Meeting the Needs of Graduate International Students in a Mid-South University: A Descriptive Phenomenology Study

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN A MID-SOUTH UNIVERSITY: A DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership, and Research
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Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Ifezinwa N. Onwelumadu

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS IN A MID-SOUTH
UNIVERSITY: A DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

Date Recommended October 8, 2019

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I dedicate this dissertation to God Almighty, my provider, my rock, my strength, my hope, my healer, and the very One who sustains my life. The times I felt I could not go on anymore, the times my strength failed me, the times my health was at risk, the times I moved about like a robot because of all the responsibilities I had to carry, I relied on Your unending grace. Thank you, God the Father. Thank you, God the Son. Thank you, God the Holy Spirit. May the testimonies You have put in my mouth never cease.

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To my mother, Mrs. Dorothy Ngozi Onyeke, who never failed to check on me and encourage me. Thank you for the priceless lessons and solid training you and Daddy gave us. I see the results today.

Finally, to my father of blessed memory, Late Barrister Frank Uzodinma Onyeke, I remember those words when I was down and beaten, “Ifeyinwa Onyeke, be yourself.” You never failed to remind us, your children, that the training you were giving to us was to equip us to survive in any situation and any place we found ourselves. With joy and gratitude in my heart, I tell you today, “Daddy, I made it, yes, Ifeyinwa Onyeke made it…”
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NAFSA’s economic analysis indicates that international students and their families created or supported 340,000 jobs and contributed $26.8 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2013-2014 academic year (NAFSA, 2014). The analysis for reveals that for every seven international students enrolled, three U.S. jobs are created or supported by spending. These occur in the following sectors: higher education, accommodation, dining, retail, transportation, telecommunications, and health insurance. By the 2017-2018 academic year, the US witnessed further significant contribution of international students to the US economy, contributing $39 billion from living expenses, tuition, and fees. Also, the contributions of international students created over 455,000 US jobs. Therefore, it is fundamental that the needs of these students are explored and strategic support structures put in place to meet these needs.

This study utilized a phenomenological analysis approach to gather data pertaining to the stated goals and research questions. The study also utilized purposive sampling to gather a list of graduate international students currently enrolled in the institution who were chosen based on the purpose of this study. To find additional participants, the snowballing sample was used. Eleven women and one man agreed to
participate in the study. Finally, the semi-structured method of interviewing was employed in the study.

Overall, the participants of the study expressed their needs and equally gave recommendations of appropriate support structures toward meeting these needs. Despite the challenges, graduate international students continue to persist and reach for their American dreams.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the price of higher education has increased at a faster pace than almost all goods and services in the United States (Blumensty, 2015). Mitchell, Leachman, and Masterson (2017) supported that as states in the US continue to reduce higher education funding, the price of attending public colleges has risen significantly faster than what families can afford. In addition, global diversity of campuses faces decline as new international student enrollments have continued to decline since Fall 2016 (Schulmann, 2017). Unfortunately, the higher education marketplace has become more competitive as other countries are creating innovative strategies to make their higher education systems more adaptive, innovative, and globally engaged. Schulmann (2017) noted that many English-speaking countries, and even China, are making intense efforts to harmonize public policies, in addition to working with institutions to create strong internationalization frameworks. Needless to say, the pressure in U.S. higher education, as regards the recruitment and retention of international students, is real and the need for colleges to come up with strategic ways to navigate these challenges is critical.

I came to the United States of America on January 24, 2015, accompanied by three children on a student visa (F1 visa). My two older children were my dependents and so they were naturally on the F2 visa, which is the visa for the dependents of international students. My third child did not need the F2 visa as she was already a US citizen by virtue of birth. I had been admitted from my home country into one of the universities located in the Mid-South through an agency whose focus is to accelerate the internationalization of higher institutions all over the world. The agency, which assisted
in my admission to the US university, also partnered with the university to provide a pathway program for new international students. I must admit that this experience made for a smoother entry into the system, and I was able to better navigate the university as a graduate student. About 18 months after I entered into the US, I completed my Master’s degree in Organizational Leadership and that was when my problems began.

I had applied to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for my Optical Practical Training (OPT), which is a one-year work permit for all international students who intend to work in the US. On a closer look, I realized that I actually had just 90 days from the date on the OPT card to get a job. If on the other I was unable to secure employment within the 90-day window, I was then left with two options: to go back to school or quietly leave the country to avoid breaking the law. The one-year period solely depended on my getting employed within 90 days. Nothing prepared me for this. I was shattered and scared. How do I get employed within this time limit? If I had to go back to school, how do I do this as I had run out of funds? Days turned to weeks, weeks to months, and my desperation grew. The only interview I was invited to was for the position of an academic advisor of a university, and the outcome was unsuccessful. In my desperation to get employed, I went to speak to one of the professors in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, and he advised that I consider applying to the doctoral program.

I had always dreamed of getting my doctorate degree, as I come from a strong educational background. My father had a bachelor’s degree in English and a degree in law. He retired from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, as the Deputy Registrar. My mother, on the other hand, graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Adult Education and retired
from the Ministry of Education as a Zonal Inspector. I would love to go for my doctorate but not now, and even if I had to, how? I had no money and above all, I was mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted, especially with the fact that I had three children depending totally on me. I barely had enough money to register for my Graduate Record Examination (GRE), which was a requirement for being considered for acceptance into the program. Nonetheless, I was able to eventually take my GRE and finally got accepted into the program. Then I met a mentor who accepted me as her graduate assistant and, to my greatest joy, this paid my school fees and still provided some form of stipend. Hope came back into my life again as she encouraged and never failed to let me know I was geared for greatness. This made me realize the importance of institutional support that strategically targets the needs of international students. I was also reminded of the importance of mentors in the life of a foreign student. This was roughly three years ago.

Today, I have written my dissertation. Where did the years go? How did I come this far? An impossible journey was fast becoming a reality before my very own eyes. Still, it does not make me lose sight of the fact that yet another graduation is around the corner. There are decisions to be made about my career, whether here in the US, back in my home country, or in another host country. I must not allow myself to get into the situation in which I found myself in 2016. Most importantly, I do not wish to see other international students in this position, as I believe this is too often the case, and this realization has informed the careful selection of my dissertation. What are the needs of graduate international students in the United States? What are their perceptions of the support services provided for them by the university? Only then can the school be able to strategically address the needs of this heterogeneous group and be able to create a great
learning experience for them. Meeting these needs, as expressed through the lenses of graduate international students, will enable them accomplish their goals of coming to the US to study.

**Statement of the Problem**

Among international students, there is an undeniable problem with the current status of international student enrollment in the US as enrollment continues to decline. According to Redden (2017), data from surveys collected by Open Doors reported a 7% decline in international student enrollment from Fall 2016, after years of steady growth. Saul (2018) supported this by stating that international student enrollment began to flatten in 2016. Furthermore, Schulmann (2017) categorically stated that although international student enrollment increased by 3.4% for the 2016/2017 academic year, there was a 3.3% decrease in continued new international student enrollments. The author concluded that institutions are not replacing international students who graduate. The Institute of International Education (IIE, 2017) also noted that while the overall number of international students in the US has increased, the number of new international students declined by nearly 10,000 students (a 3% decrease from 2015) in the fall of 2016. The author reports that this is a bit worrisome because this is the first decline recorded in 12 years since Open Doors started reporting new enrollments. This could be attributed to the changing conditions abroad and the increased lure of schools in Canada and Australia and other English-speaking countries.

Yang, Wong, Hwang, and Heppner (2002) stated that the decline in international student recruitment and enrollment in the US has necessitated the need for the development of services that appropriately reflect their needs and characteristics. But
how does the host university create these support structures when they are not sure what these needs are? Bista and Foster (2011) interviewed six international students from Africa, China, India, Jordan, Japan, and Nepal to determine their perceptions of their first experiences with the community and the academic issues and concerns at a university in one of the southern states. The authors insisted that asking and paying attention to the details that support international students in their quest to study in the US will ensure the students are supported where they need to be supported, as well as provide an atmosphere that will likely increase recruitment of more students. They criticized that many universities attempt to provide services for international students but fail to meet their needs at a more practical level.

In the particular institution under study, there has been a steady decline in international student enrollment, and this informed the selection of this dissertation topic. Data containing the current enrollment status of international students from Fall 2012 to Spring 2019 in the institution under study were obtained from the Office of Institutional Research of the institution under study. The details can be seen in Table 1.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>1,116</td>
<td>1,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>1,112</td>
<td>1,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>1,019</td>
<td>1,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>1,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2016</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>1,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2017</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>1,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2017</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2018</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2018</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2019</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>485</td>
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Courtesy of Office of Institutional Research, WKU

The international student experience begins with recruitment. Ozturgurt (2013) stated that with the competitiveness of the international student markets and complexities surrounding each country and culture, international student recruitment will be better achieved through local agents with local expertise in their countries. The author further stated that Marissa De Luca of the Marketing and Communications Department at International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF) argued that utilizing education agents for international students has great advantages. She discussed that agents are familiar with the language and culture and as a result, provide fast and direct access to specific markets (Lee, 2008). The researcher was recruited to a Mid-South university in the US by the NAVITAS group, now known as the NAVITAS Global Student Success Program (GSSP), an agency whose focus is to accelerate the internationalization of university campuses. They do this by partnering with universities in Australia, United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Singapore, New Zealand, and Sri Lanka to increase students’ access to and success in higher education (GSSP, 2019). In addition, this
facilitates greater opportunity and access to high quality learning experiences and brings
global perspectives to the university communities. The organization was able to
accomplish this through a third-party agent, the British Canadian International Education
(BCIE) located in Nigeria. As a result, the researcher has first-hand knowledge of the fact
that agents have the advantage of being more effective at recruiting international
students, as they have a stronger grip on the terrain than any foreigner. As earlier
mentioned, data containing the current enrollment status of international students from
Fall 2012 to Spring 2019 in the institution under study were obtained from the Office of
Institutional Research of the institution under study. The details can be viewed in Table 1.

Mudd (2015) stated that the institution under study ended its five-year partnership
with the Navitas Global Student Success group in the Fall of 2015. Table 1 shows the
drop in international student enrollment after this departure. Enrollment rose from Fall
2012 to Spring 2015 but began a steady decline in Fall 2015. McCarthy (2018) stated that
data released by the U.S. DHS in 2017 reveals a steady rise in international student
enrollment but a decline in 2016-2017 academic year (Table 2). Redden (2018) attributed
this to the uncertain future availability of post-study work opportunities for international
students and also the recent perceptions of the US as a less welcoming country to foreign
nationals under the Trump presidency. However, Table 1 infers that the decline in
international student enrollment started in 2015, probably after the exit of the NAVITAS
GSSP, and the political environment of the country in 2016 worsened this decline. The
data in Table 1 support the importance of recruitment agents in the international student
recruitment process.
Consequently, Ozturgurt (2013) cited China and Turkey as examples of countries that require an extensive expertise of the higher education systems for the purposes of recruitment. This is because both countries have complicated higher education systems with extensive government oversight on regulations. Recruiting students from both countries requires significant understanding of cultural differences. Students from these countries mostly utilize family funds for their studies; therefore, the families need to be convinced rather than the students. Ozturgurt (2013) agreed that using agents and third-party agents improves the quality of student applications by enforcing the admission criteria, providing counseling for both parents and students, and helping with visa and travel arrangements. Notwithstanding, Shay (2011) warned that the international students must be protected, and the first step to protecting foreign students is to ensure credibility and integrity among representatives overseas who help advise students on educational options in the US. This includes third-party agents who contract with institutions, as well as independent counselors who work with the students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of this study were to explore the goals and needs of graduate international students and their perceptions of the resources provided to them by their host institutions. It explored graduate international student experience in a Mid-South university, their needs, and how they perceive the support services provided to them by the university. The researcher sought to understand and describe the students’ personal experiences as graduate international students in the university, and share these experiences with the institution. Their responses will enable the university to strategically plan and provide services that will support international students and ensure they have a
great learning experience and achieve their goals of coming to the US to study. It is also anticipated that other host campuses worldwide would be better advised on appropriate support structures to be put in place so that the needs of graduate international students are met. In addition, if these students have a great learning experience, then host institutions can experience a boost in their international student enrollment and retention. This will be a win-win situation as the economic contributions, in addition to the academic and cultural value international students bring to the US, will not be lost.

Research Questions

1. What are the goals of graduate international students as they leave their home countries to come to the United States for further studies?
2. What are the needs of graduate international students in the United States?
3. How do graduate international students perceive the support services offered by their host institutions and the community?
4. What recommendations do graduate international students have for their host institutions to better enable them to have a great learning experience and to reach their goals?

Need for the Study

Perez-Encinas and Rodriguez-Pomeda (2018) identified the different types of services to international students provided by higher institutions through different stages of the international student life cycle. The first stage involves the pre-arrival services, the second involves the services provided on arrival, and the third stage involves services provided during the students’ time in their host country. Although most higher institutions stop at the third stage, the authors suggested that there is a fourth stage which
is related to re-integration and which has two aspects. The first aspect relates to the return of the students to their home countries. The second aspect refers to the comprehensive integration into the host university and the country to find employment and establish a life after the international student’s period of study. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018) posited that as a result of the increasing competition for attracting and recruiting international students by higher institutions, it has become vital that institutions desist from merely focusing on the academic aspects of the international student experience. The article insists that there must equally be a strategic focus on the services related to their stay and their comfort. Escriva-Munoz, Helm, Perez-Encinas, Stasiukaityte, and Zimonjic (2015) further stated that international students place greater emphasis on their stay in their host country than the quality of the studies. Perez-Encinas and Rodriguez-Pomeda discussed that this puts institutions in an advantaged position in the global market, as they are equipped to provide a variety of quality services and practices. This will likely serve to achieve greater satisfaction and to improve recruitment and retention rates among international students. It is also a known fact that enrolling international students makes up for budget shortfalls and increases the bottom line in their host institutions and the US economy as a whole. It then becomes fundamental that higher institutions work to identify the range of services most suited to the needs of international students at each stage. Since this is the case, this study serves as an analysis of the needs of graduate international students and their perceptions of the services provided to them by their host institutions. It looks at whether the host institution has appropriate support structures to meet the needs of these students, and also aids the
institutions in making more informed decisions for improving and expanding services offered to graduate international students.

**Background**

International students are non-U.S. citizens who come from other countries to the US for study purposes. They are required to obtain a student visa (an F1 visa) from the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) under the DHS, formerly known as Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) (Otsu, 2008). The student visa can be obtained from their home countries via the U.S. embassies located there, or in the US. Every international student is required to have a Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) number, which is issued by The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (2018) reported that SEVP is a part of the National Security Investigations Division and acts as a bridge for government organizations that are interested in information on non-immigrants who have come to the US primarily to study. The website also describes SEVIS as a web-based data collection and reporting system used to track and monitor schools and F, M, and J individuals while they visit the US and participate in the U.S. education system (ICE, 2018).

According to NAFSA (2018), international students and their families created or supported 340,000 jobs and contributed $26.8 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2013-2014 academic year. The NAFSA economic analysis for academic year 2013-2014 reveals that for every seven international students enrolled, three U.S. jobs are created or supported by spending occurring in the following sectors: higher education, accommodation, dining, retail, transportation, telecommunications, and health insurance.
International students contributed more than $30.5 billion in the U.S. economy in 2014-15 academic year. In that year, 72% of all international students received the majority of their funds from sources outside the US: 64% from personal and family resources and another 8% from foreign governments or universities (Zong & Batalova, 2016). By the 2016-2017 academic year, international students contributed $36.9 billion to the U.S. economy and created and supported 450,331 jobs (NAFSA, 2018b).

NAFSA (2019) reported that while international students as a whole make up 5.5% of overall US college enrollments, this heterogeneous group continues to make significant contributions to the various U.S. communities. Figure 1 further explains the contributions of foreign students to the U.S. economy in the 2017/2018 academic year and further substantiates the reasons there is a need for institutions to ensure that they are strategically placed to recruit and retain graduated international students, and all international students as a whole on their different campuses.

International student contribution to U.S. economy and innovation.

*Figure 1*
Figure 1 describes the fact that the 2017-2018 academic year witnessed further significant contributions of international student to the United States economy. This was a leap from their contributions in the 2016/2017 academic year, as previously mentioned.
International students and their families contributed $39 billion from living expenses, tuition, and fees. In addition, the contributions of international students created over 455,000 US jobs.

Strangely, despite the reports of increased international students in the US, Schulmann (2017) reported that despite the increased international student enrollment over the years, there was a 3.3% decrease in continued new international student enrollment. IIE (2018) supported that while overall numbers of international students have been on an increase over the years, new international student enrollments fell by 6.6% in 2017, in a downward trend which was first observed in the 2015-2016 academic year. Research has posited that the continued increase was traced to increased participation in the OPT program, and these drops were primarily seen at the graduate and non-degree levels (IIE, 2018). On the other hand, Gluckman (2017) conversed that the 50 states have decreased their appropriation per student by 3.3% over the last five years. At one of the Mid-South universities, the state funded 70% of university budgets a decade ago, but it is a different story today as the President of the university complained that the state funds only 30% of the university budget at this time. Blackford (2018) reported on the university budget cuts at Kentucky universities. The article talks about the plan to cut the state’s allocation to public higher education by 6.25%.

It is apparent that the American higher education system is in crisis as domestic student persistence and retention also continues to decline. Research supports that student persistence, retention, and success in higher institutions across the US has continued to be one of the most researched topics, and yet the answers to student persistence and retention remain somewhat discouraging and elusive. According to Tinto (2017),
persistence rate can be defined as the percentage of students who return to college at any institution of their choice for their second year, while retention rate is the percentage of students who return to their starting institutions. A report from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2016) states that of all students who started school in the fall of 2014, 72.1% persisted at any U.S. institution in Fall 2015, while 60.6% were retained at their starting institutions. Invariably, one in nine students who start college in any fall term transfer to a different institution by the following fall. The same report further posits that the overall persistence rate for first-time college students dropped 1.2 percentage points since 2009. With state and federal policymakers increasingly discussing the possibility of using performance-based funding criteria for universities, it has become essential that college administrators strive to uncover best practices that cultivate student persistence and retention (Miao, 2012).

Certain factors raise grave concerns for the higher education sector, such as the budget cuts, the decline in domestic student persistence and retention, and the declining international student enrollment trend. However, looking at the economic contributions and the immeasurable academic and cultural value international students bring to the US, every institution wants to ensure a great learning experience for these students. In order to achieve this, there is a need for host institutions to be strategic about finding out the needs of international students and to determine whether they are meeting these needs.

The number of students from all over the world enrolled outside their country of citizenship has risen dramatically over the past decades. Ren and Hagerdon (2012) discussed that the US remains one of the top major host countries for international students throughout the world. Education Indicators in Focus (2013) posited that about
4.5 million higher education students are enrolled outside their country of citizenship each year, and that figure continues to increase. Furthermore, the OECD countries hosted roughly 77% of all students enrolled outside their countries of citizenship in 2011. The OECD dates back to 1960, when 18 countries, including the US and Canada, joined forces to create an organization dedicated to economic development. Today, the OECD can boast of 35 member countries that span the globe, from North and South America to Europe and Asia Pacific (OECD, 2018).

Education in Focus (2013) proposed that almost half of all international students were enrolled in one of the five top host countries for higher education. The article further asserted that as of 2013, the US hosted 17%; the UK was next by 13%; and Australia, Germany, and France hosted 6%. In 1950, the US enrolled about 25,000 international students, and roughly 15 years later enrollment exceeded the 100,000 mark and went on to reach half a million by the turn of the century (Glass, Buus & Wongtrirat, 2015; IIE, 2013). The authors also stated that today, the United States has witnessed roughly one million international students make their way to class at U.S. higher education institutions each day. The IIE (2018a) reported that the international student enrollment data provided by Open Doors proposed that in the 2017-2018 academic year there were approximately 1,094,792 international students in the US.

Currently, the tide has gradually shifted as research has reported a decline in new international student enrollment in the US. Schulmann (2017) acknowledged that the IIE’s Fall 2017 international student enrollment hot topics survey cited visa problems as the number one reason for enrollment decline at 68.4%, up from 33.8% in the previous academic year. Furthermore, the author posited that 58.6% of institutions surveyed cited
the US social and political environment as a factor for declining international student enrollment. McCarthy (2016) stated that one of the main reasons for this decline is the reduction of Indian students studying Computer Science and Engineering in 2017. Table 2 reports that their ranks declined by 21%, with 18,590 fewer graduate students enrolled in those programs in 2017.

Table 2

*Indian Student Graduate Enrollment at U.S. Universities in Computer Science and Engineering: 2016 to 2017*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student and Level</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Decline from 2016-2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indians enrolled in computer science and engineering at U.S. universities (Graduate Level)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>86,900  68,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-21% (18,590)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Research has deduced that the number of international students enrolled at the graduate level in Science and Engineering at U.S. higher institutions declined by 6%, or 14,730 fewer students, between 2016 to 2017 (McCarthy, 2016). The report further states that the number of graduate international students from India who were enrolled in Computer Science and Engineering fields declined by 21%, or 18,590 fewer students. It can be inferred from this report that graduate students from India who are enrolled in Science and Engineering fields are a source of talent to the US economy.

