through different assessment conventions. However, they are expected to handle academic demands such as, develop optimistic and friendly associations with professors and other university professionals, get used to the differences in curriculum and teaching techniques, adjust to oral communications, and develop studying tactics and strategies in taking tests (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Notably, the aforementioned demands are challenging for international students from non-English speaking countries and various education systems (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

While entering into a new college environment can be a challenging process for most students (Shelton, 2003; Tinto, 2007), it could be even more intimidating for international students. International students often experience more challenges, such as lack of language fluency, learning preferences, note-taking strategies, asking questions, and continuous assignments (Bai, 2016). These findings were consistent with the results from other studies

(Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Isbell et al., 2018; Rao, 2017) that indicate interactive classroom discussions, presentations, independent research, pop quizzes, continuous assignments, plagiarism, and teaching styles cause transition concerns to international students. Since many international students come from an academic system where memorization is an essential measure of their learning process and academic success (Bista & Foster, 2011), they may find it difficult to focus on critical thinking and interactive teaching practices (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

International students reveal that when overcoming challenges in terms of academics and adjusting to a new educational system, they turn to peers, faculty, or academic advisors for support and guidance (e.g., Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Rao, 2017). Furthermore, international students state that academic achievement is of high priority and failure is not an option, especially in their families and society (e.g., Bai, 2016; Sutton & Sankar, 2011; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Thus, international students indicate that faculty and academic advisors' expertise is paramount to their success (Andrade, 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Classroom Communication

International students who are non-native English speakers experience a myriad of challenges as they adapt to different studying and learning methods. First, Rao (2017) notes that they have a hard time transitioning from the academic environment they are used to and adapting to the new environment, where English is predominantly used in giving instructions. As such, some of them find their professors' and lecturers' accents challenging to grasp and the instructional content quite challenging to follow. Elturki et al. (2019) state that such a level of inadaptability contributes to their low grades, which is a significant point of concern. Notably, when there are cultural discrepancies between both parties, then there is a higher likelihood that a

breakdown in classroom communication will occur. Besides, students occupying new learning environments have a higher probability of losing their self-confidence. Sato and Hodge (2015) and Park et al. (2017) note that this experience is familiar and common to learners experiencing a new culture and making learners feel inferior to their domestic peers academically.

Student Interactions and Relationships

Extensive research shows that student interactions are essential for international students to determine their success level and thrive in a new learning environment. In this case, Rao (2017) notes that most international students miss their family ties and familiar social settings, which often results in social anxiety. For that reason, Smith and Khawaja (2011) and Bai (2016) show that some tend to reach out to students from their home countries and avoid associating with native English speakers. Additionally, students from international collectivist communities only trust other learners from similar in-groups, based on family, religion, and race, presenting substantial challenges in adjusting to the new collegiate environment. Due to closed interactions and relationships, their academic performance substantially deteriorates (Sato & Hodge, 2015). Moreover, student relationships are determined by different personalities. Although most international students recognize the need to associate with peers in the host nation, Bai's (2016) research notes that they prefer to network with peers from their home countries because relationships with peers from the host country do not seem comfortable associating with their own.

Instructional Tactics and Research Methods

Most international students from different Middle-Eastern and Asian countries are not accustomed to the pedagogical instructional tactics employed in the U.S., such as class discussion posts, debates, presentations, groups work, and case studies (Bai, 2016; Rao, 2017).

Notably, most of them prefer non-participatory or passive instructional methods (e.g., lectures), because most of them have been culturally trained in taking notes, memorizing study materials, and listening to lecturers submissively (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). As such, they face tremendous difficulty when it comes to responding to content, questioning diverse subject matters, and critiquing concepts during instruction. Besides, they also have considerable difficulty grasping concepts vital to academics in the U.S. (e.g., avoiding plagiarism and citation methods; Elturki et al., 2019; Isbell et al., 2018; Rao, 2017). Consequently, they face issues with academic integrity that impair their academic performances in the long term. More importantly, international students from Asian cultures struggle with academic writing styles and are forced to relearn appropriate writing techniques relevant to the U.S. context. For example, students in China and India rarely present topic ideas and thesis statements in academic papers, which is a requirement in the American instructional environment (Rao, 2017).

Student-Instructor Relationships

Due to being educated in different educational systems, most international students tend to depict below-average analytical and critical skills required in the U.S. educational system. Notably, research claims that many international students prefer working with questions that demand recalling concepts and knowledge but generally struggle with those that require the application of concepts (Rao, 2017). Also, non-native English speakers have difficulty participating in class discussions due to the fear of different accents and not communicating clearly. This lack of participation lowers attainment of learning outcomes and grades for various courses (Omar et al., 2016). Interestingly, learners from most collectivist nations have been taught to develop a close rapport with their lecturers and professors (Andrade, 2006; Omar et al., 2016). However, in the U.S., professors are viewed as guides, and the ultimate decision

regarding the use of instructional materials depends on the student. Due to the aforementioned student experiences, most professors are forced to become support systems to international students within their introductory years in college (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Park et al., 2017). Ultimately, international students believe that their instructor relationships are critical to their academic success (Omar et al., 2016). For example, international students depend on dialogic interactions outside the classroom to eventually grasp concepts. However, research shows that most students are denied the opportunity to participate in such dialogues (Park et al., 2018).

Resources to Overcome Academic Challenges

International students play an imperative role in educational internationalization and exert necessary social, educational, and political influence in their home countries when they return from studying in the United States. As such, most colleges and universities offer various resources and services in helping international students succeed in their studies. These services include but are not limited to recreational clubs, on-campus counseling centers, student writing associations, on-campus writing centers, and tutor centers (Park et al., 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Past research shows that writing centers and tutor centers in most higher education institutions help international students improve their writing and necessary academic skills (Cachia et al., 2018). Apart from providing students with one-on-one and customized writing tutorials, these centers also offer international students research workshops that aid them in writing essays, conducting multifaceted research, and work as support groups for global learners (Ammigan & Jones, 2018).

International Students' Social Adjustment

Mobility amongst international students in higher education institutions in the United States is a sensitive issue. Gündüz and Alakbarov (2019) define social adjustment as a

psychological process through which international students handle new social values and standards, leading to individual acceptance (Pan et al., 2007). Notably, integrating into the social life of a new environment (e.g., a country, a city, or a university), building a network in the immediate environment, and managing different social freedoms in the context of a new setting is a complex experience and is fundamental for social adjustment. For that reason, Gündüz and Alakbarov (2019) and Pan et al. (2007) highlight that social adjustment presents an enduring challenge to different international students as they face considerable difficulties in adapting to the host nation, maintaining and forming new social associations, and developing a unique sense of belonging. Notably, perceived discrimination, cultural differences, and language barriers create the most substantial concerns in international students' social adjustment.

Previous literature (e.g., Leong, 2015; Rao, 2017) suggests that social support has a significant influence on student's social adjustment and validates their self-concept and self-esteem (Yeh & Inose, 2003). For example, Asian international students follow a collectivist culture where family and friends are essential to their social adjustment (Ku et al., 2008; Leong, 2015; Rao, 2017; Sutton & Sankar, 2011). Additionally, researchers Yeh and Inose (2003) claim that the "social support from one's academic program is essential to the welfare of international students." (p.17); this statement stands as a testament to students' views on the value of social relationships. However, international students face unique challenges in English fluency, connecting with American students, building social relationships, and receiving social support (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

A study conducted by Leong (2015) indicated that international students seek information from the university or their academic advisors about social events, networking opportunities, and enrolling in extra-curricular activities. International students reveal that building social networks

and attempting to connect with American students through events or activities may lower the feelings of loneliness and homesickness and increase their sense of belonging (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Furthermore, Leong (2015) suggested that when students have greater familiarity with American customs, they show higher self-concept, self-esteem, and satisfaction with the host university (Leong, 2015).

Language Barriers

The greatest challenge to social adjustment for international students is language difficulty. Language fosters interaction between learners and plays a crucial role in whether international students complete their studies successfully in an English-speaking and learning setting (Andrade, 2010). For that reason, Bai (2016) and Isbell et al. (2018) note that a lack of literacy skills between learners impacts their academic performance. Accordingly, English learning and teaching have received considerable attention in most Asian countries. However, many international students from Asian countries did not visualize the essence of English vocabulary and language while in their home countries (Omar et al., 2016; Sherry et al., 2010).

Most importantly, students who are less fluent in spoken English have a hard time interacting and being integrated into peer groups, thus impairing their academic success. Such challenges present tremendous difficulties for international students compared to domestic students (Sherry et al., 2010). In this case, most university and college admission departments in the U.S. demand that all international students attain an English test certificate: International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which helps in evaluating their abilities in speaking, listening, reading, and writing the English language to empower their social adjustment in the learning environment (Bista, 2019). Moreover, language barriers present substantial difficulties when making friendships with other

American students. Many American students find it difficult to build lasting associations with international students who cannot fluently communicate in English due to their accents. In this case, English is required for academic purposes and international students' social adjustment and building social relationships with other learners (Sherry et al., 2010). In 2015, Sato and Hodge found that international students felt anxious when using English to speak, read, and write. However, most of them gained proficiency in the language after staying in foreign countries for a considerable time. Overall, Thompson (2018) notes that engaging and encouraging international students to share their interactions, experiences, and interests helped improve their learning performance and improved their language skills.

Inadequate Social Support

When people move into newer environments, there are numerous differences in their cultural and social patterns as they attempt to integrate themselves into the host society, both sociologically and psychologically (Pan et al., 2007). Integrating oneself from one culture to another is mentally stressful and might deteriorate a person's well-being (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Bai, 2016; Leong, 2015). As such, it is critical to assess the role of social support for international students since their original social networks are disrupted when they move to unfamiliar territories. In most cases, Lee and Ciftci (2014) note that social support mediates the association between the onset of stress and how students react to different stressors in their immediate environments (Bai, 2016; Leong, 2015). More importantly, social support is crucial to international students who are still adjusting to different life changes. However, the considerable amount of evidence provided by Andrade (2006) suggests that international students have less social support compared to domestic learners since their family members and friends are located at a much greater distance. Besides, Leong (2015) and Sherry et al. (2010) note that most

international students felt lonely and homesick, which affected their satisfaction with different social networks.

Many international students experience the need to connect with peers locally because of the time differences and distance between their host country and their home countries. Lee and Ciftci (2014) and Leong (2015) posit that the nature of friendships and cultural norms in the U.S. prevents international students from being fully integrated and forming a robust social network. Additionally, most international students reported that the United States' cultural systems make them feel isolated and different. This lack of social support impairs their adjustment and intensifies students' loneliness in the host nation (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). While social support depends on improving the retention rates and fulfilling international students' academic adjustment needs, the acculturation process through social networking has not been easy for most international students in the United States (Glass et al., 2015). Overall, the concept of social support includes informational, tangible, network, esteem, and emotional support.

In the end, Lee and Ciftci (2014) and Leong (2015) believe that the level of social support offered to international students determines their psychological adjustment, well-being, and acculturation stress. International students build two categories of friendships, i.e., networking with nationals and co-national networks. In this case, Leong (2015) depicts that international students often build friendships with fellow international students (co-nationals) to share their emotions and thoughts, while friendships with domestic students (nationals) form a sense of togetherness and relieve stress. Such a sense of belonging predicts their psychological well-being (Bai, 2016; Leong, 2015; Pan et al., 2007). Despite the positive impact of intercultural relationships between international and domestic students, existing literature fails to evaluate the conflicts that arise when domestic and international students relate. Notably,

intercultural conflict predicts poor socio-cultural adaptation and integration for the international student population (Bai, 2016; Leong, 2015; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Evidently, schools and colleges must introduce various policies and strategies to foster social support to help international students' transition.

Cultural Differences and Intercultural Conflict

Past research by Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) depicts that the interaction between domestic and international students helps increase their sense of belonging and aids social adjustment. However, for most international students, the ways and cultural norms employed in interacting with others differ from that adopted in the United States. Such cultural differences result in conflicts when associating with domestic peers (Glass et al., 2013). Intercultural conflict is an emotional frustration experience due to perceived incompatibility of outcomes, processes, scarce resources, goals, orientations, norms, and values between two parties from different cultural entities (Isbell et al., 2018; Leong, 2015). The everyday intercultural conflict between international and domestic students throughout history includes antagonism, deep-seated hatred, misunderstanding, and cultural ignorance (Hunter, 2016). For example, an international student from Asia with strong roots in the concept and value of humility might not be entirely comfortable asserting various needs. However, such a behavior might be viewed by domestic students as being unapproachable and unassertive, which potentially increases a sense of despair and alienation.

The cultural conflict between domestic and international students results from a myriad of reasons. For example, a linguistic anthropological perspective depicts that cultural background shapes the symbols, phrases, and metaphors used in different cultures during interactions (Leong, 2015; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Notably, numerous international students are unaware of the

attitudinal tones behind certain English terms as it is not their first language, which provokes diverse evaluative reactions. Learning the host nation's nonverbal and verbal cues becomes crucial for international students to handle such conflicts effectively. Second, from a pragmatic cognitive perspective, cultural norms and backgrounds define the existing divide between people from diverse countries. Besides, the closeness between people estimates the ability to communicate effectively (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). When communicating with people from the same culture, international students do not encounter a vast cultural divide that might deteriorate effective communication (Hunter, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010). However, when communicating with people from different cultures, there are different expectations, which result in conflict.

