Integrating International Graduate Students on Campus: The Perspectives of Student Affairs Professionals and Staff

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INTEGRATING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS ON CAMPUS:
THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENT AFFAIRS
PROFESSIONALS AND STAFF

by

Rachal Etshim

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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INTEGRATING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS ON CAMPUS: THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS AND STAFF

Rachal Etshim, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2021

International graduate students are a unique population that face specific challenges that affect their campus integration (Arthur, 2017; Burdett & Crossman, 2012; Sharma, 2019). The role of student affairs professionals and staff includes developing and integrating all students, including international graduate students, on-campus (Di Maria, 2012; Braskamp, 2011; Kuh, 2009; Wilcox, et al., 2005). However, many student affairs professionals and staff feel unprepared to serve or work with international graduate students (Brandenburg, 2016; Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018). There has been little empirical research conducted on student affairs professionals and staff members’ perspectives about their role in integrating international graduate students on their campuses.

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to understand the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. This study was conducted at a four-year public higher education institution in the Midwestern United States that has committed to internationalization. The study design included data gathered from multiple in-depth semi-structured interviews, site observations, and documents shared by student affairs professionals and staff members.

Inductive thematic analysis was used to examine the perspectives of each participant. It consisted of identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set. The data analysis revealed that student affairs professionals and staff play five roles in
integrating international graduate students: educators, adapters, liaisons, career shapers, and barrier breakers. Within their roles of serving international graduate students, student affairs professionals and staff face challenges, such as limited on-campus resources for international graduate students, limited understanding of university policies, limited intercultural training, and limited intercultural exposure. To respond to the needs and challenges of international grad students, student affairs professionals and staff adapt the existing programs and support services initially designed for undergraduate domestic students, while some of the needs and challenges of these students are different. My findings recommend that institutions create support structures that allow student affairs professionals and staff to work with these students and learn more about their needs and challenges related to integrating into their campus.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions in the United States (U.S.) recruit international students as part of their internationalization strategies (Knight, 2015). The overall number of international students enrolled in American universities and colleges between 2017 and 2018 increased by 1.5% compared to the previous year, totaling over 1 million international students (Open Doors, 2018). Of this total, 382,983 are international graduate students.

International graduate students are good resources for the internationalization and economies of higher education institutions in the U.S. (Urban & Palmer, 2014) and, despite the reduction in the number of visas approved and job prospects, their numbers continue to grow (Almurideef, 2016; Killick, 2015). These students come from different countries, have different cultural backgrounds and needs, and face different challenges that student affairs professionals and staff at host institutions must address to integrate them into campus (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007). Moreover, the integration needs and challenges of international students differ depending on a variety of characteristics such as their level of studies, major, and undergraduate vs. graduate status (Rai, 2002). Although student affairs professionals and staff are often the first contacts for all international students, and they play a key role in the integration and development of international graduate students on campus (Brandenburg, 2016), most higher education institutions and their student affairs units today are not yet equipped or prepared to serve international graduate students (Arokiasamy, 2011; Burdzinski, 2014; Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Yakoboski & Perozzi, 2018).
Definitions and Background

Definitions of Key Terms

As background, it is important to define some key terms that I will use in my study: international graduate students, student affairs professionals and staff, acculturation, intercultural competence, and integration. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2009) (UIS) Global Education Digest and OECD (2012) define an international graduate student as someone with a bachelor’s degree who has left his or her country or territory of origin and moved to another country or territory with the sole goal of earning an advanced degree. In the American context, this definition incorporates holders of F (student) visas, J (exchange visitor) visas, and M (vocational training) visas. Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education (Knight, 2015). The term student affairs professional describes professional staff within a higher education institution responsible for the out-of-class experiences and learning or development of students (Burdzinski, 2014). There is no single path to become a student affairs professional but most positions require a master’s degree in a field related to educational leadership or development. Many higher education institutions today also have student affairs master’s and doctoral degree programs. Most student affairs’ management positions require a Doctoral degree (Burdzinski, 2014). In most institutions, student affairs encompasses units such as admission, residence and housing, career and counseling, dining, multicultural, recreation, and academic. Acculturation describes a long-term process of cultural and psychological change that results from contact with culturally different people, groups, and social influences (Berry, 2006). Intercultural competence is student affairs professionals and staff members’ knowledge, behavior and skills that lead to effective
interactions with people from different cultures (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). Finally, integration is an intentional process to create community, by encouraging both domestic and international students to engage with one another in continuous interaction, as distinguished by mutual respect, responsibility, action, and commitment (Young, 2014). These terms and definitions will be used throughout this dissertation.

**Background**

Despite tightened immigration policies that lead international students to choose other destinations such as China, South Korea, Canada, and the United Kingdom, the U.S. remains the top host of international students in the world. As such, international students constitute over 5% of more than 20 million students in higher education institutions in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2018). Regarding their places of origins, China, India, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Canada account for approximately 55% of the international students studying in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2018). Differences in the places of origins and levels of studies (graduate or undergraduate) of international students can result in different challenges and needs (Rai, 2002). Those challenges and needs include the gap between students’ expectations and those of the graduate school; their responsibilities towards their families that came here with them or stayed in the home country; language and communication; academic and socio-cultural integration; economic or financial issues; health and psychological issues; immigration and employment (Gareis, 2012; Guo & Chase, 2011; Trice, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007; Womujuni, 2007). In a study that addressed challenges facing domestic and international students, Tas (2013) noted that even though international students are subject to the same stresses of academic and personal life as their U.S. counterparts, these stresses are compounded by being in an unfamiliar culture and surrounded by challenges of language and communication.
Taken altogether, these challenges usually have negative impacts on the integration of international graduate students (Kilinc & Granello, 2003).

The integration of international graduate students into campus plays a crucial role in their academic performance. For example, international graduate students who have friendships with host national students develop stronger language skills and a sense of connectedness and belonging, which in turn improve their academic performance (Arthur, 2017; Gareis, 2012; Trice, 2007; Rienties et al., 2011). Integration requires international graduate students to participate in the culture of the host institution, both within and outside of the classroom (Trice, 2003). International graduate students who effectively integrate into their new educational environment participate in the classroom, enrich their own and domestic students’ educational experiences, and contribute to further internationalization on campus and in the outside community (Gareis, 2012). An effective integration strategy of international graduate students is crucial for improving retention rates (Ozturgut, 2013). If the institution provides a diversified campus climate and an effective support system that meet the needs of international graduate students, encourages them to be involved in campus life, and invests in their future career, these students will integrate and not leave before completing their degrees.

However, different studies have reported that many international graduate students do not integrate well into their new American campus. In a study conducted by Trice (2003), international graduate students reported having no close American friends. In another study conducted by Erichsen and Bolliger (2011), international graduate students said they are less socially engaged on campus and are less satisfied with their overall college experience than their peers born and raised in the U.S. These reports question the effectiveness of employees within
U.S higher education institutions, including student affairs professionals and staff, in the integration of international students on American campuses.

The role of student affairs professionals and staff is a supportive one, in which student affairs professionals aim to develop college students as a “whole person” both academically and professionally (Braskamp, 2011). Their role provides them with a chance to interact with both domestic and international graduate students. Student affairs professionals and staff can therefore use that opportunity to develop and support international graduate students’ integration by fostering a warm, welcoming, learning, and supportive environment (Braskamp, 2011). As noted by Shushok et al., (2009):

Much of students’ college experience happens without direct faculty involvement…
given this fact, one important role of student affairs educators at our institution is to serve as educators outside the classroom, convening academically purposeful conversations, planning educational programs, and creating learning rich environments.

(p. 10)

The role of student affairs professionals and staff in higher education is not only crucial in the integration of international graduate students on campus but also for the dissemination of the importance of having international students on campus throughout the community (Di Maria, 2012).

Despite the crucial role that student affairs professionals play in the integration of international graduate students, the research suggests that student affairs professionals and staff do not possess enough cross-cultural awareness to serve and integrate international graduate students (Burdzinski, 2014; Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Moswela & Mukhopadhayay, 2011; Pope, Reynolds & Muller, 2004). Today, educational institutions are driven by globalization, and
all aspects of university life, and student-related services must meet the challenges of globalization, including those brought and experienced by international graduate students (Ciobanu, 2013). Therefore, student affairs professionals and staff must be able to demonstrate their own global competencies in the way they integrate international graduate students on their campuses (Bresciani, 2008).

**Problem Statement**

This section summarized the challenges of international graduate students and the role of student affairs professionals and staff in their campus integration. This summary provided a practical rationale for conducting this study, and I presented different studies that justify it. I concluded this section with a call for further research on the strategies that student affairs professionals and staff use to integrate international graduate students on their campuses.

**The Practical and Researchable Problem**

Student affairs professionals and staff are often the first contacts of international graduate students, but the literature suggests that they do not possess intercultural competencies to best serve and integrate this category of students on campus (Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Trice, 2003, 2007; Womujuni, 2007). International graduate students come to American universities from different countries, have different social, cultural and economic status or backgrounds, and different educational experiences. These differences coupled with their level of studies imply that international graduate students bring in different challenges compared to undergraduate students and their domestic counterparts (Arthur, 2017; Burdett & Crossman, 2012; Cicognani et al., 2008; Christie, Munro, & Fisher, 2004). International graduate and undergraduate students share a few common challenges and needs which include language and communication, immigration, and socio-cultural and academic
adaptation. International graduate students experience more challenges and needs compared to their undergraduate counterparts. Most of these challenges and needs are related to the requirements of their academic level and social responsibilities (Gareis, 2012; Guo & Chase, 2011; Trice, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007; Womujuni, 2007). Once on campus, student affairs professionals and staff help international graduate students navigate these challenges and needs.

The role of student affairs professionals and staff includes the development and integration of all students on campus (Di Maria, 2012; Braskamp, 2011; Kuh, 2009; Wilcox et., 2005). Higher education institutions across the United States are developing their recruitment strategies to attract more international students in order to meet their institutions’ enrollment and internationalization goals (Knight, 2007). However, most student affairs professionals and staff feel unprepared to serve or work with international graduate students and have expressed the need for more intercultural competencies training (Brandenburg, 2016; Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Mazon, 2010; Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018). There has been little empirical research conducted on the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students on their campuses, especially from the perspectives of entry and mid-level student affairs professionals and staff.

Studies Addressing the Problem

The available literature on the integration of international students focuses more on undergraduate students or all international students at both undergraduate and graduate levels, though these students are from different countries, have different cultural backgrounds, and are in different degree levels (Di Maria, 2012; Rietenties et al., 2011; Sullivan, 2012). These differences in terms of places of origins, cultures, and the level of study also imply that an undergraduate domestic student faces different challenges and needs compared to a graduate
domestic, an international undergraduate and an international graduate student (Curtin et, 2013; Grayson, 2008). It is important to clarify different challenges that each category of these students’ experience.

All students face challenges when they go to college, either in their own country or abroad. Domestic undergraduate students in the U.S. face many challenges, some of which are similar to the ones of international undergraduate students (Curtin, et al., 2013; Grayson, 2008). Those similar challenges are emotional and mental health issues (Mitchell, Greenwood, & Guglielmi, 2007; Rodgers & Tennison, 2009), and social and academic adjustment (Burdett & Crossman, 2012; Gardner, 2013). In addition to these challenges, international undergraduate students also face language and communication, immigration, cultural, and finance challenges. Even though some international undergraduate students may adapt easily to their new educational environment, many are overwhelmed by the pressure of changing cities or countries, living without families, higher academic requirements compared to the ones of high school, and they become unable to overcome those challenges (Perry, 2016; Tinto, 1975). All these challenges lead many undergraduate students to feel hopeless, stressed and to drop out (De Araujo, 2011; Tinto, 1975).

Graduate students face challenges such as time management, finance, socializing, learning to cope with reading, writing and comprehending voluminous quantities of graduate academic text and statistics (Perry, 2016). International graduate students face more challenges compared to their domestic and international undergraduate counterparts (Trice, 2003, 2007). These challenges may influence international graduate students’ campus integration.

The literature on the integration of international graduate students focuses on two aspects: social-cultural and academic. Social-cultural integration refers to the ability to ‘fit in’, to acquire
culturally appropriate skills and to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment (Tsegay, Zeergish, & Ashraf, 2018). Institutions and their social networks have a great influence on the ways international students adjust to their new educational environments (Yang, Salzman & Yang, 2015). Academic integration refers to the extent to which students adapt to the academic way-of-life and it has significant influence on students’ academic performance (Arthur, 2017; Burdett & Crossman, 2012; Cicognani et al., 2008; Christie, Munro, & Fisher, 2004; Gareis, 2012; Guo & Chase, 2011; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 1993; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). International graduate students struggle to integrate socially, culturally and academically (Astin, 1984, 1999; Tinto, 1995; Yao, 2016; Young, 2014), and that is in part attributed to some student affairs professionals and staff members’ lack of intercultural competencies (Cierra, 2004; Deardorff & Jones, 2012; Mangope & Major, 2014).

Research suggests that some student affairs professionals and staff are not inter-culturally competent to interact, serve and integrate international graduate students, and this competence often results from communication barriers associated with culture and language (Brandenburg, 2016; Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; DiMaria, 2014; Kretovics, 2002; Moscaritolo & Roberts, 2016; Sullivan, 2012). The lack of intercultural competencies is due to limited training, which leads to deficiencies in knowledge, skills, and awareness of unfamiliar cultures (Castellanos et al., 2008; Cuyjet et al., 2016; Di Maria, 2012; Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Pope et al., 2004). This lack of some student affairs professionals and staff members’ intercultural competencies may in turn prevent international graduate students from using the resources available on their campus and fully integrate (Mangope, 2004).

Studies also suggest higher education institutions to provide frequent intercultural trainings to student affairs professionals and staff, since their work environment, including the
presence of international graduate students, seems to develop much quicker than the available staff development opportunities (Brandenburg, 2016; Haber & Cheryl, 2011; Herdlein; 2004; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Yakaboski & Perrozzi, 2018). With the ever-changing landscape of higher education, student demographics, and educational delivery methods, student affairs professionals and staff must be continuously trained (Cierra, 2004; Kezar, 2009; Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011). In particular, Burdzinski (2014) noted that colleges desiring to enhance their internationalization endeavors might wish to support student affairs professionals and staff members’ intercultural trainings opportunities, e.g., to study a language other than English and travel to other countries.

All of these studies addressed the role of student affairs professionals and staff in the development of students as a whole, and the importance of intercultural competencies in interacting, serving and integrating international graduate students on campus. However, there is little empirical research on the perspectives of entry and midlevel student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students on their campuses. My study addressed that gap within the context of a university that has many international graduate students and is committed to internationalization.

**Significance of Study**

My study sought the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. Other higher education institutions that desire to enroll international graduate students may use the findings of this study to develop training for their student affairs professionals and staff to meet the needs and challenges of this category of students. Even though this study did not focus on
international graduate students, its findings suggest several important issues and perspectives about international graduate students that future literature should explore or consider as they write about these students. Furthermore, this study clarifies some of the assumptions made about international student in general and international graduate students, focusing more on their backgrounds and needs, including programs and level of maturity as it relates to social and academic success. Researchers or practitioners interested in international students and student affairs may use the findings of this study as a baseline of information. Finally, this study contributed to the limited body of research that address the roles of student affairs professionals and staff in the internationalization of higher education.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to understand the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students.

This study addressed the following questions:

1. **How do student affairs professionals and staff who work with international graduate students view their role in integrating these students into a university campus?**

2. **What strategies, policies, services, and programs do student affairs professionals and staff deem most helpful to facilitate the integration of international graduate students, including any adaptations needed to best support such students?**

3. **What support and training do student affairs professionals and staff receive to help integrate international graduate students?**
Conceptual Framework and Narrative

A conceptual framework is an abstract, logical structure of meaning that guides the development of a study; it is based on the identification of key concepts and the relationship among those concepts (Jabareen, 2009). My conceptual framework stems from the literature on the challenges, needs, and integration for international students, the role of student affairs professionals and staff, and the theories of student integration (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton et., 2000; Rovai, 2002; Tierney, 2000; Tinto, 1975, 1987, & 1993) Figure illustrates my conceptual framework.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (Etshim, 2021)

There are 382,953 international graduate students on American universities’ campuses, and the first big box explains that when these students transition to their new educational environment, they bring all of their pre-existing academic, cultural and socio-economic experiences, challenges, and needs. These pre-existing factors are key to international graduate
students’ transition into their new educational environment (Trice & Eun-Yoo, 2007). Adapting to American higher education may present conflicts within personal and cultural identity for international graduate students. When a campus community is unaware of these cultural differences, this could create many misconceptions, assumptions (Andrade, 2006). For example, these misconceptions create gaps between the services that higher education professionals think are not needed and the services that are actually needed. Therefore, it is incredibly important for higher education professionals to understand the culture norms and nuances of each international student group in order to identify and provide the services individual student need for success (Franklin-Craft, 2010).

The box after “Intl. graduate students pre-existing academic, cultural, socioeconomic experience” explains that academic, cultural and social challenges such as acculturation, low English language competency, discrimination, isolation, homesickness, financial, housing, gap between international graduate students’ expectations and the ones of graduate school, food, the relevancy of the curriculum, uncertainty about graduation, career after graduation, and different learning patterns, impact international graduate students’ campus integration (Almurideef, 2016; Knight, 2007; Trice, 2003, 2007). One of the most appropriate theories that can explain the integration of international graduate students is the Theory of Student Integration, created by Tinto (1987, 1993) and later expanded by other authors to include international and other nontraditional students (Astin, 1999; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Kuh & Love 2000; Kuh, 2009; McCubbin, 2003; Rendón et al., 2000; Rovai, 2002; Tierney, 2000).

Tinto’s (1975) theory of student integration argues that educational experiences, socioeconomic status, community backgrounds, as well as social relations and interactions with
domestic and other international students, including the availability of opportunities to get involved in student groups and extracurricular activities, and the interactions with professors and the social dynamics in class all have a significant impact on international students’ integration into campus (Almurideef, 2016; Guan, 2017; Poteet & Gomez, 2015; Kwai, 2010; Rienties, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993; Yao, 2015). Tinto (1993) distinguished two types of integration: academic and social. Academic integration is the degree of congruency between the intellectual development of the individual and the prevailing intellectual climate of the institution (Tinto, 1975, p. 106), while social integration focuses on the interaction between the individual with given sets of characteristics (backgrounds, values, commitments, individual and social attributes, etc.) and other persons of varying characteristics on campus (Tinto, 1975, p. 107). Therefore, the overall integration of international graduate students on campus depends on their level of both social and academic integration. This integration is effectively achieved if staff, faculty, the community and student affairs professionals and staff provide engagement and involvement opportunities in and out of the classroom (Astin, 1999; Axelson & Flick, 2010; Coates, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kuh, 2009).

Tinto’s theory of student integration was initially designed to explain the retention and integration of domestic undergraduate students, but other authors have adapted it to explain the retention, engagement and integration of international students on campus (Al-Dayel, 2018; Guo & Chase, 2012; Kahu, 2013; Kwai, 2009; Rienties et al., 2011; Yao, 2015; Young, 2014). That has been in part due to some similar challenges that domestic and international students face (Burdet, et al., 2012; Grayson, 2008; Perry, 2016). For the purpose of this study, I draw from several theories of student integration, as I explain in Chapter 2.
It is important to note that the theories I draw upon for this study stem from Western traditions and ways of thinking that reflect individualist views as opposed to collectivist views found in many other countries. However, I will interrogate these views during the data analysis phase of the study.

The box labeled “Student Affairs Professionals and Staff” indicates that student affairs professionals and staff are often the first contact for international students at host universities, from their admission, arrival and transition on campus (Di Maria, 2012). Such professionals help international graduate students academically, culturally, and socially integrate through academic and career advising, athletics, counseling, coaching and mentoring, financial aid advising, course selection, graduation, student activities, student development, student life, and life skills training (Braskamp, 2011; Jaroslav & Martin, 2013). The box to the left of “Student Affairs Professionals and Staff” reveals that student affairs professionals may not possess inter-cultural knowledge, behavior and skills (intercultural competence) to serve or integrate international students on campus and have not received adequate professional development and support (Arthur, 2017; Braskamp, 2011; Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Sullivan, 2011; Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018). The box on the right of “Student Affairs Professionals and Staff” explains that in order to facilitate the integration of international graduate students on campus, student affairs professionals and staff use and adapt strategies, policies, services and programs in place (Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Sullivan, 2011).

This conceptual framework illustrated my views of the integration process of international graduate students. It addressed the challenges this category of students faces, the types of support they need to better integrate and the role that student affairs professionals and staff play within the integration process. In fact, international graduate students struggle to
integrate into campus, both socially and academically. Higher education institutions and their student affairs must provide adequate support and services to facilitate the integration of international graduate students into campus.

**Methods Overview**

I conducted an instrumental case study of one university to understand the perspectives of student affairs professional about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. In a single instrumental qualitative case study, the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue (Stake, 1995).

An instrumental qualitative case study approach was the best approach to my study because I focused on a specific issue, which is the strategies used by student affairs professionals and staff to integrate international graduate students on campus (Stake, 1995). It allowed me to focus on a specific four-year higher education institution committed to internationalization, located in the mid-western of the United States (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Moreover, I wanted to gain a deep understanding of the ways student affairs professionals and staff integrate international graduate students within a specific campus (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005; Woodside, 2010; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2009).

The sample consisted of 10-15 entry and mid-level student affairs professionals and staff who interact with international graduate students early in their integration process. An in-depth semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions, document analysis and site observations were used to get the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international students on campus, the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. Semi-structured
interviews were used because it was a conversational way to offer student affairs professionals and staff the opportunity to express themselves and share with me what they do and think, as it pertains to international graduate students’ integration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, semi-structured interviews call for the use of probes, and I used probes to expand my interviewees’ responses and cover various issues of my study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Chapter 1 Closure

Every year, thousands of students decide to study out of their home country (Institute of International Education, 2018). Their educational journey is filled with challenges and needs that institutions and their student affairs try to meet by providing support services and engaging, involving and integrating these students on campus. The next chapter looked deeper at the literature that has addressed internationalization, international students, student integration, and student affairs professionals and staff.
CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the literature on globalization and internationalization of higher education. The literature review began with an overview of internationalization of higher education. It then continued with an overview of international students in the U.S., international graduate students’ experiences in American higher education, the support services for international graduate students, international graduate students’ integration experiences, and I also discussed theories of student integration and departure. The last part of this literature review covered the student affairs and internationalization.

**Internationalization of Higher Education**

Globalization is a complex term and scholars have not been able to agree on a single definition. However, the definition I used for this study is:

The inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before, in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before. (Friedman, 2000, p. 14)

Friedman’s (2000) definition of globalization explicitly encompasses the integration and partnership opportunities between people and countries by controlling cost, goods and services. Hence, globalization creates new types of institutions that aim to address bilateral issues of countries—such as trade, foreign direct investment, short-term capital flows, knowledge, movements of workers, and political cooperation—by dismantling borders between nations and people (Hall et al., 2018). This definition focuses on the economic and cultural aspects of globalization.
The Internet and the accessibility and affordability of personal computers and phones have dramatically influenced the globalization of our era (Friedman, 2005). The Internet has allowed countries and organizations to access information and address global issues such as famine, environmental protection, and epidemics. E-commerce has provided organizations the opportunity to reach millions of new consumers in the emerging market economies of Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Borcuch et al., 2012). In recent years, I have witnessed how the Internet has been used as a communication tool for democratic movements that are intended to improve governance in countries such as Libya, Tunisia, DR Congo and Morocco. The Internet has dramatically increased people’s ability to instantly communicate and share knowledge and skills with other people around the world (Borcuch et al., 2012).