To support the earlier text, Beeler (2018) stated that figures released in the 2018 Science and Engineering Indicators from the National Science Board report that STEM
fields in the US also saw a decline in international graduate student enrollment. This was because there was a 6% decline from Fall 2016 - Fall 2017, especially in Science and Engineering. The author proposed that the biggest drop came from Indian students (19%), followed by students from Saudi Arabia, Iran, and South Korea. It is fundamental to note that Indian students are the US’s second largest international student population (Bhattacharya, 2018). The report cited the changing U.S. immigration policies under the Trump administration, safety concerns, and job prospects after graduation as the possible reasons behind this decline.

Meanwhile, international student enrollment trends in Australia and Canada increased, with enrollment in Australia increasing by 15% from March 2016 to March 2017, and by 11% in Canada in the same time period (Beeler, 2018). Redden (2018) conversed that international student decline in the US can be attributed to reductions in scholarship programs sponsored by foreign governments, challenges in cost and affordability, and uncertainty about visa policies. In addition, the author also cited the future availability of post-study work opportunities and the recent perceptions of the US as a less welcoming country to foreign nationals under the Trump presidency. In all these, some countries, notably Canada and Australia continue to see increases, while the traditional top destination countries, the US and the UK, see falling or stagnating numbers (Redden, 2018).

Figure 2 shows an infographic of the decline in international student enrollment, both undergraduate and graduate enrollment in the US between 2012 and 2017 (McCarthy, 2016).
Figure 2. International Student Enrollment Declining in the US.

Source: The National Foundation for American Policy

The infographic in Figure 2 infers that the number of international students who are enrolled at U.S. universities declined by 31,250, or approximately 4%, from 840,160 in 2016 to 808,640 in 2017. As illustrated, the decline in international student enrollment in 2017 follows consistent increases in enrollment since 2012. Table 3 further describes the enrollment data in figures, from 2012 to 2017.

Table 3

International Student Enrollment at U.S. Universities: 2012 to 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels (All fields)</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All levels</td>
<td>633,070</td>
<td>673,480</td>
<td>747,400</td>
<td>776,720</td>
<td>840,160</td>
<td>808,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergrad.</td>
<td>349,400</td>
<td>371,990</td>
<td>405,930</td>
<td>416,350</td>
<td>450,850</td>
<td>440,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>283,680</td>
<td>301,490</td>
<td>341,470</td>
<td>360,380</td>
<td>389,310</td>
<td>367,920</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Le (2017), because of two major political phenomena, the June 2016 British vote to exit the European Union (Brexit) and the November 2016 U.S. presidential election, international students began diverting their interest to Canadian colleges and universities. The article reports international student applications for undergraduate studies at Concordia University in Montreal increased by 23% and by 74% for graduate classes since May 2016. In addition, from Mexico they jumped 325% and 233% from India in the same period. Likewise, University of Toronto rose by 27%, University of Alberta by 27%, and Queen’s University in Ontario by 40%. NAFSA (2018) stated that following graduation, international students can work for a time period equal to the period they studied in Canada and work experience considered “skilled” qualifies graduates for legal residence in Canada. By 2017, international student enrollment had increased by 20% (NAFSA, 2018).

Schulmann (2017) posited that Australia is an example of a country that has strategically developed its higher education infrastructure. The government of Australia released a plan titled “National Strategy for International Education 2025,” which set a 10-year plan to enable Australia’s international education sector to be more adaptive, innovative, and globally engaged (Australian Government, 2016). Schulmann further stated that together this strategy, with the collective efforts of individual institutions, served to increase international student enrollment. IIE (2018) asserted that the growth of international students is largely driven by China, especially from the undergraduate level. The report further states that China, India, and South Korea represent 49% of the total
number of international students in the US, with the numbers from China increasing and those from India and South Korea declining. Research points to the fact that in terms of regions, Asia has been the leading distributor of international students studying in the US from the 2008-2009 academic year (Open Doors, 2009; Kisang, 2010).

Schulmann (2017) discussed that China is the largest country of origin for internationally mobile students. That notwithstanding, China’s 2012 vision of becoming host to half a million international students by 2020 has almost hit its target. This is because by 2017, China had surpassed 400,000 international students and is now the third largest host of foreign students. From data sourced from the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in the IIE, McCarthy (2016) posited that China supplies the most international students to U.S. universities, followed by India. This data can be seen in Figure 3 below and displays the top ten countries that send the most number of international student.
China tops the list, while India follows with 165,918, which is roughly the number of students from China enrolled in the 2015 to 2016 academic year. By 2016/2017, China was still topping the list, with India following in tow. However, Saudi Arabia slipped from the third position to the fourth position, while South Korea now replaced Saudi Arabia in the fourth position.

Schulmann (2017) stated that many countries are making intense efforts to harmonize public policies, in addition to working with institutions and colleges to create a strong internationalization framework. He argued that this is not the case with the US, as lack of an overarching national policy framework and agenda is challenging for schools. In addition, the threat of declining domestic student enrollment and policies and the continued budget cuts make international student recruitment more challenging. According to Gluckman (2017), the 50 states have decreased their appropriation per student by 3.3% over the last five years. The article further emphasized that in one of the Mid-South universities, the state funded 70% of university budgets a decade ago, but it is a different story today as research stated that the state funds only 30% of the university budget at this time. Blackford (2018) reported on the university budget cuts at Kentucky universities, the plan to cut the state’s allocation to public higher education by 6.25%.

Looking at the declining international student enrollment trend and then at their economic contributions, in addition to the immeasurable academic and cultural value international students bring to the US, declining enrollment raises concerns. Every
institution wants to ensure a great learning experience for international students and, in order to achieve this, there is a need for host institutions to be strategic about determining the needs of international students in order to determine whether they are meeting these needs or not.

**Conceptual Framework**

Backerson (2009) noted that as a service industry, higher education must place a great emphasis on meeting the expectations of students, students’ parents/guardians, companies, and government employees who are their most important customers. They further stated that with the rapid expansion of universities and the demographic shifts in student populations and marketplace dynamics, it has become fundamental that higher institutions re-assess the role of student satisfaction to ensure student satisfaction in the institution.

Swail (2003) supports this notion as can be observed in the Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement. The Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement is a user-friendly method proposed by Swail to discuss and focus on the cognitive and social attributes that students bring to higher institutions. This campus-wide retention model was designed to provide administration with an effective strategy and framework to build a student retention plan that incorporates the individual needs of the students and institution (Swail, 2003). The model focuses on three distinct factors: first, the cognitive attributes that the student brings to the institution; second, the social attributes; and, third, the institutional role in the student experience. According to Backerson (2009), the cognitive factor refers to students’ intelligence, knowledge, and academic ability. The social factor, in turn, refers to parental and peer support,
development and existence of career goals, educational legacy, and the ability to cope in social situations. The institutional factor refers to the ability of the university or college to provide appropriate support to students in the course of their academic sojourn in the institution. A combination of these three factors provides a solid foundation for student development and persistence.

This model is different from other models/theories because it places the student at the center of the model by focusing on the dynamics between cognitive, social, and institutional factors that take place within the student. As earlier mentioned, the model recognizes the institutional role in ensuring that students persist through the university and graduate. This model can be applied to the experiences of graduate international students in the US as a whole. It further strengthens the argument of this study about the perceptions of graduate international students concerning the support services provided to them by their host institution and suggested recommendations by the participants themselves. By and large, the model supports that these factors must combine to provide a solid foundation for student growth, development, and persistence.

Figure 4 is an illustration of Swail’s Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement. It lists the cognitive, social, and institutional factors that combine to ensure student persistence and achievement in higher education.
Figure 4: Swail’s Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement

Courtesy of Swail, Redd, & Perna (2003)

Tinto’s Student Integration Model theorizes that social integration increases institutional commitment and reduces attrition (Tinto, 1975). Tinto further stated that it is the interplay between the students’ commitment to successfully graduate and their commitment to the university or college that determines the successful graduation or attrition of the student. It becomes vital that every institution commit to student satisfaction so that the students can also be committed to them, seeing that the institution is committed to their success. This is also seen in Tinto’s Withdrawal Model, which theorizes that students who are integrated in the academic and social life of the institution are less likely to drop out (Tinto, 1975). Tinto argued that there must be a commitment on
the part of the institution to commit to student satisfaction; and, ultimately, this results in the success of the institution.

**Research Design**

This research employed a qualitative method. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) stated that one of the advantages of qualitative research is the fact that data are based on the participant’s own categories of meaning. The phenomenology study of qualitative research was specifically employed because, according to Sagepub (2006), phenomenology focuses on describing the essence of a lived phenomenon and understanding the experience. This method of qualitative research was excellent for this study because it served as a powerful tool to capture the voices of graduate international students and the ways they make meaning of their different experiences as international students in the US. The participants were 12-15 graduate international students who constituted a representational sample of the currently enrolled 159 graduate international students in the institution. The interviews were semi-structured and did not exceed 45 minutes.

Research describes purposive sampling as a fundamental kind of non-probability sampling which identifies the primary participants (Groenewald, 2004). This was done via an email message to all currently enrolled graduate international students in the institution. To find additional participants, the snowballing sample was used. According to Groenewald (2004), snowballing expands the samples by asking the primary participants to recommend others for interview purposes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Also, interviews and responses were researched and used to develop an
accurate representation of the study’s conceptual framework. Emergent themes were identified from coding in NVivo.

**Definition of Terms**

**Student Success**

Student success includes the student’s journey from enrollment to persisting through school, to graduation and finally to a successful career post-graduation. Nazerian (2018) posited that student success means that higher education institutions have an obligation to ensure that students who are enrolled in their institutions are equipped with three plans. The first is an educational plan which covers their major, classes, schedule of study, and social activities while enrolled. The second is a financial plan which covers how to fund their tuition. This is especially important so that students do not drop out of school for lack of finances. Finally, it is fundamental that students have a career plan which covers how their program guarantees a career path post-graduation. This career path includes, but is not limited to career counseling or portals where they can find internships and jobs. In the case of international students, student success includes the ability to persist through school and graduate despite all the challenges they face. Most importantly, success includes the ability to abide by the restrictive immigration policies that guide their legal status as international students in the US, successfully navigating the system by using the program provided by the system to be gainfully employed whether in the US, in their home country, or in another host country.

**Sense of Belonging**

After physiological needs and safety needs, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs indicates love and belonging as fundamental human needs of man. This involves the need
for interpersonal relationships that motivate behavior. At this level emotional needs drive human behavior; some of the things that can satisfy these needs are friendships, romantic attachments, family, social groups, community groups, and church organizations. These relationships play an important role in the life of an individual to avoid problems such as loneliness, isolation, depression, and anxiety.

**Cultural Barriers**

Cultural barriers are one of the most common sources of stress experienced by graduate international students in their host institutions and can negatively affect their academic and social performance. Cultural barriers in communication exist between people/parties of different cultural backgrounds. Some causes of these barriers may stem from language, cultural norms and values, stereotypes, values and beliefs, and body language and gestures. These factors can create tension between different cultural backgrounds.

**Limitations**

This study considered only graduate international students from one university. In addition, only one male participant was involved in the study as a result of the fact that mostly females responded to the official email request. As a result, one could assume that this study has limited generalizability. Still, the international student (F1 visa) rules apply the same in the 50 states of the US. The difference is the way institutions equip the students to successfully navigate these rules and reach their American dream.

**Summary**

Overall, the higher education marketplace has become increasingly competitive, not just in the US but in other parts of the western world. Unfortunately, the US has been
portrayed as unwelcoming, as its immigration policies have been seen by many in the US academe as counterproductive to the cause of recruiting talented foreign students and scholars on American campuses (Redden, 2018). Higher institutions must not lose sight of the challenges encountered by graduate international students as they strive to actualize their goals of coming to the US to study. Consequently, there is a need for U.S. higher institutions to come up with innovative strategies to increase the recruitment and retention of graduate international students. In addition, there is also the need to ensure these students have a great learning experience and achieve their goals of coming to the US to study. A significant part of research in Chapter II is focused on the challenges faced by graduate international students in the course of their studies in American higher institutions as they struggle to actualize their goals. Some of these challenges are adjustment problems, sense of belonging, financial hardship, lack of English proficiency, career concerns, and a perceived lack of concern by their host institution. This research also looked at the need for institutional support, their financial contributions to the U.S. economy and the cultural diversity they bring to U.S. campuses.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of literature is related to the factors that motivate graduate international students to opt for higher institutions in the US for their graduate programs. Related literature reviews the challenges faced by graduate international students and how their expressed needs and expectations for appropriate support structures receive attention from host institutions. In addition, this chapter reviews literature concerning the career needs of international students, whether they stay in the US after their studies, go back to their home countries, or get jobs in host countries. This study also looked at the efforts made by host institutions to meet the needs of international students and the level to which the students are satisfied with these support services.

It is common knowledge that the US is one of the top major host countries to international students from the different continents of the world. According to Rena and Hagedorn (2012), the Open Doors Report of 2011 reports that about 723,277 international students studied in the US in the academic year 2010-2011. This is supported by Tas (2013), who stated that the IIE also reported a record number of 723,277 international students in universities and colleges in the US between 2010-2011. According to Glass et al. (2015), the United States witnesses roughly one million international students making their way to class at U.S. higher education institutions. In 1950, the US boasted of about 25,000 international students, and about 15 years later enrollment had exceeded the 100,000 mark and went on to reach half a million by the turn of the century (IIE, 2013; Glass et al., 2015). Research has supported that in the last decade, international student enrollment doubled from 514,723 in 1999-2000 to 819,644
in 2012-2013, and surpassed the one million mark in 2017. Zong and Batalova (2018) reported that in 2017, the US hosted about 1.1 million of the 4.6 million worldwide enrolled international students.

Over the years, international students have been known to be significant financial contributors to the U.S. economy. Novak (2015) pointed out that the number of undergraduate international undergraduate students enrolled in U.S. colleges hit 1.13 million in 2015, which was 14% more than the 2013-2014 academic year and 50% more since the 2007-2008 academic year. The author argued that with the rising cost of college tuition and the $1 trillion debt in student loans, international students have become a great back-up plan because they pay full freight, thereby enhancing the bottom line in higher education institutions. Canada is not left out of this as Brown (2014) stated that Premier Dalton McGuinty, who was the 24th premier of Ontario from 2003-2013, came up with strategies to transform Ontario into a beacon for international students. The author acknowledged that the Premier’s plan in 2010 to boost international student enrollment to 57,000 within five years overshot its target and hit 66,417 within four years. The author posited that this action boosts the economy, as graduate international students contribute roughly $35,000 Canadian dollars per annum and their presence has led to a lot of jobs being created in Canada. The article suggests that international students pay more so that institutions can recoup their charges. In addition, welcoming international students brings foreign investments to Canada by bringing in foreign talents via international students.

Otsu (2008) acknowledged that international students contribute nearly $14.5 billion to the U.S. economy per year. In addition, 2008-2009 witnessed a $20 billion
contribution to the U.S. economy by international students (Mcfadden, Maahs-Fadung, & Mallett, 2012). According to NAFSA (2018), International students and their families created or supported 340,000 jobs and contributed $26.8 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2013-2014 academic year, according to NAFSA’s economic analysis.

NAFSA’s economic analysis for academic year 2013-2014 reveals that for every seven international students enrolled, three U.S. jobs are created or supported by spending in the following sectors: higher education, accommodation, dining, retail, transportation, telecommunications, and health insurance. International students contributed more than $30.5 billion to the U.S. economy in the 2014-2015 academic year. In that year, 72% of all international students received the majority of their funds from sources outside the US: 64 percent from personal and family resources and another 8% from foreign governments or universities (Zong & Batalova, 2016). By the 2016-2017 academic year, international students contributed $36.9 billion USD to the U.S. economy and created and supported 450,331 jobs (NAFSA, 2018)

Besides financial contributions to the U.S. economy, academic exchange holds great potential as a force for enhancing intercultural understanding and promoting internal development, and this has been a core feature of cultural diplomacy. Research also has suggested that international students are economic drivers and multicultural providers (Kwon, 2009; Trice, 2003). Similarly, Glass et al. (2015) supported that international educators and activists are increasingly drawing attention to the need for the qualitative dimensions of international students’ experiences in the US. According to Mcfadden et al. (2012), international students create a multicultural environment on U.S. campuses, and a culturally rich environment prepares students to interact with diverse
populations and to develop global competence. In addition, welcoming international students helps strengthen ties with countries across the globe, as well as enhances U.S. national security (NAFSA, 2016). International and cross-cultural awareness remains fundamental for future political and economic success, and ties with foreign countries across the globe foster the ability of the U.S. international collaboration and creativity essential to effective U.S. leadership, prosperity, and national security. NAFSA (2016) also acknowledged that recruiting international students encourages a more globally and economically diverse student population through education and exchange.

**Historical Context for International Students in the United States**

Akanwa (2015) supported that the history of international students in the US dates as far back as the late 18th century. The author stated that the international student population did not witness exponential growth in the US in the early phase of higher education. This was because the US did not welcome the influx of immigrants, with some individual states passing restrictive immigration laws and making the country a bad choice for international students. Bevis and Lucas (2007) further noted the effect of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prevented any Chinese without family residing in the US from entering the country. In addition, the Scott Act of 1888, which banned all Chinese immigration including immigrants who had gone to China and were planning to return to the US, resulted in the loss of international students in the US. These Acts are likely to have affected the growth of international students in the US at that time.

Today, the story is different, as Starobin (2006) stated that a report from the IIE revealed that students from India, China, Republic of Korea, and Japan accounted for 41% of all international student enrollment during the 2003-2004 academic year. In
addition, Asian students comprised over 59% of all international students. In the 1980s, the majority of international students were from the Middle East, but this changed with the fall of the oil industry and change in regime. Kwon (2009) also supported that Asian countries have continued to fund the largest amount of money for international students. This shows the large population of Asians that come into the US as international students and the effects of the Scott and Chinese Exclusion Acts on international student recruitment and enrollment in the early phase of higher education. This data can be seen in Table 4.
### Table 4


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
<th>2016/17</th>
<th>2017/18</th>
<th>2017/18 % of Total</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>350,755</td>
<td>363,341</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>India</td>
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<td>196,271</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>South Korea</td>
<td>58,663</td>
<td>54,555</td>
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<td>-7.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>-15.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>-4.3</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
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The repercussion of this was that these acts opened a large international market for developed countries with less strict immigration laws. However, Akanwa (2015) stated that the current U.S. policy on immigration seeks to make immigration and visa procedures easier and more transparent. This is made possible through the SEVIS program, which is a requirement for all international students who are pursuing a degree in the US.

**Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS)**
SEVIS as a web-based data collection and reporting system used to track and monitor schools and F, M, and J nonimmigrants while they visit the US and participate in their U.S. education system (ICE, 2018; Rosser, Hermsen, Mamiseishvili, & Wood, 2007). SEVIS is also defined as a national database that tracks international students and higher education institutions in the US (Ross et al. 2007). Starobin (2006) described SEVIS as a web-based data collection and reporting system that monitors how universities and colleges act in accordance with federal regulations. Every international student is required to have a SEVIS number, which is issued by the SEVP. ICE (2018) reported that SEVP is a part of the National Security Investigations Division and acts as a bridge for government organizations that are interested in information on non-immigrants who have come to the US primarily to study.

When first proposed in the 1990’s, this system sent unwelcoming messages to the world’s academic systems because of its stringent scrutiny on international students. This was because the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was not comfortable with the fact that there was lack of information or data tracking the international students studying in the US. According to Rosser et al. (2007), these concerns were expressed in the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) and as a result, an automated system to this effect was demanded. According to a press release by the U.S. Department of Justice (2001), the Coordinated Interagency Partnership Regulating International Students (CIPRIS) commenced in June 1997 and went on until October 1999, though further development on improving the system was halted. This was because members of Congress and NAFSA raised concerns about the system and the type of information gathered (Rosser et al, 2007). The PATRIOT Act was
passed in October 2011, immediately after the 9/11 attacks and, in this Act Congress authorized over $36 million for an international student tracking system to be fully implemented by the end of 2002 (Rosser et al., 2007). Specifically, CIPRIS was converted to SEVIS version 1.0, and the development of the system resumed. By July 2002, universities and colleges in the US could voluntarily use the SEVIS, and by August 2003 it became mandatory for all international students to have a record in the SEVIS system (Rosser et al., 2007). By this act, it became easier for the INS to have a record of and track international students in the US. Furthermore, this provided an avenue for the INS to monitor how universities and colleges act in accordance with federal regulations.

**Who are International Students?**

International students are non-US citizens who come from other countries to the US for study purposes. They are required to obtain a student visa (an F1 visa) from the BCIS under the DHS, formerly known as Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) (Otsu, 2008). The F1 visa is designed for students engaging in a full course of study in the US. In order to get the F1 visa, the prospective international student must have received an I-20 form, which contains the SEVIS number from the host university. The DHS requires that international students strictly adhere to the requirements of this visa, and this involves enrolling full time in their host university (12 credits per semester). In addition, international students are not allowed to work off campus but can work on campus and must not exceed 20 hours per week (Otsu, 2008). However, those who want to work outside the university can apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT), and this job must be related to their course of study as the title implies. This permission differs from the one-year voluntary internship training at the completion of a degree program,
known as Optical Practical Training (OPT). At the conclusion of studies, the international student files for a one-year work permit and pays a sum of $380 for this permit to be processed by immigration. Within the given one year, the F-1 student must find a job within the first 90 days of the issue of the permit. The job must be related to the degree just acquired by the student.

