

Faculty Advisors' Experiences with International Graduate Students

Huynh Mai Nguyen (Doctoral Student)
Texas A&M University, College Station (USA)

Abstract

The current study explored the experiences of faculty advisors working with international graduate students (IGS). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and a demographic survey and was analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding strategies. Three central categories emerged from the analysis: (a) advisors' perceptions of IGS, (b) lessons learned by advisors, and (c) indicators of success. A model for advisors' experiences emerged using the data gathered. Overall, advisors reported positive experiences with current and former advisees. Advisor perceptions' of IGS were used to develop strategies and approaches that they believe enhance their experiences as well as the advisees' experiences. At the core of the Advisor Experiences Model are variables that convey success regarding the relationship between advisors and their IGS. These variables are: (a) sustained relationships and (b) student success rates. Advisors all reported that the sustained relationship is one of the most rewarding aspects of being an IGS advisor.

Keywords: international graduate student; multicultural counseling; advisor advisee relationship

For the 2010/2011 academic school year, there were 723,277 international students studying in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2010/2011). This was a 4.7 percent increase from the previous academic year's enrollment (Institute of International Education, 2010/2011). The current trend suggests that international student enrollment in the United States appears to be increasing with each passing academic year (Institute of International Education, 1948-2011). Institutions should prepare to help these students with different needs since the literature suggests that they face many obstacles once they arrived at their respective American universities and colleges (Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Rice, Choi, Zhang, Villegas, Ye, Anderson, Nestic, & Bigler, 2009). Upon their arrival at their universities and colleges, international students have to adjust to a new culture as well as adjusting to different academic demands and expectations than they were accustomed to (Olivas & Li, 2006). Other difficulties include language barriers, alienation, isolation, discrimination, homesickness, and lack of social support (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Kilinc & Granello, 2003; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008). In a review of the literature, Mori (2000) listed language barrier as the "most significant prevalent problem for most international students" (p.137). In addition, The Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) might not serve as an accurate indicator of international students' verbal communication skills (Mori, 2000). This suggests that international students who meet the minimum TOEFL score for admission into a U.S. university or college might not have enough proficiency to achieve success. Language proficiency is an important component of academic success and, without it, international students' academic performance will be affected. This will affect their ability to comprehend lectures and complete their readings. It may take

international students longer to complete reading assignments due to difficulty with understanding the language (Mori, 2000). In addition to academic performance, language proficiency can affect mental health. Sumer, Poyrazli, and Grahame (2008) found that international students with lower levels of English proficiency reported higher levels of depression and anxiety (p. 435).

Isolation and lack of support are also issues that confront international students (Kilinc & Granello, 2003; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; and Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008). In a study about depression and anxiety in international students, Sumer, Poyrazli and Grahame (2008) found that social support significantly predicts depression. Lower levels of social support predict higher levels of depression in international students. Feelings of alienation, discrimination, and homesickness are also reported in international students (Kilinc & Granello, 2003; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; and Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008.) Perrucci and Hu (1995) found that perceived discrimination, to self-esteem, contact with U.S. graduate students, and perceived attitudes towards their native countries are linked to international students' satisfaction on U.S. campuses. This suggests the importance of the social environment and social context of the campus in determining international students' levels of satisfaction on U.S. campuses. In addition to social support and language proficiency, the relationship with the faculty advisor has been shown to increase satisfaction with academic experiences (Rice et al., 2009; Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007). This relationship is significant for international graduate students (IGS) since many of their funding and dissertation work depends on this relationship (Rice et al., 2009). IGS sometimes hesitate to voice their concerns to their graduate advisors for fear of reprisal. They might remain with an advisor even though they have no interest in the research. Some IGS stay with their advisors even though they perceive unfair treatments regarding long work hours and low wages. Other IGS reported abusive and prejudice behaviors by their advisors and feel that they are bullied and looked down upon (Rice, et al., 2009). Contrasting the negative experiences that some IGS have with their advisors, Rice et al. (2009) also reported some positive experiences with advisors where IGS perceived support and understanding from their advisors. In terms of emotional stress and help-seeking at a counseling center, Hyun, Quinn, Madon, and Lustig (2007) found that international students who have positive relationships with their academic advisor appear to have less stress-related or emotional problems.

Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, and Hill's (2003) found that counseling psychology doctoral students in positive advisor and advisee relationships reported frequent meetings and discussions about research, theses and dissertation, being encouraged to participate in more professional conferences, and getting support from their advisors. Knox, Schlosser, Pruitt and Hill (2006) followed this study with another study from the advisors' perspectives. Knox et al. (2006) reported desirable traits in graduate students as perceived by advisors. These traits include being goal-directed, motivated, genuine, respectful, hard-working, reliable, and passionate about their careers. Although Knox et al. (2006) study was specific to the advisor and advisee relationship in a counseling psychology doctoral program, the components of the relationship can serve as a template to assess the relationship between advisors and international advisees (Rice et al., 2009). In addition, Zhao et al. (2007) found that students' satisfaction positively correlates with the academic advising relationship with their advisor. Students' satisfaction also positively correlates with the advisors showing an interest in their advisees' well-being, personal life, and interests. Among Korean IGS, Kim (2007) found that the relationships between advisors and advisees in terms of expectations can be problematic. Kim (2007) found that Korean IGS reported that their advisors' limited availability and indifferent attitudes are "barriers to advancing the advising relationships" (p.186). Korean IGS also reported distress in the advising relationship when their advisors do not meet their expectations of what the role of an advisor entitles. This means being attentive and available in terms of guidance throughout their academic process. This indicates how important the advisor and IGS advisee relationship is in terms of IGS satisfaction in their program and on campus. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of faculty advisors in working with IGS.

The author hoped to ascertain the core themes that constitute an effective advisor-advisee relationship with these students. Since the study was exploratory, no theoretical framework was used as a guide, and no hypotheses were tested.

Method

Grounded theory (Creswell, 2007) was utilized to identify emerging themes in the relationships between faculty advisors and international graduate students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to gather data for analysis. Grounded theory is appropriate for the current study since there are no concrete theories about faculty advisor and international graduate student relationships. Using grounded theory could lead to proposed model that could be applicable to advisors and their international graduate student advisees. Since there are limited models and theories on advisor and international graduate advisee relationships, this study will attempt to suggest a model based on the data collected using grounding theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined grounded theory as “inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents” (p. 23). In grounded theory, the interested area of study is allowed to emerge and is verified through the data collection and analysis. A well-developed grounded theory must have fit, understanding, generality, and control (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Fit refers to how the theory would match with the interested area of study. Understanding refers to the comprehension of the theory by the general population and professionals using the theory. Generality means that the theory could generalize with many groups of people and control means that there should be flexibility in the theory to accommodate for new data.

Participants and Procedures

Eight faculty advisors working at a large university in a southern city in the United States were recruited. The faculty advisors were asked to participate in the study through emails containing the study information and researcher contact information. Once the advisors expressed interest in participating, the researcher contacted them through email and phone calls to set up the interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured, face to face, and lasted between 50 minutes to one hour. Before the interviews were conducted, the participants filled out a demographic survey inquiring about field of specialty, frequency of contact with IGS, amount of interaction with IGS, groups of IGS they have the most experience with, and if they have lived outside of the United States prior to their current position at the institution. All interviews were audio recorded to be transcribed for analysis.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and emerging themes were identified by the primary researcher. After the interviews were transcribed, all the transcripts were sent to the thesis advisor, who served as the advisor for this study, and a doctoral candidate, who was also involved with the research, for further analysis. The primary researcher, the thesis advisor, and the doctoral candidate analyzed each interview and identified emerging themes on an individual basis. After this was completed, the research group, consisting of the primary research, the thesis advisor, and the doctoral candidate met to discuss the themes that each researcher had identified. The group then decided which themes were the central themes recurring in each interview. These central themes were then grouped into categories that summed up the advisors’ experiences.

Data Analysis

Of the eight interviews, two were not included in the analysis because these advisors had very minimal contact with IGS in their time at the university and therefore did not meet the role criteria

of faculty advisor. The other six participants have had years of experience working with IGS and have weekly, if not daily contact, with their advisees.

Investigator triangulation was utilized and included comparing and contrasting the identified themes with themes identified in the literature (Kim, 2007; Knox et al., 2006; Rice et al., 2009; Trice, 2003; Trice, 2005) and asking an external auditor with extensive experience working with multicultural students to assist in identifying themes. Following the investigator triangulation process, open, axial, and selective coding were used to analyze the data.

Open coding was used to label and categorize the phenomenon being studied after careful examination and exploration of the data collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After open coding, the data were put together in new ways as resulted from making connections between categories in axial coding. In axial coding, the researcher tried to relate the data together through the various identified categories.

After axial coding, the focus shifted to identifying the core category and relating that to the other categories identified. The relationships between the core category and subcategories were validated in selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The end result of selective coding was the integration of the categories identified in axial coding in order to form a grounded theory.