Lastly, when assessing international cultural conflicts from a psychological perspective, employing intercultural communication competence and intergroup dynamics can point out the need for international students learn how to understand domestic peers' communication cues (Barnett, 2011; Leong, 2015). In this case, they must have a willing spirit to learn about the new culture and its norms. Furthermore, domestic students' awareness of diverse cultural values helps to inform international students of the expected behaviors, norms, and values (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). All three perspectives point out the need for international students to learn different facets of the host nation's culture as it impacts their capacity to communicate cross-culturally. Many journal articles examine the differences in conflict styles between individualistic and collectivist cultures, and the most notable finding is that Asians tend to absorb arising conflicts. In contrast, Americans opt to handle conflict in a confrontational, aggressive, or direct way (Ku et al., 2008; Lee & Cifti, 2014; Pan et al., 2007).

Resources to Overcome Social Challenges

Getting involved in dynamic group activities is a productive way of meeting new people. Research shows that international students are encouraged to participate in different social organizations and academic clubs (Glass et al., 2013). Besides, most campus activities offer a range of opportunities through which international students get to practice their language and interpersonal skills (Sherry et al., 2010). One such example is campus sporting events and activities. Participating in team sports and other campus activities helps international students build a social network (Bai, 2016). In addition, campuses offer counseling services, which is an excellent opportunity to overcome social adjustment challenges. Counseling services across several campuses help students set up appointments with certified professionals to help students cope with adjustment challenges (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Academic Advising

In 1997, Noel-Levitz defined academic advising as “a process of giving students guidance, support, and encouragement.” (p. 3). Academic advising also entails three core components (i.e., conceptual, informational, and relational) which serve as foundational elements to advising practices. The conceptual component includes understanding the concepts of academic advising. For example, advisors must understand the history of academic advising and the role of an academic advisor; approaches and strategies to academic advising; and expected academic advising outcomes. The informational component includes the knowledge academic advisors must master, such as curriculum, degree programs, and academic requirements; characteristics, needs, and experiences of student populations; and resources available on campus to support student success. The relational component includes the demonstration of skills. For instance, academic advisors must create rapport, build relationships with an advisee, communicate with an advisee respectfully, and facilitate decision-making and goal setting with

advisees (NACADA, 2017). Of the three core competencies outlined, the relational component is vital to advising international students. The relational component is due to embedded elements of trust, communication, and connectedness that help advisors develop an effective advising relationship with their advisees, which, ultimately, contributes to and promotes student learning and success (NACADA, 2017). Students, specifically international students, note that their relationship with academic advisors is an important source of support and guidance throughout their educational journeys in the United States (e.g., Shelton, 2003; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

According to Charles and Stewart (1991) and Ku et al. (2008), international students perceive academic advisors positively influence on their academic performance and adjustment in the United States. It is also argued that students persist and complete degrees in an environment where clear and consistent information is received (Tinto, 2007). Thus, in terms of selecting courses, graduation requirements, and information on extra-curricular activities and career opportunities, academic advisors play a fundamental role in the decision-making process (Sutton & Sankar, 2011). International students emphasize that they rely on academic advisors' vast knowledge in areas such as courses, workshops, and internships (Bai, 2016), degree requirements, and course expectations to meet student needs (Young-Jones et al., 2013).

The Foundations of Academic Advising

With the initiative of flexible curriculum systems in higher education institutions, there is a more comprehensive range of programs and courses for international students. Additionally, there is an ever-growing need to ensure that learners make the most effective utilization of the available information in making informed decisions on degree plans (NACADA, 2017). Besides, the ever-increasing number of international students raises the necessity to tailor different learning processes, since a 'one-fits-all' approach cannot be employed for all students (Young-

Jones et al., 2013). Higher educational institutions hire different guidance professionals tasked with advising and helping international students make productive academic choices. Iatrellis et al. (2017) provide a comprehensive background to understanding academic advising systems and how they impact learning. According to sentiments shared by Iatrellis et al. (2017), the three forms of academic advising for students include developmental, prescriptive, and intrusive advising. Notably, White (2015) posits that each educational advising form is informed and founded on student-advisor relationships' objectives.

Developmental Advising

Developmental advising is an approach wherein the advisor plays an intricate role of collaborating with the student to ensure the learner's graduation (Noaman & Ahmed, 2015). This approach is considered an ideal advising method and was first introduced by Crookston (1970). He posits that the advisor considers the students' choices in their education in the developmental approach, which helps them choose their independent path rather than being guided on what needs to be specifically done. Further, a developmental advisor extends vast support through a mutual mentoring association. In this type of advising session, fostering an advisor-advisee relationship is critical. In addition to providing the students with psychosocial and career support, Lee and Metcalfe (2017) and White (2015) suggest that developmental advisors also engage the students in information sharing and knowledge development, which helps attain their academic and career goals.

Prescriptive Advising

In prescriptive advising, the advisor has a crucial role in guiding the student on what needs to be done to graduate (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017; Stuart Hunter, 2004; White, 2015). The concept of prescriptive advising was also introduced by Crookston in 1970 and is considered a

traditional concept because the advisor-advisee relationship is described as prescriptive (Crookston, 1994). Notably, prescriptive advisors possess an authoritarian quality. They do not allow students to make independent choices throughout their educational course. Instead, they are told the exact specifications of their actions, and students are required to act accordingly (Noaman & Ahmed, 2015). For that reason, Stuart Hunter (2004) notes that the relationship between an international student and an academic advisor who employs a prescriptive approach is very authoritative and impersonal. The counselor only answers specific questions and does not consider the student's development.

Intrusive Advising

First introduced by Walter Earl in 1987, the concept of intrusive advising is getting to the heart of the problem and recommending appropriate intervention for a student. This type of advising is considered an action-oriented approach where the advisor proactively makes the initial contact with the student (Varney, 2007). This type of advising's ultimate goal is to cultivate a caring and beneficial relationship between the advisor and advisee, and one that increases motivation and persistence among students (Earl, 1987). A study conducted by Heisserer and Parette (2002) and Schwebel et al. (2008) indicated that students prefer this approach of advising over other forms, found the intrusive approach caring, and one that leads them to succeed academically.

Overall, allowing international students from different nations to choose their paths makes them more satisfied with their career alternatives and gives them an overwhelming interest and experience throughout their education. Given previous research conducted by Sutton and Sankar (2011), it is imperative to note that developmental, academic advising supports and stimulates international students to desire an enriched life and primarily focuses on

accomplishing and identifying their goals in life (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017). Thus, most students would prefer the developmental form of advising (White, 2015; Lee & Metcalfe, 2017).

Although faculty advising leads to international students' academic success, academic advising is essential to the international learner's successful development. Past research by Iatrellis et al. (2017) and Lee and Metcalfe (2017) depict that every learner is different and needs to have their individual decisions in education taken into perspective. In this case, the developmental approach is the best form of academic advising as it allows a professional association between both parties in seeking support and guidance.

The Role of the Academic Advisor

Academic advising is available in all higher education institutions in the United States. White (2015) suggests that academic advising's principal role is to accommodate all students within the campus environment and help them make reasoned and well-seasoned decisions that help set and enact different goals in their lives. Most importantly, Sutton and Sankar (2011) note that academic advising consists of pairing students with mentors and mentorship programs, having specific instructors for different STEM courses, introducing alternative majors, and linking learners to diverse internship opportunities in typical working environments. Despite the model employed in academic advising, Iatrellis et al. (2017) state that all forms of counseling are meant to establish an "educational collaboration between students and their academic advisors." So, academic advisors assist international students by guiding them through different educational requirements, helping them schedule the essential learning modules, and figure out ways through which their educational experience can be productive and relevant. Moreover, academic advisors also help international students in the timely completion of their studies, assist them in all matters regarding career development, promote campus leadership involvement, and introduce

them to diverse pertinent resources within the campus environment.

Advisors share their extensive knowledge with students to meet their degree and major requirements and generally facilitate their progress. For that reason, Iatrellis et al. (2017) show that the ultimate reason for engaging academic advisors on any campus or college set up is to see international students graduating. However, the road to reaching that objective is quite challenging and often difficult to traverse for the advisor and the student. Notably, academic advising's principal goal is not to decrease or increase a particular rate within a learning institution, i.e., retention or graduating, but to help create a relationship with international students that helps them get the most of their involvement in a higher educational setup. By coaching through new strategies, academic advisors hold the keys to students' general education choices, possible certificate alternatives, major and minor sections. Thus, any form of misadvising is costly.

Ku et al. (2008) highlight that academic advisors play a crucial role for international students and should be more accessible and care for the learners. However, in practice, Iatrellis et al. (2017) opine that academic advisors are often overloaded and overwhelmed by their duties and responsibilities to the international student community. Besides, they have too many students and lack enough time, and some students tend to be unsatisfied with the counsel provided. Despite these challenges, good academic advising yields positive outcomes in applying, planning, and understanding diverse strategies to succeed in academics. Mamiseishvili (2012) also depicts that academic advising is vital in retaining international students in higher education institutions. He states that "academic advising offices must work closely with international student advisors to ensure that international students receive sufficient guidance and direction on academic matters" (p. 15).

The Role of the Student in Academic Advising

Despite the majority of the duties being delegated to the academic advisors, international students have an equally demanding role if they are willing to develop personally, socially, and academically. Lee and Metcalfe (2017) believe that the advisor's position can be summed up as bearing the primary responsibility of linking and making contact with the student. In contrast, it is the international student's role to seek advice in the first place. Thus, the quality of efforts laid in place by students in meeting with academic advisors determines their careers and ensures their success in degree completion (Stuart Hunter, 2004). So far, Lynch and Lungrin (2018) note that college administrators have made academic advising an essential and monitored activity. In this case, students that neglect academic advising will receive lesser results from their expectations for a typical college education. Thus, college advising remains a collective effort from students, staff and faculty advisors, and administrators. Consequently, for the process to be successful, students must seek to fulfill the process's requirements to actualize its intended benefits. Faculty advisors might find it challenging to guide undecided students in their majors, making it essential for all international students to be reachable, equally approachable, and prepared to meet their respective academic advisors.

The Relationship between the Student and Advisor

The relationship between students and their advisors is an important one. In this case, the student receives a unique opportunity to understand their professional advisor over numerous years, making it easier for international students to address different concerns in their academics or even ask any questions they might have for their advisors. Such repeated face-to-face interactions between international students and their academic advisors help each party understand detailed personal information (Stuart Hunter, 2004). For instance, the advisor realizes

where the student works, their interests and hobbies, and perhaps a little family background. The student benefits immensely from this relationship. For example, he or she gets to understand the advisor's history in a particular career. Today, academic advising has moved from focusing on international students' developmental needs (Stuart Hunter, 2004). Numerous professors and university professionals are employed as academic advisors in multiple institutions of higher learning. Often, course instructors do not know the intricate student details to tailor teaching approaches to their development needs. However, the personal relationship between learners and their academic advisors is imperative in meeting their professional needs.

Suggestions to Improve Academic Advising

Influential advisors ought to be approachable, accountable, authentic, available, knowledgeable, and practice advocacy. These characteristics are necessary ingredients to increase student development. Aside from being knowledgeable and involved, all academic advisors must also be intricately tuned to the international student's well-being in any learning setup (Rice et al., 2009). Moreover, academic advisors and counselors must be available to the international students in multiple ways (e.g., through email, telephone, or in-person), to guarantee that their desired outcomes are achieved.

Furthermore, the academic advisor must also practice honesty with all international students. Besides, the advisor must also seek to maintain and develop a peer-to-peer association with the learner. According to Iatrellis et al. (2017) and Mamiseishvili (2012), every advisor must employ these strategies to provide a supportive environment to all learners in a college or higher education setting as they enhance their development and learning. Thus, the advisor will understand more details than the instructors in a learning environment. Moreover, Iatrellis et al. (2017) opine that tailoring advisory methods to match the students' needs in development is

crucial to guarantee the program's efficacy and ensure an optimal environment that fosters learning.

Influences of Academic Advising on International Students

Faculty advising centers are recently becoming common due to increased international student enrollment, which intends to increase their retention rates and effectively guide them towards degree completion (Young-Jones et al., 2013). Besides, as the international student body diversity continues to advance, so does the need to have comprehensive academic advising systems and more professional advisors. First of all, academic advising is an immense effort towards increasing the retention rates for international students in most higher learning institutions, which is a crucial objective for colleges and universities (Rice et al., 2009; Stuart Hunter, 2004). Thus, academic advising acts as a bridge connecting students to the university, increasing their retention, involvement, and motivation. Iatrellis et al. (2017) opine that although academic advising serves a myriad of purposes, learners' retention is a key objective and serves as part of the institution's success in education. Because academic advising helps retain international students, Iatrellis et al. (2017) note that there has been a gradual increase in the total number of academic advising centers in colleges and universities across the country. Overall, the retention of international students pursuing different courses has increased over the past years due to the adoption of academic advising.

Although retaining international students is a crucial objective for higher educational institutions, there is much more to getting educated than retention and enrollment rates (e.g., the quality of education offered to the students resulting in individual development throughout college). As such, student academic advising benefits the faculty through high retention rates and increases the number of students graduating per year for higher education institutions (Rice et al.,

2009; Stuart Hunter, 2004; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Most international students can maintain their track in education leading to their graduation at the end of their education. Notably, student advising plays a crucial role in how international students make important decisions to persist in their education despite challenges in academic and social adjustment, thereby increasing their chances to graduate eventually (Stuart Hunter, 2004). However, campuses still lack a mechanism that ascertains students get quality advice from their academic advisors, which might even impair student development. Such uncertainty could still result in top-notch international students dropping out or transferring due to poor advice or misdirection, which implies little to no student development.