When the OPT is over, the international student is to leave the country or comply with either of specific options. In case said student is able to get a job within the stipulated 90 days and the employer wants to extend the work permit, the job requires at least a bachelor’s degree, as associate degrees are not recognized by U.S. immigration. Extension of the work permit requires an H1B, which the employer files, and after three years, the student can file for US citizenship (Sementelli, 2002). Where the student is unable to secure employment within the given 90 days or secured employment and the employer was unable to file the H1B visa, the student can go back to school and become fully enrolled in a U.S. college or university to maintain the F1 status. Where the student is unable to fit into any of the above options, the student must leave the country or face deportation proceedings from the DHS. These students are made to go through a lot of stringent measures in order to maintain their legal status in the US and avoid risking loss of student status and possible deportation to their home countries. Most people do not understand these measures, including the host institutions. This simply means that host institutions must have to differentiate between support services for international students and support services for domestic students, as their needs differ. Despite these stringent measures, the US continues to be the preferred destination for international students from the different continents of the world (Zong & Batalova, 2018).
Why the United States and Why the Host Institution?

The United States is known for welcoming men and women worldwide and remains the preferred destination for international students, with the highest number coming from China and Saudi Arabia. Ren et al. (2012) supported this by reporting the US is one of the top major countries to international students. Research asserts that international students’ expectations to improve their future career opportunities, as well as obtain experience that will later lead to employment, drives their decision to study in the US (Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Urban & Palmer, 2016). Zhou (2015) further reported that international students now constitute a significant portion in doctoral education programs in many OECD countries. In the US, the number of doctoral recipients who were international students has steadily increased over the past three decades, rising from 13% in 1981, to 24% in 2001, and to 29% in 2011 (Zhou, 2015). The motivational factors for this rising trend include pursuit of academic and professional growth, intellectual stimulation, economic status, enhanced social status, and greater political freedom or stability (Altbach, 2004; Khadria, 2011; Li & Bray, 2007; Zhou, 2015). Still, unsatisfactory experiences continue to lead to some international students leaving their institutions before completing their programs.

McFadden et al. (2012) sought to determine what institutional, program, and recruitment characteristics influenced international students to attend institutions in the US. Undergraduate students rated friendliness of the departmental staff, speed of acceptance into the program, ease of the admission process, and length of time required to complete the degree most important. Master's students rated amount of funding, speed of acceptance into the program, opportunity for assistantships/scholarships, and length of
time required to complete the degree most important. Doctoral students were most concerned about funding, rigor of the program, friendliness of the departmental staff, and class size. In a case study involving 501 survey participants who were all international students, and 24 interviewees, Lee (2008) examined the reasons why international students choose their host universities. The findings indicated that international students choose institutions based on institutions’ academic reputations, opportunities for work or assistantships, financial assistance, and availability of specific academic programs.

**Professional Expectations vs Personal Expectations**

Urban and Palmer (2016) supported that professional outcomes for international students are significantly lower than students' expectations related to professional development. On the other hand, students' personal outcomes are significantly higher than personal expectation before leaving their different countries. The article further reported that international students expect significant social support from university staff, including help with the development of social networks via formalized peer systems and social events. However, university staff, particularly instructors may perceive these expectations as exceeding their roles (Bartram, 2007; Urban & Palmer, 2016). Similarly, an article by Tinto (2006) reported that one of the reasons that international students, and even domestic students, do not get significant support from faculty might be the fact that faculty do not see student retention as part of their job. Student retention is not high on their priority list, as they believe that student retention is exclusively the job of student affairs personnel, especially those who work in developmental education departments.

The areas in which the students had gained included getting a good quality education and becoming more independent. The areas that recorded the least gain were in
getting practical experience, understanding themselves better, and learning to write clearly and effectively. The study further posited that the achievement of students’ professional outcomes was related to having opportunities for applying knowledge, gaining skills for employment, discussing career plans with professors and advisors, and using career services. On the other hand, the achievement of their personal outcomes was related to having professors and staff encourage contact among students from different backgrounds, using career services, and having serious conversations with students very different from oneself. This study revealed that most international students are quite concerned about career-related issues such as career planning, getting work experience, and gaining job search skills (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005).

**Challenges Faced by International Students in the United States**

International students face various challenges such as isolation, financial, career, social, academic, and security concerns in their host institutions, and in the US as a whole. They are faced with a new culture and having to interact in a new language with which they might not be familiar, and this is harder on those who did not speak English in their home countries. Glass et al. (2015) noted that in an age of global terrorism, international students are often portrayed by the press as a security threat rather than people who actually need to be protected by their host country. In order to come up with strategies to create inclusive, connected, and purposeful campuses for international students in the US, it is vital that host institutions confront these challenges.

**International Students as a Heterogeneous Group**

Tidwell and Hanassab’s assessments of the needs and experiences of 640 international students from Asia, Europe, South America, Southeast Asia, the Middle
East, Canada, Oceania, and Africa support the fact that international students remain the most diverse population in U.S. higher education institutions (Glass et al., 2015). International students arrive from an increasing number of locations, bringing with them diverse cultural foundations for learning, contrasting expectations for forming intercultural friendships, and a range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Unfortunately, higher education administrators tend to approach them as one people (Glass et al., 2015). Both qualitative and quantitative studies have identified country of origin as a significant factor in the international student experience (Glass et al., 2015). There is a need for institutions to assess the needs of this diverse group so that they are well positioned to provide support structures to meet these needs. This assessment can be done in the form of surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus group meetings. Urban (2012) inferred that for this singular reason, higher education must desist from treating them as one group but, rather, must identify the peculiar needs of each of these diverse groups in order to come up with strategies to ensure a satisfying experience for this heterogeneous group.

ACE (2012), institutions must discuss the need to shift from the current focus on international students as relatively unconnected, autonomous individuals to a focus on international students as participants in complex and often vast transnational social networks. Campus context that fosters a sense of belonging also acknowledges the changing demographics of today’s international students. Choudaha, Orosz, & Chang (2012) concluded that although international students are frequently referred to as a one-student sub-population, they are the most diverse student subpopulation on campus.

**Language Barriers**
Olivas and Li (2006) supported language barriers and lack of knowledge of the host culture as some of the common sources of stress experienced by international students. This is because of the effect these can have on the social and academic performance of the student (Chen, 1999; Olivas & Li, 2006; Zhai, 2002). International students face challenges, especially those who speak English as a second language, to survive academically and culturally in the US. These students risk communication and culture to grow and succeed academically. According to Krasnof (2016), they must practically give up their identity in order to survive in the classrooms and in the society. As a result, Krosnof proposed that it is fundamental for teachers to be culturally responsive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. The article states that, “research on curriculum and institutional practices has primarily focused on white middle-class students, while virtually ignoring the cultural and linguistic characteristics of diverse learners” (p. 1).

Language barriers can affect students’ self-concept and self-efficacy, making it difficult for them to seek out social interaction within the new host culture. Invariably, this affects their ability to successfully adapt to the new culture. Olivas and Li (2006) also stated that college counselors and personnel have a vital role to play in helping international students meet these needs. Urban (2012) noted that lower English proficiency and higher stress associated with acculturation relate to high levels of depression, as was reported in a survey conducted on 320 African, Asian, and Latin American international students. However, the same study linked higher levels of English usage, greater fluency, and comfort with the language to lower levels of acculturative stress (Urban, 2012). Research has supported that policymakers and administrators must
be aware that despite the fact that international students earn high scores on admissions and proficiency examinations, English learning experiences differ from person to person. As a result, support services and mentoring programs should be set up and monitored to support these students (Olivas & Li, 2006).

While recruiting international students, research findings support that it is important that U.S. institutions provide strong support services for international students in the area of English proficiency. There is a need for them to identify these areas of discomfort and specifically target and make provisions for these sources of stress. One of them is the fact that colleges and universities need to take advantage of teleconferencing and videoconferencing to interview prospective international students rather than depend on TOEFL and GRE scores, which are not reliable. Tas (2013) cited a study by Brigulgio (2000) which examined international students’ and academic staff members’ perceptions of international students’ needs. The study found international students’ need the most help in speaking, writing, listening, reading, taking specific notes during classes, reading specialist texts, writing texts, delivering oral presentations, as well as understanding the informal English spoken by the U.S. classmates. While enrolled in their different institutions, Ren and Hagerdon (2012) postulated that forums that encourage domestic and international student interactions should be set up to minimize isolation of international students, such as University of Florida's Global Coffeehouse Program and the Conversation Buddy Program, currently a requirement of some courses in the university. In addition, all faculty members should go through mandatory workshops to sensitize them on the challenges of international students in the US. Suggested topics of these workshops should include but are not limited to the role of English in non-English
speaking countries, internal educational operating systems, cultural differences and communication barriers, and specific teaching strategies and classroom management techniques (Ren et al., 2007). Finally, Glass et al. (2015) advised that institutions should inform international students about services and programs that are pertinent to their successful stay in the institution. They insist that there is a need for orientation programs to go beyond legal status and immigration laws. The institutions should make use of this forum to create an atmosphere of understanding and compassion from administrators, faculty members, and peers. In addition, knowledge of available services that could make their academic sojourn in their host institution a successful and fulfilling experience should be addressed.

**Sense of Belonging**

Belonging for international students assumes greater importance in places like college campuses where individuals are more than likely to experience isolation or loneliness as they reconstruct support networks in a new cultural and linguistic environment. If stakeholders of U.S. institutions of higher learning continue to turn a blind eye to the role that belonging plays in human life, it will be impossible to understand the international students who come into the US and the worlds that they do or may inhabit (Choudaha & Schulmann, 2014).

According to Glass et al. (2015), increased engagement in co-curricular activities greatly affects international students’ sense of belonging, and this in turn enhances their desire for and degree of cross-cultural engagement. Kwon (2009) also discussed the difficulties faced by international students in cross-cultural learning and implored that educators and policymakers make a concerted effort to help them adjust to such
multicultural contexts. This study demonstrated that frequent participation in seminars organized by the Office for International Services (OIS) had a positive impact on homesickness for international students (Kwon, 2009). It further supported the need for educators, office staff, and the whole community surrounding universities to work together to accommodate the needs of these students. This is an attempt to facilitate the development of multicultural and intellectual environments in universities.

Glass, Buus, and Braskamp (2013) asserted that participation in leadership programs is the most reported co-curricular activity among both domestic and international students, followed by community services. They further posited that about one third of U.S. and international students participate often or very often in leadership programs, about one third occasionally, and roughly one third rarely or never participate. The 2009-2013 GPI data analysis reported that Indian students had the highest participation levels (45%) in leadership programs, even surpassing the participation level (38%) of the domestic students. Saudi students were found to be the least likely to participate (13%) in leadership programs (Glass et al., 2015). Leadership programs have significant impact on aspects of campus life, both outside the classroom and what happens in the classroom (Glass et al., 2013). The authors reported that international and domestic students who participated in leadership programs often, or very often, reported higher levels of engagement with faculty members. They also reported that they felt a stronger sense of community (Glass et al., 2015).

Curtin, Stewart and Ostrove (2013) observed that although international doctoral students in the US face challenges of acculturation in academia, they complete graduate school at higher rates and more quickly than their domestic counterparts. The study
further looked at advisor support, sense of belonging, and academic self-concept among domestic and international students at a research university in the US and discovered that international students place a higher value on research-related and other academic experiences than domestic students. They also report a stronger sense of belonging. In addition, advisor support was associated with a stronger sense of belonging and academic self-concept for both groups.

A quantitative study examined domestic students’ and international students’ response to an undergraduate survey administered at nine universities. This study was aimed at identifying similarities and differences in the ways that the two identified groups make sense of their experiences in college. According to Horne, Lin, Anson, and Jacobson (2018), the study revealed that both groups reported more similar than different experiences with faculty, but international students consistently reported lower levels of social satisfaction and feelings of being welcome and respected on campus. This points to the fact that interactions among students are a significant factor in international student sense of belonging at universities and colleges. Another study employed a consensual qualitative research methodology to examine factors that contributed to university belonging in a sample of Asian international students from a Midwest university. The study revealed 14 categories across five domains that contribute to university belongingness and these domains are interpersonal interaction, experiences of acculturation, campus environment, emphasis on academic achievement, and interpersonal factors (Slaten, Ferguson, Allen, Brodrick, & Waters, 2016). The findings highlighted the importance of within-group social connection, acculturation, and academic success on Asian graduate international students’ sense of belonging. In other
words, it is vital that university personnel assist new graduate international students who are struggling with feeling connected on campus. This is because these students need support in building connections with other students who identify with their ethnic culture, as well as students who identify with the mainstream culture. The result of this study also points to a need for counseling psychologists on university campuses to provide education for both students and staff about the acculturation process that many international students go through.

**Difference Between Domestic and International Students**

Tas (2013) sought to find out the difference between how currently enrolled domestic and international students view the importance of college services, environment, impressions, and experience. He sought to find out how currently enrolled domestic and international students rate their satisfaction level regarding these terms and what aspects of the campus climate were beneficial or detrimental to international and domestic students in achieving their educational goals. The results of the study pointed out that current graduate international students were less satisfied with their experiences in college than domestic students. In addition, these international students found the university less appealing than undergraduate students. The study supported that to prevent dropout behavior, the primary step is the acknowledgment of the challenges that graduate international students face. Furthermore, schools must acknowledge the differences between the demands and needs of international and domestic students.

Research has stated that most student services found on campus are primarily designed for domestic students without giving much thought to the needs of the international students (Ren et al.). Integration of international and domestic students,
using comprehensive orientation programs developed by the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) and Campus Life, took a high priority. The researchers advised that orientation programs be reiterative before, during, and after and include both domestic and international students to facilitate adaptation and meeting non-academic needs. Orientation programs have many advantages and are necessary for international students as they seek guidance on how to best approach and embrace their new environment. Orientation programs provide multiple opportunities for new international students to meet and interact with their peers and other members of the community, including faculty and staff, thus setting the social and integration process in motion. Shupp (2014) discussed that orientation can be the defining moment in the transition to college for the students, both domestic and international. In addition, orientation is a time in which basic habits are formed that can influence the academic success and personal growth of the students and will likely act as a determinant toward their retention and graduation. Most importantly, Shupp (2014) stated that orientation is a comprehensive process and not a single event. It is not accomplished in a day but should be done through a comprehensive, multi-faceted process that begins from the time of admission and continues throughout the student’s entire career in the host university.

**Orientation Programs**

Blackburn (2019) insist that orientation programs should set the tone of the institution and provide relevant information which facilitates the successful adjustment and retention of international students into their host community. Blackburn stated that comprehensive orientation programs for international students must include several components. These are to assess relevant and desirable student learning and development;
provide evidence of impact on outcomes; articulate contributions to or support of student learning and development in the domains not specifically assessed. In addition, orientation programs should articulate contributions to or support of international student persistence and success and to use evidence gathered through this process to create strategies for improvement of international student programs and services. Overall, NAFSA (2012) acknowledges that international student recruitment and enrollment is a holistic endeavor which includes advising, application, admission, visa work issuance, orientation, enrollment, and continued guidance by trained professionals throughout the student’s stay in the institution.

**Connecting the dots: Collaboration Among all Related Departments**

Glass et al. (2015) suggested a collaboration between international student offices and colleagues in career services, academic advising, or faculty development. Christopher Viers, Vice President for International Services at Indiana University, supports that sometimes international offices try to do too much. He suggested that the international student offices forge flexible coalitions with key campus stakeholders. According to Urban and Palmer (2016), the international student offices were mostly overwhelmed by the demands placed on them by the DHS. These demands include the need to ensure the students abide by the immigration regulations and reporting requirements and, as a result, do not have sufficient time for providing counseling, creating programs, or addressing adjustment difficulties (Rosser et al., 2007). This calls for collaboration among all related departments to ensure that host institutions meet the expectations of international students.
Glass et al. (2015) reported that Christopher Vires likened the perceived segregation of international students on U.S. campuses to the ISSS, which is likely positioned in a similar way because it is not well integrated with other related units on campus. He feared that the ISSS constantly tries to meet every need of the students and does not rely on their colleagues for what they can contribute and where their areas of expertise lie (Glass et al., 2015). Tas (2013) supported the fact that the ISSS should be fully integrated, both functionally and geographically, into all aspects of campus and off-campus life.

**Career Counseling Needs**

Career prospects remain a top concern for international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities. This is a major pull factor for graduate international students who come to the US, yet career services available are often a significant disappointment (Loo, 2016). Bridging the gap, a report by Choudaha and Schulmann (2014) cited access to career opportunities as one of the biggest areas of dissatisfaction for international students at U.S. higher institutions. The report explored the reasons international students enroll at a particular campus, why they stay, and why they transfer. Good career services emerged as the third most cited practice for institutions to have in place in order to help international students. Similarly, a 2015 World Education Services (WES) report on how graduate international students chose U.S. institutions found that career prospects are, overall, the top factor to sway graduate students toward one institution instead of another (Loo, 2016; Lu & Schulmann, 2015). Sangganjanavanich, Lenz and, Cavazos (2011) examined the experiences of eight international undergraduate students who sought employment in the US after completing their degree. Sangganjanavanich et al. noted that
career practitioners should make concerted efforts to understand the experiences of international students and to prepare them for seeking employment in the United States. Crockett and Hays (2011) reviewed the vocational situation of international students in the US. Though this population faces considerable career challenges and vocational difficulties, college counselors remain focused on the situation of American learners. Their literature revealed that career placement needs, individual factors mediating international students’ career needs and barriers, and help-seeking behaviors are patterns yielding important implications for college counselors who work with graduate international students.

Mentoring Needs

Coming to a new country to study is challenging for graduate international students, and even all international students as a whole, as they need to adapt to a new culture of studying, a new way of socializing, new sets of friends, and a new living environment. These could be quite challenging and mentally tasking for the students. According to Mai-Linh (2014), it is fundamental that graduate international students have mentors who will help them navigate these challenges and have a smoother experience with the college experience. The author suggested that this can be achieved through soliciting advice from international upperclassmen because of the knowledge they have acquired over the years. Also, asking professors for academic advice opens doors for a mentor-mentee relationship. Park-Saltzman, Wada, and Mogami (2012) posited that any mentor who wants to provide effective mentorship to international students’ needs should be aware of specific challenges faced by these students and cultural differences that may affect their mentoring relationship. In addition, there is a
need for mentors to be familiar with international issues and be equipped with the knowledge about career planning on a global level.

Park-Saltzman et al. (2012) suggested that there is a need for mentors to recognize their limitations when it comes to mentoring international students and actively encourage the student to seek others to help in their deficient areas. The authors stated that some faculty members are not adequately trained to address the unique needs of international students, and this may lead them either to disregard international students’ unique needs or to perceive these students as needy and incompetent. Unfortunately, this misconception can lead to marginalization of international students in the program. While this article was focused on Asian international student mentees, it can be applied to all international students, both graduate and undergraduate. The uniqueness of every international student needs to be respected and creative strategies applied to negotiate cultural differences with student mentees. Likewise, the article suggests that on the part of the graduate international student mentee, they too need to be open to cultural differences with their mentor and take responsibility for their own professional development.

Faculty-Student Interactions

Fusani (1994) stated that as educational institutions continue to serve diverse populations, there is a need for them to be responsive to the changing racial, age, and socio-economics of the new multicultural demographics of academic institutions. Similarly, Krasnoff (2016) supported that recognizing and addressing cultural diversity in the classroom stresses the role that classroom encounters play in the social and cultural integration of international students. Many factors affect international student
experiences, including positive faculty-student interaction (FSI) in the classroom, which is critical to successful student outcomes. International students expect significant social support from university staff, especially instructors, but the staff often perceive such expectations as exceeding their roles. Research has suggested that courses that invite international students, both graduate and undergraduate, to engage in dialogue, discussion, and interactions with peers enhance their sense of community, promote high quality faculty-student interactions, and develop complex perspectives.

Spiering (2008) examined the role of faculty in international students’ adaptation process to university life in the US, and the results indicate that faculty members are a critical factor to the success of international students. International students must manage the academic adjustment of being students within the U.S. educational system and still handle the challenges of social adjustment (Constantinides, 1991; Spiering, 2008). International students hold faculty in high regard, and their interactions with them can have a great and positive influence over them (Jenkins, 2000). Ozturgurt (2013) supported that faculty members are crucial in the sense that they have the most contact with students and are the most sought after for questions these students may have.

A Roman Catholic research university in the Midwest’s “Global Success” workshops are forums where foreign and domestic students meet for discussion with department guest speakers on special issues targeted at giving international students a greater learning experience. Rubin (2014) supported that this caused the university’s international student numbers to increase from 200 to 2000 between 2003-2014. This measure targeted increased enrollment, success, and retention of international students; and research has shown that this worked (Rubin, 2014). In addition, another college in
the Midwest’s “Global Engagement Seminar,” offers a for-credit elective course which focuses on issues concerning international students that includes discussions on topics such as U.S. healthcare, race relations, career expectations, and issues concerning the retention and success of international students. Domestic students are also advised and encouraged to take this course. These help the integration process of both the domestic and international students and facilitates faculty-student interaction, which is crucial for the success of the students. These likely contributed to increased recruitment and retention in this institution of higher learning.