Once open, axial, and selective coding were completed, the researcher contacted the participants via email and asked them to examine the initial results. The researcher solicited participants for their feedback and comments to ensure that their perspectives were captured. Four of the six participants replied and stated that they had no objections or questions concerning the results. Two participants did not reply even after the second emails asking them for their feedback.

Results

Based on the advisors' demographic information, three were foreign born and all six have lived or worked outside of the United States for prolonged periods of time, ranging from one month to 29 years. Years of experience working with IGS ranged from 10 to 36 years. The amount of contact between advisors and IGS ranged from "almost every day", "dozens", to "100 times" per semester and the number of IGS these advisors currently work with ranged from 0 to 15. The two types of IGS the advisors currently work with are graduate students and graduate research assistants. Most students and research assistants are from China, India, Taiwan, Korea, Brazil, Thailand, Japan, Mexico, and Iran. Of the six participants, three reported that they have the most international graduate students from China and India.

During the selective coding process, three central categories emerged: (a) Advisors' Perceptions of Students, (b) Lessons Learned by Advisors, and (c) Indicators of Success. To protect the identity of the six advisors, pseudonyms from P1 (participant 1) to P6 (participant 6) are utilized in this study.

Advisors' Perceptions of Students

International graduate students are very hard working

All the advisors interviewed stated that IGS are very hard working. One advisor (P4) stated, "Of course it's very difficult to do doctoral work in a second language and so they have to struggle but they do a good job because they work so hard." The same advisor also affirmed a common perception that IGS are highly motivated. The advisor (P4) stated, "International students almost always [are] very highly motivated just because they have to be to be here and to be able to do what they want to do." Another advisor (P2) exemplified the perception of IGS as hard working by

stating that, "Overall, international students in terms of school work, they always work very hard." In terms of work ethics, IGS are on average "better than domestic students" according to the same advisor (P2). Another advisor (P1) stated that in terms of publishing, IGS "just work harder; [they have] more drive to publish."

It appears that a common observation all the advisors have made of IGS is that they are very hard working and driven. The advisors cited the fact that, because they are IGS, they have to be hard working in order to get to where they are currently. This strong work ethic has helped IGS find success despite the difficulties that surround them. It seems that, when compared to domestic students, IGS work hard and are more driven when it comes to their education and research.

International graduate students are respectful to their advisors and faculty

IGS are respectful to their advisors and other faculty and five of the six advisors mentioned this respect in great detail. One advisor (P4) said IGS are "always super respectful and super formal compared to US students." Another advisor (P6) added "they've [IGS] have always been nice people who are respectful." One advisor (P2) stated:

The huge thing I learned, one because of culture, either Asian student or South, Central student I work together, even African student I work with or Indian student, you always learn that they're much more respectful to professors than domestic students.

In addition to their work ethics and drive to succeed in their academics, IGS are seen as being respectful to their advisors and other faculty members. This respect for advisors and faculty could be the result of the IGSs' cultural background or educational system. Having such high respect for advisors could be responsible for the strict hierarchy in the advising relationship. IGS might not feel comfortable interacting with their advisors or faculty on a casual level because of the strong respect they have for them. IGS could view their advisor or faculty at a higher level in the relationship hierarchy and, therefore, could not imagine interacting with them on a casual basis. For these reasons, IGS might feel discomfort when they are invited to join their advisor or other faculty members on casual departmental outings, outside of the academic setting. As one advisor relayed, often, they do not come or they come out of respect since they believe that declining an invitation by an advisor or faculty is a sign of disrespect. It would be interesting to get the IGS perspectives on the topic of socializing outside of the academic setting to see what their thoughts are.

Language barriers

The most common problem that IGS encounter on U.S. campuses is the language barrier. All six advisors mentioned language barriers as a big challenge for IGS. One advisor (P4) observed that if IGS have difficulties, "It's probably language difficulties." Recognizing this, he confessed to being "more permissive with their written work." He added, "When they write, I can't be as critical about their writing as I want to be with the domestic students, and I'm willing to do that knowing it's a second language." One advisor (P5) noted "100% of all the students we have here are going to the international language English training." Another advisor (P3) added that in order to prepare IGS for his program at the university, there are "language proficiency standards that they need to meet. Often times, that may not be the case." One advisor (P6) noticed that language difficulty can create a lack of confidence with IGS. She noted that Asian female IGS might be proficient in English but "not confident." She (P6) stated:

At the end of formal presentations, when people start asking questions or on a job interview or something like that, the lack of confidence in their English skills, even though their English is good, sort of takes over.