In contrast, high-quality academic advising increases student development by improving their grades, decreasing their interest to drop out of the learning process, and improving their student satisfaction (Leong, 2015; Rice et al., 2009; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Notably, keeping international students satisfied with their education helps them feel they are on track and prevents them from feeling lost despite the challenges they encounter in academic and social adjustment (Stuart Hunter, 2004). For that reason, given the essential role academic advising plays in student retention, serious efforts are being included to evaluate students' desires, perceptions, and satisfaction, making academic advising improvements a continual process. Lastly, academic advising increases the rates of student retention and helps learners to prepare better for the workforce after graduating (Young-Jones et al., 2013). Notably, as international students develop through the college environment, they are prepared by professional counselors to integrate into the professional world and employ their skills. For that reason, the kind of relationship that learners have with their advisors often talks about career and vocational alternatives for the learner after they graduate (Stuart Hunter, 2004). Students tend to talk about

their academic goals during such sessions with their faculty counselors. Most advisors understand their students' career goals and objectives to point them in the right direction (Stuart Hunter, 2004). Moreover, such underlying knowledge of the learner's career objectives also helps faculty members talk openly about the learner's current career options and incorporate those goals into the advisory process. It reminds international students of their ultimate goal and that it would help them remain in school.

Theoretical Framework

Several theorists have developed frameworks and models for understanding the adjustment experiences of international students, for example, Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, Berry's (1992) acculturation model, and intercultural communication competence (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Chen & Starosta, 1998). However, I chose to use validation theory (Rendón, 1994; Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011) because validation provides a framework to guide studies that focus on understanding the college experiences of international students. In the 1990s, Laura I. Rendón noted a change in student demographics where a large wave of immigrant students enrolled at schools and colleges across the United States. Among these students, African American, Mexican, Puerto Rican, American Indian, and Asian students were identified as the majority. This theory of validation was based on Astin's (1985) research on student involvement and Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) research on college effects on students. Taken together, Rendón (1994) designed a 'Transition to College Project' to determine if and "how students' learning was affected by student involvement in academic and non-academic experiences in college." (p. 34), as well as emphasized the importance of "in- and out-of-class experiences on students' learning and growth" (p. 35). To that end, Rendón (1994) posits that validation occurs in- and out-of-class and that validation is defined as a process of

“enabling, confirming, and supporting students through in- and out-of-class agents” (p. 44). Here, Rendón (1994) discusses two types of validation: academic and interpersonal.

Academic Validation

This type of validation can be fostered when faculty, classmates, advisors, peers, or significant others (in- and out-of-class agents) help students “trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student.” (Rendón, 1994, p. 40). Of these agents, faculty and advisors possess the most critical roles in encouraging students, demonstrating genuine concern, and providing meaningful feedback to enhance academic development. For example, Rendón-Linares and Muñoz (2011) note that faculty can validate students through their cultural experiences by writing or discussing topics related to students’ personal histories. When applying academic validation, students feel proud when recognized, feel cared about, and develop confidence in themselves.

Interpersonal Validation

In addition to academic validation, Rendón’s (1994) study also revealed students’ need for interpersonal validation. This type of validation is fostered by in- and out-of-class agents similar to academic validation. However, the agents are invested in students’ personal development and encourages social adjustment among students. Rendón-Linares and Muñoz (2011) state that faculty, advisors, classmates, and other agents strive to “build supporting, caring relationships with students and allow students to validate each other and to build a social network through activities” (p. 19).

Dynamics of Validation

When Rendón concluded her 1994 study, she found that two main elements supported students’ academic achievement and social adjustment: involvement and validation. While

results on involvement – when students devote more time and effort to learning and are more involved in their education, the greater the achievement, resonates with the findings of Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991) and Astin’s (1985) studies, experiences of students from Rendón’s (1994) study illustrated otherwise. Students from Rendón’s study related that when someone lent them a helping hand, it validates them as capable individuals and supports them in academic endeavors and social adjustment. Rendón (1994) also stated that for students to involve themselves academically and socially, they need opportunities to gain skills that would affirm, support, enable, and reinforce “their capacity to the fully develop themselves as students and individuals.” (p. 45). That being said, the following are the elements of the dynamics of validation. Validation is:

- a) Enabling, confirming, and supportive.
- b) When students feel capable, experience self-worth, and are recognized as valuable.
- c) A prerequisite to student development.
- d) Can occur in-and-out-of-class.
- e) Creates richer academic and interpersonal experiences.
- f) Best when offered during the first year of college.

Validation theory has provided a theoretical framework in quantitative and qualitative studies that research college experience for first-generation students, students of color, immigrants, and international students. Previously, Rendón’s theory has indicated that validation through students’ faculty, counselors, or advisors affirms that students can be successful in academics and socially adjust in a new learning environment (Barnett, 2011; Pérez & Ceja, 2010). Therefore, for this research study, I used Rendón’s validation theory as a guiding theoretical framework to understand international Indian graduate students’ academic advising

perceptions and experiences and to understand the influence of academic advising on students' academic success and social adjustment.

Conclusion

Overall, international students add intense diversity and richness to learning institutions globally and provide necessary social, educational, and political influence in their home countries when they return from studying. However, given the susceptibility and vulnerability amongst international students, this literature review evaluated how they socially and academically adjusted to their new environment and assessed how academic advising impacts their educational journey in a contemporary learning environment. Academically, international students experience significant challenges in classroom communication, student-student relationships, keeping up with instructional tactics and methods, relationships with their lecturers and professors, deteriorating level of satisfaction, and financial problems that lead them to work in part-time jobs. Socially, they struggle with language barriers, intercultural conflict, and cultural differences. In conclusion, influential academic advisors should be approachable, accountable, authentic, available, knowledgeable, and practice advocacy. Evidently, academic advising improves international students' retention, involvement, motivation, satisfaction, graduation rate and prepares them for the modern working environment. While the current literature illustrates results on East-Asian students' adjustment and academic advising experiences in the U.S., there is limited evidence to support South-Asian, especially Indian students' successes and challenges. It is my aim that the following research study fills the gap in the existing literature.

Chapter 3. Methods

This chapter explains the research design and the methodological approach that was used in conducting this study. There is limited research available regarding international Indian graduate students' perceptions, lived experiences, and the influence of academic advising on academic success and social experiences in the U.S. In the following sections, I reiterate the research questions. Then I discuss the research design for my study, including my positionality as a researcher, site selection, participation recruitment and selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, limitations, and summary.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do international Indian graduate students at a four-year public research university in Texas perceive academic advising and academic advisors' role in their academic and social adjustment?
2. How does international Indian graduate students' experience with academic advising validate or invalidate their academic adjustment?
3. How does international Indian graduate students' experience with academic advising validate or invalidate their social adjustment?

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative methodology and used Rendón's (1994) theory of Validation as a framework to explore international Indian graduate students' lived experiences at a four-year public research university in North Texas. While a quantitative study may be used to study the impact of academic advising on international Indian graduate students' academic and social adjustment, I employed a phenomenological approach to gather and analyze information

because of the research questions' explorative nature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological approach describes participants' lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the next section, I briefly explain the concept and the use of phenomenology in research.

Phenomenology

A *phenomenon* is a common or collective experience shared by groups of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An *exploration* of this phenomenon is defined as a phenomenological approach. There are two broad types of approaches to phenomenology, hermeneutical and transcendental approaches (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Although the hermeneutical approach focuses on the meaning and interpretation of a phenomenon, this approach relies on the researchers' interpretation of texts on life experiences (van Manen, 1990). However, the transcendental approach focuses on bracketing the researcher's experiences and draws on new perspectives toward the phenomenon under exploration (Moustakas, 1994). Here, researchers specifically focus on the description of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, I used the transcendental approach to explore international Indian graduate students' perceptions, lived experiences, and the influence of academic advising on academic success and social adjustment in the United States.

Research Site

The research site that I selected for studying international Indian graduate students' lived experiences was a large Texas public university (TPU). TPU hosts a significantly diverse population of students and is ranked among the top 10 national universities for ethnic diversity (U.S. News & World Report, 2020). In 2018, the total graduate student enrollment was approximately 14,167, which included 13.8% African-American, 6.5% Asian, 16.5% Hispanic,

and 25.3% international students. In addition to being a diverse campus, in the previous few years, an increasing number of international Indian students have enrolled at this university (IIE, 2020). In 2018, the international Indian student population increased to approximately 1,500 students from nearly 1,000 students in 2017. In 2019, IIE reported nearly 2,000 international Indian graduate students enrolled at this university. Moreover, having all the participants at one site was appropriate because of their shared lived experiences attending a large public university. Additionally, due to this phenomenological study's nature, recruiting participants from one site was appropriate for this study.

A significant step in the site selection process is access to participants and permission to conduct this research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After my research proposal was accepted, I gained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at TPU to conduct research involving living human subjects (Appendix A). Upon receiving IRB approval, I began recruiting participants for this research study.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Research shows that qualitative studies do not require a defined sample size and tend to use small samples that focus on an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences (Guest et al., 2006). For studies employing a phenomenological approach, Polkinghorne (1989) suggests a sample size of 5-25 participants or until data saturation (i.e., a situation where the data collection process no longer offers any new perspectives). For this study, I interviewed 11 participants, after which I reached data saturation (Charmaz, 2014). First, I employed a criterion sampling method to recruit participants. This form of sampling maintains consistency between participants' experiences and is helpful for quality assurance (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Additionally, "criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who

have experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.157). That means, to be eligible for this research study, participants had to:

- 1) Be of Indian origin and on an F1 or J1 visa (enrolled as an international student at TPU).

The student’s origin is vital to my study because it focuses on Indian students alone.

International students come to the U.S. with different visas, I invited Indian students on an F1 (i.e., international student) or J1 (i.e., exchange student) visas.

- 2) Have completed at least one semester in their graduate degrees. I chose to interview international Indian graduate students who completed at least one semester because students will have met with an advisor at least once. Advisor-advisee interactions are fecund to the research questions of my study.

- 3) Be current members of the Indian Cultural Council (ICC), a local organization at TPU.

ICC is a local organization that serves international Indian students. This organization is a cultural forum that allows students to develop a sense of belonging, form a community, and provides an opportunity to take part in, and showcase cultural events. The requirement of using ICC members was so that a point of contact could help me recruit international Indian students.

To begin my study’s recruitment process, a point of contact at ICC agreed to send an email invite (Appendix B) with screening questions to the organization’s members. My goal was to conduct 15 interviews depending on data saturation. However, four weeks had passed, I had heard from only one interested participant. I requested the point of contact to send a reminder email to ICC members; unfortunately, two more weeks had passed, and I did not hear from any participant. Thus, I used the snowball sampling technique (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to recruit participants. This form of sample recruitment involves informants referring the researcher to

other informants; the process continues until sufficient participants have been identified and the researcher meets the desired sample size for a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With my former participant's help, I was able to recruit potentially interested participants at ICC.

An email invite with screening questions was sent to five potential participants. All five participants were interested in taking part in my study, and these five participants directed me to eight more potential participants. While some of these participants did not respond to my email invite, some referred me to others who would fit the criteria and be willing to participate in my study. This snowball recruitment continued until I had a sufficient number of potential participants. I finally recruited 11 participants who fit the criteria for my study, and Table 1 provides a summary of participants' demographic information collected through a short survey (Appendix D).

Table 1

Summary of Participants' Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Degree	Date of Arrival	Have you changed your major?	Semesters Completed
Deidra	Female	29	Engineering	January, 2019	No	Three
Harish	Male	30	Engineering	January, 2019	No	Three
Rhea	Female	23	Engineering	August, 2019	No	Two
Rohit	Male	30	Engineering	January, 2019	No	Three
Reesha	Female	25	Architecture	August, 2019	No	Two
Samyuktha	Female	22	Architecture	August, 2019	No	Two
Suresh	Male	27	Engineering	August, 2019	No	Two
Shyam	Male	25	Engineering	August, 2019	No	Two
Siddharth	Male	27	Business	January, 2019	No	Three
Sannath	Male	23	Engineering	August, 2019	No	Two

Vinod	Male	30	Management	January, 2019	No	Three
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Data Collection

When students agreed to participate in my study, the desired date, time, and interview platform were discussed via email. Upon fixing a date, time, and platform, an informed consent letter (Appendix C) was emailed to the participants. The consent explained my study's purpose, time commitment, research procedures that included consent to audio recording, possible benefits and risks, any compensation, confidentiality assurance, participants' consent, and participants' rights (i.e., voluntary participation or withdrawal from the study). Upon receipt, the consent forms were stored on a OneDrive folder shared by the research study members. I used 1) a demographic survey and 2) conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data from participants.

Demographic Survey

During the initial part of the interview, I emailed participants a demographic survey to complete and return to me before beginning the interview. Participants provided information about their name, gender identity, age, date of arrival to the United States, degree and major, and if they have changed their major (Appendix D). Pseudonyms Deidra, Harish, Reesha, Rohit, Rhea, Samyuktha, Sannath, Shyam, Siddharth, Suresh, and Vinod were used to protect participants' identities. Four participants were female, and seven were male; participants' ages ranged from 22 years to 30 years; five of the participants arrived in Spring 2019; and six of them came in Fall 2019. None of the participants changed their major throughout their time in the United States. After I reviewed the demographic survey responses with each of the participants, as presented in Table 1, I began conducting and recording the semi-structured interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

An interview in qualitative research is an "attempt to understand the world from the

subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). For a phenomenological study, Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that researchers interview five to 25 participants who have experienced the phenomenon. When a research study focuses on gaining insight and understanding, interviews are suitable for in-depth exploration (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Semi-structured interviews were the primary data source to explore international Indian graduate students' adjustment in the U.S. and the influence of academic advising on students' academic success and social adjustment. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) state that interviews follow a series of questions and sub-questions (i.e., interview protocol, Appendix E) that are phrased in a manner that interviewees can understand. Using this interview protocol, I conducted 11 one-on-one interviews with the participants via a video-chat platform of their choice (i.e., Skype, Teams, or Zoom). Each participant interview lasted about 45 minutes to one hour, with the same interview questions for all participants. All interviews were audio-recorded using a handheld recorder. In addition to conducting interviews, I also observed and noted participants' body language and gestures to gain a complete picture of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

After data collection, the next step in the research process is data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collected through audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using a qualitative online transcription service – Temi. Additionally, I reviewed the recordings and transcripts to ensure the accuracy of participants' experiences. Then I emailed the transcripts to participants for review and for them to add or edit any information. Participants did not indicate any changes to the transcripts and confirmed the transcribed information was accurate. Next, I used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software, to analyze the transcribed data.

Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate different types of data analysis in qualitative studies. For this study, I employed: (a) horizontalization of data (b) forming themes (c) textural description of statements (d) structural description of statements (e) creating the essence of participants' experiences.

Horizontalization of Data

After the transcription of audio recordings, the first step in the data analysis process is the horizontalization of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this step, I read participants' transcripts and developed a list of significant statements. Each of these statements indicates how each participant experienced the phenomenon. Additionally, these statements carry unique as well as equal value.

Forming Themes

The second step to the data analysis process includes grouping all the significant statements from step one (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Here, I grouped all significant statements from participants' experiences under a broader theme. This step is crucial because it provides the foundation for interpreting participants' experiences and allows the research to remove any data repetition.

Textural Description of Statements

The third step answers the question 'what' the participants experienced with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, for this step, I created a description of what happened to the participants when they encountered the phenomenon and included verbatim examples from their transcripts.

Structural Description of Statements

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe the fourth step to data analysis as answering the

question ‘how’ experiences happened. Here, I reflected on where the participants experienced the phenomenon and described how participants experienced the phenomenon.

Creating the Essence

The fifth and final step I employed was, forming a “composite description of the phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201). This step includes steps three and four, and the final result is the essence of participants’ experiences. Here I described participants’ experiences on what and how they experienced the phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate that this is the “culminating aspect of a phenomenological study” (p. 201).

Trustworthiness

Creswell (2014) presented three groups of validation strategies recommended for qualitative researchers: researcher’s lens, participant’s lens, and reader’s lens. These three groups include nine procedures, and Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that at least two of these nine procedures are employed in qualitative research. For this study, I used three procedures: (a) clarifying researcher bias, (b) member checking, and (c) peer review.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

The first procedure I used was – clarifying researcher bias. This allows the researcher to comment on past experiences and biases that might have led to the study’s interpretation and approach (Weiner-Levy & Popper-Giveon, 2013). Therefore, in addition to my personal experiences that were discussed in chapter 1, I acknowledge my connection to this research study and bracket my biases and experiences that might impact the study’s findings (see *positionality of the researcher*).

Member Checking

The second procedure I used was member checking (i.e., participant’s lens). I requested

the participants' views on the data's credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I returned drafts of transcripts to the participants and requested their feedback. This allowed participants to review the transcripts and offered participants an opportunity to provide their views and edits, if any (see *data analysis*). Subsequently, I returned preliminary data findings, which consisted of themes and descriptions. This allowed participants to review the preliminary analyses, ensure the interview was recorded and reported accurately, and provide their views and edits.

Peer Review

The third procedure and final step I took to ensure trustworthiness was a peer reviewer (i.e., reader's lens). I used a peer reviewer to debrief data collected and ensure findings were not biased (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The peer reviewer was someone who recently received their doctorate and has methodological expertise. The peer reviewer asked questions about the study's methodology, coded a few of the transcripts, and met with me over Zoom to discuss my interpretations of the study's findings.

Positionality of the Researcher

I am a female doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at the University of Texas at Arlington. I was born and raised in India, and I am currently working as a graduate research assistant at the University of Texas at Arlington. As a qualitative researcher, it is vital to explain my positionality as a researcher and my standpoint for this research study.

As an international student of Indian origin, I have a personal, vested interest in the adjustment and academic advising experiences of international Indian graduate students and the influence of academic advising on academic success and social adjustment. Before enrolling in this Ph.D. program, I enrolled as a graduate student at a university in the United States. Although

I have been exposed to different cultures before moving to the U.S. for my graduate studies, I did not live outside my country for an extended period. Besides, I did not have difficulties communicating in English because it is the medium of instruction in most regions in India.

However, some academic and social adjustment experiences and academic-advising influences have impacted my academic success and social adjustment in the United States. For example, when I initially moved to the U.S., I was homesick and went through a cultural shock phase. My experiences adjusting to a new academic system, building a social support system, and exploring my ways to adapt to a new environment took a toll on my emotional health. Additionally, my perception of academic-advising was purely different from what I experienced in the U.S. and negatively impacted my career path in education.

Therefore, the experiences mentioned above have led me to my interest in exploring of international Indian graduate students' adjustment in the U.S. and whether academic advising influences their academic success and social adjustment. I believe that these experiences enhance my awareness and knowledge of the issues addressed in this study. I also recognize the need to bracket my experiences to expand my understanding of participants' perceptions and opinions. I hope that I can serve as an advocate for students who require additional guidance and support.

Limitations

With any study, limitations should be considered when interpreting findings. First, as an international Indian graduate student, my personal experiences and views (biases) can impact how the participants react to my questions and interpret data. Therefore, the aforementioned validation procedures intend to eliminate this issue. Second, this study only represents the experiences of participants from STEM disciplines. Originally, I had intended to recruit participants from various disciplines to present a complete understanding of international Indian

graduate students' experiences. However, I was able to recruit students only from STEM disciplines. Thus, other international Indian graduate students at this university or other institutions might have different experiences. Third, participants' genders were not fairly represented. The study included experiences of four females and seven males.

Summary

This chapter discusses the research design employed for this study, including the type of qualitative research, research site selection, participant recruitment and selection, data collection strategies, and data analysis strategies. The chapter concludes with measures taken to ensure trustworthiness, my positionality as a researcher, followed by limitations to the study. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings from interviews with the participants.

Chapter 4. Findings

This study aimed to explore international Indian graduate students' academic advising perceptions and lived experiences at a large four-year public research university. Since there is a gap in the literature concerning Indian international students' academic and social adjustment in the U.S. and the influence of academic advising on academic success and social adjustment, it was essential to understand international Indian students' perceptions and lived experiences. The following research questions were used to explore the gap:

1. How do international Indian graduate students at a four-year public research university in Texas perceive academic advising and academic advisors' role in their academic and social adjustment?
2. How does international Indian graduate students' experience with academic advising validate or invalidate their academic adjustment?
3. How does international Indian graduate students' experience with academic advising validate or invalidate their social adjustment?

In the following sections, I introduce the participants, review the data analysis and conclude with a summary of the chapter.

The Participants

To provide context for understanding the data, I briefly introduce the 11 participants. All participants were recruited through criterion sampling. Criteria included:

1. Participant's origin (i.e., international Indian students),
2. Length of stay (i.e., at least one semester in their graduate degree programs), and
3. Participants should be current members of the Indian Cultural Council (ICC).

I was able to recruit one participant with the help of a point of contact at ICC. When no more

students showed interest, I employed snowball sampling to select participants. To preserve participants anonymity, I assigned all participants a pseudonym. Before the interview, participants completed a demographic survey that consisted of five questions: gender, age, date of arrival, degree, and major, and if participants have changed their major. Apart from the demographic questions, participants were asked to introduce themselves and provide a brief background at the beginning of the interviews. The following information portrays participants' demographic and background details (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participants' Demographic Characteristics, Educational Background, and Work Experience

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Educational Background	Work Experience
Deidra	Female	29	Mechanical Engineering	Yes
Harish	Male	30	Mechanical Engineering	Yes
Rhea	Female	23	Information Technology	No
Rohit	Male	30	Electronics Engineering	Yes
Reesha	Female	25	Architecture	No
Samyuktha	Female	22	Civil Engineering	No
Suresh	Male	27	Biotechnology	Yes
Shyam	Male	25	Computer Science	Yes
Siddharth	Male	27	Mechanical Engineering	No
Sannath	Male	23	Computer Science	Yes
Vinod	Male	30	Business Management	Yes

Deidra

Deidra is a 29-year-old female international Indian student with a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and three years' work experience in India. Her primary reason for

choosing TPU as an institution to further her education was because of friends who were already enrolled at TPU. Additionally, the courses offered at TPU were of interest to her and perfect to enhance her knowledge in the field. She described her successes and challenges navigating throughout her degree at TPU and the influence of academic advising on her academic success. But she has not changed her major for any reason.

Harish

Harish is a 30-year old male with a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and four years' work experience in India. His interest in choosing TPU was the Industrial Engineering curriculum that aligned with his background experiences. He expressed several challenges in terms of academics and some successes adjusting to a new environment in the United States. However, his experiences with academic advising were challenging. In addition, he stated that he did not change his major for any reason

Rhea

Rhea is a 23-year old female student with a bachelor's degree in Information Technology. To fulfil admission requirements in the United States, she completed an additional diploma to hold a U.S. equivalent bachelor's degree. She chose to pursue a master's degree at TPU because of its cost effectiveness. She faced some challenges in terms of academic adjustment, but did not change her major for any reason, and mostly had a positive experience overall.

Rohit

Rohit is a 30-year old male international Indian student who graduated with a bachelor's degree in Electronics Engineering in India and has four years work experience as a supply chain analyst. He wanted to pursue a master's degree in supply chain because he did not receive a formal education in the role as a supply chain analyst, thus chose to pursue his master's degree at

TPU because the university possesses a degree that aligned with his needs. He did not change his major, but expressed that he had a mixture of successes and challenges when adjusting to his environment in the U.S.

Reesha

Reesha is a 25-year old female who pursued a bachelor's degree in Architecture in India. She always wanted to pursue her master's degree in the United States, she chose the line of construction management because the profession is in high demand, and Texas is booming in terms of construction. During the interview she stated that she had some challenges when adjusting to academics and receiving academic advising, but overall, she had good experiences when building a social support system.

Samyuktha

Samyuktha is a 22-year old female international Indian student with a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering. She wanted to pursue a master's degree in Construction ---Management and chose to further her education at TPU because she received good reviews about the degree program from her friends who were already enrolled at this university. She expressed that her overall experiences at this university were good, mostly because of peers.

Suresh

Suresh, a 27-year old male student who completed his bachelor's degree in Biotechnology back in India. He worked for three years and then decided to pursue his master's in Computer Science in the United States. He chose TPU to further his education because of several factors such as, tuition and courses that fit his needs. Over the course of his time at TPU, he expressed having good experiences with academics and social interactions.

Shyam

Shyam is a 25-year old male international Indian student, he was born and brought up in India and moved to U.S. to pursue his master's in Computer Science. Prior to moving to the U.S., he worked as a research associate for a year, he chose to study at TPU because of its status as a TIER I research university. He expressed that he faced some challenges in terms of academic advising, but overall had a positive experience studying at TPU.

Siddharth

Siddharth, a 27-year old male completed his bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering in India and chose to pursue his master's degree in Mechanical Engineering at TPU. He chose this university for two main reasons, one because he found the courses interesting and two because of the university's Formula SAE team – which designs and builds a formula car for racing. He stated that his experiences at TPU were overall positive.

Sannath

Sannath a 23-year old male international Indian student completed his bachelor's degree in Computer Science in India. Later he worked for a year as a software engineer in India. He chose TPU to pursue his master's in Computer Science because of its research and academic rating, which he stated was good. He expressed that he had a mix of good and challenging experiences at TPU and wished that academic advising was true to its nature.

Vinod

Vinod is a 30-year old male, completed his bachelor's in Business Management in India. He came to the U.S. in 2019 to pursue his master's in Information Technology because the IT field is booming in Texas. He chose to further his education at TPU because he received good feedback from his friends who were already enrolled at TPU. He added that his peers played a vital role in selecting courses and helped him navigate his way through the U.S. education

system. In terms of overall experiences at this university, he stated that it was a mix of good and bad experiences.

Overall, the afore brief introduction of the participants provides context to the findings. The participants' mixed experiences relating to academic and social adjustment as well as academic advising will be discussed in the key findings. In the following sections, I explore the following themes: academic adjustment, social adjustment, and academic advising.

Thematic Findings

The study examined international Indian graduate students' perception of academic advising, academic advisors' role in their academic and social adjustment, and participants' experiences with academic advising. In this section of the chapter, I discuss unique findings from the face-to-face interviews that were conducted. International Indian graduate students expressed their opinions and experiences concerning academic advising. While they experienced successes, they also faced several challenges with academic advising. In the following sections, I discuss four major themes that emerged from participant interviews, including 1) lack of understanding of academic advising, 2) perceptions and expectations of academic advisors, 3) supportive experiences with academic advising, and 4) challenging experiences with academic advising.

Lack of Understanding of Academic Advising

The first theme that emerged from the interviews was related to participants' lack of understanding of the process of academic advising and the role of an academic advisor. While some participants had prior knowledge about academic advising, they did not completely comprehend the role of an academic advisor. For example, Vinod stated, "I know there was something available like that [academic advising], but I actually didn't know, what they were really there for and what they really did." Likewise, Harish was aware of academic advisors but

unclear about their roles. He stated:

I knew there was an official called the graduate advisor and that they would contact you for any clarifications.... I obviously did not have much idea on what would they do, or what would they advise us on. I had no idea about their role.

In fact, most participants noted that they learned about academic advising after arriving at the university. They learned about it through orientation, peers, or through faculty. For instance, Rohit did not have any prior knowledge of academic advising and he learned about their roles at orientation. He stated:

So when we came for the department orientation, they told about this [academic advising] ...that you can meet your advisor, you can talk...and he or she [academic advisor] can guide you in enrolling courses and letting you develop your coursework plan and all those things. I was excited that someone was there to help, but my expectation was different from reality.