**Financial Aid**

Rubin (2014) stated that a college in the Midwest has a hardship fund which allows international students with a family, medical, or financial emergency to apply for a one-time scholarship. The author supported that when it comes to financial aid for international students, host universities need to put some thought in this, as cost can lead to international student attrition or transfer to another college that they perceive will support them financially.

**Comparing Institutions**

Finally, looking at institutions with large numbers of international students and how they manage to maintain these numbers will help institutions in coming up with strategies for an all-inclusive campus. According to Glass et al. (2015), one of the universities in the Midwest is one of the top 25 institutions hosting international students and home to 6,123 foreign-born students. Keeping track of over 6,000 international students led to university-wide efforts to create “sunapsis” a proactive case management and tracking system that ensures the university is engaging international students before
issues and problems arise with visa issues or student academic performance. Research has shown that the key to success at this university has been building long-term, trusting relationships that allow the international office to leverage existing opportunities and services. This includes collaboration with colleagues in career services, academic advising, or faculty developmental students before issues and problems arise with visa issues or student academic performance. Midwest is one of the most ethnically diverse institutions in the state, with one third of every freshman class composed of Filipino, Asian African American, and Hispanic students (Glass et al., 2015). The school has distinguished itself as an organizer of an active and engaged International Student Advisory Board (ISAB), willing to advocate for issues on behalf of its international student population. It provides suggestions for improving current programs and services and makes recommendations for new initiatives (Glass et al., 2015). This is done through 20 board members and a faculty adviser who understands how to negotiate the political dynamics of both the university and the international student community and has developed sufficient status and relationships at the university to be effective. Research looks at the strategy employed by the university to address the frustrations of mid-level administrators who work with international students and seek to strengthen their campus commitment to these students. They are responsible for informing senior administrators about programs, resources, and outcomes, yet many have little influence over the university’s major strategic and budgetary priorities.

Summary

This chapter focused on the challenges faced by graduate international students in the course of their sojourn as students in the US. It also looked at how their expressed
needs and expectations for appropriate support services receive attention from their host institutions. In addition, it reviewed the factors that motivate graduate international students to opt for higher institutions in the US. Initially, the Acts of 1882 and 1888 discouraged immigrants and international students from coming to the US. Today, the story is different, as research has supported that the US has become the preferred destination for international students, with the highest number of students coming from China. This desire is driven by their desire to improve their future career opportunities and obtain experience that will later lead to employment, whether in the US, back in their home countries, or in other host countries. Certain areas of challenges were identified, such as language barriers, inadequate orientation programs that lack the essence of survival for foreign students, and support services focused on domestic students without much thought to the needs of international students.

Research has supported that the presence of international students in U.S. colleges and universities contributes economic, academic, and intercultural exchange to the US. These contributions are essential since they hold great potential for economic growth and as a force for enhancing intercultural understanding and promoting internal development. As a result, international educators, activists, and journalists are calling for closer attention to the qualitative dimensions of international student experiences at U.S. colleges and universities and to push for more inclusive campus environments for them. Chapter III details the research methodology utilized in the study, the method of data collection, and the analysis of data which led to an unbiased study.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative descriptive phenomenology study regarding the needs of graduate international students in the US. This method of research proved a powerful tool to capture the voices of the participants of this study and the ways they make meaning of their individual experiences as graduate international students in the US. It also allowed for a deeper understanding of the goals and needs of these students, as well as the way they perceive the support services already provided by the institution. Furthermore, this approach provided a way to develop theory from the data in order to enable institutions to be able to better understand the needs of these student and strategically build support services to meet these needs. The applicability of the phenomenology method using Husserl’s descriptive, and specifically the bracketing method of phenomenology, are all discussed indepth in this chapter. In addition, the research plan, including the methodology, study participants, procedures, analysis method, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations of this study are primary components of this chapter. Finally, Curtin and Fossey (2007) posited that the trustworthiness of the results is the bedrock of quality qualitative research and so the researcher discusses the reliability and validity of the results of the study in this chapter.

The purposes of this study were to determine the needs of graduate international students and their perceptions of the resources provided to them by their host institutions. From their responses, to be able to better advice on appropriate support structures to be put in place so that their needs are met, they have a great learning experience, and host institutions can experience a boost in their international student enrollment and retention.
This is a win-win situation as the economic contributions, in addition to the academic and cultural value international students bring to the US, will not be lost.

**Research Questions**

The participants of this study shared profound experiences and their sincere views about their goals of coming to the United States to study, their needs while enrolled, their perceptions of the support services provided by the institution, as well as their recommendations on appropriate support structures to enable them have a greater learning experience and achieve their goals. The following research questions framed this study:

1. What are the goals of graduate international students as they leave their home countries to come to the United States for further studies?
2. What are the needs of graduate international students in the United States?
3. How do graduate international students perceive the support services offered by their host institutions/the community?
4. What recommendations do graduate international students have for their host institutions to better enable them to have a great learning experience and to reach their goals?

**Research Method**

This research employed a qualitative method. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) stated that one of the advantages of qualitative research is the fact that data are based on the participant’s own categories of meaning. It also provides understanding and description of people’s personal experiences of phenomenon, and this is referred to as the emic, or in a layman’s understanding, the insider’s viewpoint. As a researcher, I was not
blindsided by the other qualitative research methods, as it had the option of choosing the narrative method, but its primary focus was on exploring or telling stories of an individual’s experiences. Moen (2006) defines narrative research as the study of how people experience the world, and narrative researchers then collect these stories and write a narrative of these experiences. In addition, narrative representations are likened to teacher biographies and autobiographies, and so it does not come as a surprise that within the research tradition, biography and narratives are used synonymously.

The phenomenology study of qualitative research was specifically employed because according to Sagepub (2006), phenomenology focuses on describing the essence of a lived phenomenon and understanding the experience. This method of qualitative research was excellent for this study because it served as a powerful tool to capture the voices of graduate international students and the ways they make meaning of their different experiences as international students in the US. The Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching (CIRT, 2018) states that the methodology used in phenomenology differs from most research methodologies because the goal of this method of study is to describe a lived experience rather than to explain or quantify it.

Overall, phenomenology emphasizes subjectivity, and the goal is to maximize the depth of information collected. In addition, it requires less structured interviews, and as such the phenomenological method of research was excellent for this study. This method served as a powerful tool to capture the voices of graduate international students and the ways they make meaning of their different experiences as international students in the US.

Participants
The participants were 12 graduate international students, 11 females and 1 male, and are the source of interview data. This was the case because the researcher discovered that the males were reluctant to come forward and be interviewed. According to the Office of Institutional Research, as of Spring 2019 there were 110 graduate international students and 375 undergraduate international students, making it a total of 485 who are currently enrolled in this Mid-South institution. The 110 graduate international students make up 4.7% of the total number graduate students in the institution, which is 2,329, and 23% of all international students in the institution. Cresswell (1998) recommended that long interviews of up to 10 participants are advisable for a phenomenological study, and a sample 12 graduate international students, which constituted my sample size, was used. Based on the fact that Urban (2012) indicated that higher institutions should desist from treating the international student population as one group, the different cultures and religions were considered while selecting participants. The interviews lasted roughly 45 minutes.

**Sampling**

Research has described purposive sampling as a fundamental kind of non-probability sampling which identifies the primary participants (Groenewald, 2004). This sample was chosen based on the purpose of my research. To find additional participants, the snowballing sample was used. According to Groenewald (2004), snowballing expands the samples by asking the primary participants to recommend others for interview purposes. Ozturgurt (2013) also describes snowballing as a process that benefits from word-of-mouth recommendations. Consequently, the researcher was cautious of this method because Research Methodology (2018) acknowledges that one of
the challenges of this method is oversampling a particular network of peers, which may lead to bias. In addition, the researcher got a grant from the institution’s Graduate School which enabled her to reward each participant with a $25 gift card at the conclusion of the interviews. This was a way of appreciating their time and also supporting the research focus about acknowledging their needs. After obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct interviews, graduate international students were contacted. Table 5 displays the demographics of the participants.

**Data Collection**

Data for this study were obtained via interviews with graduate international students. The interviews were semi-structured to allow in-depth interviews, and participants were required to answer pre-set, open-ended questions. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2006) stated that semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews where respondents have to answer pre-set, open-ended questions. They are conducted with a fairly open framework, which allowed focused, conversational, two-way communication. In addition, the researcher followed a guideline but was still able to follow topical diversions in the conversation that may likely stray from the guideline, when necessary. By so doing, both the researcher and the participant had the flexibility to go into details. The interviews were conducted and covered a duration of at least 30 minutes or more. The researcher chose this method as the most effective instrument for the study. As suggested previously, using this instrument served as a powerful tool to
Table 5

**Participant List**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Level of Study</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Method of Recruitment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Family ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Healthcare Administration</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Currently enrolled student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Currently enrolled student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>College of Education and Behavioral Sciences</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Currently enrolled student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Environmental &amp; Occup. Health Science</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>College of Education &amp; Behavioral Sciences</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Family ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>College of Education &amp; Behavioral Sciences</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Family ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Physical Sciences</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>East Africa</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Alumnus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
capture the voices of graduate international students and the ways they make meaning of their different experiences as international students in the United States.

**Procedures**

All participant interviews were conducted at different days and times at the institution, and all within the month of October 2018. Invitation to participate in the interview was sent via email to all international students through the institution’s official email. The students were emailed to participate in the interview by the researcher who was also a graduate international student.

Appendix A contains the email with greetings, and closing from the researcher was sent to all international students inviting all graduate students among them who were interested to contact the researcher. The institution name, contact numbers, and office address were redacted for reasons of anonymity. On the other hand, Appendix B lists the questions directed at the participants in the course of the interviews. The listed questions were targeted at answering the research questions of this study.

**Plan for Data Analysis**

Data containing the current enrollment status of international students from Fall 2014 to Spring 2019 in the institution under study were obtained from the Office of Institutional Research of the institution under study. Plan for data analysis included bracketing or phenomenological reduction, a main argument of descriptive phenomenology and an important concept central to Husserl’s philosophy. Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, and Irvine (2008) noted that phenomenological reduction can be achieved through bracketing. Bracketing simply cancels out the natural attitude where
individuals hold knowledge judgmentally. Graduate international student experiences were described precisely, i.e., the data captured rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings or surroundings (Groenewald, 2004). Each interview was summarized.

The interviews were recorded via audio recording and transcribed. Interviews and responses were researched and used to develop an accurate representation of the article’s conceptual framework. Emergent themes were identified from coding in NVivo. The analyses of survey data contained semi-structured interview questions and were focused on creating a clear picture of the attitudes of graduate international students as regards to their needs. Information obtained from the interviews was used to obtain detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions.

CIRT (2018) states that the methodology used in phenomenology differs from most research methodologies because the goal of this method of study is to describe a lived experience rather than to explain or quantify it. The article states that phenomenology is solely concerned with the study of the experience from the perspective of the participants. CIRT states phenomenology is designed to be less structured and more open-ended to encourage the participant to share details regarding their experience. A typical example of a phenomenological study can be seen in a dissertation titled, “From deaf to deaf-blind: A phenomenological study of the lived experiences of deaf-blind individuals in the Deep South.” In this dissertation, the researcher employed the phenomenological methodology of research to explore the lived experiences of culturally deaf individuals who have become deaf-blind. Wright (2017) used phenomenology to explore the question of how deaf-blind individuals articulate the process of transitioning from deaf to deaf-blind. The researcher achieved this by employing the philosophies of
Husserl and Heidegger to uncover the meaning of the participants’ in-the-world experience (Wright, 2017). Another example of a phenomenological study is a research article titled, “A descriptive phenomenology study of newcomers’ experience of maternity care services: Chinese women’s perspectives.” According to Lee et al. (2014), this phenomenological study used in-depth semi-structured interviews to describe immigrant Chinese women’s experiences of maternity care in Toronto, Canada.

**Framework**

**Historical Perspective**

According to Converse (2012), phenomenology could be described as a philosophical perspective that enables a researcher to explore and better understand everyday experiences without presupposing knowledge of those experiences. The author states that the philosophical origins of phenomenology can be traced back to the ancient platonic allegory of the cave. The allegory claims that what human beings understand to be reality is only a shadow of the phenomena of true reality, and that reality and phenomena of the reality are distinctly separate.

By the 18th and 19th centuries, the idea of phenomena began to develop in philosophical thought as events/happenings that occur in the mind rather than objective realities to be observed (Converse, 2012). The great German philosopher of the 18th century, Immanuel Kant, was of the opinion that a phenomenon is that which exists in the human mind. He believed that this thing/event as it exists in reality is separate and not perceptible by human senses (Converse, 2012). The author further states that the 19th century witnessed the ideas of great philosophers such as George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who believed that phenomenology was an appropriate way to study the time that
human consciousness takes to travel from natural consciousness to real knowledge. His philosophy was based on how knowledge makes its appearance. Still in the 19th century, Franz Brentano, who was a psychologist, went further to include thought into the notion of phenomena. According to Converse (2012), Brentano proposed the principle of intentionality. By this, the psychologist emphasized the idea that every mental act is related to some object and implies that all perceptions have meaning. The author stated that the principle of intentionality became a central concept in the phenomenology of Husserl, the father of phenomenology and a student of Franz Brentano.

Dowling and Cooney (2012) reported that Husserl is credited with the initial development of phenomenology. The article mentions that Husserl’s thinking was greatly influenced by the Cartesian tradition, which is the assumption of a mind-body split. In addition, the philosopher’s thinking was also greatly influenced by the principle of intentionality as proposed by his teacher, Franz Brentano. The authors stated that Husserl went further to propose that there is a phenomenon only when there is a subject to explain phenomena. He also explained that meaning is projected onto the object by the perceiving object, which ultimately points to the fact that object and subject are inextricably linked but separate. According to Dowling and Cooney, Husserl concluded that it is not possible to study intentionality empirically and, as a result, his goal became to study phenomena through the consciousness. He strongly believed that the knowledge of the world around us is possible only through people’s thoughts and assumed reality to be the lived experience.

Theory
Husserl firmly believed that life-world refers to experiential happenings that people live before they know it (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2008). Simply put, this can be explained as what people experience pre-reflectively without restoring to interpretations. By narrowing attention, the researcher discounts what is already known about or experienced of the phenomenon. This is referred to as phenomenological reduction or bracketing, and this is in a bid to get to the essence of the phenomenon and make analysis without any bias (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2008; Dowling & Cooney, 2012). The authors further stated that phenomenological reduction is also an equally important concept central to Husserl’s philosophy. Phenomenological reduction can be achieved through bracketing because bracketing cancels out the natural attitude where individuals hold knowledge judgmentally (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2008). Husserl was of the school of thought that it is possible for the researcher to narrow his or her attention in order to successfully identify the rational principles underlying the phenomenon of concern (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). Bracketing, explained in clearer terms, simply means the suspension of the researcher’s prejudices, preconceptions, and beliefs so that they do not influence participants’ descriptions of their experiences. Hamil and Sinclair (2010) also stated that Husserl’s descriptive or eidetic approach supports that the researcher’s preconceptions of the phenomena are held in abeyance in a bid to ensure that his or her assumptions do not interfere with the data collection. Also, the researcher does not impose his or her understanding and construction on the data.

Martin Heidegger is another great name in phenomenology, a philosopher, a student of Husserl’s, and also a critic of the descriptive nature of Husserl’s philosophy. Unlike Husserl, Heidegger believed that phenomenology should go beyond just focusing
on experiential epistemology and go further to investigate the meaning of being (Converse, 2012). He was of the opinion that what is to be revealed in the course of the research is not the essence of the phenomenon, but the being of the phenomenon. According to Dowling and Cooney (2012), Heidegger did not just stop at building on the writings of Husserl but went on further to develop Schleiermacher’s and Dittley’s work on hermeneutics. The authors described hermeneutics as interpretive or existential phenomenology, a philosophy that aims to achieve understanding. In addition, it adopts a process that clarifies the phenomenon of interest in its context.

Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009) supported that since Heidegger’s primary focus of philosophy was the meaning of being, he argued against the principle of intentionality (bracketing). He stood on the belief that to be human is to be interpretive because the very nature of the human realm is interpretive. He believed that Husserl’s attempt to develop methods to guarantee a truth undistorted by human perspective was misdirected. He further argued that it is impossible to bracket one’s being in the world and that interpretation presupposes some prior understanding on the part of the interpreter. In Heidegger’s opinion, everything people seek in the process of inquiry is guided by what is sought.

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

According to Noble and Smith (2015), while validity in qualitative research refers to the “integrity and application of the methods undertaken and the precision in which the findings reflect the data, reliability describes consistency within the employed analytical procedures” (p. 1). Validity looks at whether the research questions are valid for the desired outcome, the choice of methodology, the sampling and data analysis is
appropriate, and, finally, whether the results and conclusions are valid for the context (Leung, 2015). On the other hand, reliability of study findings involves the researcher ensuring to make judgments about the soundness of the research. This is done in relation to the application and appropriateness of the methods undertaken and the integrity of the final conclusions (Noble & Smith, 2015). Golafshani (2003) posited that although some qualitative researchers have argued that the term “validity” is not applicable in qualitative research, they have come to terms with the need for some kind of qualifying check or measure for their research. As a result, qualitative researchers have gone ahead to develop their own concepts of validity and have also generated appropriate terms such as rigor, quality, and trustworthiness. Common threats to validity such as researcher bias, reactivity, and respondent bias were effectively addressed during the study.

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is often questioned by positivist researchers, as they are of the opinion that the concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in a naturalistic environment (Shenton, 2004). The author stated that ensuring credibility of a study is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness in a research study. Merriam (1998) propounded that internal validity in all research is hinged on reality and that one of the underlying assumptions of qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing. Research proffers that reality is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research. In addition, Anney (2014) described reality as a multiple set of mental constructions made by humans and since humans are the primary instruments of data collection in qualitative research, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews. The comparison above
makes it clear that the qualitative research is closer to reality than the quantitative research, where a data collection instrument has been interjected between the researcher and the participants. Merriam therefore argued that viewing reality in this manner makes internal validity a definite strength of qualitative research. Research has advised on how qualitative researchers can incorporate measures that deal with these issues of validity and reliability and has proposed some strategies that should be applied by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study (Shenton, 2004).

**Member Checks**

Member checks are checks relating to the accuracy of the data and may occur during the interview or at the end of the data collection interviews (Merriam, 1998; Shenton, 2004). Participants may be asked to read any transcripts of dialogues in which they have participated. In observance of this rule, the researcher had the participants listen to their personal audio recording at the end of the interview. This was done in the bid to ensure that what they heard over the audio recorder were their exact words and that it reflected their thoughts exactly. Using an audio recorder was effective because their exact words, feelings, and perceptions were accurately captured.

**Detailed Descriptions of the Phenomenon Under Study**

The study also employed detailed descriptions as an important provision for promoting credibility. Shenton (2004) discussed that having a thick description of the phenomena under scrutiny helps convey the actual situation that has been investigated and, to an extent, the contexts that surround them. In this study, actual quotations were used to give detailed descriptions of feelings and perceptions, thereby promoting credibility. Detailed descriptions supported by vivid quotations were used in an attempt
to enable the readers to assess how far the defined text truly embraced the actual situations.

Iterative Questioning

In iterative questioning, there is a need for the researcher to constantly return to discussed topics previously raised by a participant to extract data by rephrasing the question (Shenton, 2004). This was employed in this study, and where any contradictions emerged, the suspect data were discarded.

Participatory or Collaborative Modes of Research

Merriem (1998) described this phenomenon as involving participants of a study in all phases of the research process, from conceptualizing the study to reporting the findings. The participants of this study not only listened to their audio recordings immediately after the interview, but they were involved in all phases because the researcher wanted to be sure the reported findings actually reflected their feelings and perceptions exactly.

Researcher’s Biases

Merriem (1998) discussed that one of the strategies to enhance internal validity in a study is for the researcher to clarify assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study. The researcher of this study is a graduate international student of the institution under study, and so one would expect that there may be pre-conceived notions and biases already. Earlier in this chapter, the researcher mentioned the use of bracketing or phenomenological reduction employed in Husserl’s method of descriptive phenomenology to reduce researcher bias to its barest minimum. Still, this study acknowledges Heidegger’s method of interpretive phenomenology. It states that to be
human is to be interpretive and the fact that everything people seek in the process of inquiry is guided by thought (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2008). Fusch, Fusch and Ness (2018) also argued that one of the most challenging aspects of qualitative research is to account for the use of personal lens because novice researchers, such as students, deny the presence of any form of bias in their data collection. They further argued that a participant, as well as a researcher’s bias, is present in all social research whether intentionally or unintentionally. Nevertheless, the researcher took critical steps as mentioned earlier in this chapter to ensure that researcher bias was reduced to its barest minimum. This was in support of Husserl’s approach, which involves a researcher holding preconceptions of the phenomena in abeyance in a bid to ensure his or her assumptions do not interfere with data collection, or impose his or her understanding and construction on the data (Hamil & Sinclair, 2010).