In the context of higher education, globalization has led to the incorporation of a more global, international, and intercultural dimension into the mission, philosophy, teaching, learning, research and services of higher education (Knight, 2004; Sullivan, 2011). Therefore, Internationalization is an instrument of globalization. Today, higher education institutions around the world are internationalizing their campuses as a response to globalization (Altbach, 2013; Jibeen, 2015), which is challenging their core mission and goals (Altbach, 2013). The term internationalization is understood and used differently, based on the needs of each institution (Knight, 2004). While most people believe that internationalization means having international students on campus (Knight, 2015), this literature review provided evidence that internationalization is a broad process that encompasses change in the curriculum and teaching, as well as the mission and goals of education. International students are just one of the forces of internationalization that higher education institutions use to internationalize (Jibeen, 2015; Wihlborg & Robson, 2018).
Higher education institutions are accelerating their internationalization process. In order to reach their internationalization goals, higher education institutions and administrators rely on student affairs professionals and staff, and student services personnel to better serve and help both domestic and international students develop intercultural competencies (Di Maria, 2012). From the perspective of student affairs, internationalization implies a new set of responsibilities and services, and changes in their roles (Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018). For example, regarding the responsibilities and services, student affairs professionals and staff have to organize specific events, such as orientation, for international students and include them in other activities that are predominantly organized for and attended by domestic students. They also have to adjust services and programs or co-curriculum to meet the needs of international students (Ward, 2017). One of the goals in adjusting these services and programs is to create an inclusive environment where both domestic and international students can interact and develop intercultural awareness (Braskamp, 2009; Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018).

Internationalization for student affairs also implies changes in their role. They become facilitators of the interaction between international students, domestic students, and faculty (Ward, 2017). This new role usually leads them to assess both international and domestic students’ experiences. Besides, as facilitator of international experiences, student affairs professionals and staff need to have intercultural skills and aptitudes to better influence campus internationalization, either through policy or programs (Osfield, 2008).

Indeed, higher education institutions around the world are constantly using internationalization as a tool to improve their quality and prestige (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004, 2015). They are building unique and sophisticated infrastructures. They are also creating study abroad programs and partnerships with institutions
across the world (Knight, 2015). All these efforts are responses to globalization, and they mostly help higher education institutions to remain competitive and attract more international and domestic students (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; Sullivan, 2011).

Although attracting international students is one of the most used strategies of internationalization (Knight, 2004), some scholars have provided some disadvantages of internationalization of higher education, such as competition for scholarships, on-campus jobs, and higher grades between both domestic and international students (Lambert & Usher, 2013). However, the literature available on internationalization of higher education asserts that there are many more advantages than disadvantages (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Jibeen, 2015; Knight, 2004, 2018; Wihlborg & Robson, 2018).

The benefits of internationalization higher education are characterized in three specific areas: individual, college, and university (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004). At the individual level, all students benefit from internationalization when they obtain knowledge and skills that allow them to compete and become efficient workers in the global market. At the college level, the internationalization of curriculum allows student to consider study abroad and enhances intercultural awareness and understanding. At the university level, internationalization improves the ranking and reputation of the institution (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004). Both reputation and ranking are crucial in attracting international and domestic students (Lambert & Usher, 2013). However, it is crucial to understand why most higher education institutions internationalize.

Rationales for the Internationalization of Higher Education

The traditional rationales behind the internationalization of higher education institutions have been social/cultural, political, academic, and economic (de Wit, 1995; Knight & de Wit,
1997, 1999). However, the increasing level of competition between higher education institutions has created another important rationale, which is branding, also known as international reputation (Knight, 2004). According to Knight (2004), this rationale is leading higher education institutions to seek accreditation from international accreditation bodies.

Higher education institutions use internationalization as a mechanism to introduce their students to the world’s global market and raise socio-cultural awareness in the community (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004). The Association of International Educators (NAFSA) (2010) reported that “by strong margins, Americans were clear: international education is critically important. Without it, the graduates of the future will be at a disadvantage in their careers and will find themselves lacking the skills to thrive in the global workplace” (p. 1). The same report found that 73% of participants believed that America’s higher education institutions must do a better job of teaching students about the world if they are to be prepared to compete in the global economy.

In order to successfully thrive in a world that has become global, students should have extensive knowledge on different regions of the world, its people, politics, and cultures (Sullivan, 2011). Internationalization helps provide both domestic and international graduate students the skills to understand, analyze, and evaluate the world and their knowledge (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges [NASULGC], 2004). Internationalization also provides institutions adequate environments that should prepare their students to be productive in a more economically, socially and culturally diverse world. Knight (2004) believed that if students are exposed to international education or experiences, it will be much easier for them to undertake and solve global issues. Moreover, internationalization efforts that aim at attracting bright scholars from the world and encourage collaboration between
faculty, scholars and institutions positively affect competitiveness and strengthen U.S. campus colleges (NASULGC, 2004).

The landscape of higher education is changing rapidly as the result of fierce competition between institution and technology advancement (Knight, 2015; Staley & Trinkle, 2011). This situation requires institutions and researchers to review the rationales for their internationalization. Knight (2015) provided new driving rationales that incorporated some of the traditional ones, which are: national level rationales, human resources development, strategic alliances, commercial trade, nation building, social and cultural development, institutional-level rationales, international profile and reputation, student and staff development, income generation, strategic alliances, research, and knowledge production. Since people have different interpretations of these rationales, I should note that they could change over time and vary by institution (de Wit, 2002; Shaydorova, 2014). Even though higher education institutions use many of these rationales to justify their internationalization efforts, they still face challenges in the process.

**Challenges of Internationalization in Higher Education**

Higher education institutions in the U.S. are embracing internationalization. Despite all their efforts to internationalize, higher education institutions are facing challenges to integrate international dimensions into their missions, goals, teaching and services (Zolfaghari et., 2009). Those challenges can occur either at the individual or at the institutional level. It is therefore imperative for educational leaders and other stakeholders in each institution to identify their own challenges and use effective strategies to facilitate the internationalization process (Saat, 2007; Zolfaghari et al., 2009).

The individual or stakeholders’ challenges of internationalization of higher education include negative attitudes from stakeholders, lack of incentives, lack of competence, lack of
knowledge and expertise, and lack of international socio-cultural awareness (Kezar, 2009; Knight, 2007). These individual challenges are mostly the results of pre-conceived perceptions of stakeholders regarding internationalization. For example, some stakeholders believe that undertaking internationalization may negatively affect their institution by bringing changes in their core values (de Wit, 2013; Larbi & Fu, 2017; Zolfaghari et al., 2009).

The institution itself has different challenges associated with internationalization (Saat, 2007). The challenges of internationalization for higher education institutions include limited financial resources to support internationalization initiatives, lack of strategy on the institutional level and national level, and limited faculty and student affairs involvement in the process (Altbach & Peterson, 1998; Knight, 2007). Based on these challenges, it is imperative for educational institutions’ leaders to be more responsible for addressing these issues and undertaking change initiatives that might help solve them.

Challenges of internationalization are unique to each institution. The location, mission, goals, culture and context play a crucial role in the challenges of an institution (Kezar, 2001, 2009). What one institution considers challenges may not be for another institution (Saat, 2007). For example, a lower-funded institution in the Midwest that has culturally aware student affairs professionals and staff and faculty may find it easier to internationalize compared to a highly funded institution in the South.

**Strategies of Internationalization**

Each higher education institution adopts internationalization strategies that reflect its mission, goals, culture and context (Cantu, 2013). For example, if an institution has a decline in enrollment and desires to ensure financial stability, it may use the recruitment of international students as a strategy for internationalization. To provide both domestic students and the campus
community an opportunity to interact with students from different cultural backgrounds and improve their curriculum, institutions may recruit international students, send domestic students abroad, and embark faculty and student affairs professionals and staff on cultural trips in other countries (Knight, 2004; Zolfaghari et al., 2009).

Strategies of internationalization in higher education are described as a set of activities that seek to integrate a global perspective into research, teaching, service functions, management policies and systems (Knight, 2004). Other strategies of internationalization include the recruitment of international students and faculty, study abroad programs, internationalization of faculty, development of knowledge and skills, and the infusion of intercultural and international initiative (Cantu, 2013). The recruitment of international students is one of the most common strategies of internationalization. It is crucial to involve international students themselves and key stakeholders, such as student affairs professionals and staff, with inter-cultural knowledge or experience into the design and implementation of internationalization strategies (Agarwal et al., 2007; Ginkel & Seddoh, 2002; Knight, 2012).

**International Students in the United States**

The U.S. remains the top host country of international students in the world. The number of international students in the U.S. has declined by 1.8%, resulting in 1,075,496 international students during 2019/2020 (Institute of International Education, 2020). Of all these international students 427,313 are undergraduate, 383,935 graduate, 85,09 non-degree, and 147,498 optional practical training students. The Institute of International Education (2020) attributes this decrease to the COVID-19 virus and President Trump’s immigration policy that prevents people from certain countries to enter the U.S., high tuition rates and fewer scholarships for international students, the rise in mass shootings, and the effort of other countries such as Canada, the United
International students in the U.S. are from both English-speaking and non-English speaking countries around the world. For the third consecutive year, the country with most international students in the U.S. is China, followed by India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada (Institute of International Education, 2020). These countries account for over 60% of international students in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2020). Table 1 illustrates the countries of origin of international students in the U.S. during 2016/2017 and 2017/2018.

Table 1. Places of Origin of International Students in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th># of Int’l Students</th>
<th>% per country</th>
<th># of Int’l Students</th>
<th>% per country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>363,341</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>372,532</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>196,271</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>193,124</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>54,555</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>49,809</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>44,432</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>30,957</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>25,909</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>25,992</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Created using data from the Institute of International Education Open Doors’ (2020) report.*
International students have studied in all regions and states in the U.S. but tend to be highly concentrated in certain states and cities. The Institute of International Education (2020) ranked states and the percentage of international students each of them hosts. California was the first, followed by New York, Texas, Massachusetts, and Illinois. Most higher education institutions in the U.S. have welcomed international students, even though not all of them have had great success at attracting these students. In terms of higher education institutions hosting international students, New York University ranked first, followed by Northeastern University-Boston, the University of Southern California, Columbia University, and Arizona State University – Tempe (Institute of International Education, 2018). The presence of these students on American campuses can produce great benefits.

**Advantages of International Students on Campus**

The presence of international students has both economic and academic impact throughout the country (Knight, 2015). According to the U.S Department of Commerce, international students contributed more than $42.4 billion to the U.S economy in 2017 (Institute of International Education, 2018). International students bring international perspectives into the classrooms and the sharing of ideas allows American students to prepare for global careers and long-term business relationships (Campbell, 2012; Grayson, 2008; Knight, 2015). Their presence also affects student affairs professionals and staff members’ work and work environment (Di Maria, 2012). In a qualitative study that aimed at analyzing the level of internationality of nonacademic staff and its effects on internationalization activities in German Higher Education Institutions, Brandenburg (2016) found that internationalization activities influenced personality traits; attitudes and competences; and work environment of non-academic staff. For example, student affairs professionals and staff with no or little intercultural experiences and competencies
to serve international students change their perspectives on international students, attend intercultural training sessions to be able to help these students, and add multi-cultural items or artifacts in their offices to show that they care about this category of students and are available for them.

The presence of international students, especially graduate-level students, helps fill research assistant positions, helps faculty establish ties, and provides domestic students and faculty an opportunity to better understand the perceptions of international students and their life conditions (Trice, 2003). The interactions between international students, faculty, domestic students, and staff influence the educational experience of international students (Fallon & Brown, 1999). Since my study seeks the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff in integrating international graduate students into campus, I next address the experiences of this category of students.

**International Graduate Students’ Experiences in American Higher Education**

International students are a unique and extremely diverse population. Most studies mainly focus on international undergraduate students or group all international students together, despite differing levels of studies (undergraduate vs. graduate), places of origin, or socio-cultural backgrounds (Ammigan & Jones, 2018). Although international students may share some similarities in their collegiate experiences, there are differences.

Common challenges of international students include issues with language, communication, and socio-cultural and academic adaptation (Young, 2017). However, international graduate students have specific needs and challenges such graduate level of English fluency, research and publication, socio-cultural and academic integration, career, finance, curriculum relevancy, and graduation (Gareis, 2012; Guo & Chase, 2011; Trice, 2003, 2004,
2005, 2007; Womujuni, 2007). For the sake of this study, I categorized the experiences of international graduate students into language and academic, cultural, and social challenges.

**Language and Academic Challenges**

Language is one of the biggest challenges that international graduate students face (Trice & Eun, 2007; Womujuni, 2007; Young, 2017). This lack of language proficiency from international graduate students is a barrier towards their successful integration in the classroom and the community. In a study that described academic staff opinions about working with non-UK postgraduate students in higher education, Fallon and Brown (1999) found that 87% of faculty considered the language capabilities of international students to be a problem, and 56% of faculty found cultural differences to be a problem. The same result was reported by Ramsay, Barker and Jones (1999) who found that understanding lectures, including professors and teaching assistants speaking too quickly and with unfamiliar jargon, was reported as being especially challenging (p. 108). These challenges could cause international students to be silent in class discussions and affect their overall educational experiences (Akanwa, 2015; Almurideef, 2016; Harman, 2003; Trice & Eun, 2007; Young, 2014).

Trice and Eun (2007) examined the academic experiences of 497 international graduate students studying at an American university and found that most students viewed their academic experience positively, although a majority did not believe their curriculum had an international focus. They also learned that 77% of international graduate students felt prepared to work in their home country following graduation, but only 32% planned to return home immediately after completing their degrees. These results are similar to those of Harman (2003), who found that 69% of international doctoral students had a high degree of satisfaction with their overall experience, but they were somewhat less satisfied (55%) with the help they received in designing
their doctoral research project. These findings led researchers to seek to understand the level of satisfaction of international graduate students with their educational experiences and programs (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; Goodwin & Nacht, 1984; Han et al., 2015; Mehra, 2004; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Trice & Eun, 2007).

In order to understand the factors of this positive satisfaction of international graduate students towards their educational experiences, Perrucci and Hu (1995) conducted a quantitative study, with approximately 600 international graduate students at a large American university. These authors found that self-esteem, contact with American students, freedom from discrimination, and favorable attitudes of American people toward their home country were statistically significant predictors of students’ academic satisfaction.

The relevancy of the curriculum towards their career goals and expectations is another challenge of international graduate students. In order to address curriculum relevancy from the perspective of international graduate students, Goodwin and Nacht (1984) surveyed Brazilian students who had returned to their home country after graduating from American higher education institutions. These authors found that graduate-level alumni from business, technical and semi-professional fields, and those with doctoral training in the hard sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities, all wished they had received more internationally focused training, or they experienced frustration because they could not continue their line of research at home due to a lack of facilities or funding. Only the doctoral graduates believed they were equipped to adapt their new knowledge to the Brazilian context. Most international students attend graduate school to advance in their careers (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Shen & Herr, 2004). These students expect their programs and curriculum to meet their needs, career goals and the requirements of the work market. Apart from the language and academic challenges, which
affect the academic experiences of international graduate students in the U.S, these students also face cultural challenges that are as important as academic issues.

**Cultural Challenges**

International graduate students also face cultural challenges throughout their academic journey in the U.S. Mehra (2004) examined the process by which international doctoral students acculturated, learned, and adapted to their new campus. He found that factors such as pre-existing social and cultural backgrounds, prior educational experiences, assumptions, learning experiences and prior classes taken, affected the experience of international graduate students. The international graduate students interviewed expressed the need for past cultural experiences of students, such as culture related learning habits, to be associated to their present and future cross-cultural learning process. In essence, Mehra (2004) noted “that past cultural experiences shape both participants’ pasts and futures” (p. 118).

The acculturation process is another element that affects the experience of international graduate students. Gonzales (2006) found that “several interconnected components converge to characterize the acculturation experience of international graduate students” (p. 59). These components are language proficiency, social support, cultural learning and individual growth. Huxur et al. (1996) examined how foreign graduate students at U.S. and Canadian universities adapted to their new institutions. Huxur et al. found that international graduate students still encountered a great deal of culture shock and a feeling of social loss. International graduate students have different expectations, and they feel out of place and live in social isolation (Chung, 2004; Constantine et al., 2005; Gonzales, 2006; Womujuni, 2007). International graduate students feel more affinity with other international students than with Americans (Rose-Redwood & Rose Redwood, 2013; Trice, 2007). This lack of interaction with domestic students
has an impact on international graduate students’ overall acculturation process and it may also create social challenges.

**Social Challenges**

The lack of social support can be detrimental to the social success of an international graduate student. Although personal loneliness (loss of familial contact) and social loneliness (loss of social networks) are commonly understood and anticipated, international graduate students also recognized cultural loneliness, based on an absence of their familiar cultural and/or linguistic environment (Lee, 2014, p. 108). International graduate students who do not have a strong social support system are less likely to adjust to college life and experience feelings of anxiety, depression, and alienation (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; Hagedorn & Ren, 2012; Han et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2005). International graduate students are not often on campus due to their many responsibilities beyond classes, which in turn affect their ability to form friendships and participate in subcultural communities (De Araujo, 2011; Trice, 2003; Trice & Eun, 2007). Other variables that contribute to the difficulties that international students experience include: limited English fluency, length of stay in the U.S., perceived discrimination or prejudice, homesickness, and establishing relationships with Americans (De Araujo, 2011).

International graduate students prefer to interact with co-nationals and other international students than their domestic peers. Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) studied the social interaction patterns among 60 international graduate students at a large research university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States and the authors articulated four primary types of social interactions that shape international graduate students experiences at U.S. higher education institutions: self-segregation, exclusive global mixing, inclusive global mixing, and host interaction. Self-segregators refer to those who experienced negative encounters with domestic
students on campus, which often involved a language barrier, and as a result, they become more attached to students who shared their own national and cultural background (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Global mixers are international graduate students who had travelled to at least two other countries prior to engaging in study on their host campus, spoke English relatively well, despite their accent, and socially interacted with international students from other countries. Inclusive global mixers are international graduate students who socially interact with co-nationals, other internationals, and host nationals, whereas host interactors are the ones who interact with American host nationals along with a few co-nationals from their home countries.

The lack of interaction or friendship between international graduate students and their domestic peers impedes both their language improvement and excellence in academic performance, and integration (Gareis, 2012; Young, 2014). Moreover, it increases the feeling of discrimination between international graduate students and their domestic counterparts.

International graduate students experience discrimination from their domestic peers. In a study that scrutinized 188 American students’ negative attitudes toward international students, Charles-Toussaint and Crowson (2010) found that American students worry that international students pose threats to their economic, education, physical well-being, beliefs, values, and their social status from anti-immigrant prejudice. The lack of intercultural communication between domestic and international students can be one of the causes of this anxiety, vice versa. However, other studies have reported a positive attitude of domestic students towards their international peers, despite the language and cultural differences. For example, the British Council (2014) found that overall, most domestic students had positive perceptions of their international student peers and their experiences. Of the domestic students surveyed in the study, 74% perceived that international students were welcomed at their host institutions, 44% reported that they had
international friends, and 76% believed that it was everyone’s responsibility to make international students feel welcomed. These studies show that social support is crucial to the success of international graduate students in their new educational environment.

All of these challenges that international graduate students experience during their educational journey have potentially negative impacts on their academic and social achievement, and both mental and physical health (Kilinc & Granello, 2003; Robinson-Pant, 2009; Trice & Eun, 2007). Moreover, they affect international students’ level of satisfaction with cross cultural experience and attitudes towards the host nations, throughout the acculturation process (Lee & Rice, 2007; Trice & Eun, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial that the institution, faculty, and student affairs professionals and staff provide adequate support to facilitate the transition and integration of international graduate students (Di Maria, 2012; Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007).

Support Services for International Graduate Students

Each higher education institution is structured differently and the support system for students that each has in place depends on the missions and goals of the institution, the needs or challenges of each category of students (domestic, international, undergraduate and graduate), and the campus community (Bartram, 2008). Even though the structure and organization of support system for international students vary in role, function, department and type of institution, each higher education institution has student service offices that focus on students’ academic, cultural, and social transition to campus (Arthur, 2017). These offices provide support services such as immigration, academic, career and employment, financial, student disability and personal issues, and hosting social and cultural programs that help with the transition and integration process of international graduate students on campus (Kelo et al., 2010; Perez-Encinas & Ammigan, 2016).
The role of all these offices is to serve all students, but student affairs professionals and staff view the international office as the primary provider of services for international students (Di Maria, 2012; Hammer, 1992). However, the international students’ office can also have the effect of reinforcing the segregation of international graduate students from the broader campus community (Hammer, 1992; Samano, 2012). To avoid this segregation and ensure that the whole campus participates in the well-being of international graduate students, higher education institutions have the obligation to promote all support services available during orientation events.

Some of the challenges and needs of international graduate students are different compared to those of their undergraduate counterparts (Trice, 2003). The international students’ office alone cannot help international graduate students with all of these challenges (Hammer, 1992; Samano, 2012). Despite the role of the international students’ office in offering specialized services, its advisors are limited by mission, resources and areas of professional expertise (Hammer, 1992). It has been more than 25 years since Hammer published his results. Nevertheless, a lot has not changed, and researchers are still calling for a collaboration between international student offices and other student affairs units (Di Maria, 2012; Samano, 2012). A lack of intercultural competencies in some higher education institutions is not helping.

Some student affairs professionals and staff lack intercultural competencies, which impede them from providing good and effective services to international graduate students (Di Maria, 2012). International students often receive less help than domestic students despite paying more for their educational experience and their integration. Their acculturation to the larger campus and local community has become an issue and challenge at many U.S. universities (Choudaha & Hu, 2016). The increased immigration regulations implemented by the United
States’ Government since the 9/11 terrorist attack have created a need for more services for international graduate students.

The educational experience of international graduate students depends on all campus services. Institutional support services are crucial to the academic and social experiences of international graduate students (Cho & Yu, 2015; Wang, 2009). It is therefore crucial for student affairs services and professionals—such as admission, residence and housing, career and counseling, dining, multicultural, recreation, and academic staff—to collaborate with one another and international services to effectively integrate international graduate students in their campus community (Kelo et al., 2010; Nuss, 2003).

**International Graduate Students’ Integration Experiences**

Integration is an intentional process to create community, through encouraging both domestic and international students to engage with one another in continuous interaction, distinguished by mutual respect, responsibility, action, and commitment (Young, 2014). Higher education institutions have the responsibility to help integrate international graduate students by ensuring interaction with faculty, student affairs professionals and staff, and domestic students (Grayson, 2008). Yet, there is often little contact between international graduate and domestic students (Arthur, 2017; Trice, 2003; Young, 2014), which inhibits social and academic integration of international graduate students. This lack of social and academic integration has a great impact to the overall performance and experience of international graduate students (Rienties et al., 2011; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013).