Similarly, Reesha expressed that she was not aware of academic advising or the role of an academic advisor until after she arrived at the university. As a result, her experiences with advising at TPU were very different from her expectations. She thought an advisor would help design her degree plan, enroll in courses, and provide career advise. She specified:

I learned about academic advising after I came here [TPU]...I got to learn from the students...they [students] used to say that...there were these advisors that can help you out. In my mind, I was thinking great! There is someone to like plan my degree according to my career goals.

Participants' limited knowledge about academic advising in the U.S. could be primarily attributed to their different academic and cultural backgrounds. As indicated by Shyam, "a lot of

people [Indian students] aren't used to this whole academic advising process because we never had that sort of thing back at home." He explained that this was because students in India "don't really approach people [staff] for academic advising" and degrees in India "are really 'canned' in the sense that we have six courses in semester one, two, three, and four, and everything's very linear." According to Shyam, one of the main reasons Indian graduate students do not understand or have little knowledge of academic advising in the U.S. was because the number and sequence of courses were pre-determined by colleges and universities in India. In contrast, in the U.S., students often rely on their advisors to select courses.

In another example, Reesha compared her experiences with mentors in India and her experiences with academic advisors in the U.S. She assumed that academic advisors at TPU would "help literally with anything." However, once she arrived at TPU and learned more about academic advising, she noticed the differences and felt disappointed:

I did not have anything specifically, like advising things in India...here we have it on a professional basis, back in India I used to get it from my mentors...They [mentors] used to talk to us about our work...here I had high hopes from the advising department...I thought they can help literally with anything but, it was not exactly like what I expected.

In summary, some participants had knowledge about academic advising before they came to the U.S. and some participants learned about academic advising during orientation or through their peers. Participants also acknowledged a disconnection between what they expected from academic advising and what they experienced in person. Furthermore, some students noted that this lack of understanding stemmed from the different educational backgrounds in India.

Students' Perceptions of Academic Advisors

In the previous section, I discussed participants' lack of understanding of academic

advising. In this section, I present the second theme, which highlights students' perceptions of academic advisors. More specifically, it includes three subthemes: 1) importance of academic advisors, 2) authority figures, and 3) limited understanding of international Indian students' backgrounds.

Importance of Academic Advisors

Although most participants had limited knowledge about academic advising in U.S. colleges and universities, many believed that advisors played an important role in their academic journey and perceived them as mentors. For instance, Suresh emphasized that students need to “go for advising....even if they know what they're gonna specialize in,” because when talking to an advisor, “students can discuss their roadmap to success and choose the right courses for their degree plan.” In addition, Vinod noted the importance of developing a “healthy relationship” with academic advisors. He urged students to utilize academic advising to stay on track and succeed in their academic degrees. He stated:

Every student needs to go talk to an advisor, form a relationship...a healthy relationship and really take advantage of their advising about academics, so that they know where they're going from the day one...advisors help you to make your path to your destination.

While few participants highlighted the importance of an academic advisor, few suggested that along with talking to an advisor, students should receive advise from peers or seniors, especially those who have already completed a semester or two in their degree. For example, Reesha shared, “the students should not...totally blindly rely on these advisors.” Likewise, Deidra stated, “ask around...ask the seniors because they will be most helpful.” However, Sannath expressed his firm opinion regarding the importance of academic advisors rather than peers. Sannath urged against relying on senior students when selecting courses. He noted that

things change every year and sometimes every semester; thus, depending on peers would not help international Indian students' academic success. He stated:

What I would suggest is if you have any doubt related to academics, we do not just ask seniors because things get changed year by year, semester by semester, the only person who could guarantee you is, the academic advisor.

In this manner, some participants emphasized the importance of an academic advisor in degree planning, developing a healthy relationship, and relying on an advisor for guidance. Although few participants suggested that students should meet with peers or senior students for clarification of doubts, most participants believed that it was important to seek advice directly from their academic advisors.

Authority Figures

According to the interviews, some participants viewed academic advisors as authority figures and thus perceived them as “unapproachable.” Therefore, it was not surprising that some participants did not want to meet with academic advisors, and some chose to search for answers on their own or seek help from their peers. For instance, Rhea described her experience meeting with her advisor in person. She stated that she did not want to disturb her advisor for any academic resources or doubts that she had. She added that she would rather ask her peers or figure things out independently. She stated:

I've just met them once and, I am like the person who won't go to a grad advisor anytime I want or something. I'm usually like, I'll get it done myself or, since all the seniors are available in groups, I could just message over there if I have any doubt instead of going there or mailing a grad advisor. So it's more like the grad advisor are like in this, authority position where you can't really, or you don't really want to disturb them as

such.

In addition, some participants reported that they felt uncomfortable raising questions when working with certain advisors. Recalling her experiences with the first advisor, Samyuktha indicated that the advisor was in a position where he kept a distance from the students. More specifically, she felt the advisor was “a bit more strict...not that opening towards students or ready to give advise or explain what it is,” and thus, she felt that she “wasn’t comfortable enough to ask him anything.” Similarly, Reesha expressed that she was “not comfortable enough” to ask her advisor for any academic-related help because her advisor was “always busy and did not seem personable.”

Meanwhile, most participants believed that regardless of an advisor’s authority position, they need to be more approachable when helping students. Samyuktha expressed:

They need to be approachable and not disregard students’ concerns or dismiss students who had doubts. Like for example, my advisor simply dismissed me by stating “Oh, I don’t know about it. You’d have to find out about it on your own.”

In summary, while most international Indian graduate students perceived advisors to be important, some viewed them as authority figures and found it challenging to form a relationship with advisors. Some participants also stated that they would rather seek help from peers. Thus, participants noted that they were not comfortable asking for help due to advisors’ position as an authority or due to their stringent nature when talking to students.

Limited Understanding of International Indian Students’ Backgrounds

In addition, participants perceived that academic advisors were unfamiliar with students’ international backgrounds and previous experiences in a different educational system. For instance, Harish indicated that advisors needed to be aware of international Indian students

educational background and how it was different from the U.S. He also hoped that advisors to sympathize with international students because of their unfamiliarity with a new environment.

He stated:

I would just hope that they [academic advisors] would be a bit more empathetic towards students coming from other countries, just because they are not aware of... academic situation right here, usually the whole academic system is completely different in India and most of them [students] are honestly overwhelmed by all the activities and a completely new system of learning.

Since the participants were from a different academic system that the advisors were not familiar with, many participants wished for the advisors to be more patient and kind to international students. The participants also shared their views on cultural differences between India and the U.S. They went beyond to suggest that advisors need to understand that all international students come from varied backgrounds. Rohit shared:

I think it's not only with Indian students, with any international student I think it's a cultural difference for them. So the advisors and assistants to the advisors need to be patient. They [academic advisors] have to deal with the students patiently. They [academic advisors] should be in a kind of way like a mentor. ... They [academic advisors] come from a different culture so they might not understand our needs. Advisors need to know, that we need initial hand holding, a little direction until we get adjusted to things.

The participants reported that they would like the academic advisors to be more aware of their cultural background and academic experiences in India, due to which the participants have experienced many challenges when adjusting to a new learning environment at TPU. Without

such knowledge and awareness, Deidra felt academic advising did not help her much. She further explained, “as an international student there was not a lot of ease and, ...when you come to a new culture there are like many problems, we are facing already,” and thus, she hoped that academic advising was not “just kind of a formality.” Most participants, like Deidra, noted that they were already struggling to adjust to a new environment. Thus, they stated that academic advising could be improved on the basis of an advisor’s knowledge of students cultural and/or academic backgrounds, and to be patient and friendly when advising international Indian students.

Supportive Experiences with Academic Advising

Though participants had limited knowledge and diverse perceptions about academic advising, their experiences with academic advising were different from their perceptions. The third theme that emerged from this study was participants’ supportive experiences with academic advising. I discuss participants’ experiences related to 1) academic support and 2) other forms of support, such as help with social networking, information about clubs or associations, and assistance received from academic advisors during the pandemic.

Academic Support

One common supportive experience that most participants shared was that their advisors were prompt with email communication. These students consented that receiving clear guidance from advisors was a vital component in advancing their academic journeys. For example, Rohit stated that his advisor “was very prompt in responding to me. She used more of technology to communicate with me, but it served the purpose that she responded to me...” Although he did not meet his advisor regularly in person, Siddharrth appreciated that he always received immediate feedback from advisor:

I hardly got to meet my advisor in person, but whenever I needed help, she responded to me through email. To me, that was most important...because when you're new to a university or a completely different academic system, you depend on someone for answers...my advisor always responded to me...that helped me a lot.

More importantly, participants expressed that it is comforting when advisors respond to emails or when there is clear communication between the advisor and advisee regarding academics. Rohit added, “when advisors assure me, or boost my confidence, I feel like I am capable of doing a lot, and its great! I need that.” Likewise, Vinod stated:

I feel good when I talk to my advisor, it's just like talking to a friend...they helped me a lot with my academics...like selecting courses and attending workshops and stuff. It felt like there was someone looking out for me.

In addition, participants noted that advisors guiding them during coursework selection was crucial. Some participants shared that their advisors' support in selecting courses based on past experience and help in designing degree plans made their academic journey smooth and easy. For instance, Siddharrth stated:

There was an incident where I needed some course clarification on if I am going for the right subject...they [academic advisors] would basically look at what classes we have taken prior to this and what class you are enrolling into...sort of you know keeping you on the right track, or right direction. This was helpful.

Likewise, Shyam noted that, due to his advisor's diligence, he was able to register for a course that helped him succeed academically. He stated:

I wanted to take a course that was completely full by the time I registered for it. And then one of them [academic advisor] kept a track of the students who wanted those

courses...when few more seats were made available, one of the advisors actually approached me because I wanted that course and I registered for it...I could attribute my success to the compassion or just the mindfulness of a certain advisor.

To sum up, some participants noted that their advisors' immediate feedback, even though it was electronic, proved beneficial to their academic success. Other participants stated that their advisor's support was encouraging and boosted confidence. Ultimately, participants recognized that because of their advisors' due diligence, they were able to stay on track in their programs.

Other Support

When it comes to other forms of support, participants looked to their academic advisors for help with social adjustment resources as well. Although only a few students reported that their advisors' provided them with social adjustment resources, the interviews indicated that these resources aided participants in adjusting to a new social environment. Additionally, participants acknowledged their advisors' support during the COVID-19 pandemic. All but three participants noted that their advisors provided them social adjustment resources that helped expand their social circles and make meaningful connections. Suresh stated:

I was introduced to the list of clubs and associations in our institution by my advisor.... It was helpful...it was my advisor's suggestion to join the computer science club, which helped me socialize and make connections...this also helped me in finding an internship opportunity.

Vinod stated that he was shy to talk to anyone because he was embarrassed about his language skills. But, his advisor introduced him to the IT club, which helped him communicate better. He stated:

My advisor was very friendly, she took the time to introduce me to the IT club...this

helped me interact with other professors and students...it also helped me overcome my fear of speaking. I used to be very embarrassed because my English was kinda broken.

Shyam described his social experience as an “eye opener.” He shared that when he came to the U.S., he was only focused on his studies and strived to do his best for an internship opportunity. He added that he was not interested in joining any associations or clubs because he did not want to lose focus. However, his advisors encouraged him to venture out of his comfort zone and interact with other students and faculty. Doing so, ultimately proved beneficial to his academic and future career. He stated:

My advisor suggested that I interact more with people from here [U.S.] or from other cultures because that would really be beneficial and that's where a lot of the opportunities for collaborations are. I am very grateful that he gave me this piece of advise, because I made connections through an association designed for those interested in research in the field of computer science...it eventually helped me land an internship. I always think of his advise.

In addition, some participants acknowledged their advisors’ support during this COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Samyuktha appreciated her advisor’s efforts in easing various procedures for international students, allowing for a smooth transition to online learning, and providing academic resources during the pandemic. She noted her fear of whether she could stay in the country, but after receiving some kind of acknowledgement from her advisor, she was at peace. Additionally, she also stated that her advisor was quick in responding to her emails and that they were doing a great job. She expressed:

They [academic advisor] has actually definitely been helpful even right now because of the sudden news that we got yesterday regarding international students going back...So I

mailed him [academic advisor] as well about what to do when, and he just sent a reply back immediately, like maybe within one or two hours, which is pretty decent. Um, he just sent mail back saying he hasn't received any information yet that everybody's just waiting for the university to announce...before that, even because of the coronavirus, everything was online, so I couldn't go to his office and ask him...I had a doubt regarding the online and offline classes, so I could just, email it to him. And I think he gave a pretty quick response... I think he was really helpful enough throughout.

Similarly Suresh noted that his advisor “was extremely helpful especially now during this pandemic...very quick in responding to my doubts about my internship course...” Suresh explained that he unsure how his internship course because of the pandemic. When he reached out to his advisor, he clarified his doubts immediately and was able to provide him a solution. Likewise, Rhea stated “my advisor was willing to meet with me on Teams...I think that was very helpful because I was so confused about the situation [pandemic] and I equally scared.” Rhea added that her advisor’s willingness to meet with her and answer and questions, eased her tension.

Challenging Experiences with Academic Advising

The fourth theme that emerged from the interviews was the challenges that participants experienced with academic advising. Although some participants faced positive academic advising experiences, most participants shared challenging experiences with their academic advisors, especially with coursework selection. In this section, I discuss 1) advisors’ lack of time and effort to advise students, and 2) the need for detailed academic information from academic advisors.

Lack of Time and Effort

Almost all participants stated that their advisors were overwhelmed with the number of students they had to advise, and that advisors did not have time to talk to them. Due to lack of time to advise, participants perceived that some advisors seemed to be irritable or rude while talking to students. For example, Rohit expressed, “they would get irritated too soon...just because I ask questions, that’s just rude.”