**Triangulation**

According to Merriam (1998), triangulation involves using multiple researchers, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the findings of a study. In addition, Fusch et al. (2018) stated that triangulation, which involves using multiple sources of data, can strengthen the reliability of the study results, thereby adding depth to the data that are collected. To explain this more clearly, the author discussed that employment of multiple external data collection methods concerning the same phenomenon can be enhanced by multiple analysis methods. This study employed the use of multiple methods such as member checks, detailed descriptions of the phenomena under study, iterative questioning, collaborative modes of research, as well as acknowledging possible researcher biases, to confirm the findings of this study.
Transferability

Amankwaa (2016) stated that external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations. One could argue that the findings of this research study may not be transferable since the interviews were limited to 12 graduate international students in a particular institution located in the Mid-south part of the US. Still, it is noteworthy to mention that immigration rules for international students popularly known as F1 students are the same in the 50 states of the US; and, as a result, all international students face those challenges that deal with non-violation of the F1 status. The difference becomes the support structures effected by the different institutions to help these students effectively navigate these challenges and achieve their American dream. So to say, the researcher is of the opinion that this study provides a baseline understanding of the needs of graduate international students in the US, with which the results of previous research in similar areas may be compared.

Ethical Considerations

Additional pragmatic ethical considerations were present throughout the study. The researcher followed the advice of both her committee and the IRB representatives at the institution with regards to the ethics of this study. The researcher followed all relevant local, state, and federal laws. The researcher had completed the required training of the Human Subjects Review Board, as required by the Educational Leadership Department at Western Kentucky University. The researcher also obtained approval from the Western Kentucky University Institutional Review Board in order to conduct this study. Electronic files containing the recordings of these interviews are being kept on a secure hard drive that is protected by a password to ensure participant
confidentiality. The transcriber agreed to confidentiality and had no record of the files once the transcription was complete. The researcher followed all of the described processes and use of data description from the consent form.

**Summary**

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of the research participants. In addition, data collection, analysis of data, and the conclusions are the primary responsibility of the researcher. In this study, the researcher happens to be a graduate international student of the same institution where the study was carried out and, as a result, had to take extra measures to guard against the three common threats to validity. According to Curtin and Fossey (2007), researcher bias can be described as any kind of influence of the researcher’s knowledge or assumptions of the study, including the influence of his or her assumptions of the design, analysis, or even sampling strategy. Reactivity, on the other hand, can be described as any kind of influence of the researcher as an individual on the studied phenomena or research participants. This study employed Husserl’s principle of descriptive phenomenology, and this means that bracketing was applied. Hamil and Sinclair (2010) stated that by using bracketing in a study, the truth is arrived at based on the participants’ descriptions rather than the interpretation of the researcher. The advantage of using Husserl’s method of bracketing in this study was that it ensured that any preconceptions of the author’s international student experience did not affect data collection. On the other hand, the study did not apply Heidegger’s interpretive method because the best way to present an unbiased study was to ensure that the author’s personal experiences as an international student did not interfere with data collection, as
this might have put this method at a disadvantage to the study. That notwithstanding, the study did not underestimate the challenges of bracketing personal experiences and took steps to ensure that personal experiences did not interfere in the study. In order to achieve this, preconceptions, beliefs and prejudices were suspended so that they did not influence participants’ descriptions of their experiences, and this was only possible through Husserl’s method of bracketing.

As previously mentioned, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2006) states that semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews where respondents have to answer preset, open-ended questions. They are conducted with a fairly open framework which allows focused, conversational, two-way communication. In addition, the researcher follows a guideline but is still able to follow topical diversions in the conversation that may likely stray from the guideline, when necessary. By so doing, both the researcher and the participant have the flexibility to go into details. This line of questioning allowed the researcher to ask probing questions, listen, think, and ask more probing questions based on the responses of the participants. This was also in an attempt to explore the feelings of the participants by getting to deeper levels of the conversation. The researcher was conscious to be self-critical and self-aware of personal values so that they did not interfere with the way interview questions were structured, including the process of data collection and analysis. There was no attempt to try to lead participants on in the interviewer’s choice or words or questions, but rather the semi-structured questions were precise and ensured that questions were structured to mean the same to all participants. This was in an attempt to avoid the third common threat to validity which is respondent bias (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). The authors described respondent bias as a situation where
participants of a study do not provide honest responses for any reason, and this may include their perceiving a given topic as a threat or trying to please the researcher with responses which they believe are desirable. This study also endeavored to be open to the alternative interpretation of peers and be honest and transparent, including being articulate and taking ownership of whatever the analysis indicates. Chapter IV reports the findings of the study and the application of the research methodology, skillfully interwoven to achieve a great dissertation that was strictly unbiased by the researcher.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study and reveals the needs of graduate international students and their perceptions of the services provided to them by their host university. Each section describes the students’ personal experiences and their sincere advice to the institution on strategically targeted services that will support graduate international students to ensure they have a great learning experience and achieve their goals of coming to study in the US. Furthermore, the chapter compares the findings to Swail’s Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement, a campus-wide retention model which was designed to provide institutions with an effective strategy and framework to build a student retention plan which incorporates the students’ needs and the institutional factors at play. The model explores a combination of the cognitive, social, and institutional factors and provides a solid foundation for student development and persistence, as it places the student at the center of the model. Finally, this chapter seeks to present the results of the interviews.

RQ1: What are the goals of graduate international students as they leave their home countries to come to the United States for further studies?

RQ2: What are the needs of graduate international students in the United States?

RQ3: How do graduate international students perceive the support services offered by their host institution and the community?

RQ4: What recommendations do graduate international students have for their host institution to better enable them have a great learning experience and reach their goals?
The participants of the study were 12 graduate international students, 11 females and 1 male. The researcher discovered that the males were reluctant to come forward and be interviewed, unlike the females who were excited to be given an opportunity to air their opinions. Seven of the participants responded to the email sent out by the institution on behalf of the researcher, while the other five were recruited via snowballing. A copy of the official letter can be seen in Appendix A. As previously discussed, some of the information was redacted for privacy reasons. There were three participants from Nigeria, one from Taiwan, one from Estonia, one from China, one from Uganda, four from India, and one from Iran, making up the 12 participants. The participants were all graduate international students; four students were enrolled in different doctorate programs in the institution, and eight students were enrolled in the master’s program at the same institution under study.

Some of the questions in Appendix B were directed toward more than one research question. This was deliberate, as the research employed a method of questioning known as iterative questioning. Shenton (2004) describes iterative questioning as a method of questioning where the researcher periodically returns to previously discussed topics to check whether any contradictions might emerge. This was the idea behind having several interview questions answer more than one research question. Where any contradictions were observed, the suspect data were discarded by the researcher.

Finally, most of the participants of the study speak English as a second language and, therefore, there may be grammatical and/or syntactical errors seen in some of the quotations. In addition, the researcher made every effort to preserve the original language of the graduate international students involved in this study. All direct quotations are
presented as they are spoken to the researcher, and in some cases where clarification is needed, the researcher has provided context and clarity in subject or meaning.

Findings

The findings of the study were grouped in alignment with the research questions in order to make for a clearer reading and understanding. The semi-structured nature of the interview process created avenues for the researcher to stray from the stated questions when the need arose. The researcher followed a guideline/list of questions but was still able to follow topical diversions in the conversation that strayed from the proposed research questions, when necessary. By so doing, both the researcher and each participant had the flexibility to go into details.

RQ1: What are the goals of graduate international students as they leave their home countries to come to the United States for further studies?

RQ1 was aimed at why and how the students got recruited into the university. This was fundamental in order to determine their goals for choosing the US for their graduate studies.

How They Came

Family and Friends. One of the students verbalized that having family ties in that particular city was the dominant factor that drew her into the institution. She stated:

Well, I come from Taiwan originally. Well, I was an alumnus previously, so I am familiar with the institution. When I was looking for my advanced degree, I always put up this institution on my list. On top of that, my family, they are here. That's the main reason that I apply for the program.
Another student discussed that he was considering applying for a school in Canada, but a friend who was a Nigerian and a student of the institution under study, encouraged him to put in an application:

I got recruited by a friend, who recommended this school to me. As at that time, I was considering going to schools in other countries, like Canada. I was very keen on going to Canada. But a friend just got in here and he was basically one of the few Nigerians and he was like, I should just come over and then I can join the Nigerian community, then we go all to school, together. That’s how I came here.

The third student said she was recruited through friends and relatives who were already enrolled in the University:

My country of citizenship is Nigeria, and I got recruited through friends, my friends and relatives that were already attending this school. So, that was how I heard about this school and I decided to apply.

The fourth student conversed that she also got recruited into the institution through a close friend:

Well, I'm from Nigeria and I got recruited through a friend that who is an alumnus of the school. She did her masters here and before she came here she was in Europe; we were in Europe together. Then she came here and we still kept contact. I don't know how she got to know about this school though but I got to know about this school through her.

Another participant also reportedly enrolled in the institution at the recommendation of friends who were currently enrolled and were having a good learning experience at the institution:

I'm from India and one of my friends, not just one but quite a few friends have studied in this school and that's how I got to know about it and they have good experiences so recommended me and I applied and I got accepted.

The sixth student said she learned about the institution from successful alumni and for some personal reasons:
I'm from Iran. I just heard about this program by my ... some Iranian friends. I also had a personal goal to study in an American institution, an English one, an English-speaking institution.

**Institutional Support.** One participant revealed her reason for choosing the institution and presented a different reason for her recruitment into the institution, ‘I'm from Estonia, it's Northern Europe. And I'm on an athletic team, so they offered me an athletic scholarship, so that's how I got recruited here.’

**Previous employment in institution.** A participant discussed that she chose the institution because she had actually worked in the institution before applying for a graduate degree. She verbalized, “I'm from China. I work here before I got into the program.”

**University Professor.** A participant revealed that she got recruited into the institution by a suggestion from her university professor:

> It is my university professor whom I was doing research with who told me about the opportunity to get to this school. I guess someone had told him about it and therefore he told me to apply to the institution, to do GRE first and that is how I got admitted here.

**Online.** One of the student discussed how she found the institution online, applied, and got recruited, “I did GRE, and I applied to WKU and by myself, I'm here. Actually, there is no consultancy or something. Yeah, I saw it online. I just applied to the school, and I got it.”

Another student also revealed she did not have friends in the community and discussed she found the university online, applied and got accepted:

> My country of citizenship is India and I got recruited through an online application. I don't have any friends here around, but then as soon as I saw their
programs and curriculum online, I found it interesting and that's how I applied to the school.

The third student verbalized she found the university online and was drawn to the university because of the low cost of living in the city:

I'm from India, so I'm a citizen of India. I just found this university online. And in other schools, I mean in the other universities, the got concentration on simple topics in this course. But here I felt the course curriculum was better detailed and met my needs. Also I felt the cost of living here is low.

**Goals in Leaving Home Country (Why They Came)**

Still in answer to RQ1, the participants stated their goals for leaving their home countries and coming to the United States for graduate studies.

**Research.** A participant conversed that research opportunities was actually the dominating factor for her coming to the US to study. She also verbalized that this goal was met with resistance by the attitudes of some of the academic staff whom she had approached for research opportunities:

Having to do some research which would help me publish some papers, something like that. So I was looking for those opportunities in my first and second semesters. There's no door that I did not knock on. I used to go to all my professors and ask them like, "I want to work with you," and some rejected me. Luckily, right now I'm working on six research projects.

**Employment.** Another participant discussed what he perceived as the limited internship opportunities available to international students in the US. His goal of coming to the US was to get as much experience in the field of Healthcare Administration and then return to Nigeria to impact his community:

I left with the dream and the intentions of, “Oh, I'm going to come here and I'm going to be a better Healthcare Administrator.” The goals I wanted to actually
achieve when I got here was to have a lot of internship experience, working experience. Because it's not just about coming to get the knowledge. If it’s just about getting to the knowledge, I would have done an online program, I wouldn't bother coming here. But I want to get the knowledge and also practice it, put it into practice. Let me go back and say, “Oh, I have walked in the American Healthcare System. This is how we worked.” Let me be proud and bold to say, “This is what I have done.”

He expressed that experience remains the key for him and should be for all graduate international students. He stressed the need for every graduate international student to be employable at the conclusion of their degrees.

Another participant verbalized the importance of getting enough working experience in one’s field of study. She verbalized that without sufficient work experience in the US, she will be “nothing” on her return to her home country:

My goals of course when I came to the US I knew I'd get my Masters, and maybe get a job, and work. At least I have to go to Uganda when my CV is built here in that I can even get a job and tell them, “I've worked here for three years, I've done this, I've done this, I've taught here. I've worked in this industry. Right now, I'm nothing if I go back to Uganda. I'm nothing.”

Another clearly cited her goals for coming to the US. She cited the US as the country with the best education in the world and verbalized that she had come to the US to explore herself:

I'm here for a better opportunity. I'm here for my career. I'm not here for grabbing or stealing jobs from these people but I'm here for to explore myself because the US is the number one education system all over the world. That we know. So that's why we are here for to explore ourselves, not to steal jobs from these white people. Not at all.

The fourth participant also clearly stated her goals was not just to get a good education, but also to get a job, “I feel, at the end of the day, it's still getting that degree and a job.”

Another participant discussed her struggles and her goal and expressed the need to get a job at the end of her degree program:
I'm struggling so much because I'm struggling financially, emotionally, obviously I would want some, I would want it to be fruitful, so obviously I would want to work here and then understand the concepts better that I have learned in school in case I'm going back to my country, I can establish myself. Obviously, I would not come here, just spend money like that lavishly. I did not come here to enjoy. I have come here to study and also to get my life settled for the rest of my life. So, yeah, that would be my goal, to work here, get a good job, get paid good.

Another participant stated her goals and her reason was different from that of the rest of the participants:

For me it was like my parents have saved the money for my marriage and I took that money for my education because I wanted to study, I wanted to get a job and I was like ... one day when I get a job, I would again earn the same amount back and then I would get married, so you don't worry about that. So at the end of the day, obviously I would want to get settled better and get a good job wherein I can earn good and then replace the same money that I have taken, that I've borrowed for my education.

**Summary of Findings (RQ1)**

There was a need to ascertain how these students got recruited into the institution in the first place, as this knowledge was fundamental toward meeting their needs and encouraging retention and further recruitment. The following is a list of results of the findings.

- Six of the participants were recruited via family and friends
- One of the participants verbalized that she was recruited via institutional support
- One had been previously employed on a foreign visa by the institution
- One of the participants was referred by her professor in her community.
- Finally, three of the participants went online, searched for a university, found the institution, and applied.

The study equally sought to discover the goals of these students when leaving their home countries to come to the US for further studies. One of the factors that stood
out was in search of research opportunities. This was seen in a number of students but especially among the students from India who felt the need to go home at the end of their studies to contribute their quota to the healthcare system in their country. Despite this fact, they expressed the need to get some work experience through targeted internships, as well as permanent jobs that would help them achieve this goal. However, securing permanent employment in the US was the most dominant factor in the goals of the participants of the study.

- Eleven participants verbalized employment.
- One participant verbalized research but still wanted a job in the US post-graduation.

**RQ2: What are the needs of graduate international students in the United States?**

Looking beyond their goals, RQ2 sought to find the needs of these students as they struggled in the foreign land they ventured into. The research was focused on the fact that without the needs of these students being identified, it is difficult for the institution to claim that they are meeting the needs of their graduate international students.

**Career Needs**

Eleven of the participants indicated that their goals for coming to the US were to secure employment post-graduation, while one discussed her goal was for research purposes. However, the same participants still indicated an interest in securing a job in the US post-graduation. In as much as all of the participants expressed this need, selected
direct quotations are presented as they were spoken to the researcher an effort to provide clearer evidence of this need.

One of the participants discussed her needs. She expressed her desire and the urgent need to get a job ultimately at the conclusion of her studies:

So you jump the hurdle of graduating summa cum laude, magna cum laude, 4.0 GPA, and then you're faced with another hurdle of, would I get a job? And even sometimes you get job offers and then the question is, are they going to file H1B or J1? So my goal is get a job that would file either H1B or J1.

She also discussed the issue of career fairs at length. She verbalized her opinion of the way career fairs are organized in the institution:

They do career fairs and I've been to a lot of career fairs when I was doing my master's and seriously I couldn't find anything tailored to me as an international student or even me as a graduate student in those career fairs. Most times the companies that come don't even employ you as an international because they will either have to ... they cannot file H1B or stuff like that. So I think there should be a form of diversity with the career fair like bringing companies that are actually like, international student friendly and like to hire international students because. There are very good and exceptional international students and these companies can take advantage of their skills. I feel that that part is lacking, we should increase that awareness in the career fairs, diversify the career fairs, bring in companies that are willing to file the H1B or even the J1 students.

Another participant also expressed an earnest desire to be gainfully employed in the US on graduation:

I wouldn't say I have really received anything from them to support my success, because career-wise, when I finished my masters I was hoping I would be able to get a job in the ... but there was no job offering. What I heard about some other schools is that, the schools even connect you with organizations before you graduate, so by the time you graduate you have something. Even the job fairs, because I find they clearly have job fairs. A friend of mine told me about the job fair that she went for it and they were recruiting high school students, that's high school graduates. That is kind of a joke, they were not there to recruit graduates from the university, they were there to ... Anyway, it’s just for the institution to have that feeling that, “Oh, they also do job fairs.” But it's not meant for graduates.
The third participant expressed her fears and uncertainties about how to go about the application for a job in the United States:

So once I graduate, I really don't know how to apply for the jobs, where to look for the jobs and all those stuff. Even though your professors may help you, but they cannot put you like- a hundred percent. So if the ISO can also help in that like, yeah, maybe support from both of them will be much better.

Another student discussed her belief that the career issues of graduate international students stems from a lack of confidence these students perceive with their employers:

I was so frustrated, so disappointed, that you are an international, maybe you cannot work in this country after graduation, because they are native, they can speak better than you, ... I am confident, I am really confident that I am smarter than them, and they do not have my experiences in their life.

**Financial Needs**

Just like all 12 participants verbalized the need for career services targeted at the needs of graduate international students, all 12 specifically verbalized the fact that there is a need for the institution to financially assist their international student group. Out of the 11 responses, seven quotes were selected to reflect in this section.

One of the students discussed the needs of other graduate international students. She acknowledged that she receives financial support from her department but that not all graduate international students are that lucky:

Not many people are as lucky as me to get help and be financially supported from the department. Not everybody. I had to help some friends. My department helped to pay my high tuition, but other students cannot get any scholarship, and they are very good students. I think the institution should help these students. Give them scholarship.

The second student discussed that the institution promised her a tuition waiver and she felt misled because she continues to struggle financially because the tuition waiver does not cover even half of her expenses:
They told me I was going to do TA. The money they were telling me, I thought would pay for all that fees and all that stuff. I didn't know it was very, very ... not even half of what I need.

The third student discussed what she perceived as reasons behind certain financial challenges:

What's wrong with the international students? They're increasing their fees. Why? Did we do a wrong thing? This semester I paid 9,000 after getting a scholarship of like $2,000. That's it. So I had to pay like $11,500 and that's a big amount for me in Indian currency. It is approximately 8 Lakhs and that is a very big amount for my family. So why? Why? They can increase their in-state fees for the domestic students but they haven't. They're increasing their international fees. Why? They're saying budget cut but that should not affect us.

She further discussed her frustration with the limited scholarship opportunities for the graduate international students in the US:

There are so many scholarship links. There are so many scholarships opportunities. I have applied a lot. I didn't get it. I didn't get it. Even I didn't get any notification whether you're selected or rejected. They didn't even bother to reply me.

The fourth student discussed the ways the institution can step in and financially help the students:

Even at the master's level, most times you don't even get the GA until you've done one academic year. So, at a master's level, you have to put in like at least one academic year before you're considered ... at least one semester before you're considered...and then most times they might offer you by your second year of grad school. Not all international students get GA, TA, but for me I've been fortunate to get GA positions, and also scholarships from the school, from the department ... different departments, master's and doctoral level. But this doesn't ... My case doesn't apply to all the internationals because I know some international students that go through the whole master's program and even Doc. Program and they don't get any GA or TA position. But like I said, I'm fortunate to have gotten some form of support from the different programs both at the master's and doctoral level.
One of the participants said that graduate international students could do with some financial assistance from the institution and reiterated that the school was not doing enough in this area:

In my years as a master’s student, I felt the department didn't provide enough financial assistance. As a doctoral student, also financial assistance remains an issue. In fact, I think the doctorate program here does not really do well with providing financial assistance. I think the master's program actually gives more assistance but the doctorate program did not provide any financial assistance.

Another participant also discussed the need for scholarships for graduate international students. She noted that she could not understand why she could not get a tuition waiver though she works as a teaching assistant (TA):

I personally feel we should be given good scholarships and things like that so that ... you know, I don't want to compare but a few of my friends from India have also traveled to other universities and they are in the same department that I am in currently and they have got the complete fee waiver, and they also have the same scores, or the scores that I have are much better compared to their scores. You talk about GRE, you talk about GPA, I have better scores compared to them, but then they got the scholarship, they got the waivers and there is not as much work for them to do as a TA as I am doing. So, I'm busy throughout the week and they don't even have so much work. They just work for a day or two in a week. They don't work complete week. I feel we are being overburdened.

This same student discussed at some length her working hours in relation with the rules that are stipulated by her F1 status, and how this affects her studies:

We get to hear that we are supposed to work only for 20 hours, yeah, we're working only for 20 hours, and practically that's not the thing that is happening. We are assigned ... and we have got a lot of things to do in a week, like we have to take classes, I have four classes a week that I'm supposed to teach, so four classes a week for four hours would account for 16 hours and then I have to grade the papers, I have to attend the meetings, I have to prepare myself to teach them the next class, grading papers itself takes like two to three hours for each class. I'm grading like four classes papers, so that's a lot of things that I have to do.