The advisors' observation that IGS have difficulty with language reiterates what the literature about IGS has indicated regarding international students' difficulty with the language of their host country (Kilinc & Granello, 2003; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; and Rice, et al., 2009). For some students, the difficulty with English could lead to some discrimination on campus. This could be in the form of domestic students not wanting to work or interact with them. One advisor (P6) noted that, "there were some domestic students that didn't seem all that accepting of them [IGS]." This perceived discrimination on the IGS' part may lead to a lack of interaction with domestic students at an academic and social level. Another advisor (P2) observed that, "outside of school work, the whole issue would be to encourage them to interact with American students." He stated that "in [the] old days, it's easier because you don't have so many international students so [you] are forced to do it." He used himself as an example, "When I was a Ph.D. student at University X, the whole building, I was the only Chinese student so I had to speak English. I had no choice." However, since there are more international students on U.S. campuses than when he was a student, he noticed that IGS "have a lot of peers along with them so they somehow say, 'I can survive hanging out with my friends from my home country so why do I bother to do that [interaction with domestic students]." According to the advisors in this study, language barriers and perceived discrimination are contributing factors to a lack of interaction between IGS and domestic students. At the academic level, the lack of interaction between the two groups could be explained by the IGS' educational system.

International graduate students' educational system

The largest groups of international students are from Asia where the educational system is different than in the United States. One frequent topic that came up during the interviews was IGS' lack of understanding of the concept of plagiarism. One advisor (P3) summarized the problem that IGS often face:

In terms of the concept of plagiarism, what does that mean? In some cultures, if it's out there, it's public information, and working on papers or doing something, they'll just think it's there for them to use and often times, may not reference it.

In the United States, this is a concern because this is considered plagiarism. The IGS' lack of knowledge about plagiarism is a reason it takes time for them to learn and incorporate this concept into their writing.

Another frequent observation that advisors noted about IGS was that they lack creativity and the ability to create new ideas. An advisor (P2) observed that, "they [IGS] all want to learn but they don't think so much about [the fact that] they have to create." The same advisor (P2) also observed that when working in groups, international students "do most of the work, but the idea will come from the domestic students who [are working] with them." One advisor (P5) noted:

A lot of students that we face, they are good students [who] take exam and get good grades, but they're not good at doing independent research. That makes the process of doing independent research thesis more difficult. So the advisor has to basically guide him or her all the time until he or she is finally on his or her own.

Another advisor (P1) added, "I've always had wonderful students who have no aims, no drive, no driving force; only when you [tell] them exactly what to do, they do. Other than that, they have no creativity." This lack of creativity may strain the relationship between advisors and students since one advisor (P1) listed "be creative, to be active, and to be thinking" as desirable characteristics of her graduate students.

All six advisors mentioned that IGS are very silent regarding their needs in the classrooms. One advisor (P2) said, “They’re [IGS] [are] always quiet in the classroom. It’s very difficult to know where they’re running into problems in their study.” He added that for Asian students and other international students with the same educational system, the objective is “go to class, [...] [go] to learn, try to memorize it, [and] go to [take the] exam.” Another advisor (P6) corroborated this observation stating that “with some of the students that come from a different culture, they expect to be lectured to and be tested.” Another advisor (P4) also observed that “if they don’t understand sometimes they act as though they do because they don’t want to impose on my time or whatever.”

This idea of imposing on the advisor or professor’s time is highlighted by another advisor (P6) who stated that “the only thing they might fail on, which is not a huge failure, is coming to me if they have something they need to have fixed.”

Overall, the advisors noticed that the strategies that IGS use as students such as rote memorization might be detrimental to their creativity and critical thinking skills, which in turn could affect their research. The advisors cited the IGSs’ educational background as a main reason for their methods of studying and thinking. Since IGSs’ studying habits and patterns are ingrained, it could be difficult for them to break away from these habits and patterns. Advisors also noted that IGS do not come to them whenever they encounter a problem in the classroom. The advisors identify this as a problematic setback for IGS success.

International graduate students’ needs

International graduate students “have very little demand. If they have demand, they won’t say it,” according to an advisor (P2). The majority of advisors stated that financial difficulties are something IGS have to deal with constantly. One advisor (P5) said:

The challenge is finances. A lot of them don’t have enough money [for education] and they just come and they think the system will eventually support them somehow. They [want to] find a job but they cannot find a job.