Studies conducted in American universities and other parts of the world found that many international graduate students struggle to integrate to the social and academic lives of their campus (Arthur, 2017; British Council, 2014; Burdett & Crossman, 2012; Gareis, 2012; Harper
& Quaye, 2009; Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 1998; Trice, 2003, 2007). Arthur (2017) explained that one of the ways for international students to foster a sense of connectedness and belonging and improve academic performance in the host university is to socially integrate with local students. International students who had friendships with host nationals have stronger language skills, better academic performance, lower levels of stress and greater life satisfaction (Gareis, 2012). The British Council (2014) said that often the academic success of international students could be dependent upon their integration into the local and domestic student communities. Both academic and social integration have a great influence on the persistence and study performance of international students (Baker & Siryk, 1999; Rienties et al., 2011; Tinto, 1975).

In order for students to graduate, they must persist, participate, and immerse themselves within and outside of the learning environment (Tinto, 1998). Severiens and Wolff (2008) discovered that historically marginalized students, including international students, who feel at home, who are well connected to other students and faculty and who participate in extra-curricular activities are more likely to graduate. Moreover, social support by family and friends (i.e., social networks of students) has a positive influence on the study-success of international students (Wilcox et al., 2005).

The participation of international graduate students in campus social activities also has a positive influence on their wellbeing, sense of belonging and connectedness (Cigognani et al., 2008; Trice, 2003, 2007). The interaction between international graduate students, domestic students, faculty and staff is key to their integration on campus and college experience. Similarly, Arthur (2017) identified three resources that facilitate the transition and integration of international students on campus, which are: 1) academic faculty, 2) counsellors, and 3) domestic
students. These resources are important to the integration of international graduate students, but there is a lack of interactions between faculty members and international graduate students.

Faculty members also play a crucial role in the transition and academic integration of international students. However, the literature strongly suggests that the relationship between faculty and international students has never been easy. For example, in a study that explored the experiences of international students at a U.S. research university, Lee and Rice (2007) found that faculty made negative comments about international students’ home countries or culture during class and sometimes engaged in verbal or sexual harassment. Lee and Rice’s findings corroborate with the ones of Nguyen (2013), who reported faculty concern about graduate students’ silence regarding their needs and challenges in the classroom and their reluctance to meet with faculty whenever needed. In order to gather international students’ perspectives on their relationships with faculty, Mukminin and McMahon (2013) explored the lived experience of academic engagement of 12 Indonesian doctoral students attending an American graduate school. They found that international graduate students were reluctant to approach faculty for their academic problems, despite office hours and other opportunities offered. The reason for this reluctance was that international graduate students were unfamiliar with the nature of relationships between faculty and student. Another factor that affects both academic and social integration of international graduate students is their interactions with domestic students.

The quality of international graduate students’ integration experiences is strongly influenced by their interactions with domestic students (Arthur, 2017). Having many friends sharing accommodation with other students, being member of a study association, student organization or sports club is crucial for social integration (Trice, 2007; Kashima & Loh, 2006). This friendship and the engagement of international graduate students allow international
graduate students to become attached and be part of their campus social life (Nguyen, 2013; Severiens & Wolff, 2008). However, the literature notes a lack of interactions between international graduate students and their domestic peers (Arthur, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013; Wilcox et al., 2005).

This lack of interaction is the result of factors such as cultural differences in leisure time; unresponsiveness of local students; local students’ lack of interest in extending their social circles; negative perceptions and intolerance of international students in general; and international graduate students’ preference to interact only with co-nationals and other international students (Arthur, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Trice (2007) noted interactions with local students strongly impacted the quality of international graduate students’ experiences. However, language barriers, diverse cultural norms, and time to engage in social activities also surfaced as barriers for social interactions between local and international students. In a qualitative report that explored best practices for integrating international and domestic students, Young (2014) found that building relationships with students of different cultures was one of the greatest challenges, even though this relationship is one of the responses to the “extreme loneliness of being an international student and the need for empathetic support” (p. 95). Other studies have found positive results of the interaction between domestic and international graduate students.

For example, in a study that sought to understand the ways to foster host national and international students’ friendship, Gareis (2012) found that international graduate students who had friendships with host nationals had stronger language skills, better academic performance, lower levels of stress and greater life satisfaction. Gareis also found that international graduate students who were well integrated were more likely to participate in the classroom, which in turn
enriches the educational experiences of domestic students’ and advances international perspectives on campus. In a report that examined UK students’ perceptions on the integration of international students, the British Council (2014) also found that many domestic students enjoyed sharing experiences with international students both within and outside the classroom. However, UK students who reported that international students were welcomed were those who had international friends or intercultural awareness. Similarly, in a qualitative case study that explored domestic student interactions with and perceptions of international students, Schreiber (2011) found that domestic students viewed the presence of international students on their campus positively. These students considered international students as hard working, school centered, academically oriented, valuing education and taking their studies seriously. Knowing that the interaction between international graduate students and their domestic peers is key to international graduate students’ integration, higher education institutions and their student affairs professionals, staff and services should create opportunities for these two categories of students to connect.

Theories of Student Integration and Departure

Tinto (1975, 1987, & 1993) proposed the Theory of Student Departure, also known as the Theory of Student Integration, to explain the rationale for students’ departure or persistence in higher education. Tinto argued that students’ departure or persistence is the result of their interactions with their new educational community. These interactions between students and the campus community, which includes faculty, staff or student affairs, are crucial to the academic and social integration of students, which in turn determines their persistence and graduation (1993). Tinto’s Theory of Student Integration was supported by Astin’s (1984, 1999) Theory of Involvement. Astin (1999) argued that students learn by becoming involved and their level of
involvement reduced the likelihood of drop out. Like Tinto (1993), Astin believed that pre-existing college experiences were key to students’ persistence. He therefore suggested pre-existing college experiences that affect persistence, which are: a) experiences within the classroom, b) academic advising, c) the living environment, d) financial support, e) extracurricular activities, and f) faculty involvement (Astin, 1984).

When international graduate students enter a new educational environment, they bring with them their pre-existing socio-cultural and academic experiences (Mehra, 2004). This category of students faces some different challenges than some international undergraduate and most domestic students, which negatively affect their overall campus integration (Almurideef, 2016; Hegarty, 2014; Schreiber, 2011). Tinto (1998) attributed these students’ difficulty to integrate to their inability to dissociate themselves from their pre-existing experiences and challenges. He believed that integration could be possible if students detached from their own culture and embraced the one of their new campus community. However, separating from prior experiences is very hard for students from different cultures, languages, countries of origin, and nontraditional students (Yao, 2016). This lack of considerations for students from different cultures, languages, countries and learning environment, including online students, has brought criticisms to Tinto’s Theory of Integration.

Some critics argued that Tinto (1975) placed full responsibility for integration on the students and less on the institution. Instead, they believe the institution should strive to create a supportive environment that fosters student interactions and development, particularly for students from historically underrepresented groups (Kuh & Love 2000; Rendón et., 2000; Tierney 1992, 2000). Tierney (2000) refuted Tinto’s idea that underrepresented students should abandon their pre-existing cultural backgrounds to integrate into their new campus environment.
He considered Tinto’s approach to be a difficult mission because these students may not be able to assimilate into the dominant culture due to the pressure of severe cultural ties with their home culture, which in turn negatively influences their integration.

Another criticism of Tinto’s theory is that it is applicable only to traditional residential students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton et al., 2000; Rovai, 2002). Bean and Metzner (1985) proposed their own model of student persistence. They argued that Tinto’s model: a) did not explain retention or persistence for students who were over 24 years old, b) did not live on campus or were not full-time students, c) did not fully account for those students who do not particularly wish to become involved in the social aspects of student life, d) and for whom the greatest concern about the university they attend is what it can offer them, academically speaking (pp. 485-530). The rationale for this argument was that most students have a fairly similar type of support system and classmates, while non-traditional students have a very different form of support system, which may include friends and family outside of the campus environment (Bean & Metzner, 1985; McCubbin, 2003).

Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 1998) Theory of Departure or Integration tried to explain overall student persistence patterns. However, it failed to address the persistence patterns of some student populations, including international graduate students, because these students’ entire experience of higher education is different from that of domestic students and international undergraduate students (McCubbin, 2003). The few studies addressing the retention and integration of international students focused on undergraduate or international students in general (Yao, 2016).

For example, Yao (2016) analyzed Tinto’s (1993) Theory of Integration and provided three reasons why this theory was biased. The first rationale was that the idea of international
students assimilating to the dominant culture is problematic since they are mostly seen as the other “on college campuses.” Second, Tinto’s (1993) idea of integration put all the burden of integration on students rather than on all the members of the campus community. The third rationale was that it is difficult for international students to separate from their own culture and embrace the ones of the new community.

Despite all of these criticisms of Tinto’s theory of student integration, it is still the most widely used theory to explain why students leave or persist and graduate in higher education. Many authors have adapted Tinto’s theory to explain the internationalization of campus or the integration and retention of international undergraduate and graduate students on campus (British Council, 2014; Grayson, 2008; Guo & Chase, 2011; Kahu, 2013; Urban & Palmer, 2014; Wan, 2001; Young, 2014). The integration of international graduate students is a collaborative process, which requires the involvement all higher education institution’s stakeholders, including student affairs professionals and staff (Coates, 2007).

The use of student integration theories in this study provides a complex and comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of student affair professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus. Moreover, they provide me with different lenses through which I will look at the complex issue of integration for international graduate students. They will also allow me to focus on multiple and different facets of data and provide a framework that I will use to conduct the analysis.

The adapted theories of student’s integration, which I will use in this study, posit that educational institutions should strive to create a supportive environment that fosters student interactions and development, particularly for underrepresented or international students (Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendón., 2000; Tierney 1992, 2000). They put the burden of integration on both
students and the campus community. Therefore, to gain a deep understanding of the integration of international graduate students into campus, I chose to interview student affair professionals and staff, who are part of the campus community. Since I will listen to the words and experiences of student affairs professionals and staff, I will use an inductive thematic analysis approach to ensure that my analysis and finding are rooted in the data obtained from student affairs professionals and staff interviewed. The data and the result of the analysis will be connected to the theories of integration, which may generate a new theoretical proposition or extend the initial theories. Those theories have shaped the design of this study. The research questions and strategies of data collection are based on the literature and the theories of student integration.

**Student Affairs and Internationalization**

The structure of a student affairs division or department depends on the size, type, location, mission, and goals of the institution. It is important to contextualize the study to participants’ titles and roles, and to the institution where the study will be conducted. The rationale for this strategy is that the titles and roles of student affairs professionals and staff in the targeted institution may differ from the ones in another institution.

The contributions of student affairs professionals and staff are key to the internationalization of higher education. Over the past three decades, higher education institutions committed to internationalization have involved student affairs professionals and staff in international travel, professional collaboration and exchange, and worldwide communication (Osfield, 2008). However, student affairs professionals and staff may view themselves as not having the necessary knowledge, understanding, and tools to engage with
international education issues, and facilitate the international experiences of all students (Mazon, 2010). In this section, I address the role of student affairs professionals and staff.

The Role of Student Affairs Professionals and Staff

There is no singular path to becoming a student affair professional or staff because there are many roles in the field. However, the majority of positions require at least a master’s degree in any fields close to educational development or leadership. Upper management positions, such as dean, provost, etc., usually require a doctoral degree (Mouris, 2018). Therefore, it is common to have someone with a degree in a field not related to educational development or leadership occupying a student affairs role or serve and develop student effectively (Martinez, 2017).

The role of student affairs is supportive, and its aim is developing college students as “whole people” both academically and professionally (Braskamp, 2011). They do so in helping students with academic and career advising, athletics, counseling, coaching and mentoring, financial aid advising, courses’ selection, graduation, student activities, student development, student life, and life skills training (Braskamp, 2011). Moreover, students’ interactions with student affairs are an opportunity for both students and student affairs professionals and staff to reinforce their international or global awareness (Clarke, 2016; Long, 2012).

Student affairs professionals and staff have ethical obligations to their institutions, and those ethical obligations involve upholding the mission and values (Di Maria, 2012). Creamer et al., (2001) stated that “student affairs professionals and staff include three principal roles: educator, leader, and manager” (p. 122). In their role of educators, student affairs professionals and staff “are responsible for being knowledgeable about higher education and the campus cultures in addition to being specialists in their unique professional roles” (Di Maria, 2012, p. 71). Student affairs professionals and staff occupy administrative and leadership positions within
the organization (Northouse, 2007), and they also possess skills or abilities to create and integrate a shared vision into the organization, to understand the culture of their organization, motivate others, and undertake change initiatives (Fullan, 2009; Senge, 2011). As a manager, student affairs professionals and staff oversee administrative functions within the institution.

Creamer et al. (2001) said that the management function of student affairs professionals and staff incorporates “institutional planning, human resources, assessment of programs and environment, budgeting and use of technology and information systems” (p. 23).

The roles of student affairs professionals and staff also imply the adaptation, accommodation, and integration of international students. However, the available literature suggests that student affairs professionals and staff are not prepared to serve international students (Burdzinski, 2014; Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011). In a study conducted by Di Maria (2012) that examined the factors affecting the views of campus services for international students among student affairs professionals in Ohio, 64% of student affairs professionals reported that their offices were not doing anything specific to accommodate the international student population, and they expressed their lack of intercultural awareness. Di Maria also found that student affairs professionals in different higher education institutions feel unprepared to work with the growing number of international students and have expressed the need for more training. In a qualitative study that explored the role student affairs professionals can play in campus internationalization efforts in a U.S. and Dutch higher education context, Mazon (2010) discovered that student affairs professionals do not view themselves as having adequate knowledge, understanding, and tools to engage with international education matters, much less facilitate internationalization experiences on behalf of students.
If student affairs professionals and staff possess intercultural awareness, their roles of serving students and institutions will be much more effective. It is therefore imperative for student affairs professionals and staff to be exposed to other cultures and consider their own role in working with students from different cultures. As Mazon (2010) noted, “by rethinking their roles as facilitators of internationalization experiences, and as professionals with global skills and aptitudes, student affairs professionals will have a greater capacity to influence campus internationalization policy and programs” (p. 205).

**Intercultural Competencies for Student Affairs Professionals**

Higher education institutions are embracing internationalization and one of the keys to the success of this process is the capacity of student affairs professionals and staff to create an educational environment that welcomes students from all over the world (Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018). Accepting and serving students from different cultures, countries and speaking different languages requires student affairs professionals and staff to be inter-culturally competent (Mangope & Major, 2014). According to Deardorff and Jones (2012), inter-cultural competence is related to internationalization at home, which focuses on the diversity and inclusion of the campus. On the other hand, Pope et., (2004) defined intercultural competence as “the awareness, knowledge and skills needed to work with others who are culturally different from self in meaning” (p. 13). Wallace (2000) stated that:

> inter-cultural competence involves an individual going beyond their possession of intercultural sensitivity to obtain acceptable level of knowledge, sufficient shift in attitude, and the production of a repertoire of behaviors consistent with successfully interacting with diverse populations in multicultural settings (p. 1101).
The focus of intercultural competence is on student affairs professionals and staff members’ knowledge, skills, and abilities to understand different cultures, and interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (Bennett, 2009a). Student affairs professionals and staff who possess intercultural competence have a great influence on the campus internationalization and the learning outcome of all students since there is a much better interaction between them (Di Maria, 2012).

Interacting with diverse populations requires student affairs professionals and staff to possess inter-cultural knowledge and skills. However, most higher education institutions and student affairs professionals and staff receive limited training for understanding the complexity of inter-cultural issues (Cierra, 2004; Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Pope et al., 2004). Di Maria (2012) found that communication barriers associated with culture and language as well as a lack of training opportunities available were the concern of student affairs professionals. In fact, the lack of training for student affairs leads to deficiencies in knowledge, skills, and awareness of unfamiliar cultures (Pope et al., 2004). In a study that discussed intercultural competence in student affairs in the University of Botswana, Major and Mangope (2004) stated that the lack of inter-cultural skills hinders student affairs professionals’ performance. This lack of inter-cultural competence for student affairs professionals led Ciera (2004) to wonder:

If a goal of student affairs professionals is to promote a diverse and inclusive environment on campus, how can decisions on programs, goals, and outreach be equitable if individuals in student affairs lack the knowledge, skills, and awareness of a diverse student body? (p. 3)

Although several studies highlight a lack of intercultural competence for student affairs professionals and staff and the lack of professional development for these stakeholders (Di
Maria, 2012; Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018), this should not infer that all student affairs professionals and staff lack these skills. Although there are institutions and student affairs professionals and staff who are competent and provide intercultural support to their student affairs professionals and staff (Ward, 2017), there is a definite need for better attention to intercultural competencies to ensure all students are served appropriately.

Another question that requires an answer is the types of knowledge, skills and attitudes inter-culturally competent student affair professionals and staff should possess. Yakaboski and Perozzi (2018) surveyed student affairs professionals about what knowledge, skills, and attitudes a globally competent student affairs professional should possess. Yakaboski and Perozzi found that student affairs professionals should be knowledgeable and skillful about general international higher education and student affairs issues; cross-cultural communication abilities; culturally appropriate and diverse advising and help skills; culturally relevant and internationally diverse programs, services, policies and practices, and global perspectives of higher education and student affairs (pp. 51-60).

The ways of thinking and doing of student affairs professionals and staff are also a key element of their inter-cultural competence. The respect of the uniqueness of various cultures; understanding one of one’s assumptions, biases, and identity; values both cultural similarities and differences, open to shifting one’s cultural perspectives based on context; recognition of power and privilege based on culture; reflection on one’s place in a global world; and curiosity about other cultures or countries (Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018). In a meta-analysis of 30 years of research that addressed the competencies of student affairs professionals, Lovell and Kosten (2000) found that the skills most lacking in competence in student affairs professionals were associated with multiculturalism, diversity and internationalization. In a mail survey of 81 chiefs
of student affairs officers, Herdlemin (2004) discovered that the most critical trait for success of student affairs practice included the ability to work with diverse populations.

The lack of appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes—also known as multi-cultural competence—may hinder the effectiveness of student affairs professionals and staff in accomplishing their duties, which include the integration of international graduate students (Sullivan, 2011). In turn, it may prevent international graduate students to fully integrate and use the resources available on their campus (Rienties et al., 2011).

The presence of international graduate students requires student affairs professionals and staff to add international or global dimension in their work culture, while most of them do not have international education experience or have never been abroad (Di Maria, 2012). Moreover, the work environment of student affairs professionals and staff changes much faster than the available staff development opportunities (Brandenburg, 2016). In order to close the multi-cultural gap of student affairs professionals and staff, higher education institutions may provide intercultural training opportunities to student affairs professionals and staff, encourage them to learn a language other than English and travel to other countries (Burdzinski, 2014). Other strategies may also be used to close this gap, but each institution should decide on which ones to adopt, based on its mission and goals.

Chapter 2 Closure

This chapter provided an overview of the literature on international students and student affairs professionals. It reviewed the internationalization of higher education, the experiences of international students, including their trends, challenges, and integration into campus, and student affairs professionals' role and multi-cultural competencies in serving international students. It also addressed institutions' responsibilities to provide resources needed by student
affairs professionals, the support staff, and the campus community to serve international graduate students better.

Higher education institutions in the United States are embarking on the road of internationalization, either abroad or at home, to build their reputation, become competitive in a more globalized education market, and increase revenue (Knight, 2004). Another primary reason these institutions internationalize is to offer their students, faculty, student affairs professionals, and staff an opportunity to acquire intercultural competence needed to work and live in a more globalized world (Knight, 2004). Often, many of these institutions' ambitions to internationalize are shattered by a lack of resources, competence, and readiness and involvement of the campus community to embark on the internationalization journey (Albatch & Knight, 2007).

The lack of resources, competence, and readiness, and involvement of the campus community in serving international graduate students are a few of the many reasons international graduate students do not effectively integrate into campus. Hence, internationalization in many of these institutions is summed up in slogans instead of incorporating the institution's mission, goals, culture, and context (Cantu, 2013). Student affairs professionals and support staff are crucial in developing, adjusting, and integrating international graduate students into campus. However, their limited intercultural competence and training opportunities may impede them from effectively serving and integrating international graduate students (Di Maria, 2012). Student affairs professionals and staff adapt existing programs and support services intentionally created for undergraduate students to serve international graduate students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to understand the perspectives of student affairs professional and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. Little empirical research has been conducted on the integration strategies for international graduate students, even as higher education institutions are recruiting more international graduate students as part of their campus internationalization. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do student affairs professionals and staff who work with international students view their role in integrating these students into a university campus?

2. What strategies, policies, services, and programs do student affairs professionals and staff deem most helpful to facilitate the integration of international graduate students?

3. What support and training do student affairs professionals and staff receive related to international graduate student integration?

This chapter described the research design and methods used for this study. The parts of this chapter are the following: research design or approach and rationale, reflection on my identity, participants, sample, and site, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and delimitations and limitations of the study.

Research Design, Approach and Rationale

I used qualitative inquiry as the methodology for this study. My goal was to understand the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other
elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. In order to get a deep understanding of those perspectives, I gave voice to student affairs professionals and staff, listened to their experiences and interpretation of events and activities related to the integration of international graduate students. A qualitative research study was the most suitable method to get an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon to answer the research questions, and it relied on the direct experiences of human beings (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, 2009).

The perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff were crucial for a deep understanding of their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. To obtain understanding, I focused on a specific higher education institution in the Midwestern United States (U.S.) that has committed to internationalization. I was not interested in evaluating student affairs professionals and staff members’ work but in understanding how they approach it. A case study is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit; and in which multiple sources of data is used” (Merriam, 1998, p. xii). In this study, interviews, site observations, and documents such as the students’ career guide, meeting minutes, invitation to ACE laboratory cohort, acceptance of ACE laboratory invitation, ACE laboratory self-study report, internationalization meeting agendas, internationalization laboratory peer review report, internationalization strategic plan, internationalization statistics, institution’s factsheet, international student statistics, and study abroad statistics were used as sources of evidence.

My ontological position encompassed the interpretative framework of socio-constructivism paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).
Socio-constructivism views knowledge as constructed through contextualized lived experiences and interactions, rather than created (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Since knowledge is constructed based on peoples’ experiences, I had to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who lived it. It was crucial that I consider student affairs professionals and staff members’ individual perspectives, experiences, and the contexts in which the integration of international graduate students happened. It was also important that I understood how they construct their worlds and the meaning they accredit to their experiences integrating international graduate students on campus. Therefore, a qualitative case study method was the best approach because it allowed me to develop a holistic account of the experiences and strategies student affairs professionals and staff, in a higher education institution that is committed to internationalization, use to integrate international graduate students on their campus, policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students.

I conducted an instrumental case study, which allowed me to focus on an issue or a concern, such as the integration international graduate students, to illustrate this issue (Baxter, 2008; Gordin; 2006; Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015). The institution where I conducted this study is located in the Midwestern United States, and it is committed to internationalization. In the next section, I discussed my experience conducting the pilot test of this study.

**Pilot Study**

In the fall of 2017, I took the Qualitative Research Practicum class. During that class, I had the opportunity to pilot test the design of this study. My main goal in pilot testing this study was to determine its feasibility by identifying flaws or limitations within the design, which I could modify for my dissertation (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Kim, 2011). The
pilot study allowed me to refine both my research and interview questions and ensure that they align with and reflect the literature. I also made some changes in my data collection and analysis procedures. Those changes include the use of Braun and Clarke’s (2004) six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis, which I explain in the data analysis section.