The student went into further details, discussing how her TA job affects her studies, as well as her domestic life:
Because we were working as TAs, we were working as GA's, the thing is, we were being overrun with the work, so what is happening is we are not getting time for our own works to be done. We have actually ... we are not eating food for about a week because we do not have time to cook ourselves and it is only Saturdays and Sundays that we cook for ourselves and at times, not even on Saturdays and Sundays because we have to prepare for Monday.

Another participant shared a view common to several other students. She expressed concern about tuition and the conditions for some graduate assistantship positions:

Sometimes I wonder why the tuition rate is different for international students and why the domestic pay is less. Is it because they are American? So you claim that you think equally to all ethnicities… I thought my GA was tuition free. They say that it's $1,000 for each semester, but it's not. It is like 600 and I'm paying like 400 for my house and 4,300 for tuitions. That's tough… I just cannot think about that, because it makes me sad.

Need for Increased Knowledge and Opportunities

The CPT covers international students seeking work or internship related to their field of study during their degree program. As the rules apply, these students may work part time or full time but stipulates that one full year of the CPT makes an international student ineligible for the OPT. The OPT program creates opportunities for international students pursuing full-time or part-time employment related to their field of study for 12 months, immediately at the conclusion of their degree programs. The study delved into how conversant the participants were with the laws guiding the CPT and OPT programs. Some of the participants claimed zero knowledge of the CPT program, while all the participants knew about the OPT program.

One participant had a lot to discuss about this topic. She spoke on the ignorance of many international students concerning the employment opportunities provided via CPT and OPT:

But the thing is that, that is why the international office should have all these workshops. It's mandatory that international students are told of options they
have, employment options they have in the United States… and that is something that ISO should do semester wise. International students should be given the opportunity to sit and hear of employment options here in the United States, like CPT and OPT… International student should avail themselves even as the international office makes it available in the form of workshops and talks for international students.

She also discussed the role of the mentor-coach relationship in the career success of international students in higher institutions in the US:

I'm just speaking from my own experience. Graduate international students, from my own experience, actually look for their internships without much success. But like that's where that mentor-coach relationship comes in, because if you have a mentor that has all the, as I said, that threefold experience, networking ... the person can network you into a veritable internship spot. And even from that internship you can actually get OPT, from OPT you're getting situated with an employer that's going to file H1B. So, it actually starts with that professor-student relationship.

Another participant stated that she had never heard of the CPT, “Actually I've never heard about CPT. Maybe that's why I said the international office has much to do. That is the truth.”

The third participant expressed dissatisfaction regarding lack of knowledge of such important programs like the CPT and OPT programs:

Yeah. Most of us in summers work on campus. Okay. And one of my roommate, she's an Indian too, and she had a CPT. She got to know that she can apply for a CPT because her boyfriend was studying here before she came. So he graduated without doing a CPT and then he advised her like, "See, I didn't use that option. I never knew that exists." So she used it. So when she started it, I got to know that I can do something like an internship off campus with the CPT, but it was too late by the time.

This same student verbalized that there is a need for departments to help in the placement of great internship opportunities for graduate international students:

From my department, they don't show you there are offers in this organization so you can apply and they have never shown any opportunities present. I'm a healthcare administration student. Although other universities from the very first semester itself, they'll show you there are internship opportunities here… There is
an alumnus from my department, he is from the same place. So I met him during the last semester because he came to receive the best alumni award... he's now working as a professor in some other university. So he was telling me that in their university, they offer the students internships from the very beginning. So by the end of their master's they'll be having a placement because of practical experience so that they can get jobs.

The fourth student discussed her fears about how to go about getting internship positions, either within or outside the institution:

Yeah, because I'm not used to these places. I don't know how to approach them or meet them. What I felt like is that it is good if somebody were there to guide, these kind of things, if you do these kind of things, then you get these kind of opportunities. It will be better if you choose this one. Just to guide you in one direction, which is the better one.

Meanwhile, one of the participants did not seem to have a clue about CPT because when asked what she knew about CPT, she replied with a question, “... CPT?”

**Language/Cultural Barriers**

Language barrier is recognized as one of the factors that contribute to culture shock for graduate international students in the US. Culture shock can be described as the impact of moving from a familiar culture to an unfamiliar culture, the shock of being separated from familiar and loved ones, and learning the ways of the new culture. Some international students have a hard time understanding professors, as well as the curriculum of their programs.

One of the students recounted her experiences in class. She recounted difficulty in following some classes simply because she was unable to understand the professor:

There was a lady that used to teach there and in the first semester I could only understand few of her words. It took me time. By the second semester I found out that I have improved with the number of sentences I could understand. She was an American. She had this singing kind of voice, so it was really difficult to understand her. But second semester I was okay, I understood more of what she was saying and all that.
Another student verbalized that language barriers were responsible for most international students’ inability to express their concerns to their professors or support staff, as the case may be:

We as international students are not as good in expressing our problems as the nationals are. Whatever the doubts we have or whatever the problems we have, the initial action is to transcribe it in our own mother tongue, which makes it a lot easier to express every emotion or every feeling of actually what the problem is. But then it comes to ... even if we have some doubts in the class, we'll be like, “it's better to understand on our own than to go and speak to a professor.”

Acceptance/Sense of Belonging

Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) posited that social support has both direct effects on psychological adjustment and buffering effects on the impact of life stresses. The survey further revealed that lack of social support is actually a source of stress, while the availability of support has a positive impact on adjustment. Yao (2015) posited that though the idea of international student integration may seem innocent and harmless, it may actually lead to cultural suicide causing distress among graduate international students. She pointed out that the emphasis on fostering international student success should be through increasing graduate international student sense of belonging. As earlier stated in this study, belonging for graduate international students assumes greater importance in places like college campuses where individuals are more than likely to experience isolation or loneliness or to feel invisible as they reconstruct support networks in a new cultural and linguistic environment.

A participant recounted her experiences in the classroom and the level of support she felt she received from her professors:

For the professors and instructors, I wouldn't say there is really a swell communication or rapport between us. I didn’t actually start talking a lot to them until later. Even my adviser, I didn't really ... Actually, it was by the end of my
program that I started talking to her. Before then, I wouldn't really say there was ...
... I didn't feel like even talking to them. If I had a question in class, okay, I would
ask, but it didn't go beyond that. I wouldn't say there were that supportive or
probably they didn't know what to do, I don't know. Because probably they don't
know either, how they can be supportive and I didn't ask.

Another student discussed how difficult it is for her to associate effectively with domestic
students and why the reverse was the case with fellow international students:

I also want to say it's hard for me to communicate to classmates about some other
things, how I feel about a class, how I feel about something. I just ask a question
about a course, that's different. If you have some anxiety, you cannot share with
these people. You can share with the people from your country. Sometimes I can
share that with people from other countries but not from this country.

One of the participants discussed the factors that could increase graduate
international students’ sense of belonging and lessen homesickness among them, “having
a sense of association with other international students from the same country would give
us that sense of association and togetherness. So that we don't feel homesick and all that.”

One student conversed the difference between international students, domestic
students, and their level of interest in each other’s cultures:

I have friends from Nigeria. I have friends from Japan, Korea, China. So like we
are the international friends, and we are very interested to know each other's
culture, but the rest of the white people, they're like, "Oh, common guys, just shut
up." kind of and we are like, okay.”

One of the participants verbalized her level of comfort with people who speak her
language and understand her culture:

I feel it would have been great if we had somebody from the same country to
associate with. There's always this thing about, you know, if we are from the same
place, we speak the same language and similar culture, you are able to open up
and the person is even better able to understand you. I wouldn't mind that, the
emotional support.
A participant related the perceived inability of domestic students to relate with international students:

So I think most of the undergraduate students, they really don't know how to mingle with the different people from different cultures. So they're having the problem. And when it comes to the graduate students, I think most of the graduate students or international students are like 50/50 and so they don't have a choice but to mingle.

One of the students revealed her different support systems and disclosed the important role they play in her life, “I call home daily, regularly…They're my support system. I go to a local church and pray. I feel good going there. I have a sense of belonging there.”

Another student discussed the level of support she got from her classmates and how much this motivated her:

One of my classmates is so nice. He just says some sweet words to me, like making compliments about my progress, about my speaking English in front of others, in front of other classmates, and it makes me… it motivates me for my studies, for my life here, and I say so that's fine. The majority of them are supportive and kind. However, my professors, the faculty other staffs, all of them are nice but... no one can understand me.

One participant verbalized the key factor needed to increase sense of belonging among graduate international students:

Empathy. Try to empathize, try to see that these students also have feelings. They are doing the best they can. Nobody comes here wanting to saddle their responsibilities on anybody. But when they fall on hard times, try to empathize. And I'm not saying that they aren't competent people at the ISO but there should be more of that sense of empathy with international students.

About 10 of the participants stated that domestic students were not friendly with them and that they felt a sense of alienation around them. However, the remaining participants had different views. One of them had a different view on the social interactions between graduate international students and their domestic student peers,
putting it down to differences in interests. She pointed out that graduate international students are more interested in their careers post-graduation than the domestic students. She mentioned that there are differences in post-graduation plans between graduate international students and their domestic peers, which ultimately affects the trend of her discussions with each of these groups. Another student also had a different view from the other graduate international students. She communicated effectively with other domestic students and also confessed that she is the secretary of their student organization and serves as one of the officers with other domestic students. She said that her communication with the domestic students evolved over time. She also disclosed that, initially, the domestics students did not regard her suggestions but she earned their respect with them over time.

Mentors

The need for mentors came up during the interview process and was discussed by several of the participants. However, among all the students, one particular student’s response is reported in this section. She discussed at length and gave strong reasons to back up her argument about the need for mentors in the lives of graduate international students:

Mentors are very important. International students come here with the mentality that they want to achieve an American dream. They want to see the fulfillment of an American dream, and it's not only in going to school. They want to see that after they are done school, they can get a job. They want to be successful career wise. During their program, they need someone that can take them on and say ... touch base with them and say, “what are you doing post-graduation?” They've invested time. They've not only invested time in the academics, they've also invested money too, and they don't want to see that time and money go to waste.
She strongly advocated that mentors be assigned to all graduate international students, stating that the possibility of their success is higher with a mentor than without a mentor:

... the possibility of that student succeeding post-graduation is higher than an international student that doesn't have a mentor or coach. And that is the truth, and I think that studies like that should be done to test, pretest and posttest. Like, okay, post-graduation, an international student that has a mentor, would that student succeed as against one that doesn't have a mentor or coach? So mentors are very important. And international students actually seek such individuals while they are studying here in the United States.

Finally, she verbalized that research be carried out in this area to validate the importance of mentors, especially in the form of professors, in the lives of these students:

Mentors are people that, first of all, they have that career experience, they have that academic experience, and then they also have that networking experience. So they have this threefold experience that they can use to propel an international student to achieving their greatest goal. They have academic experience because they're your professors. They also have the career experience because they worked and they actually teach in the classroom. They also have that networking experience because they definitely have other people that they can call on, or organizations that they can refer you to. So, if one as an international student has the privilege of having a mentor that has this threefold feathers in their hat- their possibility of achieving their American dream is higher.

**Housing Needs**

Housing was a major issue for these students, as they felt that the institution was not thoroughly vested in the housing needs of these students who were coming into a foreign country so far away from their home country. One particular student reported that
once a semester in his hostel, all the students were required to vacate the hostels for two weeks for some reason and this led to foreign students being stranded those two weeks:

It's after two semesters. After every two semesters, yes, you have to go through that. Now, that works well for domestic students because they have a home to go to. They can go back home, travel home. But my apartment is my home right now, so it's like they are sending me out of my home.

**Summary of Findings (RQ2)**

The participants discussed their various needs, and principal among the findings were career services: financial needs, need for the institution to recognize and act on existing language/cultural barriers, need for a sense of belonging in the institution, the need for mentors, and housing needs. All the participants verbalized that they wanted to get jobs in the US post-graduation. Some participants discussed that they did not feel accepted most times but found ways to navigate the system. Out of the 12, seven of the participants had unique discussions about their sense of belonging with their peers, their professors, and the institution as a whole, and these are reported in this section. All the students verbalized the fact that the institution needs to provide housing for graduate international students who are so far from here, though only one response is reported here. Overall, the participants discussed the following areas of need:

- Career needs
- Financial needs
- Need for increased knowledge and opportunities
- Need for the institution to recognize and address existing cultural/language barriers
- Need for acceptance and to feel a sense of belonging in the institution
- Need for mentors to help them achieve their American dream
Housing needs

**RQ3: How do graduate international students perceive the support services offered by their host institutions/the community?**

In Swail’s Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement, the institutional factor refers to the ability of the institution to provide appropriate support to students in the course of their academic sojourn in the US (Swail, 2003). The model further states that this is one of the three factors that provide a solid foundation for student growth, development, and persistence. To this effect, RQ3 looked at how graduate international students perceived the different support services already provided by the institution.

**Institutional Staff Support**

This study looked at the students’ perceptions of the support given by the academic staff of the institution, as well as the support they got from the academic staff of their department.

**Relationship evolving from formal to informal over time.** One of the participants described her relationship with her professors at this time as informal, though she admitted that this evolved over time:

I have both masters and doctoral degrees. So, different stages, different modes of communication. Now, when I came in, I came in for a master's, so then I still had that perception from home that professors were like ... they're all in all, they are the law, their word is law. But over time in observing other American students, I felt that okay, professors were more like approachable, and you could make appointments, you could ask questions, if you see them on the corridor and stuff. So, I think I was saying my communication with my professors evolved over time from formal to informal, overtime and over the years. So, that's basically it, it just evolved over time. So, initially it was a little more formal, but now they actually let me know that I could be informal in my approach to them.
Another participant also described her relationship with her professors at this time as informal, though she admitted that this evolved over time:

For the professors and instructors, I wouldn't say I have a swell communication or rapport with them. I did actually start talking a lot to them until later. Even my adviser, I didn't really ... Actually, it was by the end of my program that I started talking to her. I wouldn't say my professors are that supportive or probably they don't know what to do, I don't know. Because probably they don't know either, how they can be supportive Still, they should be more supportive but I don't think they are. Because that's not from my experience, I don't think they are.

She discussed the reasons she perceived she felt she was not receiving adequate attention from her professors:

So yes, they are also very busy, probably that's why it's difficult for them to engage with students that much. But I don't think they've been very supportive. If you are not self-reliant, it will really be difficult because you have to self-reliant to do these things or look for where to get information ...because reliance on them is not wise. I think it would be very difficult for you to achieve what you want to if you rely on them. They are always very busy on one thing or the other. I feel that honestly they don't take it as their own challenge and the general attitude is, it’s your own challenge so you should deal with it. That's the way they look at it.

**Supportive nature.** One participant discussed that his relationship with the academic staff from his department was actually good due to certain factors:

With my professors it's been good, it's been actually good. In my department, we have domestic faculty, we have international faculty from Asia, from Africa, from India. It's been ... That diversity ... Even from the Middle East, that diversity has made it easy to communicate. Because amongst themselves they have been communicating already, so they know how people from diverse backgrounds communicate and how they speak, difference in accents, interpreting information and all that. It's been very good with my faculty. It's been fantastic.

One of the students also conversed about the supportive nature of her professors/academic staff of her department:

In class, my professors are good because I've done a lot of courses since I came here. In class, they are good, they'll communicate, but maybe the challenge is always the language itself. The first two, three weeks you're not really
understanding the language because it is very different from yours but for the
support and helping, they are really good.

She said that not just the academic staff, but also the administrative staff of her
department were supportive of her success in the department:

The graduate coordinator helped me so much. He told me, “you can't do this, you
can get some scholarship from here, you can get some scholarship from here.” He
went and talked to the head of department and got me some scholarship.
Financially, even in the summer, they provided an opportunity for me to work in
the summer to enable me pay my spring semester tuition and fees.

The third participant discussed the supportive role the head of department played
in her life as a graduate international student prior to her arrival from her home country,
and even while enrolled in her program of study:

I work as a graduate assistant for my head of the department and also one of my
other professors. I have been in contact with my head even before I came here. So
I used to email him and he was very supportive. He was supportive and kept
saying, “You can do this, you can do this.” He was great. And as soon as I got
here, he could recognize me like you were the one I was talking to and then once
the position for his GA got vacant, he was the one to offer me a graduate assistant
position.

Nevertheless, the same participant discussed her misgivings about the attitude of a
particular professor in her dealings with her and her experiences in her quest to get into
an internship program:

I have a professor I don't want to mention her name. I wanted to get some
information regarding my Ph.D., my thesis and all that. She didn't guide me and I
don't know why. She was like, “Oh, you want to do a Ph.D., you want to do a
thesis? I must suggest to you that you don't go with the thesis because it's too
hard, you won't be able to do that.” And I was like, “What?” Please, if the
professor is telling you this, then definitely the student will be demoralized. My
personal thinking is like if you don't want to encourage someone, don't discourage
anyone. Let them do whatever they want to do. So after that, I never went to her. I
never see her. I never meet with her. Also, I tried to get into a research but I don't
know why I didn't get any opportunity to get into it. Funny enough, some of my
domestic friends, they got in in the very first semester. They got research
opportunities in the very first semester but I didn't.
The fourth participant reported having a lot of support from the professors in her department and talked about how much encouragement and support she had received from them, right from the time she arrived the institution:

I just got to the United States, for example, this night, and the day after that, I was at the school. My professor was so good and she told me, “You can be absent, that's fine. I understand,” but I didn't feel good missing the classes. My professor is so nice. She's very, very intelligent and nice and smart and respectful. As I told you, she told me, “It's not necessary to come if you are tired.” And after my class, she just sent me a message, “Get some rest.” She was so kind. And about other professors too, they were kind.

She conversed on how her professors has gone beyond just looking out for her academics but also looking out for her as a person:

And also, my professor, I really love her, because she's offering ... all the time she's offering, “If you need a ride,” ... because I do not have a car, “If you need a ride, if you need anything, just let me know. Just call me.” And she's so nice. I really like the community around myself in the department.

Finally, she commented on the level of support she had received from the community as a whole:

I think it is a friendly community between us. I'm not sure about the other departments, but what I see here, they are very warm, welcoming and encouraging. Yeah, yeah. And even my advisor says ... I'm not sure that it is a compliment or that is a true fact that she says, ‘You are better than you think,’ and that's good for me, at least encouraging.

Not supportive. Four of the participants reported that their relationships with their professors were not entirely friendly and that they are not supportive of their success. Only two participant quotes are reported in this section.

One of the participants discussed the availability of her professors and the level of comfort she felt in their presence:

The first thing that I would say is that professors should be available because most of the time, due to their busy schedules or some different reasons, they will not be. Most times, when we schedule an appointment to meet with them, they are
already preparing themselves for the next class. Then, we ourselves will understand that we have to speed up the things and I would try to cut it short to ten minutes or even five minutes between me and professor. If the same thing would have been between a professor who speaks my own language or the native language, maybe I could have continued that meeting for a bit longer because I will be more comfortable to express myself.

Another participant compared how professors relate with students in the US and how the system works back in her country:

I say they're not supportive enough to boost me up, or help me succeed. They don't reach out to me. They don't go out of their way to find out how I am doing. Being an international student, it would be good if the professor is keeping a track on what you're doing. Like a back in India, we don't really have this kind of system where we email professors to meet or give appointment. We are like being in the class, just to go and talk to professors about this problem and they spend some extra time to help us. That's not the way here. 

She further verbalized the discouragement she felt each time professors do not reach out in a timely manner each time she was in need of their help:

At times you might have a need you really want to talk about it and then you email the professor and maybe the professor emails you a week later. By then you would have solved the problem and you don't want to talk about it anymore. That’s very discouraging. They should make themselves more available, for us to talk to.

**Student Support (Domestic Students)**

**Not supportive.** One of the participants discussed the difficulties he encountered socially interacting with the domestic students:

When I first ... When I got here, it was difficult. My first group work didn't work out well and that's because I and my partner who was a domestic student and didn't really understand each other very well. It was something we had to work on and brush upon. think the faculty can do better in who they merge you with. Working with a domestic student in my first semester was challenging but if I had worked with an international student we would have more chemistry. I guess it's part getting to understand the system.
He reflected on the cultural differences between domestic and international students and the need for the institution to intervene and ensure the successful social integration of the students:

Getting into this social environment here and social culture is very different. We are coming from a completely different social background, things are said in different ways, different interpretations to different things. I think it's something that the school can help us with and if we have an association, like a gathering together as international students, we will be able to say, "This is what I've learnt. This is what I think is happening here." We'd have to share ideas on how the social environment here works and we'll be able to integrate better.

One of the students had this to say about domestic students and discussed certain areas they can prove to be more helpful and knowledgeable than faculty and administrative staff:

No one has time for you. I approach and ask them, “How can I do this?” That's when someone will say, “Oh, you can do it like this.” My professor will not be able to tell me but my peers will tell me things like, “Here, there are cheaper apartments here and these are good.” I really think when peers open up to me and they are free with me, I gain much that will help me in my own social life than a professor would do to me.

Yet another participant stated how she was treated by her peers who were domestic students. She discussed reasons she felt were responsible for the behaviors:

I have very few friends who are Americans, and they're really good with me. But the rest of the people, I don't know why they don't talk to me. Even, they're not interested to talk with any international students. Somehow I feel like its racism, they're not at all interested to talk to us. Somehow we feel like that’s the issue and personally, I feel like that.