This advisor (P5) also noted that financial worries sometimes cause IGS “stress [and] homesickness” and they “lose their concentration and their grades go down.” Some students would team up in a lab that they have no genuine interest in because of financial needs. However, as one advisor (P1) pointed out, “that adds unnecessary restraints to their relation to their advisor because advisor expect them to do things because [they’re] paying [them] and the students [have to] [do] those things because they have no other choices.”

One main area of needs that advisors noted is the financial needs of IGS. Even though they might need help in this area, the advisors also noted that they would keep silent about it. This financial stress could affect IGS concentration with their courses and research obligations, and thus affect their overall academic performance. This adds to the financial stressors that IGS face and many find themselves worrying about their academic performance as well as how they will fund their education.

Lessons Learned by Advisors

Over the years, many advisors have developed successful strategies to enhance the students’ experiences on campus as well as to improve their own experiences in working with these students.

Personalization of the relationship

Many advisors mentioned that they like to get to know the IGS on a personal level when they begin working with them. One advisor (P1) said, "I'd like to shake hands and get to know them personally" to "put them at ease and feel comfortable with me [...] then learn their background." Another advisor (P4) asks about the students' native country. He said, "I want to know where they're from and they always appreciate it if I've been to a place where they are." This adds some commonality between them and may help form a connection.

Personalizing the relationship also involves home visits. IGS are invited to their advisor's homes during holidays and other family get-togethers. One advisor (P3) found that "taking international students to your home really personalizes relationships" because "they get to see how you really live so to speak and the differences, just driving around the community." One advisor (P4) invites international students to his house for Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving and does this "just about every year." Another advisor (P2) also invited students to his house for barbecues and Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners. A third advisor (P6) stays connected with her research group by inviting them to "lunch at the end of every semester," and other Ph.D. students are invited to happy hours with their advisors and other faculty members on Fridays.

From the advisors' point of view, sharing meals with their IGS appears to be a successful method they have tried and continue doing. Another successful strategy involves inviting international students over to their houses to share with them a more personal side of U.S. culture. Opening their homes to their IGS also serves as a way to help ease IGS in the presence of their advisors outside of academic settings. Even though this appears to be a successful method, advisors should be sensitive to IGS who are uncomfortable with these types of invitations due to their perception of the hierarchy of the advisor and advisee relationship.

Need for cultural awareness

The advisors interviewed have all visited, lived, or worked outside of the United States. This helps to enhance cultural awareness and understanding of students from various cultures. One advisor (P4) said, "They always appreciate it if I've been to a place where they are. We can talk about the things that are there." Another advisor (P6) admitted that "being exposed to all these different cultures, ways of thinking, ways of, as far as they tell me, the ways they're used to be taught, it's just fascinating." An advisor (P4) summed up cultural awareness with:

I think the biggest component of any world view that has to do with people who are different than you are. It is willingness to understanding other people's culture and be sympathetic for the restrictions and limitations that they have. [You] just have to be other-culture oriented.

Many advisors take their experiences living and working in other countries into consideration when interacting with IGS. They understand the outsider perspective of incoming international students and understand what it feels like to be a foreigner. These experiences also serve as a commonality that connects advisors and advisees. This could help to further enhance understanding and appreciation for the experiences that IGS are facing at their institution.

Cultural introduction

Many advisors have attempted to introduce IGS to various cultural events in the U.S. One advisor (P3) described his attempt to introduce IGS to American culture:

We took them to the rodeo and they really got excited about that. We followed up with, one of our students had a ranch, and we took them horseback riding and things of that nature.

Another advisor (P4) attempted to introduce IGS to American culture by taking them “on field trips,” to “basketball games” and “to the rodeos.” For these advisors, it was important to show international students what American culture is like and coordinated events they felt would provide a glimpse of the culture.

Be patient with students

The most mentioned lesson that advisors learned from working with IGS was to be patient in different aspects such as communication style, instructional style, and adjustment rate. Regarding IGS making presentations, one advisor (P4) stated: “They also have much more difficulties making presentations to other students. It’s always a difficult problem so you have to, I have to be patient. The other students have to be patient.”

Another advisor (P6) admitted that “it’s being patient with them [IGS] but it’s also being patient with myself as I try to figure out what the best ways to deliver news [are], whether it’s good news or bad news.” She also admitted that she has to show “patience then from their perspectives, in terms of being patient with them, that it may be very hard for someone, [...] to ask what they really want to ask directly if they’re from a culture that isn’t used to being direct and blunt and all of that.” This advisor listed patience as one of the key components of a successful advising relationship with IGS. For another advisor (P1), having patience with the IGS’ adjustment rate and lack of research exposure means giving them a longer starting time compared to that of domestic graduate students.