While participants noted that advisors seemed ill-tempered at times, they also observed that academic advisors did not have time because of a large number of advisees. For instance, Shyam noted, “I’ve come across a couple of advisors who have a funky disposition. I realize that it’s because they seem overworked.” Likewise, Harish stated:

As an advisor, she was advising too many students I guess, my entire batch of students I assume and she was always overwhelmed.... So I don't think, she had any spare time, or you know, any incentive to really advise us.

Sannath recommended that, due to the lack of time, students should make an appointment with an academic advisor via email and not show up at their office unannounced. He stated, “advisors have a lot of students and might not remember you by name or face if the appointment is made in person or if you just walk into their office...”

However, Deidra expressed that, appointment or no appointment, her advisor was always busy. She explained that some things could not be discussed or clarified over email. When she tried to make an appointment, her advisor was not available to meet with her in person. Deidra Stated:

She never had any time...whenever I needed help with say my courses or some information, she always said “her schedule was tight” ...I mean I know I can get clarifications through email but sometimes it’s not clear...when I show up at her office,

she says like “I can’t help you right now” ...I remember that my first meeting with her was rushed too she said the same thing to me when I asked for help to pick the right courses “I can’t help you right now” ...my academic advising experiences were very disappointing and stressful.

Consequently, it was not surprising to find that some advisors were not passionate about advising. Some participants reported that their advisors were lack of passion when advising students. Some also noted that advisors did not seem to make an effort to get to know the students or provide students with helpful academic or social resources. For instance, Sannath stated, “No, no, that kind of passionate, interest, I didn’t see in her.... I don’t think they are putting that much effort.” Additionally, Shyam stated that advisors performed their job as a “clerical activity” and did not “tailor it to a student’s needs.”

Need Detailed Academic Information

During the interviews, participants talked in length about the need for academic information from their advisors. The need for information was primarily related to coursework selections, curricular practical training (CPT), and teaching and research assistantships. With regards to coursework selections and enrollment, there was a unanimous consensus that participants needed help from their academic advisors.

Coursework. Most challenges that participants faced with academic advising, was during coursework selections and enrolling in desired coursework. There was a consensus that coursework selection and enrollment was most stressful. Participants noted that they were surprised by the amount of time and number of seats allotted to enroll in coursework. Furthermore, they perceived that they would be taught how to enroll in coursework during academic advising sessions or that advisors would inform them about the competitiveness of

coursework enrollment. For instance, Rhea noted that enrolling in coursework was “like taking part in a competition.” She was shocked by the level of competition that she experienced during the enrollment process. She explained that “courses would fill up in seconds [competition] when enrollment opens up, I wish my advisor had informed me about the timeline to enroll.” In addition, she was upset that she could not enroll in her desired coursework and that she had to wait a couple of semesters until she could enroll in the courses that were of interest to her.

Additionally, Shyam talked about the strenuous process of enrolling in coursework. His experience was similar to that of Rhea. He defined the process of coursework enrollment as “confusing.” Shyam noted that during the first one week of every semester, there was a lot of confusion among students regarding coursework enrollment. Due to these experiences, he stated that the academic advisor should provide a notice with the courses being offered every semester and taught by which professor. He stated:

If there was some sort of a bulletin about what kind of courses are being offered by what professor, it would have been good. But I think that a lot of the particulars were missing...There was a lot of confusion in the first one week that I was here, especially because, you know, the enrollment process in classes, for our classes in the beginning seemed to be pretty difficult because there's a lot of contest between students and you don't really know how or when to or what courses to enroll in.

Meanwhile, Sannath provided a detailed example of his experience with coursework enrollment. He expressed that as a senior student he should receive priority over other students during coursework enrollment. He added that if he was not able to enroll in his desired coursework or courses required for his degree completion, the academic advisor could help him on the basis of graduation priority. If that was not the case, then he stated that he deserved an

explanation. He stated:

If I am not going to get that one 6000 course in Data Base the last semester, then I would probably have to wait for one more semester....They didn't provide any information. They just say, sorry, we don't have any professors teaching this subject this semester. Then I would talk ask my advisor, how am I going to graduate? Are you going to help me enroll? I have to stress a lot...if they can't give guarantee that subject will be available that semester, then the other question is will they start first come first serve basis to computer science students? In first 30 seconds all seats will be enrolled. So will I be given that first priority or not? These questions if I get an answer from my graduate advisors, then I'd probably feel much, more safer...but they hardly provide any explanation.

While some participants shared different experiences related to the competitiveness during coursework enrollment, some shared their need for helping them in making the right decisions when selecting and enrolling in their desired coursework, and providing information or descriptions regarding coursework during advising sessions. For example, Suresh stated, “I thought that, during my first academic advising session, advisors would help me enroll in my courses...based on my needs you know.” However, this was not the case. Suresh explained that advisors provided him a sheet of paper that listed the courses he had to take every semester. His advisor did not explain how to or where to enroll in these courses. This left him confused and reaching out to peers for support.

Rhea described that neither was she able to enroll in her desired course, nor did she receive a valid explanation from her academic advisor. She added that she expected her advisor to provide an explanation as to why she was not able to enroll in particular course, and the

explanation she received from her advisor was not helpful. She stated:

I was not able to register to the course...So, she [advisor] was just like, it's because you're like new here and other people have already registered that's why you're not able to get the desired courses. You can get it the next time... I was expecting more of an explanation because since I was new, it was all confusing as to why I'm not able to get the course I want, because I didn't understand.

Likewise, Reesha explained that she believed she was going to gain a lot from her academic advising sessions. She perceived that she could sit and discuss things with her advisor but that was not the case. Reesha expressed, “sometimes I’m left very confused after I get advise for them... Sometimes I just feel too frustrated or think, why am I getting advised by these guys?” When she was asked to explain what confused her, she stated, “when I asked for help picking courses for my field, the advisor stated he cannot help me and that I had to choose...I was confused in the first place, that’s why I went to him for advise.”

In the same manner, Rhea stated that she researched her coursework to learn about what each subject entailed. Unfortunately, she found conflicting information on the university website and a PDF that was provided by the department. When she turned to her advisor for help, she was turned away. She explained:

The website information was not updated as per a PDF provided by the department. So the website information was different and the PDF information was different, I was confused. I reached out to my advisor and brought it to his attention...ultimately he never helped...he just turned me away.

Along with finding it challenging to enroll in desired courses, Shyam and Vinod stated that enrolling in a course that was “open” or “available” (i.e., a course that did not reach its

maximum occupancy or a course that was not desired by the student) seemed like a waste of their academic time. They stated that when they could not enroll in a course that would help advance their academic careers, it seemed like an unnecessary financial burden to carry, “especially when it is not our fault that we could not enroll, and then the advisor does not provide a valid alternate.” In this situation, Vinod acknowledged that it was not the advisor’s fault that he could not enroll in his desired course, but he also added, “it doesn’t mean that she cannot be sympathetic to our reasons and provide us with a solution.” When Vinod was asked to explain what he meant by reasons, he noted that he had to pay \$3,000 for a course he did not want to study and would rather pay for a course that would prove beneficial to his career. To these participants, selecting the right courses in their programs was vital to their academic success as well as crucial in receiving their money’s worth.

In another unique experience, Rohit expressed his challenge in switching out courses or exchanging one course for another before the university’s census date. He was extremely upset that there were two separate rules for swapping courses. One that the university states and one that his academic advisor followed. Rohit was unaware of the different rules surrounding swapping courses, and he was not informed by the academic advisor. In addition, he wished that he could have received a better explanation or justification rather than simply denying his right to swap courses. He noted:

Honestly, when it comes to this topic, I would like to highlight one point, which was I think that’s against the rules. So you know university allows us to swap the subjects. There are two dates to swap. One day where you can swap on your own, and there’s one day where you have to get approval from the advisor. Okay. So in this case my department academic advisor was very rigid...after that date [university date], where you

can swap on your own, my academic advisor said you are not allowed to swap the subject. So I think that is clear violation of the code of conduct of TPU. If TPU is allowing us to swap the subjects. Why is she holding us back? Which is very unfair...They should state it in black and white that as a department we have decided that this is the last day to swap subjects...We should be made aware of it very clearly. Why are we kept in the dark? This has happened with me, I went for swapping my class but they said no we cannot allow you...That's wrong!

In short, coursework enrollment is a crucial factor in the participants' academic journey. They feel the need to be well prepared prior to beginning their semesters. In order to do this, participants noted that they require clear and honest information from academic advisors. More importantly, they warrant clear and well-communicated procedures from their academic advisors and the university.

Other Information. Of equal importance, certain other interviewees stated that they require more information from their academic advisors regarding research opportunities, internships, workshops, and assistantship possibilities in their departments. For example, Rhea added that she felt that she missed out on academic opportunities that could have helped her in degree program. She stated, "there were workshops which were provided, but we were not informed about it from the academic advisor or anyone..." Additionally, Harish expressed his frustration of not being able to attend guest lectures or take part in research work that would have been beneficial to him. He stated:

I have learned that, a lot of guest lecturers happen a lot of, ... let's say industry professional, lot of meetups happen right in our university, but none of those was mentioned to me by my advisor... whereas other students received this information

through their advisor.

Here Deidra shared a similar experience. She stated that she was not aware of the availability or provision of completing an internship during her degree program. When she learned about the possibility of working as an intern in the U.S., it was too late in her degree program. She expressed:

I wish, they would have encouraged at the point where I'm standing, I can see that if they [academic advisors] would have encouraged me to, go for an internship or provided me information about completing an internship as a course just because...definitely whatever experience you carry in your back, it's a different thing. I will say if you are planning to work in the U.S....you definitely have an upper edge. So I think if I could have known that thing before...very strongly it was not said from the academic advisor.

In summary, Deidra explained that working as an intern has great value. Especially in the case of an international student, working in the U.S., or having work experience in the U.S., exceeds any previous work experience (i.e., from an international student's home country). Finally she stated that she was unaware of such an opportunity and neither did her department nor her graduate advisor inform her of such possibilities. Deidra added to her experience and stated that she was frustrated with the advising she received. Because what she experienced was more confusion rather than clarity. She expressed:

if you go to your academic advisor I think your doubts should be resolved. Not like you come out again with questions, and you have to again run for, and search for answers in those questions by yourself. So that's why I'm sort of far from academic advising.

When she was asked to provide an example of her experiences, she noted that she had approached her advisor for information on internships and to complete paperwork for Curricular

Practical Training (CPT), which is an opportunity for international students to start an internship or a part-time job that can be fulfilled as a course, but her advisor was rude and told Deidra that she had “could not hold her hand”, neither did she provide any other resource for Deidra, and later delayed her CPT paperwork which cost her the internship.

Similarly, Shyam’s experience resonated with that of some other participants. He was interested in a position as a teaching or research assistant but was unaware of the availability of positions and the process to apply to only to one. He added that when he asked his advisor to help him with the process of applying to an assistantship he was denied and neither did he receive any information on where or how to apply to one. Shyam stated:

Things I think would have been really useful is, if the whole process of getting a TA or an RA job teaching assistant, a research assistant job with one of the professors. If that that procedure was clear, it would have been a really good thing...I really thought my advisor would help me, but he simply said no. No other resources were provided.

During the interview, participants were asked if their academic advisors provided them with any resources on social adjustment such as, clubs or associations they could join or ways in which they could expand their social networks and become more involved on campus. Almost all participants stated that their advisor did not provide any such resources, and neither were they invested in their social experiences. For example, Harish expressed that he did not receive any social adjustment resources from his advisor, and neither would he ask her for any information. He added, “She didn’t do a good job with my academic advising, so I’m sure she would not be of much help in this area. I just did my own research.” In the case of Rohit, he noted, “she didn’t have time to advise properly [laughs], so no time for social adjustment resources.”

Conclusion

The findings of this research study captured varied experiences of 11 participants. There were four main themes that emerged from the interviews, including 1) students' lack of understanding of academic advising and the role of academic advisors, 2) students' perceptions of academic advisors, 3) supportive experiences with academic advising, and, 4) challenging experiences with academic advising. Through all of these themes, participants' expectations, perceptions, and lived experiences with academic advising were revealed. The first theme was directly related to participants' lack of understanding of academic advising and the role of an academic advisor prior to their arrival in the U.S. The second theme discussed the participants' perceptions of academic advisors which included the importance of academic advisors in students' academic success, participants' perceptions of advisors, and finally, advisors' unfamiliarity with Indian students' academic and cultural background. The third theme was with regards to participants' supportive experiences with academic advising, which included receiving academic and other forms of support. Finally, the fourth theme discussed participants' challenging experiences with academic advisors, which included lack of time and effort of academic advisors, challenges with course enrollment and the lack of information perceived by participants.

The theoretical framework I used for this study – validation theory (Rendón, 1994) was a good fit because there was a strong connection between the four major themes and the types of validation. Rendón's (1994) validation theory contains two types of validation, academic and interpersonal validation. While all four themes had a clear connection to academic validation, the last two themes (i.e., supportive and challenging experiences with academic advising), also had a connection with interpersonal validation. In the following section I discuss the findings through

the lens of Rendón's (1994) validation theory, provide implications for policy, practice and future research, and conclusions for this study.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The total number of international students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities is 1,075,496. Among which the international Indian student population is the second-largest population in the U.S. (IIE, 2020). Yet, there is limited research about international Indian students' adjustment challenges and academic advising experiences. Previous literature (e.g., Pan et al., 2007; Park et al., 2017; Sato & Hodge, 2015) contributes to the East Asian international student population's academic and social adjustment challenges, but there is limited research about the South Asian international student population, especially students from India.