A participant voiced that she does not really have domestic students as friends and gave her reasons:

With other international students, it is okay because we're all coming from different parts of the world and we can relate because we're all in a foreign country. But with the Americans, I guess our cultures are so different ... I wouldn't say I ever had any American friend. I just take it as cultural differences. I wouldn't say I relate a lot to the American students.
A participant described her relationship with domestic students. She further gave reasons why she referred to them as just acquaintances and not friends:

I wouldn't say friends, but yeah, I have acquaintances among them. I cannot call somebody friend because to be a friend means a lot and if I have any questions or anything, yeah, I do ask them and they're good enough. They try to respond, but then again, I would say it's just a language barrier thing, you know, everything we're feeling we can't express it to them.

When asked whether her domestic student peers were supportive, one of the students responded: “Yeah, they are. But as I told you, even if I ask them something, they give me the answer in a good way and that's it. Out of class, I don't know. I don't even see them.”

Supportive. One participant verbalized that the majority of her classmates are supportive and kind. In addition, she complained about some inappropriate behavior by one of her male domestic peers and added that encouragement from her domestic peers motivated her:

They are so nice, just one of them I do not like him. Maybe I do not know if I'm allowed to share that with you or not, but I'm going to. I just needed some help for one of my classes, because I couldn't write all of the notes and I just asked one of my classmates that, “If you are okay, can you share your notes with me?” and he said, “Yeah, that's fine.” The first meeting was good. Second meeting… I cannot say if it is the fault of the school or anybody. It was maybe … it goes to his personality. He talked a lot and he talked explicitly, like talking about sexual things that I do not like to talk about with a man. On contrary, one of my classmates is so nice. He just says some sweet words to me, like making compliment about my progress, about my speaking English in front of other classmates, and it makes me… It motivates me in my studies. The majority of them are supportive and kind.

Relates depending on areas of interest. One of the students had a different view on the social interactions between graduate international students and their domestic student peers:
So, the difference in communication between an international ... the way I communicate with international students as against domestic students, is that international students are very concerned about post-graduation, life after school. “What do I do after school? Would I get a job? Would I get the job of my dreams?” As compared to domestic students... domestic students are more concerned with ... they're like, okay, family life, “maybe I'll get married and do I really want to start a job, get a job immediately?” Most of them are not as interested in getting a job immediately after graduation compared to international students.

One of the participants is the secretary of their student organization and serves as one of the officers with other domestic students. She discussed her level of interaction with domestic friends:

I'm a part of an organization from my department, and a part in a sense that I'm one of the officers for the organization. The other officers, they are Americans and the ... I'm a secretary. I have been a secretary for almost one and a half ... from my second semester. This is my second semester as a secretary and the other people, they got recruited in this semester. So it's their first semester as officers. So I have much experience and I know how to do things. Initially, when I suggest something to them, they won't take my word for it because ... you know what I mean to say.

Neutral. When asked about how she related with domestic students, the participant just shrugged and said, “Well, it’s okay.”

Student Support (International Student Peers)

All of the participants discussed that they had friends among their international student circle and were comfortable among themselves. A participant disclosed:

It's hard for me to communicate to classmates about some things, how I feel about a class, how I feel about something. I just ask a question about a course, that's different. If you have some anxiety, you cannot share with these people. You can share with the people from your country. Sometimes I can share that with people from other countries, but not the domestic students. I don't talk with them a lot. They are together most of the time.

Though this response has been reported in another section of this study, it can also be applied in this context, as the researcher applied the method of iterative questioning.
during the interview process. The participant discussed her interactions with fellow international students versus domestic students:

I have friends from Nigeria. I have friends from Japan, Korea, China. So like we are the international friends, and we are very interested to know each other's culture, but the rest of the white people, they're like, "Oh, come on guys, just shut up," kind of. And we are like, okay.

**International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS)**

The participants of the study were asked about their perceptions of the Office of International Student Services and whether they felt they were getting the needed help to enable them succeed in the institution. Their responses were diverse, as there were different perceptions of the support services being offered by this office.

**Supportive.** A participant verbalized that initially the office was supportive but stated that this supportive nature dwindled over time:

International Student Office, I would say initially when I came here, things were fine and whenever I had doubts I used to go to ISO and ask them questions like whatever I want to know, but then slowly I don't know, due to budget cuts or whatever reasons, there were not many people who were there in ISO and then most of the times I went, I couldn't speak to anybody and then I had to leave unattended because I could not wait so long because of my classes and my schedule. Nobody's there to answer my questions at times. There was a situation where I went to them to ask something and they were like, "This is not what we deal with and you're supposed to go to graduate school." And it was like ... there were so many trips from ISO to graduate school, I can't even count on my fingertips.

Another student discussed reasons which she perceived were the different justifications behind graduate international students’ experiences with the office:

I will say it depends on your advisor ... There is an advisor, he is pretty good if you talk to him, send him emails ... They've changed it in such a way that he's no longer responsible for certain students. He used to be ... My name used to fall under his ... The other person, I send her emails like, I don't know, before she responds.... The thing is, it all depends on your advisor.
Not entirely supportive. A participant discussed the level of support he got from the office concerning his personal needs and maintaining his F1 status:

I haven't received any substantial help from them to be sincere. Everything that I've done here has been with the help of, maybe, another international student or on my own. I haven't gotten much help from them. I think that there’s a lot for them to do, a whole lot. I really don’t hear from them. I just go there to get my I-20 or renew my I-20 or something and then I'm out. Nothing else.

He verbalized the need for current graduate international students to have a forum where they could meet with alumni graduate international students and exchange ideas with them:

….makes me feel like no international student who has come from this system has been successful enough for them to call back and say we are proud of this person and we can show this person off and say, “Talk to this person.” You understand? That's how I feel.

Another student also verbalized that she did not get the level of support she expected from the Office of International Student Services:

See I don't think that the international students' office is contributing to our success or they're supporting us. The first four days, they were so supportive. When we were in the orientation they told us like we are here for you. We are your people. We are here for each of you and everything. But they're not supporting anything. Like no, not at all. We are doing everything by ourselves here.

She particularly stressed that there is a need for the ISO to get more involved in the lives of these students:

We are thousands of miles away from our home. We need the people who give us at least moral support. We are not expecting much financial help but sometimes there are so many people, so many students who are struggling with homesickness and a lot of peer pressure, study pressure, exam pressure. In that situation, I think these are the people who can support us who can organize meetings once in a month and behave like our friends, behave like family members.
One particular participant reminisced about the time the Office of International Student Services was known as the Office of International Programs (OIP):

I must commend the then staff of ... It was called OIP then. Now, it has changed to ISO, but I must commend the staff and the director. They actually helped us as international students to get situated in the community for starters. And also they had like series of workshops about what to expect as an international student in the US, and also what to expect as an international student post-graduation. Like OPT workshops and yes, they had OPT and CPT workshops. But over time, maybe I would say then, they had like competent hands, but I'm not saying that they don't have competent hands now, but like over time it's more like get the students and make sure that we have the numbers. We're trying to meet a quota, get the students, get them however you need to get them and forget the most important aspect, help them succeed.

Another student also discussed how she has survived so far as an international student in the institution, and the role of the office in this process:

The person that really helped me was my friend. She was the one that helped me to settle into the system. I think there was a time I decided not to even be going to them to ask for help. Because I felt, they didn't help and I felt they were unwilling to help. Then I started doing my things by myself and asking other international students what they did in that same situation.

When asked how supportive the International Student Office had been in supporting her success in the institution, another participant simply responded:

Other than signing our documents, I don't think they're doing anything else. At least they have to tell us the options, how to better our education. Things like where we can apply for jobs, what we can do after we graduate, what are alumni doing, they can get us in touch with them, something like that. But as far as I know they don’t anything like that.

Yet another participant said:

They are too busy, it’s sad. That's why you don't know what they're supposed to be doing because you go to someone and the person is trying to tell you he's busy or she's busy. We need like an office or like something where you can just go and discuss about the life here and everything, not just academics.
Finally, one participant discussed that, for whatever reason, the office staff are always too busy to attend to her needs:

At least, if I want just one thing, one small thing, it’s having a gathering, having a meeting, with other international students, and sharing their experiences together. It helps. Actually, it just nothing, just setting a meeting, a gathering, sending an invitation to all international students that study here and talk about their experiences. How do they solve their problems? How do they overcome their homesickness? Right, because the name is international office. “So, what do you do, just checking my visa, just issuing an I-20?”

**Orientation Programs**

Orientation is a time in which basic habits are formed that can influence the academic success and personal growth of the students. It also likely acts as a determinant toward their retention and graduation. On this note, the study wanted to find out whether the orientation programs provided by the institution meet these needs. Most of the participants verbalized that the orientations programs which they had gone through in the institution did not prepare them for life as graduate international students.

**Beneficial but insufficient information.** A participant discussed how beneficial the service or programs introduced during her orientation program proved beneficial to her survival as a foreign student:

We had fun. We had a treasure hunt game and we had a lot of food and all that. We had some other stuff but that doesn't prepare me for my future here in the US because I found here is so challenging. Each and every international student is struggling for their future here. So I don't think that orientation helps me. That only helps to have fun for the four days and to get introduced to the university. I personally felt that.

The participant also discussed her departmental orientation program and the employment opportunities information provided:

Even in my departmental orientation, they were not that much clear about the opportunities, what is available for an international student. They must have to know what opportunities the international students have, so they prepare the
international students in that way...like you have this much of opportunities in your field, you have this much of job opportunities in this area. So they should be like that but I feel like they missed that point.

One of the students compared the then OIP orientation programs to the ISSS orientation programs:

I must commend the then on the staff of ... It was called OIP then. They actually helped us as international students to get situated in bowling green for starters. And also they had like series of workshops about what to expect as an international student in the US, and also what to expect as an international student post-graduation. Like OPT workshops and yes, they had OPT and CPT workshops

Another student discussed the services provided during the orientation program and whether it provided sufficient survival tips for her:

First thing they told us where get the groceries from and they gave us a tour of the campus and they told us where the libraries, where the food court is and where those convenient stores are. They gave us the tour but they didn't or ever tell us how to apply for a job on campus. They didn't tell us about that.

She noted that the necessary information that would help a graduate international student find their feet in the institution was not provided during the orientation program:

We had to talk to the students who came in the previous semesters and we had to ask them like, “Please recommend us at the place where you're working, like in the food court.” We have to go through that process, this job process. We are in a new country. We don't know how to apply. And also not just the job on campus while you're studying, but also after you graduate. They never talked about OPT. They just say, “You have to maintain your status.”

Another student said that the orientation program she went through was beneficial; however, sufficient information was not passed on to the students:

I would say to some extent yes and to some extent, no because not everything that you go through here is known in the orientation program. Yes, few things like if you have any questions or if you have any queries where you have to go or like while you're applying for a driving license, where do you have to go, which office to you have to go and ask the questions. That was told in the orientation program. But then, there are many other things that actually were not told to us, or it is like it was not explicitly stated in the orientation. Those are the problems that we ...
that are like day to day routine problems which they might not be aware of. … housing is one of the very important things, because after a hectic schedule, you will want to go home and relax.

Another yet verbalized that apart from meeting fellow international students, there were not much survival tips handed out during the orientation:

I mean I met few people that are International students, that's a good thing. But apart from that, nothing was useful. I didn't get anything that is useful for my life here. Because we just saw some presentations which they posted online and I didn’t find them useful. I have to do an internship during my program and I'm not aware of any kind of practices, they do here. That information was not given during the orientation. Yeah, because I'm not used to these people and place. I don't know how to approach them or meet them. I felt like, it is good if somebody is there to guide you in these kind of things, if you do these kind of things, then you get these kind of opportunities.

**Financial Support**

Participants of this study were asked about the perceptions of the financial support services provided to them by the institution as a whole, and there were different views. Some participants testified to the benevolence of the institution via the graduate positions and institutional scholarships, while some complained about lack of financial support from the institution.

**Not supportive.** One of the participants discussed what he perceived as the lack of financial support from the institution and revealed it had discouraged some of his friends who had actually wanted to attend the school:

I was trying to invite a friend of mine to come here, and she asked me, “what's the scholarship like?” I said, “It's about $2,000 or something.” She was like, “How much is the school fees?” I said, “Almost $9,000 per semester.” She was like, “I'm not coming to your school.” She just told me blatantly that she's not coming.

He also discussed a particular challenge he had to go through in his accommodation at the start of every academic year:
It's after two semesters. After every two semesters, yes, you have to go through that. Now, that works well for domestic students because they have a home to go to. They can go back home, travel home. But my apartment is my home right now, so it's like they are sending me out of my home.

Another participant complained that her post-graduate degree department did poorly in providing any form of financial assistance to its graduate international students and noted some instances where she felt the institution could help, but was lacking in help:

My department, I think they really do poorly in helping students. Because when I came in first and I was looking for a graduate assistantship, they directed me to the graduate office. Then graduates office will send you back to the office. I thought they were just sending me back and forth amongst themselves and I wasn't going to be used, to be sent back and forth and all that. I just stopped. But I've also applied for other graduate assistantship program that are not in my department but even those ones, I felt they've already recruited the people they want there. At first I thought I was just being biased and just me thinking that way but there were two of them that was posted on the graduate assistant website during the summer that I applied for. At first, I thought I was just the only one feeling that way. Then I met with another graduate international student that was in my departmental who felt exactly the same way ...

She further conversed on the major support services that should be provided to graduate international students:

It all boils down to getting a job. Why are we going to school? But as I said earlier on, the university is doing nothing ... There is nothing that the university has done to support this goal. It's difficult for international students, because you don't know places, they are the ones that know organizations here, they are the ones that should be able to relate, affiliate and sell us to different organizations and be able to link us. We as international students we don't know these people. But I've not received any such help or even ...you know.

A participant complained about what she perceived as lack of support, as well as lack of integration between the offices that provide services for not just graduate international students, but all students of the institution:

And I would like to share another thing with you. Maybe it goes to my personality, but I was thinking how tough, how awful could paperwork be? For
example, it was the deadline of my tuition pay, and they just didn't put all of the amount for graduate assistant scholarship. They just put a full amount of the tuition and sent it to me. When it was reaching the deadline, they started sending emails, “you have to pay. If you do not pay up, you will be charged $50 more.” "Oh, okay." And I was confused. They didn't put my scholarships and other stuff there. And I was just going to the graduate office, to Potter Hall for paying my scholarship. "Hey, there is something wrong because in my admission letter, it says I have some scholarships, why didn't you put," ... "Okay. Well, we'll amend that. We'll cut it back," and then they didn't. And I just kept coming back.

Another student had a different view and had a lot to say concerning the support services provided by the institution for graduate international students, and all international students as a whole:

International students don't come here without concerns. Most international students come here and maybe mid-semester through their academic program they fall on hard times. It may be financial, maybe someone is sick at home and money is now re-channeled to medical expenses instead of being sent for their academic progress here. Over time international students have complained about that lack of empathy and about maybe concerns with their own lives as individuals and I've seen this grow over time. That lack of empathy, okay we're here, but you know, we pay all these fees, but we also want people to empathize when we fall on hard times. I think that this lack of empathy has become a recurring decimal now.

She commended the department where she got her post-Graduate degree on the level of financial support she received from them while in the program. In addition, she discussed avenues through which the institution could assist international students financially:

I must commend my department, the financial support that I got from them and the university. The university gives us as international students what's called the graduate international scholarship. Everyone gets it depending on the number of credit hours you register for, you get something waived from your tuition and fees. Then also at the graduate level, you get ... you could be offered a GA or an RA or TA position, which automatically gives you the privilege of paying in-state tuition.

Supportive. Another participant also related the level of support she got from the professors in her department, as well as the level of financial support she had gotten from the institution as a whole:
This school is not contributing anything towards my success, first of all, and regarding my department, there are some professors who are really helping me out to get into the doctoral program. They are really helping me out to get into research. They are supporting me but their credits are their credits alone and cannot go to the school in general. Now, see the current issue in this school, the budget cuts. I think I can say like they're putting my future or they're putting the future of every international student in jeopardy, they're making it quite messy.

The participant speculated possible reasons that were responsible for the increment in school fees for international students:

Right now, the current issue of this school is budget cut and it is affecting us. If the budget cut is the institution’s issue, why are international students’ tuition and fees affected? Initially, my tuition was $7000 and it has increased. Why? They can increase their in-state fees for the domestic students but they haven't. They're increasing their international fees. Why?

She further spoke at length about her perceptions of the increment on tuition and fees for international students and the problems associated with this development:

What's wrong with the international students? They're increasing their fees. Why? Did we do the wrong thing by coming here? This semester I had to pay like $11500 and that's a big amount for me in Indian currency. It is approximately 8 Lakhs and that is a very big amount for my family. Why? If they're taking from us like $11500, then how do we have extra money to do a certificate course? I agree that these certificate courses are beneficiary courses for us, especially for people in my department. Yeah, they have the health promotion and health education certificate courses which is really beneficial for me, but I don't have money to do that. Financially, this school does not support me.

**Summary of Findings (RQ3)**

This section discusses the perceptions of graduate international students toward the different support services provided by the institution. Perceptions of support structures such as institutional staff support, student support, support from the International Student Services, perceptions of the different orientation programs, and financial support were raised by the participants. The following is a list of the responses
of the participants when asked how they perceived the support services offered by the institutional staff:

- Two of the participants verbalized that their relationships with their professors had evolved from formal to informal in the course of time.
- Four of the participants said that their professors were not supportive of their success. Only two participant’s quotes were reported in this section.
- Six of them verbalized that their professors had been supportive of their success.

The study also examined the ways graduate international students perceive the social interactions between the domestic students and among themselves. Institutions can actually be hostile and inhospitable for graduate international students, starting from the members of the local community, faculty, administrators, right down to the domestic students. This makes adjustment difficult for these students, thereby increasing the stressors they have to deal with. The following is a list of the social interactions between domestic students and graduate international students, as well as among graduate international students:

- Eight of the students verbalized that domestic students were neither supportive nor friendly, but only six responses were reported in this section.
- One student reported that they were supportive of her.
- Two students reported relating with domestic students according to areas of interest.
- One student was neutral.
All the participants reported they felt comfortable with other internationals and were supportive of one another.

The participants of the study were asked about their perceptions of the Office International Student Services (ISS) and whether they felt they were getting the needed help to enable them to succeed in the institution. Their responses were diverse, as there were different perceptions of the support services being offered by this office.

- Seven students verbalized that the Office of International Student Services was not supportive of their success.
- Five of the students reported that the office was supportive of their success.

Only two of their responses are reported in this section.

Orientation programs have many advantages and are necessary for international students as they seek guidance on how to best approach and embrace their new environment (Schultz & Sheppard, 2015). Orientation programs provide multiple opportunities for new international students to meet and interact with their peers and other members of the community, including faculty and staff, thus setting the social and integration process in motion. Shupp (2014) posited that orientation can be the defining moment in the transition to college for the students, both domestic and international. In addition, orientation is a time in which basic habits are formed that can influence the academic success and personal growth of the students and likely acts as a determinant toward their retention and graduation. On this note, the study wanted to find out whether the orientation programs provided by the institution meet these needs. All the participants verbalized that the orientation programs they had attended were beneficial but did not provide enough survival skills to succeed as foreign student in the US.
The participants had different views on the level of financial support they received from the school. Some of them had been privileged to get substantial financial support through the different graduate assistantship programs, but others were not so lucky and were constantly faced with the exorbitant school fees they had to pay each semester. As previously mentioned, the participants had different views on the level of both financial and social support they received from the school. Some verbalized that they had been privileged to get substantial financial support through the different graduate assistantship programs. Others were not so lucky and were constantly faced with the exorbitant school fees they had to pay each semester. One student had full institutional support as regards the terms of her recruitment and did not complain of any financial struggle. Finally, some students discussed that they had graduate assistantship positions, but these positions did not cover their school fees. At the end of the day, they complained they still had a lot of bills on their hands.

**RQ4: What recommendations do graduate international students have for their host institutions to better enable them have a great learning experience and reach their goals?**

In response to RQ4, the participants of the study not only discussed their needs, but also gave recommendations on strategic support services/structures that the institution could put up to enable them have a great learning experience and reach their goals. This could be related to Swail’s Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement. It all boiled down to the fact that institutions have a major role toward the success of graduate international students, from recruitment to alumni status.

**Institutional Staff**
The students recommended that they be more supportive, patient, and make themselves more approachable in order to make this possible; the students verbalized that professors be schooled and made to be culturally literate, as well as schooled on the uniqueness of the F1 visa. This way, there will be a seamless interaction between the faculty, academic support staff, and the ISSS. All concerned staff should be aware of the uniqueness of the F1 visa; work opportunities; and how to strategically navigate the CPT, OPT, and internship opportunities to achieve their American dream while still maintaining legal status in the US. The students felt that this among other factors will ensure a seamless interaction between faculty, academic support staff, and the ISS. This will serve to lessen confusion and frustration on graduate international students as they struggle to navigate the American higher education system. Because of their “three-fold experience,” the participants verbalized that faculty should be able to intimate them on job opportunities, internship opportunities, and also prepare them for the job market in the US:

So the first thing that I would say is professors should be available because most of the time due to their busy schedules or some different reasons, they will not be. So if we are taking an appointment and going and speaking to them, it would be ... because they are already preparing themselves for the next class and things like that, so we ourselves will understand that we have to speed up things. One thing, they should be more available. Second thing, I would say more for international students, I guess they should try to reach out and probe answers from us so that you know, we are able feel more comfortable in expressing whatever we want to.