Recognizing that IGS have difficulty adjusting to life on campus, advisors might give them a longer time period to get situated in a lab and learn protocol. Advisors also recognize that the students’ cultural background might hinder communication so they have to be patient and go with the students’ pace. The advisors also try to be patient with how fast students understand the material and with their academic presentations.

Advisor flexibility

Flexibility is also important when working with IGS. When IGS come onto campus, their expectations might differ from what they actually get so advisors have to be flexible to accommodate their needs. One advisor (P3) said, “we want them to leave here feeling they had a good educational experience, they had good social experience.” Flexibility can also be seen when an advisor adapts to the style of the IGS he or she is working with. This can also mean that an advisor changes his or her teaching style to accommodate for language difficulties and rate of understanding by IGS.

Open communication

Open communication is important in an advising relationship. One advisor (P1) pointed out that “it’s important to maintain conversation, [and] communication with them.” Having open communication and conversation with the advisor might help lessen the student’s homesickness or other distress. The advisor (P1) added that “if we have a way of better communication, maybe those kind of things [students falling into “emotional traps”], at least it could be kind of relieved a little bit [of] the stress for the students.”

Even though the advisors list open communication as an important element in the advisor and advisee relationship, this might be difficult with IGS. A reason for the lack of open communication between IGS and their advisors could be the hierarchy of the relationship where IGS believe it is not appropriate to address concerns they might have because it may be seen as

disrespectful. They might also not address any concerns with their advisors for fear of being reprimanded and their funding might be affected if they say anything. Even though the advisors say open communication is important, it might not be completely realistic.

Acceptance of students

For one advisor (P1), acceptance of students means finding “what is our strengths and what’s our weakness and direct them appropriately to amend the weakness and to hopefully [adapt] to their strengths to use them that way.” For another advisor (P6), acceptance of students might mean that she has to accept that “some of the foreign students can’t quite wrap their mind around the fact that we [department] invite them to happy hour or we have them over to our house for a party.”

It appears that the advisors try to work with the IGS that come into their classrooms and their research teams by focusing on the IGS strengths. The advisors also appear to be accepting of the different characteristics of individual IGS and work with those different characteristics.

Strategies and approaches

With experience, advisors have developed strategies for resolving conflicts. Some are direct with advisees while others are indirect. For one advisor (P5), dealing with conflicts between him and an IGS means having “them come face to face, one on one in my office. I’ll tell them what bothers me, they make an assessment, and they try to fix it.” Another advisor (P2) would “joke with them” because he doesn’t “want to make it very serious with them.” He would take the student out “to the cafeteria” or “to the bar” and “then [he] would talk with them individually.” Other non-direct approaches that he tried included playing basketball with them and “would just talk at the basketball court.” When they rest on the bleachers, he would “mention to them about some comments about their work when they’re relaxed.” He stated, “I don’t want to talk to them in my office because then they get nervous.”

Other approaches that advisors utilize are the *Team* approach and the *Family* approach. According to an advisor (P6) the *Team* approach means “having the oldest member of the group train the new person.” The *Team* approach of the advisor (P6) ensures that “there’s always continuity in terms of how I do things and some of these research projects are long term so there’s never a gap of someone that doesn’t know what’s going on in my research team.” The *Family* approach encourages members to be involved in each other’s lives. One advisor (P5) described his *Family* approach:

I run my lab on my team as a family. It’s like a close knit family. If a new foreign or international student arrives at the airport, a few of the students are in the airport waiting for them.

He added, “two years later, the student who was greeted would go to the airport to greet someone else.” These two approaches encourage current members to actively train and help new members adjust while the advisors’ role is to make sure the team or family is running smoothly.

Indicators of Success

Advisors pointed out keeping long term contact to sustain their relationships with their students and having their students succeed after graduation constitutes a successful advising relationship. Student success is measured by different variables such as degree obtained, professional achievement, and publications.

Sustained relationships

Sustained relationships refer to after an IGS has graduated and gone back to his or her home country, contact is maintained with the advisor in the United States. Forms of communication include emails, Christmas cards, letters, phone calls, and other communication means such as connecting through Facebook. Another advisor has framed pictures of all his IGS hanging in his office. He (P2) described his relationships with all his previous IGS advisees: "Right now all of them work very closely with me. Even some of them, sometime I write to them, [or] email, even now. This is a picture of all my students when I moved from state X."