Conducting this pilot study was a rewarding experience because it allowed me to interact with student affairs professionals and staff, immerse myself into their work environment, and reflect on the overall research experience. It also allowed me to realize that as the primary instrument of this study, I have to be mindful of my biases, and do not let my experiences, as an international graduate student, instructor, and student affairs professional, affect my perceptions of student affairs professionals and staff members’ experiences. In the following section, I addressed my role and the ways I will ensure trustworthiness throughout this study.

Reflections on My Identity

I am an international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Central Africa. I have a bachelor’s degree in applied pedagogy; have worked as a grade four social science teacher at the Little Jewels International School of Kinshasa and as a Research and Teaching Assistant at the Université Pédagogique Nationale. I came to the United States in 2013 as a Fulbright Fellow for a Master’s degree in Educational Leadership, with a concentration in Organizational Analysis.

It was during my first semester of the master’s program that I felt the loneness, anxiety, culture shock in and out of the classroom, and a lack of social support. To avoid being trapped into all these challenges, which in turn would have affected my academic performance, I started to spend more time with fellow international students. However, classes were getting harder, and we were all trying to maintain good grades. This attitude led all of us to become isolated. The
only times we met and caught up were during dinner parties or events organized by the Fulbright chapter or the international students’ office.

My loneness and anxiety became unbearable knowing that I left my wife in my home country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and direly needed her support. Besides, my scholarship’s stipend was $1,200 a month and after covering all the expenses, I was unable to send her some money. We then decided that she should join and support me during my studies. We had our fist son Egide in 2014, and my scholarship ended in May 2015, right after obtaining my master’s degree. I started my Ph.D. program in fall 2015, and we had our second son, Nathan, in 2017. With two children, a meager bi-weekly stipend from my instructor’s position and no scholarship, our expenses drastically increased. It also affected my academic performance. That led my wife to work more extra hours to help cover our expenses, including housing, loans, insurances, and day care. Despite our efforts to be financially independent, we lived on paychecks while expecting a prosperous future once I earn my Ph.D.

The financial hardship brought anxiety and uncertainty in our family. Sometimes, we would wake up in morning with less than $20 in our bank account. Then, we decided to work on a positive attitude towards our challenges and started to consider them as opportunities. We enforced few rules, which really changed our educational journey here in the U.S. In fact, we believed that as long as we have paid our bills and have food on the table for the day, we are at peace. That mentality was what helped us to navigate our hard times.

In spring 2019, I had interactions in which I was threatened. In fact, an account receivable employee called and threatened to drop my classes, if I did not pay my tuition by the end of the day. I asked for few more days so I could find a solution, but she refused and called me a liar. She even asked me to use my credit card, but I told her that I did not have access to
credit like a domestic student. A friend of mine, who is in the Democratic Republic of Congo finally helped me to pay the tuition. Other international students have already reported the same behavior from that student affairs professional. This situation made me realize that the account receivable employee I dealt with did not know that as a self-sponsored international graduate student, I did not have access to credit like domestic students and my sources of income were limited.

All these challenges have reinforced my doubts on the rationales of most higher education institutions in recruiting international students. The limited help received clarified that higher education institutions recruit international students for their financial sustainability. The lack of support from student affairs professionals, staff and other professionals who are supposed to help me meet my needs and navigate my challenges led me to question their intercultural competencies and readiness to serve students from diverse backgrounds. To make sure that my experiences do not negatively affect my lens as I conduct my study, I was critically self-reflective about my own preconceptions and record detailed field notes throughout the study. Moreover, I designed my research and interview questions in way that my assumptions are not voiced. I therefore made sure that the interpretation and the analysis of my data emerge from data collected, not my personal experience.

During my studies at Western Michigan University, I have had the opportunity to work as an International Programs and Projects Assistant for the International Admissions and Services. I also own an agency that recruits international students for higher education institutions in the United States, Canada, South Africa, Poland, Belgium, England, and Germany. Therefore, my previous experiences, as an international graduate student, recruiting agent and administrative
staff, could bring biases that affect this study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

I could be tempted to bring in my pre-conceived theories regarding the international graduate students’ integration, involvement, and engagement, and the role of student affairs professionals and staff, without considering crucial elements, such as the environment where the phenomenon occurred, and people involved in. My experience as an international student may convince me that I know what should be done in order to facilitate the integration of international students and to allow student affairs professionals and staff to meet the needs of international students with citizenry and responsibility. That could lead me to ask questions that are not directly related to my research questions, which would eventually affect my findings, the interpretations of the findings and the conclusion of the entire study (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To avoid such bias, I was critically self-reflective about my own preconceptions and record detailed field notes throughout the study. Besides, participants and committee members reviewed my data to ensure trustworthiness.

My experiences and biases also have some positive aspects on this study and myself. They have provided me with an insider perspective and knowledge of the needs and challenges of international graduate students. The aforementioned experiences may also positively influence my ability as a researcher. In fact, I conducted this study being mindful of my experiences, perspectives and biases, and prevent them from negatively influence the collection and interpretation of my data. My experiences as an international graduate student and staff in one institution is different from the ones of others. The context and the events that occurred throughout my experiences might be unique and could not influence my interpretation of the data obtained from student affairs professionals and staff.
I interviewed student affairs professionals and staff within various units of student affairs. My identity as a doctoral and international student might lead them to question my motives in conducting this study. Therefore, my motives were well explained in advance to avoid inaccurate answers from participants. I used my research, leadership and teaching skills and knowledge to get close to them and ensure that they are part of the entire trustworthiness process. I also used memos to capture insights, reflect and explore the meaning of my contacts with participants throughout the study. Memoing helped me to organize ideas and reflect on the larger thoughts presented in the data and formed initial categories. Moreover, it provided credibility to the data analysis process and the outcome of this study (Saldana, 2017). A log trail was used to describe the steps of this research study, from the beginning to the end (Saldana, 2017). A log trail allowed me to have an account of all my research decisions and activities throughout this study. It is also one of the ways to ensure trustworthiness throughout this study. As noted by Koch (2006), trustworthiness may be established if a reader is able to audit the events, influences and actions of the researcher, and Akkerman et al. (2006) added that a log trail represent a means of assuring quality in qualitative studies.

Participants, Sampling and Site

Participants

As defined earlier, student affairs professional and staff includes any member within a higher education institution responsible for the out-of-class experience and learning or development of students (Burdzinski, 2014). I was interested in understanding the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus, and the policies, services, programs and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. The participants that I included in this study were 11 entry-
and mid-level student affairs professionals and staff from one public higher education institution in the Midwestern U.S., which, as part of its integral strategic plan, has committed to internationalization. The participants came from areas such as Career Services, Counseling, Residence Life, Student Programs, and Student Conduct. I also included other student affairs professionals and staff whose job is to help all students but do not structurally fall under the student affairs division, such as those from the University Recreation, Health Services, International Admissions, and Financial Aid Offices. Entry-level student affairs professionals and staff are those in lower-level student affairs positions. Their responsibilities are to provide services, such as admissions, advising and support for development to students. Their responsibilities also include administrative and management of tasks, such as attend meetings, write report, serve on committees, develop and maintain a budget (Burkard, Cole & Ott, 2004). Position titles may include advisor, coordinator or assistant coordinator of career services or student activities and involvement (Ford, 2014). Mid-level college and university administrators are integral to the life of an institution. Even though the definition of mid-level student affairs professionals and staff may be elusive, Fey and Carpenter (1996) chose to classify student affairs professionals based on the following criteria: 1) has a master-level degree or higher; 2) holds the most senior position in a functional area; 3) reports directly to the senior student affairs officer (SSAO); and 4) supervises at least one full-time professional. They are the largest administrative group in most college and university systems (Rosser, 2000). Their principal role is to bridge the gap between university policy makers and front-line staff, and they may be responsible for programs or services offered within a department or office (Young, 2007). These individuals often have master’s degrees in a field related to educational leadership or development.
I chose to include these individuals in my sample because they are often in contact with international graduate students from the time they seek admission and help them prepare for departure. They help these students navigate and integrate through orientation and other on and off campus activities and co-curricular programs. They are the people who enact the institutional and departmental or office policies as they are related to international students in general. Their interaction with international graduate students provides them with unique knowledge of this specific population compared to student affairs professionals in upper management (Brandenburg, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). These characteristics made them the most suitable participants for this study as they have the right information and experiences that I am looking for. I chose to locate the study in the Midwest because it has a high number of international students compared to other parts of the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2020).

**Sampling Strategy**

I used purposeful sampling to identify entry and mid-level student affairs professionals and staff who have knowledge and experiences serving international graduate students. Purposeful sampling is an appropriate method if the researcher selects participants based on their in-depth knowledge and experiences with the issue under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Palinkas et al., 2015). These participants were recruited from various areas of student affairs of the chosen four-year higher education institution in the Midwestern of the United States, for a total of 11 participants (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Those areas include Career Services, Residence Life, Office of Student Activities and Involvement, Office of Student Conduct, the Leadership Institute, the International Students Office, the Academic Advising and Assistance, and the Center for Inclusion and Diversity.
There is no consensus on the number of participants in qualitative research, with some researchers believing that quantifying the sample size is important and others who do not find it useful (Bertaux & Bertaux, 1981; Creswell, 2008; Guest et al., 2006; Kuzel, 1992; Yin, 2009). However, the sample size should not be too large to the extent where it makes difficult to extract thick data, but it should also not be too small to make it difficult to reach data saturation (Bowen, 2008; Burmeister & Aitken, 2012; Mason, 2010; Morse, 2000; Morse et al., 2014). Based on the literature, I interviewed 11 participants from different areas of student affairs, because they would provide sufficient thick (a lot), and rich (in depth, nuanced, detailed, etc.) information, which allowed me to reach data saturation.

I connected with a gatekeeper on campus, a faculty member at the targeted institution, in order establish contact with student affairs professionals and staff. The contacts (emails and phone numbers) of student affairs professionals and staff were obtained from the institution’s website or the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper emailed the solicitation for participation letter to targeted entry and mid-level student affairs professionals and staff to explain the research project and its benefits (see Appendix A). The gatekeeper informed potential participants that I will also be sending out an invitation to this research study. At first, I had inadequate response to the solicitation for participation letter, which led me to use a snowball sampling technique to secure more interviewees as needed (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

For the inclusionary criteria, the student affairs professionals and staff interviewed for my study were entry and mid-level professionals and staff, who had been in their positions for at least 1 year, and had experience serving and interacting with international graduate students. For exclusionary criterion, the participants must not have been working in senior management positions. The reason for this exclusionary criterion was to avoid a conflict of roles, interest and
lack of in-depth insights into the issue under investigation, which may affect the success of this study. Exclusionary criteria are the characteristics of the potential study participants who met the inclusion criteria but present with additional characteristics that could interfere with the success of the study or increase the risk for an unfavorable outcome (Gentles et al., 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). This information was included in the solicitation for participation letter to determine who should be included or excluded from the research sample (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The recruitment email included my contact information and requested entry- and mid-level student affairs professionals and staff who met the inclusionary criteria to contact me for more information about the study if they were potentially interested in participating (see Appendix A). When interested participants contacted me, I fully explained the study, answered questions, and determined if the respondent was interested in participating. If he or she answered yes, I either went over the consent document as approved by the Western Michigan University’s Human Subject Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) or set up a time to do so (see Appendix B).

Site

This study was conducted in a four-year public higher education institution in the state of Michigan that has committed to internationalization. As part of its internationalization effort, the targeted higher education institution works with the American Council of Education's (ACE) Internationalization Laboratory to catalogue and analyze its current international activities, and develop attainable plan for the comprehensive internationalization (CI) of the institution, based on ACE's internationally-recognized CI framework. I chose this state because it is ranked by the Institute of International Education (2020) as one of the 10 states that hosts many international students, and the university has over 700 international students from 60 countries. The university
provides a fully accredited intensive English language program for international student, and offers over 100 study abroad and exchanges programs in more than 40 countries (American Council on Education, n.d.).

As part of its internationalization plan, this higher education institution is a member of the American Council of Education's (ACE) Internationalization Laboratory. The lab committee of this cohort works closely with the university’s provost, Office of International Affairs (OIA) and the American Council on Education (ACE) to: 1) catalogue and analyze the institution's current international activities, and 2) develop an aspirational and attainable plan for the comprehensive internationalization of the university based upon ACE's internationally recognized CI framework (American Council on Education, n.d.).

This higher education institution has a student affairs division divided in eight offices or services. Those services and offices are Career Services, Counseling, Residence Life, Student Programs, and Student Conduct. For the sake of this study, I also included other offices or services that help students but did not fall under student affairs division. These other offices or services included areas such as University Recreation, Students, Health Services, the International Students Office, and Financial Offices, etc.

Instrumentation

In-depth semi-structured interviews, site observations and document analysis were the primary methods of data collection. Case study research relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). An in-depth semi-structured interview protocol was used to uncover the perspectives of entry- and mid-level student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus climate and the policies, services, programs, and
other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. Interviews provide researchers with rich and detailed qualitative data for understanding participants’ experiences, how they describe those experiences, and the meaning they make of those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013). The interviews were audio-recorded and collected through one-on-one interviews with student affairs professionals and staff, in a confidential setting.

Appendix C contains my interview protocol. These interview questions were developed following a detailed review of the literature and the results of the pilot test conducted with five student affairs professionals and staff. The literature and my pilot test study indicated that student affairs professionals and staff are key to the integration of international graduate students, but not all of them possess intercultural competencies to effectively serve and integrate international graduate students (Arthur, 2017; Fischer, 2011; Di Maria, 2012; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Lee, 2007; Tas, 2013; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

I used an unstructured site observation protocol to take field notes, gather information and first-hand experience of the research setting, understand and capture the context (the ambience, the atmosphere, the environment, and the physical characteristics of the research setting) within which student affairs professionals, staff and international graduate students interact.

I also used a document review protocol to record the types of documents collected and their contents (see Appendix D). The documents I collected included students’ career guide, meeting minutes, invitation to ACE laboratory cohort, acceptance of ACE laboratory invitation, ACE laboratory self-study report, internationalization meetings’ agenda, internationalization laboratory peer review report, internationalization strategic plan, internationalization statistics, institution’s factsheet, international student statistics, and study abroad statistics. All these
documents provided background information and insights on the context within which student affairs professionals and staff work, and the programs, policies and services available for international graduate students. Merriam (1988) noted that, “Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (p. 118). Relevant documents and observational notes were selected and analyzed alongside the interviews. The next section addresses the data collection procedures and the trustworthiness.

**Data Collection Procedures and Trustworthiness**

**Data Collection Procedures**

Data was collected via in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, document review, and site observations. The interviews were audio-recorded. Face-to-face interviews were recorded in a quiet room convenient to the study site (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2012). I also used Zoom software to conduct other interviews. Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allow the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Creswell, 2013; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Yin, 1994). Every attempt was made to conduct face-to-face interviews because factors such as voice, intonation, and body language of the participants could give me extra information that could be added to their verbal answers (Walther & Kyle, 2001; Wengraf, 2001). Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted following the information provided in the solicitation for participation letter, and only after confirming the consent of the participants as mentioned in the WMU’s HSIRB protocol. The consent form provided participants with full information about the research, the risks and benefits of the study, establishes trust between participants and the interviewer, and
allowed participants to decide whether or not they wanted to voluntarily participate in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kaiser, 2009). A few follow-up meetings were organized in concert with participants.

Before starting the interview, I asked participants if they had questions. After that, I started the interview following a semi-structured format mentioned in this proposal, to allow the interviewee to feel safe, be more open, and be detailed in the answers. To obtain the expected data from participants and reduce their reluctance, I used probes and avoid interrupting participants during the interview (Creswell, 2013; Eide & Kahn, 2008).

I wrote reflective memos before, during and after the interview using Microsoft Word or a notebook, to organize my ideas, reflect on the larger thoughts presented in the data and have an account of all my research activities throughout this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Richards, 2015; Saldana, 2017). The memos were also crucial in designing follow up questions. At the end of the interview, I thanked participants and informed them that they will receive a summary of the interview for approval as part of the member checking process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I directly observed and took notes during meetings and a career fair event where student affairs professionals and staff interacted with international graduate students. I also did 3 site observations. The site observations allowed me to develop a set of notes that described the scene as much as possible and better understood the interactions between student affairs professionals, staff and students (Creswell & Poth, 2018; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Documents, such as students’ career guide, meeting minutes, invitation to ACE laboratory cohort, acceptance of ACE laboratory invitation, ACE laboratory self-study report, internationalization meetings’ agenda, internationalization laboratory peer review report, internationalization strategic plan,
internationalization statistics, institution’s factsheet, international student statistics, study abroad statistics, and various public records that illuminate the university or a specific student affairs unit’s effort for integrating international graduate students, were obtained from participants or the targeted institution’s web site. These documents provided insights into the policies, the programs, and the services available for international graduate students, and into the role of student affairs professional in integrating these students on campus. Moreover, the documents provided more information on the context within which student affairs professionals and staff work. Context included background information as well as historical insights (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Bowen, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2009). The documents and the observational notes were analyzed alongside the interviews. The next section addresses the trustworthiness in data collection.

**Trustworthiness in Collecting Data**

I developed a log trail, memoed, and engaged in member checking to ensure trustworthiness in my data collection efforts. A log trail represents a means of assuring quality in qualitative studies (Akkerman et al., 2006). Therefore, I used a log trail to have an account of all my research decisions and activities throughout this study. The reflective memos helped me clarify my thinking on data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Richards, 2015), develop initial codes during the review of the transcripts (Saldana, 2013), and examine how my thoughts and ideas evolved as I engaged more deeply with the data. I also used member checking to ensure the credibility of my data. Member checking is the single most important provision that can be made to bolster a study’s credibility and it may happen during or at the end of the data collection process (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). Through member checking, I shared the summaries of interviews with participants, so they could check whether my summary
matched what they intended to say or accurately captured the audio recording. The next section focuses on my data analysis strategies and the trustworthiness in data analysis.

**Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

**Data Analysis**

I used inductive thematic analysis to examine the perspectives of each participant. Inductive thematic analysis is a data analysis method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions (King, 2004). It is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The first step in thematic analysis is to familiarize myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After each interview, I listened to the recording, transcribe the recorded interview verbatim, uploaded, and organized it as a file in NVIVO, a qualitative research. I listened to each interview at least three times to ensure accuracy of information, adjust punctuation and insert comments. Transcribing recorded interviews concurrently allowed me to make changes to my protocol for the next interview, if needed. I stored relevant documents, including observation notes and memos in the same software, and I included them during the analysis. I also used TEMI, a software to automatically transcribe them. Then, I listened to each interview and corrected mistakes or the information that the software could not transcribe correctly. This process allowed me to immerse myself into the data and write notes to determine a sense of what participants were conveying prior to data reduction, and, ultimately, extrapolating patterns and themes.

The second step in thematic analysis is to generate codes. After familiarizing myself with data, I began the coding process of the interviews with the extraction of in vivo codes (Saldana, 2017). I went through each interview line by line, to understand what the participant said or
meant, and then assign a code label using the words of each participant. When generating in vivo codes, I looked for words or phrases in the transcripts that stand out, such as action-orientated verbs, nouns with impact, evocative word choices, clever phrases or metaphors (Saldana, 2017; Theron, 2015). Once the codes generated from interviews, I carefully read and reviewed all the documents. Then, I selected the documents that are relevant to my research problem, purpose of the study or the conceptual framework. I re-read the selected documents and coded them following the codes generated from the interviews. Bowen (2009) stated that “predefined codes may be used in thematic analysis, especially if the document analysis is supplementary to other research methods employed in the study” (p. 33). I followed the same process for observational notes.

I used an axial coding technique as my second cycle coding method to generate the description of the setting, review and examine the initial codes that I identified. Axial coding involves grouping and relabeling the codes into descriptive categories, working to keep the labels connected enough to the original in vivo codes so as to not lose track of the meaning (Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2017; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

The third step in thematic analysis is to search for themes. I compared all the categories and subcategories to look for similar themes and recurring patterns. Nvivo has some features that assist with finding significance within the themes, including ability to make mind maps, charts, and word frequency queries (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, I run a Word Frequency query to see which words student affairs professionals and staff used most often. The result gave me an early insight into emerging themes. I also read through each interview and coded the emerging themes. This process involved selecting interesting comments and putting them into containers called nodes.
The fourth step in thematic analysis is reviews themes. I reviewed the themes, modified and developed them to make sure that they make sense, do not overlap, ensure that the data support each theme, and identified new themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fifth step in thematic analysis is defining and naming themes. At this point, I then defined and further refined the themes that I presented for my analysis and analyzed the data within them. In this step, I identified the essence of what each theme was about and determined the aspect of the data that each theme captures, in relation to my research questions to avoid too much overlap between the themes. I had to consider the themes themselves and each theme in relation to others. Even though the themes already had titles, this step allowed me to decide whether or not I would keep the same names or titles of themes for the analysis or report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The last step of thematic analysis is producing the report. Finally, I used those themes and their meanings to write my findings that elicits understanding around my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Creswell, 2009) established that the research should ask, “What lessons were learned?” to guide the interpretation of results or lessons learned derived from the comparison of findings. My interpretation of the findings also included meaning derived from a comparison of the findings with information from the literature and/or theories.

**Trustworthiness in Data Analysis**

I used peer debriefing and member checking to ensure trustworthiness of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Yin 2009). Through peer debriefing, I worked with my dissertation chair and other researchers to look into my data and findings to address questions of bias, errors of fact, competing integrations, convergence...
between data and the phenomena under study, and the themes that arise during the analysis (Billups, 2014). The purpose of this peer debriefing was to ensure consistency of findings across my data and findings, thanks to different lenses. Even I worked with these individuals, I also ensured the trustworthiness by implementing a process of double coding where a set of data was coded and then I would recode them after a certain period of time to compare results. Moreover, I used member checking to share my findings and preliminary analysis with student affairs professionals and staff I interviewed, so they could assess whether the information they provided was interpreted accurately or not. Such a process allowed me to gather additional data and eventually provided higher trustworthy of the findings.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

One of the limitations of this study was time constraint for the participants. In fact, student affairs professionals and staff were usually very busy, which required more time to recruit my goal of 10-15 participants. Their duties made it sometimes hard for them to spend at least few hours on something else than the wellbeing of their students. This unavailability of student affairs professionals and staff impeded me to reach many of them and conduct enough interviews. To get my participants to participate in this study despite their tight schedule, I explained that they had to choose the date, time, and mode of interview (in-person and virtual). I also clarified that the interview would last only 60 or 90 minutes. Another limitation to this study was the fact that some of student affairs professionals and staff were reluctant to address salient issues related to their own university or student affairs’ unit. To address this concern, I explained to participants they will be assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. I also clarified that only my dissertation chair and I would have access to data.
As for the delimitations, this qualitative research case study sought to obtain information only from entry- and mid-level student affairs professionals and staff, of a four-year public higher education institution in the Midwest that has committed to internationalization. These student affairs professionals and staff must had been in their positions for more than a year and had experience serving and interacting with international graduate students.

Chapter 3 Closure

This chapter described the research design and methods that were used for this study. For the purpose of this study, an instrumental qualitative case study approach was used to understand the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff, in a four-year public higher education institution that has committed to internationalization, about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus, the policies, services, programs and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. Eleven entry- and mid-level student affairs professionals and staff were purposefully sampled from and interviewed in order to complete this study. An in-depth semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions, document analysis and site observation were used in this study. Peer debriefing and member checking were used to ensure trustworthiness in the data analysis (Creswell & Poth 2018).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to understand the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff regarding their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. This study focused on student affairs professionals and staff members’ experiences and their interpretation of events and activities related to the integration of international graduate students.