While international students continue to boost the economy and contribute to classroom diversity, they face several challenges while transitioning to college life in the U.S. (Rao, 2017). Furthermore, academic advising plays a significant role in international students' lives, but research shows that students continue to encounter several academic advising challenges (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore international Indian graduate students' perceptions and experiences with academic advising and the influence of academic advising on students' academic success and social adjustment. Guided by Rendón's (1994) validation theory, I investigated the following research questions:

1. How do international Indian graduate students at a four-year public research university in Texas perceive academic advising and academic advisors' role in their academic and social adjustment?
2. How does international Indian graduate students' experience with academic advising validate or invalidate their academic adjustment?
3. How does international Indian graduate students' experience with academic advising validate or invalidate their social adjustment?

I identified these research questions to better understand international Indian graduate students' academic advising experiences. Also, I intended to offer academic advisors and other education practitioners suggestions to improve international Indian graduate students' experiences. In the following sections, I provide a summary of key findings from this study, discussion of key findings, implications for policy, practice, and future research, and finally a conclusion of the research study.

Summary of Key Findings

This section summarizes key findings using Rendón's (1994) validation theory as a guiding theoretical framework. In the previous chapter, I discussed four significant themes which emerged from this study. They were as follows: 1) students' lack of understanding of academic advising, 2) students' perceptions of academic advisors, 3) supportive academic advising experiences, and 4) challenging academic advising experiences.

Students' Lack of Understanding of Academic Advising

The first theme describes students' lack of understanding of the process of academic advising and the role of an academic advisor. While some participants related this to their different academic backgrounds, some participants had different expectations of academic advising and the role of an academic advisor. These expectations were due to previous educational experiences in India.

Students' Perceptions of Academic Advisors

The second theme described participants' perceptions of the role of academic advisors. Three subthemes emerged, which were:

- a) The importance of academic advisors in enhancing students' academic experiences,
- b) Students' perceptions of an advisors' authority refrained students from seeking help

from their academic advisor, and

- c) Advisors' unfamiliarity with Indian students' academic and cultural backgrounds caused participants to perceive that their advisors were impatient while advising students.

Supportive Academic Advising Experiences

The third theme described participants' supportive academic advising experiences. This theme consisted of:

- a) Academic support included participants' experiences when academic advisors provided them with academic adjustment resources such as support during course enrollment.
- b) Other forms of support included participants' experiences when academic advisors provided them social adjustment resources such as clubs and associations. This subtheme also described the COVID-19 pandemic support that academic advisors provided participants.

Challenging Academic Advising Experiences

The fourth theme described participants challenging academic advising experiences. This theme consisted of:

- a) Advisors' lack of time and effort described participants' experiences when advisors did not have time due to the number of advisees and advisors' lack of effort in providing students with necessary resources.
- b) The need for detailed academic information described participants' difficulty during course enrollment due to lack of information or resources from advisors and the need for information regarding clubs, assistantships, and internships.

Discussion

The following section is the discussion of this study's findings. Guided by Rendón's

(1994) validation theory, the findings are separated by two types of validation: Academic and Interpersonal validation. Using Rendón's (1994) theoretical framework and previous literature, first I will discuss the study's findings related to academic validation, and then I will discuss findings related to interpersonal validation. The theoretical framework and previous research provide a rich context for universities, academic advisors, and international Indian students in the U.S.

Rendón's (1994) validation theory posits that validation occurs using in-class and out-of-class agents and is a process that enables, confirms, and supports students. Further, Rendón (1994) states that when students receive a helping hand, they feel efficient, and it boosts their academic and social adjustment. The theory also states that for students to feel supported in their academic and social adjustment, they need to receive an opportunity to reinforce skills that will make them feel capable. Specifically, in the case of nontraditional students, such as international students, they "need a sense of direction and wanting guidance" (Rendón, 2002, p. 644).

Academic Validation

Rendón's concept of reinforcing academic adjustment skills meant that students need an opportunity to portray their intellectual curiosity (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011). By doing so, Rendón (1994) stated that students would develop themselves to become successful learners, with the support of in and out-of-class agents that help validate students' academic adjustment. Using Rendón's (1994) example, academic advisors and their role in international Indian graduate students' lives are in- and out-of-class agents in this study.

Understanding of Academic Advising

In the current study, participants described academic advising as a service available to all students when in need of help with academics or social networking. Additionally, participants

perceived that academic advisors are college professionals available to clarify doubts and to some “serve as a friend.” They also used the term “guide” or “support” to describe an academic advisor’s role. These findings align with the Young-Jones et al. (2013) study, which stated that international students look to academic advisors for support or guidance while adjusting to a new environment. Rendón (1994) also pointed out that when students receive proactive validation from in- and out-of-class agents (i.e., faculty, advisors, peers, family members), they encourage students to become active creators of knowledge. Thus, when participants were anxious about adjusting to a new learning environment, they perceived that academic advising would guide or support them through their academic and social endeavors. Unfortunately, many participants felt unsupported and confused due to their lack of understanding and perceptions of academic advising. In support of this finding, past research by Ku et al. (2008) found that students perceived academic advisors positively impact academic achievement. Further, in a positive relationship with faculty, staff, or academic advisors, international students tend to persist and complete their degrees (Tinto, 2007).

Perceptions of Academic Advising

Noel-Levitz (1997) stated that academic advisors needed to master an informational component when advising students. This component includes mastery of student needs, degree requirements, and experiences of student populations. Similar to Noel-Levitz’s (1997) description of academic advising, studies conducted by Bai (2016) and Sutton and Sankar (2011) also note that academic advisors play a significant role in international students’ degree requirements, future career opportunities, and decision-making. However, participants’ perceptions in the current study revealed a lack of academic support from advisors. For instance, participants expressed a need for guidance when selecting courses. More importantly,

participants' perceived that the first academic advising session would involve a detailed discussion of a student's prior experience (work and study) and then decide on coursework designed to meet the student's needs. For example, Suresh perceived that his advisor would arrange a meeting with him to discuss his academic needs and requirements. He added, "I thought that, during my first academic advising session, advisors would help me enroll in my courses...based on my needs you know." Unfortunately, this was not the case. Furthermore, participants perceived that their advisors would provide them personalized feedback throughout their academic journeys.

Importance of Academic Advising

Likewise, Rendón's (1994) validation theory states that when validation is presented through in- and out-of-class agents (e.g., academic advisors), students begin to feel self-confident, capable of learning, valued, and recognized. Besides, Rendón-Linares and Muñoz (2011) noted, validation is a "developmental process" (p. 22). The more and continuous the validation, the richer the student experience. In the current study, findings align with Rendón's theory. Some participants revealed that they felt recognized by their advisors, became more confident, and felt capable of accomplishing future academic endeavors. They also added that it was due to their advisors' support and diligence that they could succeed academically. Some participants noted that it was due to their advisors' continuous support that they could transition smoothly to a new academic system and complete their degrees with minimal hurdles. These findings support previous research that says when academic advisors help international students schedule essential course and degree requirements and provide continuous support, students complete their degrees on time (Iatrellis et al., 2017).

When provided an opportunity, students will involve themselves academically to use their innate skills or abilities (Rendón, 1994). Furthermore, while some students will quickly adjust to academics, it is more difficult for others. In such situations, in- and out-of-class agents help validate students' academic adjustment (Rendón, 1994). For instance, Samyuktha revealed that her academic advisor was prompt in responding to queries (especially during the pandemic), provided clear information regarding coursework, and allowed for a smooth transition into college life. Due to prompt responses and timely guidance, some participants stated they were confident after meeting with their advisor and felt capable of achieving good grades. These findings resonate with Rendón's (1994) theory and developmental advising from Iatrellis et al.'s (2017) study. They found that when advisors extend support to students, it forms a bond with their advisees, allows students to make a choice in their education, fosters independence, and allows students to attain academic and career goals. Here, it is essential to note that most participants acknowledged their advisors' timely support during the pandemic. Participants stated that their advisors reached out to provide assurance and answer any questions they had. This form of advising, also known as intrusive advising (Iatrellis et al., 2017), where the advisor proactively reaches out to advisees (Rendón, 1994), cultivates trust, motivates students, and proves beneficial in the student's academic success (Varney, 2007).

Grievances with Academic Advising

However, some participants also noted that they were not happy with the advice they received. They stated that their perception of academic advising was utterly different from what they experienced. These participants indicated that they came out of their advising sessions feeling more confused and stressed than focused and content. For example, some participants expressed that they came out with more questions every time they visited their advisor and did

not feel confident about succeeding in their academics. Here, White (2015) noted that academic advisors should keep in mind that international students come from different backgrounds and “one size might not fit all.” For that reason, academic advising should help international students build the road to academic success.

In addition, participants expressed that they found their advisors unapproachable or that advisors did not have time to explain details clearly because of the large number of advisees, which led to an unsatisfying academic experience. While Ku et al. (2008) note that academic advisors need to be more accessible for learners, Iatrellis et al. (2017) found that most advisors across universities in the U.S. are overloaded with work and the number of advisees, which creates an overwhelming and burnout experience for advisors. Due to the lack of time and too many advisees, advisees noted that they were unhappy with the advice provided.

Interpersonal Validation

The second type of validation in Rendón’s (1994) theory was interpersonal validation. Rendón (1994) posits that in- and out-of-class agents build caring relationships with students, foster social adjustment, and help students socially network. Further, Rendón-Linares and Muñoz (2011) noted that social adjustment is vital, especially in international students, because they need to utilize their interpersonal and communication skills.

Other Support

When international students utilize their interpersonal and communication skills, Rendón (1994) stated that they would develop themselves as individuals and valuable members of their learning communities. Findings from the current study are supported by the theory mentioned above. For instance, some participants stated that their advisors helped them learn about different clubs and events to build a social network. By providing this information, participants could

adjust to their environment, learn to speak confidently, and made professional connections that led them to complete an internship during their academic journey.

Lack of Time and Effort

Meanwhile, some of the study participants expressed that their first meeting with their academic advisors was stressful. For instance, Deidra expressed, “I remember that my first meeting with her was rushed too...when I asked for help to pick the right courses, she said, “I can’t help you right now”...my academic advising experiences were very disappointing and stressful.” Research shows that academic advisors are among the first staff members that international students meet. They are also the third most important person in their academic journeys (first being family and friends and second being the office of international education; Rice et al., 2016; Zhang & Dinh, 2017). In the same manner, Rendón (1994) stated that “validation is most effective when offered early on in the student’s college experience...during the first weeks of class.” (p.45). From international Indian graduate students’ experience, this was not the case. Rohit stated that his first meeting with the academic advisor was not what he expected.

Additionally, participants noted that their academic advisors did not seem approachable and patient. They termed academic advising as a “formality” or something that advisors could “check off their list.” Due to such experiences, most participants refrained from reaching out to their advisors for any resource or help. Consequently, some turned to peers for support or assistance.

Need for Detailed Information

Rendón’s (1994) theory affirmed the connection between students’ will-to-learn and students’ encouragement to learn. Her study revealed that when students involved themselves

academically and socially at the university, they were more excited to learn. Examples of being involved are regular interactions and meetings with faculty and being members of clubs or associations. In the current study, almost all participants noted that they did not receive clear and correct information from the university website or their respective departments. Thus when they reached out to their advisors for support, they were turned away. Such instances rendered catastrophic in many participants' academic journeys. For example, some participants talked about the lack of encouragement or support from their academic advisors regarding an internship program. Working as an intern during a degree program proves beneficial when students seek jobs after graduation. For international students, this is a vital step to gain experience in a new country. In such instances, international Indian students noted that receiving guidance or support from their academic advisors would have encouraged them to find an internship position.

Implications

The current study aimed to explore international Indian graduate students' experiences with academic advising and the influence of academic advising on students' academic success and social adjustment. It is important to understand international Indian graduate students' academic advising perspectives and highlight experiences due to their unique cultural background. This study's significance was to extend the existing literature on international students and provide insights into a population that has not been studied before. Additionally, the participants' perspectives and individual experiences would help higher education institutions, academic advisors, and future researchers examine the international student experience as a whole. Finally, participants' insights from this study will help prospective international Indian graduate students adjust to a new environment. In the following sections, I discuss the implications for future research and implications for policy and practice.

Implications for Policy

Knowing that international students are significant contributors to the U.S. economy and cultural diversity (Ammigan & Jones, 2018) and place trust and confidence in academic advising, higher education institutions need to provide this student population with positive transition and adjustment experiences. Doing so allows students to succeed academically and build a robust support system. Implications of this study concerning the policy include an increase in the number of academic advisors serving students and providing professional development for academic advisors.

Need for Personnel

Increasing the number of academic advisors serving students allows for a balance in the advisor-advisee ratio. Hosting a sufficient number of advisors avoids the burnout factor among academic advisors due to serving too many students (Iatrellis et al., 2017). It promotes a positive advisor-advisee relationship and proves beneficial for international students' academic and social adjustment. Providing students sufficient time, undivided attention, and proper counsel, they fare better in academics and tend to develop a sense of belonging.

Professional Development

Research also suggests that professional development helps understand students' different cultural backgrounds (Ali & Johns, 2018; Pryor, 2018) and better serve the international student population. Attending professional development workshops or coursework that focus on Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) will lay the foundation for advisors when working with international students (Pylate & Menke, 2020). ICC consists of three domains: 1) intercultural sensitivity, which includes welcoming students from different cultural backgrounds and the willingness to learn about students' backgrounds; 2) intercultural awareness, which

includes displaying patience and understandings students' needs; and 3) intercultural adroitness, which includes facilitating clear and successful communication (Charles & Stewart, 1991; Pylate & Menke, 2020; Zhang, 2015). Thus, implementing policies that promote the vitality and need for professional development will benefit academic advisors, advisees, and the institution.

Implications for Practice

Certain practices with international Indian students can enhance positive experiences. In addition to what is in place, there is a need for particular practices to support international Indian graduate students. From the current study, two forms of preparations are essential, a detailed introduction to academic advising and implementing a particular form of academic advising when helping international Indian students.