Keeping long term contact also means collaborating on projects. This advisor (P2) admitted that "Even now, [there are] some students who graduated about ten years ago, [and] we're still writing papers together." For another advisor (P5), keeping long term contact means helping "their kids, their second generation, and their second generation graduated." He also added, "I love my students. It's the best part of my job." One advisor (P1) believes that:

A successful advisor advises your students after graduation, [that] would be [after] many years to keep [in] contact with you. They may have various issues and want your help, recommendations, professional growth, so it's not a short relation just in school; in fact it could be a lifelong impact.

For other advisors, long-term contact includes meeting up with former advisees in their home countries. One advisor (P6) described her relationship with her former advisees, "When we were in Hong Kong, we flew to Shanghai and two of my students that I've had two years before gave us a tour and took us to dinner and all of that. So the relationships continue." Another advisor (P4) has a similar relationship with his former advisees, "I'm saying out of those ten years of students, there are only five or six of them that I regularly write to, send Christmas cards. When I got to China, I get in touch with them." He also mentioned that he still maintains contact with students he taught in Beirut 40 years ago.

Student success rates

For advisors in this study, the student success rate is measured by the number of students who have graduated with higher degrees and their professional accomplishment. One advisor (P5) said, "If you look at my resume, you see that student names [are] everywhere, very often first author." He also added, "I have at least 17 minority Ph.D.s and I have probably 25 minority Masters. They've all got jobs, been successful."

For one advisor (P2), the student success rate means that "they be successful in what they're doing," and "if they go out to private sector, [I] hope they have a good life, they enjoy what they're working on." Most advisors have had successes with their former advisees and have continued to follow their academic and professional progress. One advisor (P4) summed this up with, "a number those students went on to get Ph.D.s and I follow their careers, and I know where they are, what they're doing and we get together."

From the results, advisors' perceptions of IGS, based on their experiences, led to the strategies and approaches to use when working with IGS. Many advisors reported high success rates with their students using the strategies and approaches they implemented. A successful relationship between advisors and their international advisees is measured by the students' success and the sustained relationships with each other.

The Advisor Experiences Model

The current study attempts to convey the various experiences of advisors working with IGS through the formulation of the Advisor Experiences Model using the themes discussed above. The outer layer of the model consists of the faculty advisors' perception of IGS. These are the observed characteristics of IGS by their advisors. The second layer of the model consists of the strategies and methods compiled and utilized by advisors based on their experiences working with and their perceptions of IGS. At the core of the model are the indicators of a relationship, deemed successful, between advisors and their international graduate advisees. The model attempts to present a picture of the relationship between advisor and their international graduate advisees from the advisors' point of view.

Overview of the Theoretical Model of Advisors' Experiences

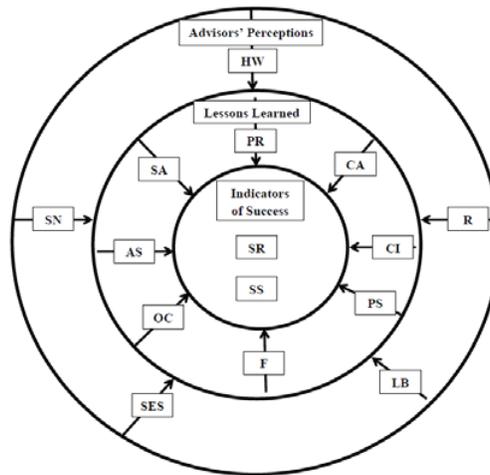


Figure 1: Model of Advisors' Experiences Working with International Graduate Students

LEGEND	
HW = Hard Working	LB = Language Barriers
R = Respectful	SN = Student Needs
SES = Students' Educational Systems	CA = Cultural Awareness
PR = Personalization of Relationships	PS = Patience with Students
CI = Cultural Introduction	OC = Open Communication
F = Flexibility	SA = Strategies/ Approaches
AS = Acceptance of Student	SSR = Student Success Rates
SR = Sustained Relationships	

This model begins at the *Advisors' Perception* which represents the perceptions of IGS by the advisors. Each arrow from the *Advisors' Perception* layer represents different characteristics of IGS as perceived by the advisors through their experiences. These perceptions help advisors develop different strategies to work with their advisees. Each arrow from the *Lessons Learned* layer represents the different strategies the advisors have adopted to shape the relationship with their advisees. All of the arrows (perceptions and lessons learned) lead into the core layer, the *Indicators of Success*. At the core of the model is a relationship between advisors and their IGS. The model is continuous since advisors' continually use their perceptions to inform their strategies when working with IGS. This in turn helps guide them to positive advising experiences and sustained relationships with their advisees.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of advisors working with IGS. Overall, the advisors reported positive experiences with their current and former advisees. The advisors recognized that IGS have unique needs, most significant among them being financial needs and adjustment to the American educational system. The advisors working with IGS also recognized that IGS have strong work ethics, motivation, and drive to succeed yet their success might be hindered by their lack of language proficiency. To help IGS in their lab and classroom, advisors sometimes allow the students more time to adjust to the lab environment and show leniency in their grading. Throughout their experiences with IGS, advisors reported that they have adopted different methods to work with IGS to best serve the students' needs. Many of the advisors' perceptions of IGS and their approaches and strategies are similar to the strategies that Trice (2005) found in a study about how different departments response to international students' needs.