This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with student affairs professionals and staff, relevant documents, and observational notes. Below, I describe the context of the case site, including details about the international graduate students it serves. Then, I address the university’s efforts to internationalize and present a profile of the participants. Finally, I introduce detailed findings based on major themes and sub-themes.

Case Description

This study was conducted in a four-year public higher education institution in the Midwestern United States that has committed to internationalization. Midwestern University has seven academic colleges: The College of Design, The College of Global Affairs, The College of College Education, The College of Public Health, The College of Sciences, The College of Bio-Medicine, and The College Aviation. In total, Mid-Western University offers 300 academic programs at the undergraduate, master’s, specialist, and doctoral levels. Its student affairs division is divided into eight units: Career Services, Counseling, Volunteer Center, Residence Life, Student Activities and involvement, Leadership Institute, Sexual Aggression and Student Conduct. The university has several other units that serve students but are not part of Student
Affairs, such as University Recreation, Students, Health Services, and Global Engagement, which houses the International Students’ Office, and Financial Office.

Mid-Western University serves approximately 21,000 students. It is located in a state ranked by the Institute of International Education (2020) as one of the 10 states that host many international students, and the university has over 710 international students (3%) from 60 countries. Approximately half of these international students are undergraduates, and the other half are graduate students. Most international graduate students major in Information Systems, Economics, Engineering, Business Administration, Science of Advanced Materials, and Medicine. These international graduate students are mainly from China, Saudi Arabia, India, Canada, Nigeria, Bangladesh, South Korea, Ghana, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. At the time of the study, there were also 28 international scholars from 12 countries.

Midwestern University provides a fully accredited intensive English language program for international students who do not meet the language requirement for admission into a program. It also offers over 150 study abroad and exchange programs, including more than 30 faculty-led programs in more than 40 countries, for students and faculty. The top destinations for these programs are Italy, Ireland, Denmark, England, France, South Africa, Mexico, Greece, Costa Rica, Thailand, and Spain. Over the last five years, there has been an increase in the number of students who studied abroad, from 649 in 2015 to 751 in 2019. These students are from more than 100 majors, and in 2018-2019, 86% of these students received scholarships to study abroad.

As part of its internationalization efforts, Midwestern University was invited to join the 14th cohort of the American Council of Education’s (ACE) Internationalization Laboratory to assess its current international activities, and develop an attainable plan for comprehensive
internationalization (CI), based on ACE’s internationally-recognized comprehensive internationalization framework (American Council on Education, n.d.). The ACE internationalization model contains six interconnected target areas that highlight the necessary attention and resources to achieve a genuinely comprehensive internationalization. Those six areas are articulated institutional commitment, administrative leadership, structure, and staffing; curriculum, co-curriculum, and learning outcomes; faculty policies and practices; student mobility; collaboration and partnerships (American Council on Education, n.d.).

A peer review team of the American Council on Education (ACE), made up of faculty who are also experts in internationalization, visited Mid-Western University for two days. During the visit, the peer review team met with key stakeholders such as members of the Internationalization Self-Study Committee; members of the Internationalization Strategic Planning Committee; Council of Deans; and Office of International Admissions, staff, faculty, and students. In consultation with ACE, Mid-Western University decided to make a two-part structure committee responsible for the assessment and the implementation of the strategic internationalization plan: The internationalization Self-Study Steering Committee (ISSC) and the Internationalization Strategic Planning Committee (ISPC). The two committees were composed of faculty, student affairs professionals, staff, and other campus stakeholders. During the first year, the ISSC was tasked with gathering data and assessing the current state of Mid-Western University internationalization. The Internationalization Strategic Planning Committee (ISPC) was tasked with using data collected by the ISCC to develop a comprehensive internationalization plan over the following year (2019).

The internationalization Self-Study Steering Committee (ISSC) collected data from all campus stakeholders through surveys, focus groups, open discussions, and document analysis.
The data was both quantitative and qualitative, and it was about institutional commitment, administrative structure and staffing, curriculum, co-curriculum, and learning outcomes, faculty policies and practices, student mobility and collaboration, and partnerships. The ISSC was trying to find the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the internationalization plan that was in place. Then, the committee wrote a report and recommendations for campus-wide internationalization. The report and recommendations resulted from a combination of a SWOT analysis of both campus research and survey findings, linked to the ACE comprehensive internationalization model.

**Recommendations for Campus-Wide Internationalization**

The Internationalization Self-Study Committee recommended the following:

**Goal prioritization.** The creation of a functional information portal that supports the campus global awareness, recruiting students and faculty, and nurturing community partnerships. Goal prioritization also included the implementation of a comprehensive risk management plan to address campus safety, security, and the ways to formulate crisis management scenarios.

**Global learning.** Not all students can study abroad. Therefore, the curricular and co-curricular activities and programs are essential in providing both domestic and international students the knowledge and skills to be successful in a more globally interdependent world. This recommendation related to student learning outcomes, the creation of opportunities for students in all programs to acquire and use that learning opportunity for their continuous improvement, and the integration of study abroad experiences in the curriculum.

**International partnerships.** This recommendation is to identify two to three strategic partnerships that will help move the internationalization initiative forward for all institutions. These partnerships should go beyond the exchange of a few students or faculty, or initiatives by
a single department. Instead, it should be a campus-wide effort to build and sustain partnerships in different areas, with other institutions in the U.S. or abroad.

**Study abroad.** The committee recommended the use of study abroad as a tool to expand and enrich the curriculum by adding valuable content. It also called for alternative efforts to traditional study abroad initiatives such as internships and research experiences abroad.

**International students.** The committee recommended the university learn from international students about how to continue recruiting them, despite the hostile immigration and political environment. The committee suggested a reliable, multi-function International Student Office and other campus units to better serve international students. To better integrate international students, the committee proposed a proactive recruitment of students to the intensive English program, and then intentionally expose these students to matriculate into Mid-Western University degree programs. The committee also recommended the development of an enrollment management plan that: (a) sets intentional numerical goals for both domestic and international students; (b) addresses the quality of new students to ensure equal attention to this issue for both domestic and international students; (c) addresses diversity for both types of students and is intentional about ensuring diversity; and (d) that ensures that international students are redistributed equally across the schools, so there is no disproportionate impact on any one of them.

**Advisory group.** For a continuous implementation of the internationalization plan, the committed suggested the creation of an advisory or council team. This team is made of senior leaders and members of the steering committees, and other stakeholders across campus.

**Database needs.** A lot of data was collected during this process, and the committee suggested an ongoing data collection process as a legacy of the lab’s work. The committee
recommended that the collected data should be made available to faculty and administration for planning their internationalization efforts.

**Reward the curriculum development.** The committee suggested a plan for curriculum enhancement grants and course release to advance internationalization efforts and showcase successful practitioners. That implies the increase of in-bound and out-bound Fulbright faculty scholars and students.

**Diversity/Internationalization.** The committee suggested a collaboration between diversity initiatives and internationalization efforts to develop MWU further. This is because diversity efforts tended be campus-centric and internationalization efforts tended to focus outside of the institution.

**International alumni.** The committee suggested the development of a tracking process for all international alumni. Alumni are valuable for the recruitment of students, development of exchange programs, and international internships and funding. They could also provide input as to how to help integrate international students.

**Communication strategies and making a case for internationalization.** The committee suggested that the Global Engagement Office develop a written statement on the rationale for campus internationalization and bring in communication specialists and internationalization leadership at MWU.

The Internationalization Strategic Planning Committee used the above recommendations of the Internationalization Self-Study Steering Committee to fully develop a comprehensive internationalization strategic plan for the years 2018-2022.

**Comprehensive campus internationalization strategic plan.** The strategic plan for internationalization comprises three imperatives, and each imperative has its specific initiatives.
**Nurturing student success.** This imperative encourages the increase of student participation in international transformative experiences for outgoing students (education abroad) by 2021, and the increase and diversification of the international student population by 15% by 2023. This initiative requires the assessment of the current infrastructure to support international students and the exploration of new strategies for growth in recruiting these students.

Another initiative under this imperative is the increase of international curricular and co-curricular opportunities at MWU. However, relevant departments should be able to identify existing barriers and potential solutions to current international students’ campus engagement. The relevant departments must also promote existing curricular initiatives and exchange encourage the incorporation of international content in curricular and co-curricular opportunities.

The last initiative is to foster the enhancement of the infrastructure for internationalization for students at MWU (in its multiple iterations), to provide both domestic and international students access to global experiences on and off-campus. This initiative implies the improvement of on-campus arrival for international students, the development of competency-based cultural understanding training for students, staff and faculty, and the expansion of specialized academic assistance to international students.

**Fostering scholarly activity.** This imperative requires MWU to foster research and creative activities that are globally engaged. This initiative can only be achieved if the infrastructure for globally engaged research and creative activities is enhanced. The increase of funding for global research and creative activities is crucial in achieving this imperative. Moreover, faculty should be encouraged to collaborate on global research and creative activities. To ensure that the goals of this imperative is reached, MWU must support the development of and the use of an instrument to measure intercultural learning and development.
Strengthening partnerships in Michigan and beyond. Mid-Western University must strengthen and grow incoming and outgoing student mobility. This initiative requires the optimization of agreements with international partners, such as schools, universities, government organizations. Partnerships can be strengthened by establishing and maintaining connections with alumni abroad. It is also crucial to maintain existing and establish new collaborative ties with the city and surrounding communities within Michigan around international resources, events, and residents. The success of this imperative depends on the Creation and sustainability collaborations with international companies with the MWU Strategic Partner Program.

The strategic plan addresses international students in general, and but it rarely addresses international graduate students specifically. The only place where international graduate students are cited is in imperative 1: Nurturing Student Success - Increasing the participation in international transformative experiences for outgoing students (education abroad) by 2021. This initiative calls for an exploration of new strategies to increase the international student population by 15% between 2021-2023 and new recruitment regions, including the use of international student recruitment agents. This initiative requires MWU to assess and add infrastructure to support international students of every level, including English Language Institute students, undergraduates, and graduate students. Even though the strategic plan does not specifically address international graduate students, the participants interviewed know that they are a specific population that has specific needs that differ from the general student population.

Participants’ Profiles

I interviewed participants between October and December 2019. Participants included 11 people from 6 areas that provide support services to international graduate students. Their
pseudonyms, genders, educational levels, positions, and years of experiences are included in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants: Student Affairs Professionals and Staff (SAP & S)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Current Position and Area</th>
<th>Years of Experience as SAP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>MA in Ed. Leadership</td>
<td>Director of Internet Services</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>MA in Ed. Leadership</td>
<td>Coach in Marathon Services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>MA in Ed Leadership</td>
<td>Associate Director of Human Development</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genevieve</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>MA in Apparel</td>
<td>Assistant Director of Co-Curricular Services</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanesa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>MA in Higher Ed. Adm</td>
<td>Director of Student Services</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>MA in History</td>
<td>Manager of Incoming Students</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>MA in History</td>
<td>Director of Professional Institute</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>MA in History</td>
<td>Assistant Director of the Non-Academic Institute</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>MA in Sport Administration</td>
<td>Assistant Director of Professional Institute</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>MA in Business Administration</td>
<td>Director of Sport Teams</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>MA in Higher Ed. Adm</td>
<td>Assistant Director Activities</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes and Sub-themes

Three major themes emerged during the data analysis process. Those major themes are:

(1) We Identify and Respond to the Unique Challenges of International Graduate Students; (2) We Support the Transition and Integration of International Graduate Students; and (3) We Face Challenges in Serving International Graduate Students. My findings lean more towards career or employment for international graduate students. This is because many of the student affairs professionals and staff I interviewed had more information or experience helping international graduate students in this area.

We Identify and Respond to the Unique Challenges of International Graduate Students

International graduate students at Mid-Western University face many challenges that are specific to them. Those challenges include language, employment/H-1B Visa, a sense of belonging and integration, time management, reaching out for help, psychological, transportation and access to other cities, internships, and economic/financial. The Student Affairs Professionals and staff have a number of tools at their disposal to respond to these unique challenges.

Language. The interviewed student affairs professionals and staff mentioned language to be one of the biggest challenges that international graduate students face, while they tend to live with other students. These students speak many languages, and English, which is the language of instruction in the United States, tends to be their 3rd, 4th, or 5th language. Hence, speaking, reading, listening and writing in English, in an environment dominated by native speakers, are challenging for these students.

Studying in English is not easy for them. Vincent noted, “In terms of going to a foreign country, having instruction in a different language than what is your home language means they are a little bit more serious about this process, the cost involved.” However, many of these
students are articulate, and “I have never had an instance when I could not understand one of them,” said Vanesa. Paul supported Vanesa, and stated that:

I got a lot of students who are still working on their English, and some of that is very difficult, so they are afraid to talk to other students thinking that they are not going to be understood. And so, they go right back and forth to their community. And most of our international students live well close to each other. So, there is no reason for them to disconnect and connect with other students unless they want to.

Midwestern University has an English as Second Language program on campus for international graduate students who do not meet the language requirements for admission. My participants also refer international graduate students who need help with their English to some of the social groups on and off campus, where they can frequently interact with native speakers and gain the needed language skills to thrive in their educational journey at Mid-Western University.

**Employment/H-1B visa.** The main reason international graduate students come to MWU is to find better employment after graduation. All the participants mentioned professional goals as the main reason why international graduate students come to their campus. Lynda noted that “all the way around there is a goal and typically it’s better employment opportunities in addition to obviously gaining additional skills.” Hence, all student affairs professionals and staff do their best to provide the needed help to this specific population, so they can better integrate academically and socially, which in turn will allow them to easily transition into their careers, either in the United States or in their home countries.

To help international graduate students address their employment challenges, the Career Development Services office helps international students with the résumé and cover letter. International graduate students usually have prior professional experiences and they know how
to write and design a cover letter or a résumé; however, “their style is usually different compared to the ones that employers in the United States want,” said Genevieve. Therefore, career service staff members encourage these students to walk in with their job application materials so they can review them together.

Career development services also offer information about the Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT) programs, which can provide employment to international graduate students during their academic program at Mid-Western University. The OPT is a program that allows international students under the F1 visa, who have completed their first academic year or have just graduated, to work off-campus up to 12 months in their major course of study. The CPT is a program that temporarily allows international students under F1 visa to get practical experiences related to their major through an internship or a cooperative education. The CPT must be completed before graduation.

An additional challenge of international graduate students is to find employers who may sponsor their H-1B visa. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows U.S. companies to employ graduate-level workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise in specialized fields. Employers are often reluctant to hire international graduate students under this type of visa because it is expensive, and the process is long and tiresome. International graduate students who are more easily sponsored are those who study specialized fields such as IT, finance, accounting, architecture, engineering, mathematics, science, medicine, etc.

The International Student Office partners with the Career Development Office to organize career fairs to allow all international students to meet employers that hire international
students and sponsor H-1B visas. Lindsay noted that the H1-B visa process is one of the causes that impede international graduate students in finding employment. She stated that:

When it comes time to find a job, that hurdle with immigration puts them at such a disadvantage if they are trying to stay in the States because of all the visas. Those are just additional barriers to highly successful people willing to stay here in the States.

To easily find employment that may sponsor their H-1B visa, international graduate students must sometimes use brokers. The process costs a lot of money, which many of these students do not have. Student affairs professionals and staff at MWU assist international graduate students in meeting their career goals, so that students do not feel the need to hire a broker. They can match international graduate students with potential employers, recommend them for employment, and help them prepare their career portfolio. However, it may get to a point where a student does not find a job after graduation and must leave the United States. In such situations, it is up to the students to decide if they want to hire a broker to help them secure a job.

**Sense of belonging and integration.** International graduate students, especially those with families, need a support system that allows them to feel home and integrate. To address this sense of belonging need, Vanesa regularly organizes community activities so that international students can participate. For example, Vanesa organizes a Halloween party to bring international students who have families and the community together. Together with the campus police department, she also distributes car seats to international students who have children. To help international graduate students with families adjust, integrate, and feel at home, Vincent and his team also organize and fund Halloween nights and Christmas bowling nights, where all students can come and have free pizza and free bowling. John said that during the summer, other events that bring together the community and international graduate students with their families around
food are organized. On these summer activities, John explained that “So, I almost think that it is the best part of that, because you have people that may not have interacted with each other before, that are now realizing, ‘Oh, we are neighbors, and we are interacting.’” Vincent also helps student organizations to organize events or parties that are specific to their cultures. Vincent organizes DIVALI for Indian students, a big fun festival where people dance and share food.

At the beginning of each semester, the International Student and Scholar Services unit organizes an orientation that is key to the integration of international students on campus. This orientation is not geared toward graduate students specifically but combines both undergraduate and graduate international students. During the orientation, they provide students with crucial information related to immigration regulations, cultural shock and adjustment, campus safety, health services, on-campus employment, community programs, English language testing, and student organizations. The information provided are for both international undergraduate and graduate students. International graduate students who have assistantships benefit from a departmental orientation that responds to the challenges of their positions. Throughout the academic year, the International Student and Scholar Services hosts multiple events to connect international students with their peers and the community, as well as giving them the opportunity to share their customs and traditions with the rest of the campus.

The orientation also includes academic integrity content, which is the most attended part of the orientation by international undergraduate and graduate students. Vanesa said that they do the integrity piece of the orientation with the graduate student population in mind, although undergraduate students participate, too. Other types of assistance that international graduate students at Mid-Western University receive during or after the orientation are transfer and
extension of I-20 or DS 2019, social security card/number, and obtaining a driver’s license or state identification card. Although this orientation covers many important aspects to assist international graduate students to adjust, they have different challenges than their undergraduate counterparts.

Another challenge of international graduate students is to have, in the offices they seek services, people that look like them and know a little bit about where they are from. Philip said that “One of international students’ frustrations and concerns that they had brought to me was that they were not seeing anybody like them that was in the Residence Life Office and was helping the students.” Vincent hired a student affairs professional from Asia to make sure that international students feel welcome and comfortable. Lindsay added that there is a need to be mindful of the differences and difficulties of international students, and always tries to make sure that these students see people who are like them. She further explained that:

So, I think really being mindful that we need to be inclusive of what the campus looks like. And again, I go back to that statement I said to you in the beginning: my vision is everyone sees a reflection of themselves as they look throughout the building like I can see myself here. That is really important and that I think also has to do with how students are using the building when they see our employees here that represent lots of different backgrounds, then they know it is safe for me to be here and there is someone here for me. Having someone that looks like oneself, even if you do not share similar cultural or national background, creates a sense of belonging for international graduate students.

Time management. International graduate students frequently face time management challenges. Angel said, “So, time management, that is something that many international
students struggle with.” This argument was also illustrated in an example of an international student Lynda gave:

It had to do with [an] international student making an appointment and showing up 10 or 15 minutes late. I ended up being a good friend to the student, and he is in New York, but he made appointments like five times, and he was late, and 5 times I kept making him reschedule and then finally showed up. And every time after that he was on time.

Genevieve considered time management as a cultural difference between international graduate students and their domestic peers. That does not mean that international graduate students do not value appointments, said Lynda. Rather, it is an indication of how time is viewed differently in different cultures.

The issue of time management impedes international graduate students to get adequate services, especially when they need help with résumés or cover letters. In order to help teach this skill, the office that provides these services at Mid-Western University began offering students a one-hour slot, per day. Lynda added that it is important to clarify things with and respect international students despite their differences or challenges, because “if we were in a different country, we would want the same respect.”

**Reaching out for help.** There is help available in many different offices for international graduate students, but participants felt they do not often seek the available services. Philip said:

I don’t think that they are seeking us out. I do not think that they are taking advantage of the resources we offer partially because of that. I mean, it could also be that we, they don’t know about us as well.

This challenge is not exclusive to international graduate students because domestic graduate students also do not seek help or use all of the services and programs available on campus;
however, participants noted that cultural norms certainly add to their reluctance. Genevieve also attributed this trend to the fact that many of these students are rarely on campus, have families, and work full-time or part-time, which prevents them from fully benefitting from those services and programs. Participants I interviewed are aware of the reluctance of international graduate students to reach out for help. Hence, only few of them reach out to these students and tell them about the services that they provide.

**Psychological.** International graduate students experience stress throughout their academic journey at Mid-Western University. During their first semester, many international graduate students start to talk about OPT and to focus on something that is two years down the road. Consequently, they end up not completing their program, or failing classes because they are too focused on areas that are long-term goals rather than the short-term goals necessary to complete their graduate education. All these goals bring pressure on international graduate students, which result in stress or depression. Moreover, additional pressure may come from their family members here in the United States or left back home. Mid-Western University has services available to support these students psychologically, but this type of support is limited and the institution advises international students who have severe stress to seek external help. Even though Mid-Western University provides some adequate services to support these students psychologically, it is the responsibility of the students to make sure that they get the needed help. In many cases, the staff members must remind international students that they should see the doctor and check if they went.

**Transportation and access to other cities.** The location of Midwestern University adds another challenge, which is transportation and access from and to other cities due to its rural
geographic location. Vincent conducted a focus group with international students, and he found out that:

The international students felt that they did not have enough busing or public transportation. They expected a city, and they got a small town. They wanted public transportation. They wanted a network of people who would welcome them in when they got here.

The transportation system is not developed in the city, but the university, along with apartment complexes that are known to house international students, has been able to convince the city to create new bus lines to transport students from their apartments to campus, and vice versa. However, transportation from and to different cities remains limited and has made it hard for incoming international students to reach campus or travel to other places because they must land or depart approximately in cities that are one or three hours away.

**Internship.** As an institution located in a rural area, Mid-Western University is predominantly White, which limits the ability of international graduate students and other students of color to find internships. Richard noted that:

There are so many barriers for them. This is primarily a white institution in a white rural area. And so, I think there are a lot of stereotypes and prejudice about our students of color, about international students. So, I think as they are looking for internships with local businesses, it can be challenging because of the community that we are in.

International graduate students must rely on faculty, student affairs professionals, and staff and career events that the career development services, and the international student office organize to connect with potential employers for internship or job. The stakeholders mentioned above usually step out to help international graduate students, who also face economic challenges.
**Economic/Financial.** Many international graduate students face economic challenges regarding their tuition, daily expenses, or just to afford certain programs or services they might need. Those with families have more substantial challenges that may require the help of the institution or the campus community. However, Mid-Western University does not have enough financial resources to help many international graduate students at the same time. In case of financial hardship, the institution, specific departments, or units provide merit scholarships or assistantships to cover tuition and provide a stipend. Some international graduate students are authorized to work off campus and can make money to cover their expenses. In case none of these is possible, participants I interviewed encourage international graduate students to return to their home country, gather more financial resources, and come back. Vanesa explained that:

I have talked to them about possibly going home and saying, you know it is not a bad thing to go home and, if you go home now before you have a huge past due amount or fall out of status, you go home and get everything together and come back. You have already been successful in getting your visa. If you complete your first semester, go back home for a year and come back and that is a good thing. And, at the embassy, probably a good sign because the government will know that you did not stay in the U.S. and not be enrolled in things.

Vanesa considers giving bad news such as “going back home” to international graduate students to be part of her duty as a student affairs professional. Philip added that part of his job is:

Helping the students understand that going home is not failure. It could help lead to future success and nobody ever wants to hear that, but sometimes they understand or miraculously they find the money that they think they didn’t have.
Angel added that “there is a large population of our international graduate students that are struggling to make ends meet. They are just financially making tough decisions, and I don’t know if we have resources on campus.” Some student affairs professionals and staff do not address finance issues with international graduate students or suggest that they go back home because they do not want to feel guilty and do not feel it is part of their duty.