Introduction to Academic Advising

Universities and colleges across the nation provide an orientation to international students to help them gain an insight into life on campus in the U.S. While orientations are a great way of allowing students to transition into college life, it also proves challenging or overwhelming for students. International students receive an overload of information during orientation and a lack of vital information, such as the practice of academic advising or contact information for academic advisors (Moon et al., 2020). Academic advising is new to international Indian graduate students. Thus, learning about academic advising practices and the role and duties of an academic advisor before arriving at the university would help international Indian graduate students adjust to a new environment. Higher educational institutions and colleges across the nation could provide incoming international Indian graduate students with information about academic advising before arriving in the U.S. Such as emailing students about the practice of academic advising, providing an overview of the duties of an academic advisor, and finally

providing contact information of academic advisors.

Form of Academic Advising

Likewise, academic advisors across universities and colleges could practice using developmental advising—especially when dealing with international students. Research shows that this advising approach is ideal and proves beneficial when advising students (Noaman & Ahmed, 2015). International students look to academic advisors as mentors or guides. For this purpose, implementing developmental advising would support both advisors and advisees. Developmental advising considers students' choices, and then advisors guide students systematically (NACADA, 2017; Noaman & Ahmed, 2015). When using this approach with international students, they develop a sense of belonging and succeed in their academic endeavors (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017).

Implications for Future Research

There is a need to research international Indian graduate students. Past research shows a gap in the literature, where the focus is on international students as a homogenous group or a focus on East Asian international students. While the current study aimed to fill the gap in existing literature, there are other ways to develop research on the international Indian graduate student experience.

Disciplines

The current qualitative study was conducted at a large four-year public research university in the State of Texas. Although it aimed to fill the gap in existing literature, it is limited to the perspectives of 11 participants, mainly from STEM fields. The participants' experiences from this study may not be the same as students from other disciplines. Therefore, extensive research with participants from different disciplines will provide richer findings and

understandings of international Indian graduate students' academic advising perceptions and experiences. Participants from varied fields of study and other universities could enhance research findings.

Methodology

While a qualitative study provides detailed insights into participants' experiences, a quantitative study might help with the frequency of challenges international Indian graduate students encounter. Quantitative studies might help researchers explain relationships between various factors such as the number of advisees and the impact of academic advising on students, advisees' experiences and years of service as an academic advisor, and adjustment level in a new environment. Additionally, using qualitative and quantitative methods (i.e., a mixed-methods study) will provide an in-depth understanding of student's experiences and the impact of academic advising on students' experiences. Conversely, future researchers could conduct qualitative or quantitative studies on academic advisors serving international Indian graduate students. Doing so will provide literature on academic advisors' experiences while helping international Indian graduate students. It would also help colleges and universities across the nation to address academic advisors' experiences.

Theoretical Lens

Finally, future researchers could use ICC to guide their studies on international students' experiences and provide insight into their relationships with academic advisors. ICC also breaks down the value of intercultural competence, communication, and sensitivity when advising international students. Therefore, conducting a study using ICC as the groundwork will help advisors understand international students' perceptions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore international Indian graduate students' lived academic and social adjustment experiences in U.S. higher education and the influence of academic advising on their adjustment. Themes developed from the interviews indicated that participants:

- 1) Possessed a lack of understanding of academic advising and the role of an academic advisor, which in turn influenced their academic and social adjustment experiences;
- 2) Perceptions of academic advising and the importance of an academic advisor in students' lives, and an advisor's lack of understanding of international Indian students background;
- 3) Relayed positive academic advising experiences, which included support during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- 4) Relayed challenging academic advising experiences, which included difficulty during course enrollment, and lack of academic and social information from academic advisors.

As discussed in this chapter and previous chapters, there is a gap in existing literature regarding international Indian graduate students. Even though international Indian graduate students are the second-largest international student population in the U.S., there is a significant research gap in the existing international students' literature. This population of students requires attention when it comes to academic advising and adjustment in the U.S. It is essential to learn ways to enhance academic success and develop a sense of belonging for international Indian graduate students. It is also vital to note that culture plays a significant role in academic advising. There is a need for academic advisors to develop cultural sensitivity when advising international Indian graduate students.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



6/4/2020

IRB Approval of Minimal Risk (MR) Protocol

PI: Vandana Nandakumar

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Yi Leaf Zhang

Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

IRB Protocol #: 2020-0677

Study Title: *The Impact of Academic Advising on Academic Success and Social Adjustment: A Phenomenological Study of International Indian Graduate Students in a Texas Public University*

Effective Approval: 6/4/2020

Face-to-face or in-person interactions with human subjects approved within this protocol may only proceed once restrictions are lifted related to COVID-19:

<https://resources.uta.edu/research/coronavirus/index.php>

The IRB has approved the above referenced submission in accordance with applicable regulations and/or UTA's IRB Standard Operating Procedures.

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor Responsibilities

All personnel conducting human subject research must comply with UTA's [IRB Standard Operating Procedures](#) and [RA-PO4, Statement of Principles and Policies Regarding Human Subjects in Research](#). Important items for PIs and Faculty Advisors are as follows:

- ****Notify [Regulatory Services](#) of proposed, new, or changing funding source****
- Fulfill research oversight responsibilities, [IV.F and IV.G](#).
- Obtain approval prior to initiating changes in research or personnel, [IX.B](#).
- Report Serious Adverse Events (SAEs) and Unanticipated Problems (UPs), [IX.C](#).
- Fulfill Continuing Review requirements, if applicable, [IX.A](#).
- Protect human subject data ([XV.](#)) and maintain records ([XXI.C.](#)).
- Maintain [HSP](#) (3 years), [GCP](#) (3 years), and [RCR](#) (4 years) training as applicable.

REGULATORY SERVICES

The University of Texas at Arlington, Center for Innovation
202 E. Border Street, Suite 300, Arlington, Texas 76010, Box #19188
(Phone) 817-272-3723 (Email) regulatoryservices@uta.edu (Web) www.uta.edu/rs

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Email Invitation

Dear Student,

I am Vandana Nandakumar, a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). I am currently working on my dissertation with Dr. Yi (Leaf) Zhang, an Assistant Professor in ELPS. My research study focuses on international Indian graduate students academic advising experiences and its impact on academic success as well as social adjustment. If you are identified as an international Indian graduate student (on an F-1 or J-1 visa) and, who has completed at least one semester in your degree program at UTA, we would like to invite you to participate in the study and to share your experiences in interacting with academic advisors throughout your graduate academic journey in the U.S.

We know this is a busy and strenuous time of year, but we kindly request your participation in one individual face-to-face interview via Zoom, Skype, or any other online communication platform that best suits your preference, which will last about one hour. In addition, prior to the interview, you will be asked to complete a survey regarding your demographic background, which will take about 5 minutes. This is your opportunity to give voice to your experiences in navigating university life. **If you are willing to participate in the study, please contact me at vandana.nandakumar@mavs.uta.edu to schedule an appointment.**

An encrypted handheld digital audio recorder will be used during the interview only for the purpose of this study. The recording will be destroyed permanently after the study is completed. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide not to participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.

Your name or personal identifiers will remain strictly confidential and will not be used for any public purpose or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym and, the results of the study may be published or presented at conferences, but your personal information will not be revealed.

Your input is greatly appreciated as we explore this topic. If you would like more information about this study, please feel free to contact me at vandana.nandakumar@mavs.uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to UTA Research Office at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Vandana Nandakumar
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies; College of Education
Box 19777, 701 Planetarium Place,
University of Texas at Arlington
Arlington, Texas 76019-0575

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)

Informed Consent for Studies with Adults

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

The Impact of Academic Advising on Academic Success and Social Adjustment: A Phenomenological Study of International Indian Graduate Students in a Texas Public University

RESEARCH TEAM

Student

Name: Vandana Nandakumar (PI); University of Texas at Arlington
 Department: COEd – Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
 Contact information: Email – vandana.nandakumar@mavs.uta.edu

Faculty Advisor

Name: Yi Zhang, PhD.; University of Texas at Arlington
 Department: COEd – Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
 Contact information: Email – lyzhang@uta.edu

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

The research team above is conducting a research study about international Indian graduate students academic advising experiences and its impact on academic success as well as social adjustment. The purpose of this research study is to obtain an in-depth understanding of Indian international graduate students lived academic advising experiences at a large four-year public research university. You can choose to participate in this research study if you are an international Indian graduate student (on an F1 or J1 visa) and have completed at least one semester in your degree program.

You might want to participate in this study if you would like to share your academic advising experiences, how/if academic advising sessions have impacted your academic success and social adjustment and, contribute your perspectives on how the university could enhance positive experiences of international Indian students on campus. However, you might not want to participate in this study if you are uncomfortable sharing your personal experiences or if you do not have time to attend a one hour interview session via Zoom or Skype.

This study has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB is an ethics committee that reviews research with the goal of protecting the rights and welfare of human research subjects. Your most important right as a human subject is informed consent. You should take your time to consider the information provided by this form and the research team and, ask questions about anything you do not fully understand before making your decision about participating.

TIME COMMITMENT

There will be two interactions with the research team:

1. You will be required to attend an interview session via Zoom, Skype, or any other online communication platform that best suits your preference. Participation in this interview will last approximately one hour.
2. Additionally, once the interview has been conducted and the recording has been transcribed, your interview transcript will be sent back to you via email. At this point,



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you can read the transcript for validity and you may choose to add or edit any information in the transcript. Please note, the final information will be used in the research study.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate in this research study, this is the list of activities that we will ask you to perform as part of the research:

1. Read through this Informed Consent and talk with the research team to make sure that any questions you may have, are answered; then make your choice about whether to participate.
2. If you agree to participate, please acknowledge the consent form and return it to a member of the research team via email. Additionally, you will be asked to allow a member of the research team to contact you via email and schedule an interview session via Zoom or Skype, or any other online communication platform that best suits your preference.
3. After connecting with you through your desired communication platform, you will receive a demographic survey that needs to be completed and returned (to a member of the research team) via email immediately. Upon receiving the demographic survey, you will be interviewed by a member of the research team.

The interview will be audio recorded using an encrypted handheld digital recorder. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, by a member of the research team / a professional transcription service. Audio recordings will be safely stored and might be used for future research studies.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

Although the research will not benefit you directly, your personal experiences will enhance existing knowledge about international student academic and social adjustment, will allow for universities to reevaluate services provided to international students and, help international students understand the adjustment process in the United States.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

You might experience discomfort while sharing academic advising experiences and how those experiences have impacted their academic success and social adjustment. This research study is not expected to pose any additional risks beyond what you would normally experience in your regular everyday life. However, if you do experience any discomfort, please inform the research team.

Remember that you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time without penalty and may do so by informing the research team. Additionally, your privacy and confidentiality are priority, nowhere in the research study will your name or any form of personal identification be released or permitted for public use. All information will be encrypted and stored safely.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation for participating in this research study.



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ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

There are no alternative options offered for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The research team is committed to protecting your rights and privacy as a research subject. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the UTA campus and/or a secure UTA server for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The audio recordings collected from this study will be kept with the other electronic data in a secure UTA Box account for the duration of the study.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used for future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB would first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and sponsors of the study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions about this research study or reports regarding an injury or other problem may be directed to Vandana Nandakumar at vandana.nandakumar@mavs.uta.edu or Yi Zhang at lyzhang@uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

CONSENT

By signing this form, you are confirming that you understand the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and your rights as a research subject. By agreeing to participate, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. You can refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits that you would ordinarily have. Please sign below if you are at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER

DATE

**If you agree to participate, please provide the signed copy of this consent form to the research team. They will provide you with a copy to keep for your records.*

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Demographic Survey

1. Name:
2. What is your current gender identity? (Check all that apply)
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Trans male/Trans man
 - d. Trans female/ Trans woman
 - e. Genderqueer/ Gender non-conforming
 - f. Additional gender category (or other); please specify:
3. Please indicate your age:
4. When did you come to the United States? Please specify month and year (MM/YY):
5. What degree and major are you pursuing?
6. Have you changed your major? If yes, please state your former major.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to further your education at this institution?
2. Describe the information provided by the institution about academic opportunities before you enrolled:
 - a. What was the most helpful information you received?
Prompt: through what mode of communication did you receive this information?
 - b. What would have been helpful to know?
3. Let's talk about your coursework selections:
 - a. What information do you/did you need to make a decision on your coursework selection?
 - b. Where did you get information about the courses?
Prompt: did you understand the information that was presented to you?
 - c. What information did you get that was helpful? In what ways was it helpful? Provide examples.
 - d. What information would have been helpful? In what ways would it have been more helpful for you? Provide examples.
4. Could you describe your overall academic experiences at this institution? Please specify with examples.
5. Describe the information provided by the institution about social adjustment (e.g., any activities, clubs/associations, services on campus, etc.) before you enrolled:
 - a. What information was most helpful?
 - b. What would have been helpful to know?
6. Could you describe your overall social experiences at this institution? Please specify with examples.

7. Were you familiar with academic advising services prior to attending this institution?

Prompt: Where/how did you learn about academic advising? How would you define academic advising?

8. Describe your past interactions with academic advisors:

a. From the beginning of your academic journey at this institution, how many times have you visited an academic advisor?

b. Could you share your reasons for your visit?

c. Have you changed advisors over the months you have been here?

Prompt: For what reasons? How has that affected your experience at the institution?

d. Has your academic advisor provided you with social adjustment resources (e.g., information about clubs, associations, and activities)?

e. Has your academic advisor provided you resources for academic success (information about workshops, guest lectures, clubs, and conferences)?

9. What suggestions would you give new Indian international students about making use of academic advising services?

10. What suggestions do you have for academic advisors working with Indian international students?

11. Please provide any suggestions or feedback that the university could use, to improve Indian international student success in terms of academic and social adjustment.

12. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with academic advising that we haven't discussed?

13. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?