Advisors use their perceptions of IGS and experiences working with IGS to develop strategies and approaches that they feel enhance their experiences as advisors as well as their advisees' experiences on campus. The Advisor Experiences Model was introduced as a template for the various factors that influence an advisor and international advisee relationship. At the core of the Advisor Experiences Model are the indicators of success of the advisor and international advisee relationship. These indicators of success are sustained relationships and student success rates. Advisors all reported that long term contact is one of the most rewarding parts of being an IGS advisor. Most advisors keep track of their former advisees' careers and professional development. Some advisors reported that they are still collaborating on research projects and publications with their former international advisees. Overall, the advisors in this study relayed that they enjoyed working with IGS and have gained a lot of experiences working with these students. It appears the advisors will continue using the strategies and approaches they have adopted when working with IGS with future IGS. In addition, Trice (2003) found that advisors working with international students reported that these students bring added cultural values to their programs. According to some advisors, international students also bring important "international perspective" to the lab and these students' presence prepare domestic students with experience for the "real world where they would interact with people from many cultures" (p. 391). Overall, IGS add diversity and important perspectives to their campuses as well as provide advisors and other students with different working experiences and interactions.

Implications

This study provides the advisors' perceptions of IGS and could help counselors, graduate advisors, and other personnel with frequent contact with IGS to understand IGS needs and concerns. This study also provides some suggestions of certain useful methods when interacting with IGS to further address their needs. The suggested Advisors' Experiences Model could serve as a template for the different factors making up a successful advisor and IGS advisee relationship. The suggested model has similar components to the the models proposed by Rice et al. (2009) and Perrucci and Hu (1995).

This study also reiterates challenges such as language difficulties and financial needs that IGS need to address before coming to an American campus. Recognizing this, American universities could develop ways to effectively prepare IGS with adequate English skills to succeed once they are here. Universities could also take steps, such as providing students with financial resources, before accepting them for admission. Universities could offer more international student grants as well as create more on campus jobs for which international students are eligible for. Strategies and approaches utilized by advisors in this study when working with advisees could be expanded upon and encouraged with other advisors working with IGS. Universities with large

number of international student enrollment could create liaison positions in different departments specifically addressing international student issues. These liaisons would be familiar with resources available to international students and could act as guides when questions about available resources on campus arise. Each department could also create a position for international student representatives to address the common needs and concerns of international students to the department head or administrator. This would facilitate communication between department heads and international student communities on campus.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations of this study are: (1) the advisors are self-reporting, and therefore might have portrayed themselves in a positive manner; (2) the study was conducted with only a small number of advisors and therefore cannot generalize to other advisor-international advisee relationships; and (3) the advisors work at a university with a limited number of IGS; results might have varied if it was conducted at a university with a larger and more distributed IGS population. Future research could examine the issue of silence with IGS. Advisors' perceptions indicated that this behavior stemmed from the students' educational systems but it would be interesting to understand silence from the students' experiences and understanding of their own educational systems. From this study, ideas could be generated to help students adapt to the U.S. educational system by addressing concerns they might face in the classroom and on campus.

Future studies could identify the IGS who have had satisfactory relationships with their advisors and examine their perspectives compared to the advisors' and identify discrepancies, if any, between the two viewpoints. Another interesting topic to explore would be the informal relationships outside of the academic setting between advisors and IGS. This would lead to what IGS are comfortable with and what they are not regarding having an informal relationship with their advisors.

Future studies could also look at the importance of open communication in an advisor and IGS advisee relationship and what open communication looks like from the viewpoint of the IGS. This could address whether IGS believe that open communication exist or is possible with their advisors. The study could also address the difficulties, if any, IGS encounter when attempting to have open communication with their advisors.

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About the Author:

Huynh Mai Nguyen is a third year doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at Texas A&M University, College Station (USA). Her research interests include international students, multicultural counseling, and Asian American psychological well-being and mental health. She can be reached at: hmnguyen@neo.tamu.edu