**We Support the Transition and Integration of International Graduate Students**

My participants said that their primary role is to make sure that international graduate students at Mid-Western University experience an easy transition into campus and to ensure that they maintain their valid immigration status. Hence, Mid-Western University has student affairs professionals and staff dedicated to assisting all international students with specific advising appointments, answering immigration questions, inviting international scholars to campus, and “providing links to our rich international community through cultural programs and events” (Lyndsay). Lynda added that “we work to secure their success while supporting and educating the international community on compliance with immigration regulations, cultural awareness, and acclimation to education within the United States.” Vanesa added that “our responsibilities are to provide that orientation to our students, help them maintain legal status, and then adjust and achieve success throughout their studies here in whatever ways the students might think is necessary.” Vanesa further explained that:

> When we focus our programming, we try to do it from the viewpoint of what will help all international students or understand our culture, American academic life, and U.S. society. We try to focus a lot on our state. What is around for the students to take advantage of.
Within their roles, student affairs professionals and staff collaborate with key units across campus to ensure that international graduate students can make the most of their educational experiences at Mid-Western University. They also provide significant assistance to the student’s primary goal, obtaining employment after graduation.

All the challenges of international graduate students can only be met if student affairs professionals and staff are available and aware of their challenges. However, “international graduate students have to feel comfortable, and remember that we are approachable,” said Ashley. To meet the challenges of international graduate students and create a sense of belonging, student affairs professionals and staff act as educators, adapters, liaisons, career shapers, and barrier breakers.

**We are educators.** Student affairs professionals and staff act as educators for and about international graduate students. Lynda said that “teaching students how to tell their story, how to communicate better who it is that they are and where they want to go,” is an important part of what student affairs professionals and staff do. They help build the clarity and the confidence or the competency piece that international graduate students need to integrate and thrive. Part of this education is so that international graduate students have experiences and conversations that they may have with employers or other students and provide them a clearer direction as to where they fit into the world of work. Lynda said that:

We are very helpful and supportive in terms of educating students around the issue of work visas, and we try to gather resources to assist students with identifying employers who are international student friendly. They come to campus, and we prepare them for what a résumé would look like in the state as well as other credentials. Aside from that,
just helping them feel comfortable, and that we are approachable for their career-related needs.

Ashley said that they help international graduate students gain insight from experiences and self-reflection, to explore opportunities by researching academic and career options they like, and to network with people, organizations, and employers to gain experiences that help them develop personally and professionally. Lynda added that:

So, typically how we educate our students, we have a new model and it’s kind of a triangle if you would, where a lot of the work we are trying to focus on scale, teaching students how to better communicate. And then we move up the ladder a little bit in terms of recommending certain services and experiences, internships, student organizations, whatever they might need.

Many offices with less knowledge and experience working with and serving international students gather data that is out there about these students and put it somewhere easy to find. Whenever needed, they use the stored data to understand what they are dealing with.

Part of student affairs professionals and staff members’ roles as educators is to help international graduate students understand their challenges and take responsibilities. For example, Vanesa said:

Some students have this idea of coming to America, and just by coming here, they are automatically going to get a job and be successful and be able to stay here forever, and that is great. But sometimes we must be the voice of reality.

The participants recognized their crucial roles in supporting international graduate students throughout their academic journey at Mid-Western University, but they also emphasize the responsibility that students have within the process. As educators, student affairs professionals
and staff provide international graduate students the necessary tools to better integrate socially and academically, but students must take the initiative to use those tools.

International graduate students have many goals when they come to Mid-Western University. Embracing all these goals may hinder their ability to graduate on time. Student affairs professionals and staff teach these students how to prioritize their needs and plans. Vanesa elaborated that:

Helping our graduate students understand that focus on academics first, make sure that you are completing your research, or you are completing your thesis or something, get that done. And then this OPT piece will work alongside. But that is not the focus. It should be your studies first. I have seen a lot of graduate students come in and start talking the first semester about OPT and focusing on something that’s two years down the road. Then they ended up not completing their program or, you know, failing classes because they are too focused on areas that are a long-term goal, but they are not where they should be right now. They should be getting classes completed and passing and doing their work, and then the other pieces will come along. So, helping students kind of prioritize is something we do.

Some of my participants said that once international graduate students know how to prioritize their needs, plans and goals, international graduate students integrate well, and succeed in their academic journey.

We are adapters. Midwestern University’s programs and services were initially created for undergraduate domestic population. The increasing enrollment of graduate students in general, and international graduate students in particular, and the need to internationalize, has led Midwestern University and my participants to adapt many of their programs and services to meet
the needs and challenges of these students. For example, based on the recommendations of the internationalization strategic plan to increase the participation of international students in campus programs and activities, to develop specialized academic and professional assistance to international students, and to grow curricular and cocurricular activities that advance Midwestern University’s goal of comprehensive internationalization, the Career Development Services Office has infused an international dimension to programs such as Campus Connect (used to promote career development events), Interview (practice), Build Your Brand (résumé building and general career guidance), Dress to Impress (professional clothing for interviews), Make a Difference (internship), and Build Your Network (connect students with employers on campus), to respond to the needs and challenges of international graduate students on campus. Infusing international dimension here refers to the introduction of global context content in materials, activities and outcomes of programs. Lynda said that “tying these resources and making them accessible to international graduate students is important.” All these programs provide the necessary skills for international graduate students to become ready for employment. Philip explained that:

The other piece is to tie it to career readiness, principles and practices that are developed through our national association aligning our employment opportunities on campus with what those career readiness principles and practices are so that the students have the language to express to employers the value that they bring to the organization, whether they are a local art or STEM they all have value and sometimes it’s just providing the language for them to be able to articulate to the employers. They have it, they have the skill set.
The School of Leadership has also infused a global dimension in its offerings to better shape the career of international graduate students. In fact, the institute has changed some of its programs and services to empower international students to contribute to a more socially responsible world with integrity and conviction. Richard said that staff at the leadership institute educate and prepare international graduate students to discover their individual leadership paths and develop skills to engage as responsible global citizens. Paul elaborated that to better serve all students, they use theories of leadership as the foundation for program development at Mid-Western University, such as adaptive leadership, immunity to change, self-authorship, critical race theory, and social change model of leadership development. All students are taught these theories, so they know how to verbalize their leadership style and how to use it in the classroom, how to use it in a more globalized world, and how to use it within their multi-cultural employment. International graduate students who need to build their leadership path can participate in numerous leadership programs, such as Leadership, MWU Leadership Series (opportunity to discover your leadership style and abilities), Leadership Event (a networking workshop for campus leaders), International Student Leadership Conference (help all students build collaborative relationships and support networks while acknowledging the importance of working across differences), The Leadership Bootcamp (six-day intensive program, participants explore not only what they want to do, but who they want to be), Boost Your Leadership (utilizes the Student Leadership Practices Inventory [sLPI] to help student leaders assess their leadership abilities and develop a personal growth plan. Lynda elaborated:

So, everything that we do is built upon the theory of student success, you know, for them to be successful at Mid-Western University, and to realize their aspirational goals, and we provide resources and advising and experiences and support.
The theories of leadership guide the adaptation and the design of programs and services geared towards international students, though the focus is not specifically aimed at meeting the needs of international graduate students.

Richard has also encouraged international students to attend and participate in services that provide leadership opportunities. International graduate students are involved with other students, faculty and staff as co-presenters in conferences. This program is designed as a bridge to all other opportunities. Richard explained that “the goal behind this initiative is to create a space where international graduate students spend time with our department, know the staff, and feel comfortable around other international students.” All these leadership programs allow international graduate students to explore various creative problem solving through risk-taking, understanding, and application; to develop a purposeful, holistic understanding of self; to build collaborative relationships and support networks; and to develop an understanding of inclusive, equitable communities.

The Residence Life Office has intensified the housing of its numerous support services in residence halls as a response to the internationalization strategic plan, which required student affairs professionals and staff to support international learning and living communities, and to increase links between international student and student affairs professionals and staff. John said that there is a student success center located in each residence hall community (North, South, East, and Towers). They are places where student affairs professionals and staff collaborate with all students, including international graduate students, who reside in the hall to become successful. Each success center has staff with different backgrounds to make sure that the residents, including international graduate students, receive the appropriate help. The staff included in each success center are an Academic Advisor, Care Advocate, Success Coach,
Residence Hall Director/Residence Director, Assistant Director of Residence Life, and a Community Policing Officer. There are also other programs organized by residence life to help all students, including international graduate students, better integrate into their campus. There is a care advocate program for licensed mental health professionals directly in the residence halls. Their mission is to provide staff consultation, support, crisis intervention, and proactive prevention efforts addressing mental health issues, and to act as a bridge to partner with offices supporting the personal growth and academic progress of students. There is also a fitness center in the graduate students’ apartments where all students can do sport and relax without going out of the building. All students, including international graduate students, also have laundry and other services available in their building, including cable TV and internet access.

We are career shapers. Some of my participants were involved in the creation and implementation of programs and services for all students. Some of these programs include orientation, immigration sessions, internship, job shadowing, different types of advising, leadership and career development. It is through these programs and services or initiatives that student affairs professionals and staff shape the careers of international graduate students. Many international graduate students have professional experiences prior to enrolling in a graduate degree program, and they come to Mid-Western University for better career opportunities, either in the United States or in their home countries. However, their pre-existing career goals do not consider the new skills, knowledge, and opportunities that they will obtain once at Mid-Western University. Once on campus, they meet student affairs professionals and staff, faculty, employers, and other students. These encounters and the new educational experience lead many of these students to change their career goals.
Student affairs offices teach these students how to design résumés, cover letters, prepare for job interviews, and negotiate salary, and many other key things. Vanesa explained that:

We want to make sure that international graduate students feel comfortable, that they feel like they have the same resources as other students as well, and that they have as many resources to get into careers here and internships here.

Once international graduate students know how to write a good résumé and cover letter and are prepared to interact with employers, they can go out and search for jobs with zero to minimal help from the Career Development Services office.

**We are the liaisons.** Student affairs professionals and staff act as liaisons to each one of the colleges and connect all students with employers. Even though this role is geared towards all students, my participants focused more on international graduate students, who are the focus of this study.

As liaisons, student affairs professionals and staff connect international graduate students with other departments on campus. My participants recognized their own lack of advanced intercultural skills as they pertain to visa, OPT, CPT, and some other programs and services. To accommodate international graduate students, they connect or refer these students to a more targeted office, such as Global Engagement, which houses the International Student Office. Genevieve explained that:

A lot of things with like visa and various specific legal questions, I a lot of times must refer to the International Office or the Global Engagement Office because I do not know a lot of [this]. I am trying to educate myself more because we do kind of need to know some of that with employers, but when it comes to any of those types of questions, yes, I do refer them.
The participants felt that they are not obligated to know about immigration issues, for example. The office that felt obligated to know these things is the Career Development Services.

As liaisons, student affairs professionals and staff also advocate for international graduate students by working with the city’s government and employers to ensure that these students’ issues are solved, and they have job opportunities. Lynda and other professionals and staff in career services help international graduate students to identify and connect with employers that are willing to sponsor a student on a work visa (H-B1), OPT, and CPT internships.

During campus career fair events, Lynda helps international graduate students to connect and meet with prospective employers, as she explained:

I have walked people up and introduced them because they felt a little bit intimidated, and then some do not at all. Some have organized their day in terms of the employers they want to meet and approach, and they go right to as soon as they knock on the door. So, whatever works. We are there to support and to break down the barriers.

This support service is complementary to what the Global Engagement Office offers.

In each event organized by career services, there is always an international students’ advisor present to answer the questions of international students and help them navigate the overall job process. These services are provided free of charge to the students and aim to effectively integrate international graduate students and guide them through their career path. This shows the type of relationship that student affairs professionals and staff at Mid-Western University constantly try to build with international students. Lynda explained that:

I will tell you at our career events, we have a pretty progressive Office of International Education. And Meghan, who works specifically with visas, puts up a table at the event so that the students have some sort of support and a friendly face aside from us that is
more aware of their situation quite possibly and can help them with approaching employers; that can be a pretty intimidating process.

Student affairs professionals and staff also act as liaisons with employers to educate them on the issues of international students since many of them do not know the process of hiring these students. Genevieve explained that:

I think educating employers on that so they understand because you know, some employers will reject international students just because they think they must sponsor them, but that is not always the case. I think that is part of where we are trying to move towards is educating employers as well.

The Career Development Services Office is charged with contacting employers that are known to recruit international students across the country and involve them in events such as the career fair. Other employers who have no experience hiring international graduate students are educated about the process and the implications for hiring an international graduate student.

Richard helps international graduate students to connect with local employers and find jobs, even though it is not part of his duties. These students feel comfortable asking Richard for help due to their relationship. Some student affairs professionals and staff have created an environment or a space for learning where students are not considered based on their religion, origin, or race, but where they can learn or acquire academic and professional skills.

We are the barrier breakers. Employers can be reluctant to hire or connect with international graduate students. This is a huge barrier since many international graduate students want to find a job or an internship either in the United States or in their counties of origin. Student affairs professionals and staff support these students by breaking this barrier of connecting and meeting with employers. Philip said that:
Every time we have a career fair, we ask employers if they are international student-friendly, and then we post that list in their pamphlet that they get at the door because we don’t want them to feel awkward, students or employers. And there are typically 20 to 25 employers that attend each career fair, that are willing to make an experience, again whether it is CPT, OPT, or with the mind of H-1B down the road.

This reluctance from employers is reinforced by the lack of student affairs professionals and staff members’ adequate intercultural skills to ensure buy-in. Lynda expressed the need to have a staff member with intercultural competencies, who can effectively connect with employers and teach employers more about hiring international students:

I would like to have a staff member who had expertise in visas and connections with employers that do have international placements. We need somebody who can do relationships with employers and bring that, bring that more to a prominent status on campus, but right now, I have got one employer relations person for the whole campus. I would have one specific set and focused on that population because there is enough that they want and, it is intense. It is a big job in terms of communicating and networking and building those relationships and connections with those employers. And giving them proper information that is required and knowledge that needs to be learned in terms of employing international students.

Lynda uses any type of resources on campus that seems helpful for international graduate students, including the library, with its extensive database of employers that are international friendly. On the other hand, Vincent is always there to help international graduate students find solutions on issues such as finance and employment. For example:
We have an international student that I know right now, whose father passed away and who was the breadwinner for the family. So, he had some money set here that was spent, so now he does not have it. So, what happened is we got on the phone and tried to see if there was anyone else that could let them work more hours as a graduate assistant or even just work on campus. And, usually, we find something somewhere if we work hard enough at it.

Additionally, some people on campus hold stereotypes regarding international students. Participants in this study claimed that they try to understand international students’ culture. Lyndsay explained:

I think some people on campus might be quick to jump to some stereotypes of, let us say, with our Saudi male population. Like I think when we first started having Saudi students on campus and that traditional viewpoint that Saudi men are discriminating against women or something, I think a lot of people had that in mind when they were working with students, and the student might’ve had frustration and been expressing frustration. Still, it was not necessarily male dominance being expressed. It was just the communication style, and you know, what they are still 20-year-old young people that we should give those allowances to plus that they have the language barrier. So, I think we in our office can be more graceful, tolerating behavior that might not be appropriate or is more of frustration than anything truly negative.

These stereotypes are usually the result of a lack of intercultural awareness. The implementation of the strategic internationalization plan has brought some changes. However, a lot of resources are needed to ensure that the many stereotypes against international students are seen and considered differently.
We Face Challenges in Serving International Graduate Students

Student affairs professionals and staff face many challenges in serving international graduate students. Despite the challenges, student affairs professionals and staff go above and beyond to make sure that international graduate students, like other students, receive the support they need while at Mid-Western University.

**Limited on-campus resources.** Participants noted a lack of financial resources and enough jobs to help international graduate students who struggle financially. Talking about financial challenges, Philip works with the Global Engagement Office on numerous initiatives. Still, the budget impedes them from implementing these initiatives, which would offer more services and opportunities to international students.

Another challenge that student affairs professionals and staff face in the International Student Office is the lengthy processing time of international applications, which they attributed to the lack of enough staff. Lynda explained that:

When you have an office that has been working for 20-25 years, the same person’s in the same positions for 10-15 years, whatever. They are used to a certain amount of paperwork and stuff coming through. Well, if that doubles, it is just pressure on them to do twice as much, and when that quadruples, they cannot take it anymore. And start rebelling things like taking vacations at the worst time of the year, and that can be a problem.

To remediate to the lengthy processing time of international applications, the International Student Office works with student workers to help processing applications. However, there is still a need for greater assistance in this office to make sure that international student applications
are processed promptly in this office and sent to the specific department for an admission decision.

My participants are hardworking and helpful to international students, but they are understaffed and overwhelmed by the number of students and work to be done. Moreover, many offices do not have the financial resources and are not even encouraged to serve international students. Richard considers the challenges for serving international graduate students like serving domestics ones. He attributed this to the university’s primary focus being undergraduate students. Therefore, any program or activity for undergraduate students must be tied to graduate students. Richard also noted the lack of financial support to create programs exclusively for all graduate students. Participants also noted the lack of campus community awareness on the real meaning of internationalization. They said that Mid-Western University, like other universities in the United States, talks about internationalization but does not do much on the ground, and many people do not know what it means. Angel elaborated that:

If you look at the websites for every university in the United States, every one of them talks about the importance of global citizenship. We understand the goal, but they do not know what that means. They use internationalization, and they use globalization interchangeably. They both mean something very different to the business folks than it does to historians or people in the social sciences.

The misunderstanding of what internationalization stands for impedes student affairs professionals and staff from better serving international graduate students on their campus. There are also cultural expectation differences between staff and international graduate students, which usually impede staff from effectively serving this population. Moreover, Mid-Western University is in a rural area far from major cities, and a less-developed transportation system makes it hard to get
international graduate students on campus or serve them effectively because student affairs professionals and staff have to direct these students to other cities for many resources they need. The offices that should or do provide services to international graduate students are on different areas of the campus. The separation or the distance of the office of international Student Office from other offices prevents student affairs professionals and staff from different offices or units meeting with and effectively serving these students like they used to. Moreover, it does not allow international and domestic students to meet and interact. Therefore, Richard explained that:

When I was here pursuing my bachelor’s degree, the international office was right next door to my student services. So, we were like; I was in student government. I had a young lady from Pakistan who was on my board, and I had a young lady from Sri Lanka, who was on my board. And when I came back for my master’s, they move the international office to a whole different building location. So now, the sense is the students don’t have that close communication with the international students anymore because where they put the students, there will be no reason for a student who is from the United States to go over there. So, it creates this separation where now international students stick together, and our American students stick together. So, it was unfortunate because they were not getting the experience that I had when I was here as a student.

International graduate students believe that the leadership and mentoring programs are only for domestic students. As a strategy to better advertise these programs and take away the stigma, the Leadership Institute is hiring staff from diverse backgrounds, and involving diverse students in the programs, but not marketing it to international graduate students. Moreover, some international graduate students fear that they will be Americanized, and they refuse to seek help
or services. John expressed his regrets regarding the lack of institutional investment in providing adequate services to meet the needs and challenges of international graduate students, as he explained:

I do not think we have invested as much as we need to. And it is kind of embarrassing to me that we charge the most tuition to our international students, but they don’t get the most services, and they don’t get the most attention, but they’re our biggest customers, so to speak, because they’re paying the most to be here. So, in my mind, if I were an international student, I would expect to get more of that because I am paying more than other people. I think we need to grow, and we need to become even more centered on the international graduate students’ experience.

Limited understanding of university policies. Many of my participants did not know about policies that were specifically designed for international graduate students or that they used to help international graduate students adjust and integrate. They rely on the international student office to help them understand policies for international students. The international student office follows the institutional and U.S government policies for international students based on each different type of visa.

Career services, which is one of the main offices where international graduate students seek help, does not have specific policies for international graduate students. Still, they do have goals and strategies that are connected to the university’s mission, vision, and imperatives. Ashley said that there is no specific policy for international graduate students, and she serves all students the same way:

I am not aware of any policy. I feel like we just treat everybody the same. And I mean we give everybody the information they need, the help, the assistance they need. So, there is
no particular policy in terms of international graduate students, we are just more accommodating.

Genevieve also said that “We don’t have anything in place, to be honest with you. We refer a lot to the office of international affairs when we do have questions, or we need, we have questions on policy.” Vanesa corroborated Genevieve’s statement saying that “I don’t know that we have any specific policies.” The most known policy for international graduate students is the continuous enrollment policy, which requires international students to be enrolled full time during the spring and fall semester.

All the participants closely work with the international affairs office. Vanesa refers international graduate students to the international affairs office if she cannot respond to questions, such as on visa, or anything related to law, as she explained: “We don’t have anything in place, to be honest with you. We refer a lot to the office of international affairs when we have questions on policy.” Although staff members in different areas work with and support international graduate students, there is a lack of knowledge about policies specific to these students. Offices have incorporated procedures, such as referring students to the International Affairs Office, but those procedures are not formally acknowledged.

**Limited intercultural training.** My participants voiced that many student affairs professionals and staff at Mid-Western University do not participate in intercultural trainings. In contrast, to serve international graduate students, student affairs professionals and staff should be able to recognize the needs of these students, where they are from, and the struggles they face. Participants noted the lack of awareness from the campus community regarding the lives and issues of international graduate students. Their responses elucidated a need for a development plan to educate the campus community to have a better conversation around international
graduate students, their career development, and to help these students develop a network of champions that will help them thrive. Participants seem knowledgeable about issues related to their areas of service and did not know much about immigration rules and regulations as they relate to international graduate students. Only the professionals and staff who closely work with the global engagement office knew immigration rules and regulations. Even though there are trainings available for student affairs professionals and staff, there is a need for more training on how to serve international graduate students better considering this hostile political climate and their evolving immigration needs. International students have different types of visas, and those helping them must be able to understand the specifics of each student and visa, which in turn affects their career plans. When I asked about the content of a training that they need, Lindsay noted that:

I would think more training on Optional Practical Training (OPT), Curricular Practical Training (CPT), and Academic Training (AT). I mean, although we have it, but just more training for like the career development and staff members so, they know exactly how to approach them when they are asked questions.

Each student affairs unit or office has its own needs in terms of training for serving international graduate students. These trainings involve several offices that serve international students, and they do not focus on international graduate students. The positive impacts of the training can only be seen if different units or offices collaborate. For example, Richard recommended joint training with those in financial aid, domestic student and international student admissions on how to collaborate and better serve international students in general. The current trainings are geared towards international undergraduate students. Philip suggested that “the future trainings
focus on international graduate students, so that we as a unit can learn more about the graduate students’ experience outside our interaction with them.”

Student affairs professionals and staff usually have their master’s degrees, and many master’s programs in higher education talk about international students. Current higher education programs are becoming more culturally competency focused. Student affairs professionals and staff at Mid-Western University receive intercultural trainings, but those trainings are limited. They are limited in terms of what they cover, the time frame, and its frequency. Many of these trainings cover general topics on internationalization or international education without addressing the real needs and challenges that student affairs professionals and staff face in serving international graduate students. Moreover, these trainings are not frequently offered, and they are optional. As for the reason why the training on how to serve international graduate student is optional, Paul explained that:

Well, one of the issues is because they keep international students so far away from us, no one has seen that type of training is important unless you can prove that you are working with a lot of extra students. So, of course, like Study Abroad Office, they get a whole bunch of different training and people who are hired, who are working with like international students like their professors and staff, they are getting a lot of training. So, for someone like me, who is just like working with all students every week, if I do not reach out to them, I will never see any of them. So basically, your service is geared to all students, but you feel like you are serving only one type of population because of that lack of closeness.

Participants noted that in the case of a training need, the specific department should require it. Many of these trainings are offered by the Global Engagement Office or other
consultants with extensive expertise hired to train staff on campus. Lynda explained that “we work with them and they have done some workshops in the past with us, just information sessions. We don’t do that every year, but we have done some of that.” There is no regular intercultural training for student affairs professionals and staff at Mid-Western University. Lynda believes that it would be helpful to have regular trainings. The few available intercultural trainings are general and do not focus on international graduate students. Vanesa said that “Here at MWU, we are provided with many types of professional development opportunities. So, either in-house or not, not many that focus on graduate students. Mostly, we just focus on international students and gender.”

Participants consider their affiliation with professional organizations and attendance at conferences as a few of the best ways to acquire intercultural skills and knowledge. For example, Richard regularly attends conferences, such as National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and he has done extensive readings to learn how to serve international students. Vincent added that “I went to a NAFSA, and I was one of the students. I became a student who learned so much at NAFSA because there is so much there. It is also an incredible learning place if you want it to be.”

Student affairs professionals and staff are very busy and usually do not have time to attend trainings, and these trainings opportunities are usually optional. To facilitate the learning and training, the international Student Office has put many of the trainings online so that student affairs professionals and staff can learn at their own pace. John said that the closeness of his office to one of the International Student Offices played a key role in the intercultural training that his staff benefits. John praised their collaboration with the International Student Office.
regarding some of the issues of international graduate students that his office could not answer, and intercultural training or professional development opportunities.

Participants also pointed out the language and cultural differences of the expectations of how often things get turned around. On the language challenge, John said that it was a source of misunderstandings between staff and international students who had limited English language skills. The misunderstanding is usually intensified if the student affairs professional who talks to the student has limited intercultural training or skills.

**Limited intercultural exposure.** The question of intercultural competence or training is individualized because the experiences of each student affairs professional or staff are different, and maybe unique. Participants recognized the importance of the training they are provided, but they believe that it is not enough. To serve international graduate students, one should be able to recognize the needs of these students “Until they have traveled abroad, connected with people from different cultures, it is hard for student affairs professionals and staff to serve these students,” Richard said. Richard further talked about his own experience that:

I was aware of the global perspective, but I do not think until I went to Hong Kong and China first, and that was a transformational experience for me. But going to South Africa was a profound transformational experience. I think that is when it clicked for me. That was in 2013. As a student affair professional, we have got to have a global perspective no matter where we live, we must be engaged in what is going on around the world.

Genevieve corroborated Richard’s words saying that “everybody should have an intercultural experience. I am a big advocate of that, get out of your little world and your comfort zone and, experience what others do when they come over here.” Philip added that “it is pretty critical to have that understanding of the students’ experience to serve them best.” One of the best
strategies for student affairs professionals and staff to get out of their comfort zone is to travel in other countries, especially the ones where many of their students come from. The arguments of Richard and Genevieve were supported by Lynda, who explained the importance of traveling abroad for student affairs who serve international graduate students. She said that “all student affairs professionals and staff must have some international travels or intercultural experiences as part of their experiences, to serve international graduate students better.”

Traveling to other countries allowed student affairs professionals and staff at Mid-Western University to know where their students come from, their lifestyle, and how career services in different countries and universities operate, especially in terms of serving students from diverse backgrounds. Lynda considered her international trips as pieces of training since they have provided her with international experiences and awareness that are key in serving international students, and domestic students who want to study abroad:

It gave me a whole different language to think about international students’ experience on this campus, as well as our domestic students that study abroad and come back. How to leverage that experience, what it meant, surviving in a country, and that you have not only just learned a new language just as international students here.

The travel experience is meaningful when student affairs professionals or staff can live like locals and meet the families of their current or prospective students, understand what kind of industries they have in those countries, and what kind of life they may have when they return. Genevieve added:

that made it richer and then to come back and to see how our students fitted in, and they were quite lost. It enlarged my little world in terms of where the opportunities lay, and
not only for international students but the domestic students that should have some sort of international experience because we are in an international market.

After her international travel, Lindsay said that “it changed my life.” All the participants with travel experience said that it helps them understanding life, and what things look like in those countries and becoming better advisers in terms of any international graduate students that would seek them out since they now have shared experiences.

Student affairs professionals and staff serve international graduate students better when they have shared experiences. Vanesa said that “it’s critical in our unit that you have international experience preferably living abroad because if you are trying to serve students who are away from their friends and family and everything, they know that’s familiar to them.” Angel, Richard, and Vincent said that the international travel experiences have allowed them to understand better where the students come from, their food, cultures, and the rationales for some of their behaviors on the Mid-Western University campus. Ashley has been abroad multiples times, and that experience has been crucial in serving international graduate students, as she explained that:

I naturally serve international students better because I can relate to them. I understand the issue they might be going through. That gave me a better understanding of how exactly they feel and what it means to them to be here, without a family or just in a different country.

Student affairs professionals and staff who realize that international graduate students are away from their families, to some extent, become close or play the role of a family member for these students.
International travel is one of the best ways for student affairs professionals and staff to build cultural backgrounds, which are crucial in understanding different cultures and helps them value other cultures as well. From his international travel experiences, Philip noted that “I have learned that preconceived ideas have no value. I became much more appreciative of international students because I also got to see that.” Vincent added that:

There are many different languages, just a lot of differences. So, for me, it opened my eyes that I have these wrong preconceived notions. And the same thing is true when students come here. I had to get rid of that. I had to get rid of that idea of grouping people together. And I think it helped me because each student is unique. Each student is on their own, and they have their own story, and there are differences, but they can tell me, I do not, I am not going to jump to the conclusion that what they might be. So, I would say my life has been enriched.

International travels have also allowed Vincent to build and sustain friendships with people in those countries, which up until now have allowed him to stay up to date on events and issues that many of these countries face.

Mid-Western University and its different units do not have enough financial resources to pay for student affairs professionals or staff to travel. Faculty are the ones who travel more often to experience and acquire intercultural knowledge and skills. John praised their collaboration with the international Student Office regarding some of the issues of international graduate students that his office could not answer, and intercultural training or professional development opportunities. However, he regretted the lack of funding for travel opportunities for student affairs professionals and staff, which he attributed to the budget cut and decrease of enrollment.
Conclusion

This chapter addressed the role of student affairs professionals and staff in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. The findings indicate that student affairs professionals and staff play five roles in the integration of international graduate students, which are educators, adapters, liaisons, career shapers, and barrier breakers. To respond to the needs and challenges (language, employment/H-1B Visa, a sense of belonging and integration, time management, reaching out for help, psychological, transportation and access to other cities, internships, and economic/financial) of international graduate students, student affairs professionals and staff adapt the existing programs and support services initially designed for undergraduate domestic students, while some of the needs and challenges of these students are different. The needs and challenges of international graduate students are closely intertwined that the job of student affairs professionals and staff is a balancing act of how to meet those needs while dealing with the challenges. In serving international graduate students, student affairs professionals and staff face challenges, such as limited on-campus resources for international graduate students, limited understanding of university policies, limited intercultural training, and limited intercultural exposure. These challenges negatively affect the quality and impact of programs and support services student professionals and staff provide towards the integration of international graduate students.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand student affairs professionals and staff members’ perspectives about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. Using a qualitative case study methodology, I gave voice to student affairs professionals and staff by listening to their experiences and interpretation of events and activities related to integrating international graduate students on their campus.

The study addressed the three following questions:

1. How do student affairs professionals and staff who work with international graduate students view their role in integrating these students into a university campus?

2. What strategies, policies, services, and programs do student affairs professionals and staff deem most helpful to facilitate international graduate students' integration, including any adaptations needed to best support such students?

3. What support and training do student affairs professionals and staff receive to help integrate international graduate students?

In Chapter 4, I presented the findings obtained from the interviews. In Chapter 5, I discuss how the results correspond to the study purpose and research questions. I propose a revised conceptual framework for understanding student affairs professionals and staff members’ role in integrating international graduate students into campus. I then examine how this study's results relate, reinforce, or extend the existing literature. Also, I propose recommendations for higher education institutions that enroll international graduate students. Finally, I discuss the implications for future research.
Discussion of Major Findings as Connected to the Research Questions

In this study, I used three theories related to student integration to understand how student affairs professionals and staff help integrate international graduate students into campus. The leading theory I used was Tinto's (2012) updated theory of student integration, which suggests that a sense of belonging, which is the feeling of belonging to one or many communities on campus and being supported at the university, is a critical element of student satisfaction, academic success, integration and retention (Tinto, 1975, 1993). I also applied Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement and Kuh's (2009) theory of student engagement as secondary theories. Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement posits that students change and develop by being involved and integrated into their higher education institution. The level of involvement in extra-curricular activities and interaction with faculty or other institutional personnel is linked with student outcomes. Kuh's (2009) theory of student engagement represents "the time and effort students devote to activities empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (p. 683).

These theories provided a foundation for understanding the vital role student affairs professionals and staff play in integrating international graduate students into campus and the strategies, policies, services, and programs that student affairs professionals and staff deem most helpful to facilitate international graduate students' integration. These theories guided the development of my study questions and framed my analysis of the interviews, documents, and observation notes from this study. I also used these theories as lenses for the discussion.

Question 1

1. The first research question was: How do student affairs professionals and staff who work with international graduate students view their role in integrating these students into a
university campus? Participants in my study shared the multiple strategies and approaches they take toward assisting international graduate students' integration into the campus. These strategies include encouraging interactions with other students, referrals to support offices, and organizing social and informational events. Participants in this study also help international graduates know the job search strategies, understand the cultural differences in the job search process, cope with their stress and depression, and navigate their financial challenges.

In this study, student affairs professionals and staff encouraged international graduate students to build and sustain friendships with domestic students to practice and improve their language and social skills. Some student affairs professionals and staff reported that they also refer their international graduate students to the English language center for their language needs. The language center is one of the few places on campus that provides international graduate students the opportunity to interact with other international students and Midwestern University instructors regularly. A high level of interactions between international graduate students, other students, faculty, and student affairs professionals and staff creates a sense of belonging in international graduate students, which affects their campus involvement, engagement, and integration (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 2012).

Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University organize and fund social events to help international students and their families meet other students and the community. These events are opportunities to limit international students' segregation, feel connected, and enhance their sense of community. All of these elements are pivotal to international graduate students' social and academic integration. This finding reflects those of Girmay (2017), who found that events are opportunities for international graduate students to learn from their
American peers and the community and share their own culture. My study’s participants clarified that international students who have families and those who live on campus are the ones who mostly attend and benefit from these events. This finding aligns with that of Rodríguez et al. (2019), who found that satisfaction in social and community relations was more common among married international graduate students and those who had more exposure to the local culture.

Student affairs units at Midwestern University collaborate with the international student office to organize an orientation to provide international students valuable information about policies on academic honesty, sexual harassment, and where to find some resources on campus. Still, they do not tap into the specific needs and challenges of international graduate students. The orientation is intended to support the transition and integration of all international students on campus. However, some student affairs professionals and staff in this study mentioned that international students still struggle to find services across campus and are underserved even after attending the orientation. This finding is similar to that of Guo and Chase (2011), who found that although many students attended the orientations organized by the international office or their own departments, they left these students in need of more in-depth discussion about how the system worked and the expectations of them as graduate students and Teaching Assistants. In the case of Midwestern University, participants who work with international graduate students did not feel that those students were served well by having the orientation as soon as they arrived in the country. In that regard, Ren and Hagedorn (2012) suggested pre-arrival orientations or regular development workshops for international graduate students. Participants in this study emphasized the importance of a specific orientation for international graduate students. Currently, at Midwestern University, only specific academic departments offer orientation to international graduate students who teach and are research assistants. This finding was echoed by
Rodríguez et al. (2019), who found that international graduate students felt the most vital connection to the university through their academic department and that their department was a source of community.

Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University help international graduates learn job search strategies and understand the cultural differences in the job search process. This help includes teaching international graduate students how to write a resume and a cover letter and find an internship or employment. In this study, student affairs professionals and staff shared that one of the main reasons many international graduate students come to their institution and the United States is for better employment opportunities during their studies or post-graduation. Hence, student affairs professionals and staff at MWU do their best to connect international graduate students with potential employers, including H1B sponsors. The career fair is the foremost opportunity for student affairs professionals and staff at MWU to connect all students with employers. One of the student affairs professionals and staff commented that during the career fair, "I have walked people up and introduced them because they felt a little bit intimidated and then some don't at all. So, whatever works. We are there to support and to break down the barriers." However, connecting international graduate students and employers was complicated for study participants because they felt that many employers were not well educated about international graduate students' challenges and needs. Connecting international graduate students to other stakeholders enhances these students' ability to further integrate into U.S. culture, which could in turn impact their overall performance and experience (Rienties et al., 2011; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Despite the staff members' efforts to help international graduate students learn the job search strategies and understand cultural differences
in the job search process, they felt that broader structural barriers inhibited these students’ opportunities to earn money and make connections through employment off-campus.

Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University help international graduate students cope with their stress and depression experienced throughout their academic journeys. The psychological help provided to these students on campus is for those with lower levels of stress or depression issues. International students with severe or higher stress or depression are referred to external providers with more resources. Participants noted that external organizations' cost of this psychological help is higher and usually not covered by international students' limited health insurance.

Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University help international graduate students navigate their financial or economic challenges, which is critical to their campus integration. They assist international graduate students by knowing where and how to find scholarships, as well as on-campus or off-campus employment to cover their tuition and living expenses. In the event that a staff unit or office at MWU cannot personally help these students find solutions to their financial or economic problems, my study participants call or refer them to other offices on campus, employers, or relatives in the community for help.

Even though student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University use the tools at their disposal to help integrate international graduate students into the university campus, they felt that the college often did not meet the various specific needs and challenges of international graduate students, particularly when they lump international graduate students in with domestic graduate and undergraduate students. This finding is consistent with the narrative of Lane (2014), who said in a phone interview that:
An international student is a misnomer. We lump them into one category, but "them" comprises Brazilian, Canadian, Chinese, and other very different groups of students. As the number of international students increases, we see increasing diversity in terms of their needs as individuals and how they learn. That requires us to adapt. (as cited in Ward, 2017, p.6)

My participants called for strategies, policies, services, and programs that respond to international students' unique needs and challenges to facilitate these students' integration into campus.

**Question 2**

The second research question was: What strategies, policies, services, and programs do student affairs professionals and staff deem most helpful to facilitate the integration of international graduate students, including any adaptations needed to best support such students?

The strategy to facilitate the integration of international graduate students at Midwestern University depends on the situation at hand. However, the most commonly used strategies used by student affairs professionals and staff I interviewed were to collaborate across student affairs units on campus, adapt the support services initially designed for domestic students to serve international graduate students, and refer them to other offices or departments known to help them. They felt the immigration and employment policies were the most helpful in integrating international graduate students. My study's participants considered career services, international student office, leadership institute, residential life, recreation center, student activities, and involvement crucial to the engagement, involvement, adjustment, experience, and integration of international graduate students into campus. Furthermore, my study's participants deemed the language program, the leadership programs and seminars, dinners' events, career development...
programs, social-community and cultural programs, and the advocate program as the most helpful programs to engage, involve, and integrate international graduate students.

My study participants considered collaboration across different campus units as one of the most critical strategies to integrate international graduate students. This collaboration implies the sharing of information related to services and programs that each office offers. This strategy allows student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University to help international graduate students in their specific units and help them know or get the other services from other units on campus. The international student office's involvement has been critical in the effectiveness of this strategy. However, the overreliance on the international student office at Midwestern University to regularly help other student affairs professionals and staff whenever they have to serve international students may imply a deference to bureaucracy, a lack of adequate services for these students in those offices, or a lack of staff in those offices to address these students' specific needs and challenges.

The participants I spoke with who did not work at Midwestern University's international student office or career development office did not know about policies on services and programs that should guide their effort to help international graduate students integrate. However, participants who work at the international student office and career development center considered immigration and employment policies the most helpful in integrating international graduate students. This difference in opinion and awareness can be attributed to the fact that the international student office is the primary office that serves international students. These students are the reason why this office exists. As Perez-Encinas and Ammigan (2016) asserted, the international student office is the one-stop-shop covering a full range of programs and services dedicated to international students and scholars. Some of my study participants who
do not work in the international student and career development offices consider international students the responsibility of the international student and career development offices. This approach is contrary to the literature which asserts that the provision of intercultural support services to diverse populations is an ethical responsibility of all student affairs professionals and staff, not just of a few, as has been the standard on many university campuses (Di Maria, 2012; Pope et., 2009), and indicates a potential gap that could impact Midwestern University’s ability to serve students.

There is a tension in higher education institutions between proponents of the idea to provide a centralized location (one-stop-shop) for international students and those who assume that everyone should have knowledge of international students' needs (Di Maria, 2012; Pope et., 2009; Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018). These distinct views are key challenges to the implementation of the strategic internationalization plan at Mid-Western University. However, Midwestern University’s strategic plan specifically called for a proactive recruitment and retention of international students, and the availability of data, finance, and learning opportunities for faculty and student affairs professionals and staff for their internationalization efforts. Their internationalization committee suggested a strong, multi-function international student office and a strong involvement of other campus units in providing programs and support services to all international students.

My study participants considered career services, international student office, leadership institute, residential life, recreation center, student activities, and involvement crucial to the adjustment, experience, and integration of international graduate students into campus. The most important services are the international student office and career services. Both services help international graduate students meet two of their main needs: maintaining their legal status and
preparing for and finding employment. Participants recognized the collaboration between career
development and the international student office to serve and integrate international graduate
students. Their collaboration stems from the fact that they provide essential services to
international graduate students and that some of their services overlap or are complementary. My
study indicates that student affairs professionals and staff from these two units regularly
communicate with international students, which gives them a wealth of intercultural competence.
Student affairs professionals and staff in my study deemed the language program, the leadership
programs and seminars, dinners, events, career development programs, social-community and
cultural programs, and the advocate program as most helpful to engage, involve, and integrate
international graduate students. Even though most of these programs are primarily intended for
undergraduate and domestic students, every program has its merits for the adjustment,
engagement, and integration of international graduate students. My participants noted a limited
participation of international graduate students in many of these programs without recognizing
their own responsibility in this situation. However, it is the responsibility the entire institution,
including students, student affairs professionals, staff, faculty, parents and other stakeholders at
Midwestern University, to create an environment that fulfills the promise of cross-cultural
engagement and integration of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Student affairs
professionals and staff alone do not have the power or the authority to make critical institutional
decisions and changes about policies, processes, programs, and support services related to the
cross-cultural engagement and integration of students from diverse cultural backgrounds.
Everybody at the institution should be knowledgeable about the context of different students be
involved and be involved in initiatives related to international students’ integration and cross-
cultural engagement. This was one of the recommendations of their strategic internationalization plan as well.

There is no single best way for student affairs professionals and staff at MWU to facilitate international graduate students' integration. It is challenging to adapt existing programs and services for international graduate students. There is also no formula for student affairs and staff at MWU to follow because international graduate students are different and have different interests, socio-cultural predispositions, challenges, and needs. This reality is also true even for international graduate students from the same country or continent (Nguyen & Larson, 2017).

Question 3

The third research question was: What support and training do student affairs professionals and staff receive to help integrate international graduate students? My study participants noted that they began their training about supporting students from different cultural backgrounds during their academic studies (undergraduate or graduate). My study's participants also acquired intercultural experience and competence through professional conferences and affiliation to professional organizations, and international travels. At Midwestern University, my study participants receive limited support and training to serve and integrate international graduate students. Participants felt that they had a limited knowledge, skills, and awareness of unfamiliar cultures because of the limited training they received.

The earliest support and training that participants in my study received was during their educational or academic journeys. Many of the student affairs professionals and staff I interviewed have master's degrees in higher education or a closely related major. Their academic training included international or intercultural requirements intended to prepare them to serve students from different socio-cultural backgrounds. However, they revealed that the various
specific and changing needs and challenges of international graduate students make it hard for those who have not been interculturally trained beyond their educational experience to help these students transition and integrate into campus effectively.

The student affairs professionals and staff in my study received limited professional development training on best practices to serve international students on their campus, but no training that focused specifically on working with international graduate students. They extend their knowledge acquired in these trainings to address the issues that are specific to international graduate students. In addition, many intercultural trainings for student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University were optional and did not focus on international graduate students, which resulted in participants feeling as though they did not always have adequate knowledge to assist with these students' challenges and needs.

Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University acquired some of their intercultural experience and competence through professional conferences and affiliation with professional organizations. Conferences provide student affairs professionals and staff the opportunity to meet other professionals and staff or practitioners and share their knowledge. As members of professional organizations, they have access to extensive materials that they can read and acquire intercultural awareness (ACPA - College Educators International & NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 2010). However, these opportunities do not replace the university's responsibility to provide its student affairs professionals and staff the necessary training to serve international graduate students.

Some student affairs professionals and staff in my study travel internationally as part of their formal and informal intercultural training or professional development. These trips provide the opportunity to experience and live like international students. This experience is critical to
ensure that student affairs professionals and staff serve international graduate students based on personal experience. As the benefit of her international travels, Ashley confirmed that "I naturally serve international students better because I can relate to them. I understand what the season they might be going through." Unfortunately, many student affairs professionals and staff I interviewed in this study were not involved in study abroad opportunities. This finding echoed the literature, which says that faculty (rather than staff) are more likely to travel for research or lead study abroad for students (Chroniste, 2017; Grazulis & Markuckiene, 2014). My participants blamed this on budget cuts across campus and their overloaded schedules, which prevented them from traveling even if they could.

Summary

Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University play critical roles in the integration of international graduate students. However, they faced numerous challenges, such as limited intercultural training opportunities, budget cuts, and limited campus resources, which impede them to help international graduate students integrate into campus. Despite those challenges, student affairs professionals and staff I interviewed use all the resources at their disposal, including adapting programs and support services, to ensure that international graduate students integrate into campus.

Revised Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Role of Student Affairs Professionals and Staff in Integrating International Graduate Students

This study's original conceptual framework focused on international graduate students' challenges and what student affairs professionals and staff do to help these students face those challenges and integrate them into campus (see Figure 1). I applied Tinto's (2012) adapted theory of student integration as a lens. Tinto's (2012) updated theory of student integration posits that the sense of belonging, which is the feeling of belonging to one or many communities on campus
and being supported at the university, is a crucial element in student satisfaction, academic
success, integration, and retention (Tinto, 1975, 1993). This theory was supported by Astin's
the literature, I expected student affairs professionals and other staff members at Midwestern
University to engage in the specific things these theories suggest to help international graduate
students integrate into their campus. However, I also anticipated that a lack of resources might
hinder those efforts.

While analyzing my study's data, a new conceptual framework emerged to describe better
the roles of student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University in integrating
international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other
elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. This updated framework
illustrates some of the most significant challenges that impede student affairs professionals and
staff at Midwestern University in effectively playing their roles towards international graduate
students' campus integration. This conceptual framework shows how, despite the numerous
challenges they encounter, student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University do
their best to meet international graduate students' integration challenges (see Figure 2).
Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University play five critical roles in integrating international graduate students into campus: liaisons, career shapers, educators, adapters, and barrier breakers. As liaisons, student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University connect international graduate students with employers, other students, faculty, offices, services on and off-campus, and the community, and direct these students to the right services whenever needed. Notably, they advocate for international graduate students when they
have challenges. Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University organize events such as career fairs to allow both employers and international students to meet and talk about career opportunities.

As career shapers, student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University offer support services, such as orientation, immigration sessions, internships, job shadowing, different types of advising, and career development opportunities, which shape international graduate students' careers. One of the main reasons international graduate students study at Midwestern University is to achieve a better career after graduation. Hence, student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University provide these students opportunities to prepare themselves for employment either in the United States or in another country. Those opportunities include knowing how to write a resume and a cover letter, do an interview, and market themselves as the best fit for employment positions in various fields and geographic locations.

As educators, student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University teach international graduate students how to tell their story, how to communicate better who it is that they are and where they want to go. They also help educate international graduate students to understand their challenges better and take responsibility where appropriate. Within this role, student affairs professionals and staff help international graduate students understand their new education system or environment and what it takes to be successful in that environment.

As adapters, student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University adapt the programs and support services initially designed for undergraduate domestic or international students to serve international graduate students. Many of the programs and support services at Midwestern University are intended for undergraduate and domestic students. Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University have become creative when working with the
international graduate student population. Not only do they adapt programs and support services crucial to the integration of international graduate students, but they also encourage international graduate students to use those programs and support systems.

As barrier breakers, student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University educate employers and the community on international graduate students' employment needs and challenges. My study participants said that employers are often not aware of the implications or advantages of hiring an international student. My participants believe that this lack of employers' awareness is a critical barrier for international graduate students who expect to find jobs before and after graduation. As barrier breakers, student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University regularly meet employers who already have international students as employees in their company. They encourage these employers to keep doing so by offering other opportunities such as internships to international students. They also encourage those who have never hired an international student to do so by explaining the numerous advantages of having an employee with different socio-cultural backgrounds. Student affairs professionals and staff also encourage international graduate students not to be shy, to go out and meet potential employers, and use different career platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed, Handshake, Higher Ed Jobs, ZipRecruiter, Monster, Career Builder, Glassdoor, and many others.

Within their roles, student affairs professionals and staff face numerous challenges. Those challenges include limited on-campus resources for international graduate students, limited understanding of university policies, limited intercultural training, and limited intercultural exposure. These challenges often impede student affairs professionals and staff from effectively integrating international graduate students into the campus and negatively affect the campus internationalization process. These challenges are usually out of the control of student
affairs professionals and staff. They are the result of institutional, structural, and individual influences across the institution. For example, the limited on-campus resources, limited intercultural exposure, limited intercultural training are institutional and structural challenges, while limited understanding of university policies is an institutional and individual challenge. Hence, student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University have to address themselves with these challenges, which they do not control. However, student affairs professionals and staff at MWU do their best to meet international graduate students' integration challenges. When student affairs professionals and staff effectively play their roles mentioned above, they lead to more engagement (Kuh, 2009), a sense of belonging (Tinto, 2012), involvement (Astin, 1999), and integration for international graduate students (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2012).

**Relationship of Results to Existing Literature**

The literature that exists on international students primarily addresses the perspectives of faculty and international students themselves (Cao et al., 2014; De Araujo, 2011; Ebinger, 2011; Horne et al., 2018; Gopalan, Beutell, & Middlemiss, 2019; Jin & Schneider, 2019; Nguyen, 2013; Ray, 2018; Trice, 2003, 2007; Wang & BrckaLorenz, 2018; Wekullo, 2019). Only a few studies give voice to student affairs professionals and staff (Burdzinski, 2014; Di Maria, 2012; McFarlane, 2015; Jaffer, 2014; Yao & Mwangi, 2017; Nguyen & Larson, 2017; Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2018).

Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University encourage the interactions, friendships, and understanding between different student populations to facilitate international graduate students' integration on campus. That is done through social events and activities. This finding aligns with the literature, which states that the interactions between
international students, faculty, domestic students, and student affairs staff influence the educational experience of international students and provide all these stakeholders the opportunity to share and acquire intercultural competence (Arthur, 2017; Braskamp, 2011; British Council, 2014; Clarke, 2016; Eland, 2014; Gareis, 2012; Long, 2012; Trice, 2003).

Encouraging international graduate students at Midwestern University to build and sustain friendships, be part of student organizations, and collaborate with other stakeholders on and off-campus also ensures that they have access to support and services that sometimes were not meant for them or that the institution cannot offer.

Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University also help international graduate students learn job search strategies and understand the cultural differences in the job search process in the United States, since many international graduate students study in the United States for better employment or career advancement. However, there is a known gap in knowledge between international students, career services professionals, and employers regarding work authorization options in the U.S. and the perception that the work authorization process is too complicated (Balin et al., 2016). The dream of finding a job is sometimes shattered by a limited awareness about these students' employment needs and challenges, and the many restrictions imposed by the immigration on the duration of work or internship, the type of work to be done and the location, and H-1B visa sponsorship. Study participant Genevieve said, "Some employers will reject international students just because they think they have to sponsor them, but that is not always the case."

There is a lack of focus on graduate-level international students in research and scholarship in the United States (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; Hyun, 2019; Huang, 2016; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Okahana & Allum, 2015; Sharma, 2019). The limited literature
on international graduate students results from assumptions about international graduate students' needs, challenges, and overall academic experience from other students, student affairs, staff, faculty, and others. Those assumptions include the belief that both international undergraduate and graduate students have the same needs and challenges, and they negatively impact the creation and improvement of support services and attention student affairs professionals and staff should provide international graduate students (Curtin et al., 2013; Girmay, 2017; Huang et al., 2016; Sharma, 2017; Trice 2003, 2007). Similarly, some of my study's participants viewed international graduate students like they did other students rather than a unique population with distinct needs and challenges for their integration. One of my participants, Paul, said, "So, we treat them no different than we do any domestic student. The only difference will be the visa issue and how they articulate their skills and what they bring to the organization." Other study's participants, especially those who regularly work with international students, recognized international graduate students as having specific challenges that differ from domestic students and other acculturating groups.

Rather than developing programs and support services designed to meet international graduate students' needs and challenges, student affairs professionals and staff in this study use or adapt existing programs services intended to meet domestic students' needs. This approach of adapting existing services and programs to facilitate international graduate students' integration on campus is common (Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Sullivan, 2011). Reflecting on her student affairs unit at Midwestern University, Vanesa said, "We don't have any programs that are tailored toward international students. And that's definitely a concern as we are starting to build out our programs and services." The American Council of Education (2017) noted that adapting programs and services to meet the needs of international students who may come from different
cultural backgrounds is a significant challenge. Instead of creating or adapting undergraduate or domestic student support programs for international graduate students, Sharma (2019) believes that new support programs and practices must be intentionally designed or added to foster these students' agency.

Student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University collaborate with other units or offices to ensure that international graduate students have an easier transition into their new academic environment and, more importantly, overcome their challenges. This collaboration with other offices improves the quality and availability of services for international graduate students. Collaborative effort between various campus partners aids international graduate students’ adjustment to their new academic environment and community (Girmay, 2017). Collaborating offers student affairs professionals and staff a way to maximize time and student participation and minimize international students' challenges of visiting several offices and attending various programmers and sessions (McFarlane, 2015).

Despite their crucial roles in integrating international graduate students, my participants did not feel they had enough intercultural competence to serve and integrate international graduate students. The literature posits that student affairs professionals and staff do not possess enough inter-cultural intercultural competence to serve or integrate students from different socio-cultural backgrounds (Burdzinski, 2014; Cierra, 2004; Di Maria, 2012; Moswela & Mukhopadhayay, 2011; Pope et al., 2004). Despite a lack of formal training, my study revealed that the role of student affairs professionals and staff at Midwestern University is a supportive one. They help international graduate students meet their needs and find solutions to the challenges that could impede their integration into campus by playing various roles. Braskamp (2011) said that student affairs professionals aim to develop college students as a "whole
person,” both academically and professionally. My finding corroborates with the one of The American Council on Education (2011), which states that:

Colleges and universities must prepare people for a globalized world, including developing the ability to compete economically, to operate effectively in other cultures and settings, to use knowledge to improve their own lives and their communities, and to comprehend the realities of the contemporary world better, so that they can better meet their responsibilities as citizens. (p. 1)

Overall, my study clarifies that student affairs professionals and staff take an individualized approach toward assisting or mentoring international graduate students. Some learn more and offer help in areas where students need assistance, even if it is outside the scope of their job duties. Others view assistance as sending them to another office, which can potentially become a deterrent for international students. Yet others are not prepared to serve international graduate students and believe that serving these students is the international student office's job, not theirs (Di Maria, 2012; Pope et al., 2009). Further, this procedure of sending or referring international graduate students to other offices is not formally acknowledged.

**Recommendations for Educational Institutions and Student Affairs Professionals and Staff**

At the beginning of this study, I envisioned that other higher educational institutions could use the findings to develop training opportunities to allow student affairs professionals and staff to meet international graduate students’ needs and challenges. I also thought that other researchers or practitioners interested in international students and student affairs might use this study's findings as a baseline of information. My findings from this study have confirmed those initial thoughts. However, it is important to note that even though these recommendations
encompass international graduate students, they are based on student affairs professionals and
staff views, and they do not reflect the opinions of international graduate students.

**Revisit Intercultural Trainings for Student Affairs Professionals and Staff**

Higher education institutions and student affairs divisions must revisit their intercultural
training and how they are often provided to stakeholders across campus. Student affairs
professionals and staff are equipped with international competence training, but they cannot
attend many trainings due to their overloaded work schedule (Di Maria, 2012). This situation
indicates a need to re-examine the workload and prioritize areas such as international and
cultural competence training that are vital to meeting internationalization goals in ways that
benefit the students. At MWU, intercultural training is not part of the onboard training, and
available trainings to gain intercultural competencies are optional. This highlights a common
problem faced by student affairs staff who work with international graduate students. How can
they best serve students if they are not provided the tools and training to do so?

**Offer Intercultural Learning Opportunities to Student Affairs, Including International Travels**

Student affairs professionals and staff should be encouraged to travel as part of their
intercultural training. However, international trips are not the only way to acquire intercultural
competence. Intercultural competence is acquired through a mix of online training, conferences,
seminars, on-campus training, reading, international trips, and friendships with people from
different socio-cultural backgrounds (Major & Mangope, 2014; Pope et al., 2004; Yakaboski &
Perozzi, 2018). The university should provide funding and time to student affairs professionals
and staff to travel abroad or acquire intercultural competence through one of the ways above.

Faculty-led study abroad programs should be re-imagined to include student affairs
professionals and staff. Like faculty, student affairs professionals and staff develop international
students as a whole (Major & Mangope, 2014). Nevertheless, many study abroad programs are led by faculty, not student affairs professionals or staff (Gregorio, 2015), and they often do not involve student affairs professionals or other staff. Higher educational institutions that desire to increase their international student population and improve support services across campus should include student affairs professionals and staff in study abroad trips. These trips are effective ways to acquire intercultural competence necessary to improve the quality of programs and services for these students. In essence, a combination of regular formal training and international trips, beyond opportunities geared toward staff such as Fulbright, is essential in ensuring that student affairs professionals and staff are well equipped to serve international students.

**Create Programs and Support Services Geared Towards International Graduate Students**

Using the programs and support services initially created to serve undergraduate students for international graduate students does not effectively respond to this special population's specific needs and challenges. Viewing international graduate students as a special population and designing programs and services for them may increase their participation in those programs and services and facilitate their campus's integration. Furthermore, it will allow student affairs professionals and staff to struggle less in helping international graduate students because these programs and services are already tailored for them.

Together with the international student office, student affairs professionals and staff should organize an orientation intentionally geared toward international graduate students. Especially with a higher population of international graduate students (Institute of International Education, 2019), a university should help international graduate students know the requirements for graduate studies (Ghalayini, 2014). Only a few departments in some universities offer a
specific orientation for their international graduate students who have assistantship or research positions.

Creating programs and support services and serving international graduate students is not solely the job of the international student office. International graduate students' learning and integration depend on a successful collaboration and involvement of all campus stakeholders, including faculty, student affairs professionals and staff, students, researchers, policymakers, global partners, in addressing their issues and providing opportunities for these students to become part of their campus community. This integrated support system can only be built through learning ecologies, dialogic relationships, collaborative teaching, and inclusive professional learning communities across campus. These strategies will reduce silos between departments, units, and people on campus.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study provided more profound insight into student affairs professionals and staff members’ roles in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. This study has also contributed to the limited body of research that addresses student affairs professionals and staff members’ roles and the programs, policies, and support services critical in integrating international graduate students. This study has given voice to student affairs professionals and staff, and the findings provide substantial information about their profession. However, there are still areas that I did not tap into. I make the following recommendations for additional research on the topic.

This study is similar to other studies that have addressed issues of international students. We all address international students in terms of the challenges and deficit rather than
opportunities or resiliency. In this study, my participants tended to talk more about the challenges of international graduate students than the resiliency of these students. Future studies should address the capacity of international students to learn from and bounce back from challenges. Hence, future studies should view the challenges of international students as opportunities for these students to effectively adjust, integrate, and thrive both academically and socially.

Some student affairs professionals and staff do not have enough intercultural competence to serve and integrate international graduate students, despite some of the training they have participated in. Instead, they do not distinguish between international graduate students and other students. This is a prevalent issue (Di Maria, 2012; Major & Mangope, 2014; Sharma, 2019). Future research should explore intercultural training programs and their outcomes in terms of intercultural competence for student affairs professionals and staff who serve diverse student populations. This exploration should include the assessment of the guidelines and standards that guide intercultural trainings.

There is a lack of focus on international graduate students in research and scholarship, as well as in academic support programs and institutional policy (Sharma, 2019). The perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff in this study have contributed to partially filling that gap by addressing the needs and challenges of international graduate students and the types of programs and support services they need to better integrate into their campus. However, other researchers should gather more qualitative and quantitative evidence as to what programs and support services international graduate students deem crucial for their adjustment, social, academic, and professional integration. It is also important that the voices of international graduate students are heard in these studies.
My participants' narratives clarified that international graduate students' needs and challenges are viewed as similar or the same as the ones of international undergraduate students or domestic graduate students. There are a few add-ons, but international graduate students are mostly on their own to navigate socio-cultural and academic issues unless they find a mentor. A future study could look at ways that international graduate students find this type of mentoring or assistance. Such a study will provide insights into the strategies that international graduate students use to locate the needed support services so that student affairs professionals and staff can better serve their habits.

This study was conducted in a four-year higher education institution with less than 600 international graduate students. Therefore, it is limited in scope. To gain extensive information about the roles of student affairs professionals and staff in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students, other researchers should include other four-year higher education institutions and institution types. Adding other higher educational institutions and institution types will provide other researchers extensive data to examine student affairs professionals and staff members’ role in integrating international graduate students and the support services and programs these students need to integrate.

I used Tinto's (2012) adapted theory of integration as a lens to understand the perspectives of student affairs professionals and staff about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. The adapted theory of student integration requires educational institutions to create a supportive environment that fosters student interactions and development, particularly for underrepresented or international students (Tinto,
1975, 1993, 1998; 2012). I used Astin’s (1999) theory of involvement and Kuh's (2009) theory of engagement as supporting theories. These theories were crucial to providing an understanding of my study. Other researchers may use other theories, such as the student development theory (Howe & Strauss, 2000), cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim & Colleagues, 2009), and acculturation theory (Berry, 2005; Safdar, et al, 2003; Ward, 2001). Using different theories could provide different perspectives about student affairs professionals and staff members’ roles in integrating these students and the needs and challenges international graduate students face to integrate into campus.

**Summary and Concluding Thoughts**

This study sought to understand student affairs professionals and staff members’ perspectives about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. Results indicate that student affairs professionals and staff play five prominent roles in integrating international graduate students on campus: liaison, career shaper, educators, adapters, and barrier breakers. Within their roles, student affairs professionals and staff experience challenges, including limited intercultural training opportunities, limited financial resources provided, and lack of programs and support services tailored to international graduate students by the institution.

Sharma (2019) noted that how students use support in one area is connected and competing with their many other needs, challenges, and interests. To make their support effective, student affairs professionals and staff must understand their challenges, opportunities, resources, and relationships. To ensure the integration of international graduate students, institutions should create support structures that allow student affairs professionals and staff to...
work with these students and learn more about their needs and challenges to integrate. The support structures should include policies that prevent all campus stakeholders from viewing international graduate students as outsiders.
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Appendix A

Email Recruitment Script
Dear Student Affairs Professional:

My name is Rachal Etshim and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership, Research and Technology at Western Michigan University. I am writing to ask for your participation in an interview that will be conducted as part of my dissertation research study that seek to understand the perspectives of student affairs professionals about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. I am seeking to interview entry or mid-level student affairs professionals and other student affairs professionals, who have been in their positions for at least 1 year, and have experience serving and interacting with international graduate students.

The purpose of this study is to seek the perspectives of student affairs professionals about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students. In addition to interviews, I plan to examine relevant documents, such as policy manuals, reports, meeting minutes, manual, event programs, program proposals, survey data, and various public records reports.

The Human Subjects Consent Form is attached for your review and contains further information about your rights as a participant, the benefits and risks of the study, and expectations of confidentiality. If you choose to participate, please sign and return the attached consent document by X date. Should you agree to participate, we will schedule a mutually agreeable time for a face-to-face interview on your campus that will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

If you have further questions, you may contact me at (785) 979-4711 or etshim.rachal@wmich.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Regina Garza Mitchell, at (269) 387-3540 or regina.garzamitchell@wmich.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rachal Etshim
Appendix B

Consent Form
You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Integrating International Graduate Students on Campus: The Perspectives of Student Affairs Professionals.” This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**

We are attempting to understand the perspectives of student affairs professionals about their role in integrating international graduate students into campus and the policies, services, programs, and other elements they consider most helpful in integrating these students.

**Who can participate in this study?**

We are seeking to interview entry-or-mid-level student affairs professionals who serve and interact with international graduate students.

**Where will this study take place?**

We will conduct telephone or face-to-face interviews with participants. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted in a place convened by the researcher and the participants.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**

We anticipate interviews will last 60-90 minutes.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**

I will ask you to sign the informed consent form, then, to participate in phone or face-to-face interview. A follow up may also be conducted, if needed. You will be asked questions regarding
your role and experiences serving international graduate students, and policies, services, programs, and other elements you consider most helpful in integrating these students.

**What information is being measured during the study?**

In gathering this data, I hope to understand the perspectives of student affairs professionals about their role in integrating international graduate students.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**

I will anticipate minimal risks to you while participating in this research. I anticipate minimal risk to you while participating in this research. The expected risks include feelings of discomfort in recalling or revealing information during interview. In case you experience strong emotional responses during the interview, we will make referral to appropriate professionals in your area, at your cost. You will be responsible for the cost of the counseling if you choose to seek it.

Pseudonyms will be assigned for use during publication or presentation of findings.

**What are the benefits involved in participating in this study?**

There is no direct benefit for participating in this study. However, other higher education institutions may use the findings of this study to develop training for their student affairs professionals to meet the needs and challenges of international graduate students. Researchers or practitioners interested in international students and student affairs may use the findings of this study as a baseline of information. Finally, this study will contribute to the limited body of research that address the roles of student affairs professionals in the internationalization of higher education.

**Are there any costs associated in participating in the study?**

There will be no costs associated with participating in this study.

**Is there any compensation associated with participating in the study?**

There will be no compensation associated with participating in the study. The participation is strictly voluntary.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
Rachal Etshim will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding pseudonyms. The principal investigator is the only other person to access the information collected.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**

You may choose to stop participating in this study at any time for any reason without consequence or question. Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you may contact the primary investigator Regina Garza Mitchell at 269-387-3540 or regina.garzamitchell@wmich.edu; and the student investigator Rachal Etshim at (785) 979-4711 or etshim.rachal@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Rachal Etshim

Please Print Your Name

______________________________  _________________

Participant’s signature       Date
Appendix C

Interview Protocol
• Explanation of the study
• Introduction and consent to record
• Turn on recorder
• Explanation of the study
• Explanation of interest in stories, perceptions; examples which will illustrate meaning
• Length of interview approximately 60-90 minutes
• Confidentiality
• Possibility of follow-up interview
• Summary of interview
• Questions or concerns before we begin?

1. Tell me about yourself and your current position? [Probes: Includes details of years worked, positions employed, educational background and professional goals]
2. What responsibilities do you have in your role related to providing services for international graduate students.
3. Tell me about a time when you supported an international graduate student in your work? [Probes: What was the situation that the student needed assistance with? Were you able to provide the required assistance? Did you ask help from someone else to serve that (those) student (s)? What kind of help was it?]
4. Based on your experience, what are some challenges you and your unit face in serving international graduate students? [Can you describe an instance when you faced a challenge in serving an international graduate student (s)? How did you overcome that challenge?]
5. How have you changed the way that you work with this population of students based on previous experiences?
6. How has your role as a student affairs professional been impacted by international graduate students [Are there different/more expectations when you serve international graduate students than domestic graduate students?]
7. Is there anything that you and your unit help international graduate students acclimate to your campus? (Probes: What are the programs and services that you have in place to facilitate the acclimation process of international graduate students? How helpful are those programs and services to the acclimation of international graduate students? Are there changes that you have made to the existing programs and services, so you can better serve international graduate students? What other programs and services do you think should be added in your unit, so you can better help international graduate students acclimate to your campus?
8. What are the policies that your institution or department have in place or refers to for serving international graduate students? [Probes: To what extent do you rely on the policies to serve international graduate students? Can you describe an instance when you had to apply a policy
to serve an international graduate student? What other policies do you think your unit should add to better serve or help international graduate students acclimate to your campus?]

9. What type of support is provided to you to better serve international graduate students? [Probe: Is there any formal or informal inter-cultural training that prepares you to help international graduate students acclimate to your campus? Who or which entity provides that training? Is there a structure that ensures your continuous intercultural training? Which country have you been while at this position?]

10. Are there other things your university could do to help you better prepare to serve and help international graduate students acclimate to your campus? [Probe: Is there a change that your institution or unit is making or planning to make to improve the services and programs provided to international graduate students?]

11. What else might it be important for me to know about the services, programs, policies, and strategies of serving or helping international graduate students acclimate to your campus?

12. Is there another student affairs professional that you would like to refer me?
Appendix D

Document Review Protocol
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of document (s)</th>
<th>Source of the document (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Here, I will write the types of documents, e.g.: policy manuals, programs, services,</td>
<td>Here I will write the origins of the document (where I obtained them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>procedures, practices, training, etc. I will have to specify whether it is a personal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or public document.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalization Lab Peer Review Report (2018)</td>
<td>Participants &amp; Institution’s website, public record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE Lab Self-Study Report</td>
<td>Participants &amp; Institution’s website, public record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft Internationalization Strategic Plan (2018, to be finalized in 2020)</td>
<td>Participants &amp; Institution’s website, public record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE Model for Comprehensive Internationalization</td>
<td>Institution’s website, public record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Guide</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Engagement Highlights</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Quick Facts</td>
<td>Institution’s website</td>
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