The participants also recommended that professors take time and understand the goals of these foreign students so that their support can be targeted and beneficial. For example, some are here for research opportunities to help in the situation that forced them to leave their countries in the first place, and their desire is to be equipped with the knowledge to enable them to contribute their quota and make the situation better. So, for
these students, they need research opportunities as well as job opportunities in that sector in order to say they have achieved their American dream. Most importantly, the participants verbalized that sometimes, not all the time, the institution takes advantage of foreign students who take graduate assistant positions and make them work over 40 hours. They recommend that if this is the case, the institution should be able to offer them full tuition waivers as a compensation for all the work they put in at the detriment of their own studies and welfare.

**Career Fairs**

They recommended that while the institution organizes career fairs, there is a need for them to understand that there is a difference between graduate international students and domestic students. The participants recommended that the institution partner with some select organizations who are ready to employ foreign students. In addition, these organizations must be schooled on the uniqueness of the F1 visa:

They do career fairs I've been to a lot of career fairs when I was doing my Master's and seriously I couldn't find anything tailored to me as an international student or even me as a graduate student in those career fairs. Most times the companies that come don't even employ you as an international because they will either have to file H1B. So I think there should be a form of diversity with the career fair like bringing companies that are actually like international friendly. So I feel that that part is lacking, we should increase that awareness even in the career fairs, diversify the career fairs, bring in companies that are willing to file for international students H1B and all J1.

Another student also recommended:

These companies don't know there are regulations which students need to comply with, the companies have no idea about the regulations in the F1 visa. It comes down to if the institution is in partnership with companies and organizations out there, then the companies and organizations how to employ the students, what kind of laws the students are required to follow so the organizations and companies have that information in place and that can work better with the students.
Still another participant insisted on diversifying the employer reach to help these students get situated in jobs:

Not all international students want to stay here after graduation, but there are a handful of international students that want to stay here and achieve their American dreams post-graduation. So, to diversify that employer reach that could help situate international students in jobs. Especially when you know that they've graduated, they've graduated with very good GPAs 4.0, magna cum laude, summa cum laude, and these are very good candidates that can do any employer good if they're just tailored to the right employer. The employer can actually file a work visa and situate that international student in a position of financial security.

Scholarships

The participants expressed dissatisfaction at the level of financial assistance provided by the institution and verbalized that the institution could do better in providing financial assistance to foreign students. Because of their visa status, they are not eligible for FAFSA or any type of student loan and so depend solely on income from their home countries and whatever assistance the institution could render. Furthermore, they verbalized that there were little or no scholarships out there for graduate international students, and so any assistance from the institution could go a long way in meeting their financial needs. One of the students conversed that:

I realized that whenever I go online to check for scholarships for international students, I really don't see much. It even gets worse when you check for scholarships for international students who are graduate students. Actually you find zero. Scholarship are very important.

They verbalized that institutions make available scholarships for graduate international students who may fall on hard times in the US One of the students recommended that “they should have some kind of waivers or some kind of scholarship for the internationals students... otherwise at least loan facilities.” They verbalized that they sometimes fall on
hard times and do not get any help from the institution and felt it was time the institution rise and do something significant in this area for graduate international students.

**Accommodation**

The students recommended that the school be more vested in foreign students’ housing needs. Some students who are housed in a particular lodge reported that every session they were required by the housing authority staff to vacate the hostel for two weeks for certain adjustments to be made. This may work for domestic students, but for foreign students who have nowhere to go, this becomes a challenge as they are practically homeless for those two weeks. Worse still, they verbalized that the institution does not intervene in this, and should, because foreign students are under their care as long as they are enrolled in school. One of the participants verbalized:

> When we get here accommodation is very ... It's a huge challenge. I have a friend who when he got here, he couldn't move into the apartment he had paid for until two or three weeks after. Which meant that he had to be squatting with somebody else, whereas he had already paid for an apartment before he got here. These are things that we need to put in perspective. Someone is coming from a different continent, a different country and then they get here and they're almost stranded. Not because they do not even have money to pay for the apartment, but because there have been no proper arrangements for that to happen. I think that's ...

Another participant discussed about her experience with accommodation on her arrival in the institution and advised that the issue of accommodation for foreign students should be treated seriously by the school:

> Well, I would have appreciated if before arrival, that they were more of help in getting assistance on how to acclimatize. Like information on housing and all that. That will really be of help, if they can link people before coming, if they can link you to somebody who can be able to assist you and if they also provided information about accommodation. Because it's really difficult. You are all the way on the other part of the world, you can't do this by yourself. I feel if they did that ... Also, if the international office were more welcoming. If they made it a kind of home that people can comfortably come in, discuss things and be more
forthcoming in listening to the needs of international students. I felt I would have been more comfortable, but there was no such. I didn't feel welcome ...

According to Kendrick, Neuberg, Griskevicius, Becker, and Smaller (2010), Maslow’s five-stage hierarchy of needs involves a five-tier model of human needs starting from the most basic need at the bottom of the pyramid. The lower needs must be achieved before individuals can attend to the needs higher up. At the bottom of the pyramid is man’s physiological needs, which involve requirements for basic human survival such as air, food, water, shelter, and clothing needs, to mention a few. The next stage is safety needs, then love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and finally self-actualization needs. Looking at the pyramid, it is obvious how essential housing is for a foreign student in a strange country and who needs to be protected and cared for by the institution they are enrolled in.

![Maslow's hierarchy of needs](https://www.simplypsychology.org/wp-content/uploads/maslow.jpg)

**Figure 5**

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

Courtesy of simplypsychology.org

**Alumni**
Some of the students recommended that there should be a gathering for currently enrolled students and graduate international alumni to meet. They verbalized that alumni could come in handy, having gone through the system and succeeded. In the absence of this, they suspect that most alumni of the institution were still struggling to find their feet in the US, and they found the thought discouraging. In addition, they verbalized that this was the duty of the ISS and that there is a need for them to rise to that responsibility and act as a bridge between the alumni and currently enrolled students:

I also think that they can be a link for international students in finding internships, because if it's an International Student Office, they are our ... They are the link. They are the bridge between international students in school and international students outside school. Which means, international students who are alumnus or alumni of the university. So they can also help us reach to those ones who have come through this school and help us reach out to them, then people get to share ideas and build relationships.

Collaboration Among All Related Departments

The students discussed the lack of seamless interaction between the ISSS and other related departments in the institution. They had to make several trips back and forth to resolve an issue, which could have been handled with a single phone call if the lines of communication between the concerned departments were open. They advised that there should be a seamless interaction between the ISSS and all related departments in order to give graduate international students a more satisfying experience in the school and avoid getting them confused and frustrated:

The international office should at least make you reach that exact person whom they think will help you. They should know how the different departments are run. Maybe what they can do to us is helping us reach to them. Take me to at least my department and say “this is someone helping you, she can tell you where a class is, she can give you a schedule.” They should have that connection.
Christopher Viers, Vice President for International Services at Indiana University, supports that sometimes international offices try to do too much. He advised that international students’ offices forge flexible coalitions with key campus stakeholders. He further likened the perceived segregation of international students on U.S. campuses to the international office, likely positioned in a similar way because they are not well integrated with other related units on campus (Glass et al., 2015). In addition, the authors supported a collaboration between international student offices and colleagues in career services, academic advising, faculty development, and all related departments in the institution.

Mentors

The students recommended that all graduate international students should have mentors who are faculty. They verbalized that the possibility of students succeeding and achieving their American dream was higher when they were attached to a mentor:

Mentors are very, very important. Like mentors or coaches, people ... And mentors and coaches are your professors. People we meet as international students when we are studying either at the master's level or doctoral level. Once an international student has a mentor or a coach, that student ... the possibility of that student succeeding post-graduation is higher than an international student that doesn't have a mentor or coach.

As previously mentioned, the participants insisted that faculty/professors come with the “three-fold” experience, which is the ingredient required to propel success and the realization of their American dream in graduate international students in all higher institutions in the US.

Empathy

GSAS (2016) clearly lays out the difference between empathy and concern. They define empathy as an individual actually feeling what others feel, as well as internalizing
their emotions as their own. On the other hand, they define concern as caring about the welfare of others and feeling compassion for their situation. The article states that the two terms differ, as empathy is a prerequisite for concern and therefore the ultimate motivator of prosocial actions. The participants of the study did not use the word “concern,” but they used the word “empathy” to describe the way they expect the institution and the ISS to view their needs and their situation as foreign students in an overseas country:

Empathy. Try to empathize, try to see that these students also have feelings. They are doing the best they can. Nobody comes here wanting to saddle their responsibilities on anybody. But when they fall on hard times, try to empathize. And I'm not saying that they aren't competent people at the ISO but there should be more of that sense of empathy with international students. And one thing I would say is that the international student life is lived, it is an experience.

When asked what she needed to succeed in the US, a participant simply said, “understanding.” This all points to the institution as a whole being empathetic toward these students who have left family, their loved ones, and practically given up their identity to socially integrate and succeed in the US:

Understanding. For example, one of my professor just talks so fast. Slow, slower! You can just ... you are professor. Professors speak in a clear way, for example. It's one of them. Second, if I want just some examples, the graduate school could be nicer to us. International office can help to understand us emotionally. Emotionally, not just with finances.

They insisted that the international student experience is lived and that it might actually take one who has been one to effectively empathize with students.

One-Stop Shop

According to Walters (2003), the One-Stop Shop services model has become a growing trend, especially in light of the recent economic challenges that now require colleges and universities to do more with less. Supiano (2011) describes the One-Stop shop as a model that more colleges have adopted over the years, in which several
functions are combined, and frontline staff can help students with any of them. Carr and Johnson (1995) supported that embedded within this model is the expectation of enhancing efficiency, quality of service to students, and accountability through technology and restructuring. One particular participant recommended a one-stop shop where graduate international students could walk in and get all their answers and consistent service that will meet their needs:

Personally what I feel is they should be a once stop shop where we should be able to know everything, from immigration status to anything international students need to survive in school. They should have a one stop shop where they can understand everything, where they can speak to people who can understand and help. The school can have an integrated system wherein if suppose I'm going to ISO for an issue, they can answer my questions by talking to somebody who is in different office.

Inasmuch as the student talked about the one-stop shop, her line of conversation also pointed to collaboration among all related departments. The student implied that these two factors are essential because they will likely create a simpler, more consistent experience for the students. This is because any bridge in communication makes their experience somewhat complex and, most times, information was inconsistent across the different areas of the institution.

**Orientation**

The students verbalized that though they enjoyed their four-day orientation program, it did not adequately equip them with survival kits for life as graduate international students in the US. They insisted that both the orientation sessions from the ISS and their departments were good but still inadequate for the challenges ahead:

We had a fun. We had a treasure hunt game and we had a lot of food and that. We had some other stuff but that doesn't prepare me for my future here in the US because I found here is so much competitive. Each and every international student is struggling for their future here. So I don't think that orientation helps me. That
only helps to have fun for the four days and to get introduced to the university and they had a shopping shuttle and all of that.

The students noted that information such as CPT, OPT, how and where to get internship opportunities and jobs on campus were absent from these sessions, and they were of the opinion that these were the fundamental survival strategies that were omitted:

I must commend the then on the staff of ... It was called OIP then. Now, it has changed to ISO, but I must commend the staff and the director. People like Andrea Ford, Beth Muffy, Sarah, Terry the director. They actually helped us as international students to get situated in bowling green for starters. And also they had like series of workshops about what to expect as an international student in the US, and also what to expect as an international student post-graduation. Like OPT workshops and yes, they had OPT and CPT workshops.

Summary of Findings (RQ4)

Finally, in response to RQ4, the students provided good insights and recommended, without any inhibitions, appropriate support structures that could enable them have a good learning experience and achieve their goals. The recommendations made by the participants are summarized as follows

Institutional Staff Support

- Institutional staff should be more supportive, patient, and more approachable to graduate international students.
- The institution should take measures to ensure that related institutional staff should be culturally literate and be schooled in the uniqueness of the F1 visa.
- The interaction between the ISS and other related departments should become seamless.
- Professors should be made to prepare graduate international students for the job market post-graduation.

Scholarships
• Scholarship opportunities should be provided for students, especially those who fall on hard times.

• GA, TA, and RA be made to these students, if possible, since they are not eligible for loans and any form of government financial assistance.

Career Fairs

• Career fairs should be organized around the notion that the career needs of domestic and international students vary.

• There is a need for the institution to partner with select organizations that are ready to provide internship opportunities or hire F1 students post-graduation.

Housing Needs

• The institution be more vested in foreign students’ housing needs and, if possible, make pre-arrival arrangements toward this.

Mentors

• Every graduate international student should be assigned to a faculty mentor who can provide career, academic, and networking guidance for the student.

Empathy

• Institutional staff should be able to empathize with international students who are so far away from home and may have no source of social support in the US.

Orientation

• Orientation programs should provide strategic information for survival as graduate international students in the US.

Summary
It is difficult to claim that a need is being met without determining from the population as to what their needs are. This study was focused on seeking out graduate international students and inquiring from them what their needs are and whether these needs received attention from the institution. In addition, the study was designed to explore how these students perceived the support structures already provided by the institution under study and whether these services met their needs. The participants shared their goals, needs, and perceptions of support services already in place. They further gave recommendations on how the institution can improve on these services to enable them have a great learning experience, meet their goals, and achieve their American dream. Chapter V will present an analysis of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations relative to the study.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Support services play a key role in attracting and retaining graduate international students, as well as building momentum for future recruitment of students. As such, Perez-Encinas (2016) stated that support services and international student satisfaction can only be achieved if institutions can work together as a whole to enhance the campus internationalization process. Ward (2001) reported that when international students have good experiences in their host institutions, the chances of recommending these same institutions to their peers are higher. This puts a lot of pressure on student services personnel who must realize they have a pivotal role to play in terms of attracting and retaining graduate international students on their campuses. This chapter gives an overview of the research findings, the researcher’s recommendations, and further recommendations on strategies to attract and retain graduate international students in the institution. It also looks at the methodological limitations of this study. This chapter ends with a conclusion that encompasses the study and provides recommendations for future research.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of graduate international students. The study focused on the goals and needs of graduate international students and their perceptions of the resources provided to them by their host institutions. It explored graduate international students’ experiences in a Mid-South university, their needs, and how they perceived the support services provided to them by the university. The researcher tried to unravel and describe the students’ personal experiences as graduate international students in the university, and share these experiences with the
institution. Their responses reflected their views and experiences in the university relative to institutional services that support international students and ensure they have a great learning experience and achieve their goals of coming to the US to study. The participants were also encouraged to give recommendations of support services that would help them toward achieving their American dreams.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the goals of graduate international students as they leave their home countries to come to the United States for further studies?
2. What are the needs of graduate international students in the United States?
3. How do graduate international students perceive the support services offered by their host institutions/the community?
4. What recommendations do graduate international students have for their host institutions to better enable them to have a great learning experience and to reach their goals?

**Conceptual Framework**

The study was designed based on Swail’s Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement. The model recognizes three factors that are fundamental for students to succeed in higher education (Swail, 2003). These factors are the cognitive factors which are the student’s intelligence, knowledge, and academic ability the student brings to the institution; the social factors which include peer and family support, the development and existence of career goals, educational legacy, and the ability to cope in social situations; and the institutional factor. The first two factors have to do with the student, but the institutional factor refers to the ability of the school to provide
appropriate support to students to ensure they succeed in college and meet their goals. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the Swail Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement is different from other models because it places the student at the center of the model by focusing on the dynamics between the cognitive, social, and institutional factors that take place within the student (Backerson, 2009). It does not blame the student for being academically inept, but recognizes that institutional support plays a big role in student success. Like the Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement, this study was based on the fact that the three factors of cognitive, social, and institutional must combine to provide a solid foundation for the solid growth, development, and persistence of graduate international students.

**Research Method**

Research describes purposive sampling as a fundamental kind of non-probability sampling which identifies the primary participants (Groenewald, 2004). This sample was chosen based on the purpose of this study. To find additional participants, the snowballing sample was used. According to Groenewald (2004), snowballing expands the samples by asking the primary participants to recommend others for interview purposes. Ozturgurt (2013) also described snowballing as a process that benefits from word-of-mouth recommendations. Consequently, the researcher was cautious of this method because Research Methodology (2018) acknowledges that one of the challenges of this method is oversampling a particular network of peers, which may lead to bias. Invitation to participate in the interview was sent via email to all international students through the institution’s official email. The students were emailed to participate in the interview by the researcher, who was also a graduate international student.
After obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct interviews, graduate international students were contacted. This study followed a phenomenological descriptive approach with 12 graduate international students, 11 females and 1 male, participating in face-to-face interviews. Each interview was strategically targeted to reveal the goals of graduate international students as they leave their countries of origin to come to the US for further studies. The interviews also targeted their needs, how they perceive the support services provided by their host institution, and finally their recommendations on the different practices that the school should implement to enable them to have a better learning experience and achieve their American dream. In order to achieve this, the semi-structured method of interviewing was employed in the study. Britter (1995) posited that semi-structured interviews are conducted on the basis of a loose structure consisting of open-ended questions that define the areas to be explored initially. It further permits the interviewer and the interviewee to diverge in order to pursue the subject in more detail.

The interviews were recorded via audio recording and transcribed. Interviews and responses were researched and used to develop an accurate representation of the dissertation’s conceptual framework. Emergent themes were identified from coding in NVivo. The analyses of survey data contained semi-structured interview questions and were focused on creating a clear picture of the attitudes of graduate international students regarding their needs. Information obtained from the interviews was used to obtain detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions of the students. The interviews were conducted with a fairly open framework which allowed focused, conversational, two-way communication. In addition, the researcher followed a guideline
but was still able to follow topical diversions in the conversation that may have strayed from the guideline, when necessary. By so doing, both the researcher and the participant had the flexibility to go into details. The interviews covered a duration of at least 30 minutes or more. This method of interviewing, together with the phenomenology method of qualitative research, served as a powerful tool to capture the voices of graduate international students and the way they make meaning of their different experiences as international students in the US. All participant interviews were conducted at different days and times at the institution, and all within the month of October 2018. In addition, the researcher received a grant from the institution’s Graduate School, which enabled her to reward each participant with a $25 gift card at the conclusion of the interviews. This was a way of appreciating their time and also supporting the research focus about acknowledging their needs.

Data containing the current enrollment status of international students from Fall 2014 to Spring 2019 in the institution under study were obtained from the Office of Institutional Research. Graduate international student experiences were described precisely, i.e., the data captured rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings or surroundings (Groenewald, 2004). Plans for data analysis included bracketing or phenomenological reduction, a main argument of descriptive phenomenology and an important concept central to Husserl’s philosophy. Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009) noted that phenomenological reduction can be achieved through bracketing. Bracketing simply cancels out the natural attitude where individuals hold knowledge judgmentally.

As stated earlier, CIRT (2018) asserts that the goal of phenomenology is to describe a lived experience rather than explain or quantify it. Every step within this
research process, from the selection of a topic to study to the dissemination of research findings, was a crucial process. Britter (1995) discussed that this is so because each step has the ability to influence the research results. Consequently, every step of this study strived to avoid error and bias as to increase credibility of the research output.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study were grouped according to research questions in order to make for a clearer reading and understanding. The researcher followed a guideline/list of questions but was still able to follow topical diversions in the conversation that strayed from the proposed research questions, when necessary. By so doing, both the researcher and each participant had the flexibility to expand their perceptions.

**Research Question 1.** What are the goals of graduate international students as they leave their home countries to come to the US for further studies?

In order to determine the goals of the participants, the researcher had to explore how and why the students came to the United States for their graduate studies.

The participants provided insight into how they got recruited into the school. Family ties in a particular town or city were a dominant factor in determining which US schools graduate international students applied to for admission. Institutional support also determined which schools graduate international students chose to go to. The data also indicated that graduate international students are recruited by their peers; i.e., when a currently enrolled student or an alumnus has a great learning experience in the institution and achieves his or her American dream, his or her chances of recommending other people are high. This was seen especially among students from Africa and the Middle East. Some of the participants, especially students from India, got accepted via online
applications. This reinforces the importance for all higher education institutions to have a strong online presence with detailed curriculum of their different programs of study. Finally, one of the participants was recruited via recommendation from her professor, who advised her to do the GRE and guided her until she got into the institution. The observations and reflections demonstrated the myriad ways graduate international students are recruited by an institution in North America.

The participants also discussed why they came to the US for their graduate studies. Research opportunities were seen as one of the goals of the participants and as a draw to the US. While this was seen among a number of participants, it was especially noted among the students from India, who felt they needed to be involved in research projects in order to gain some experience which could later contribute to the healthcare sector in their country. Graduate international students wanted opportunities to explore themselves in a country which they believed had the best education system in the world. They simply wanted to take advantage of this opportunity and explore their love for learning. The desire to get a job post-graduation was the most dominant factor expressed by all the participants of the study. No matter what their desires were, it all came down to securing a permanent job in the US at the conclusion of their studies.

**Research Question 2.** What are the needs of graduate international students in the United States?

The participants further provided insight into their needs as they sojourned in the institution as graduate international students. They verbalized that when these needs are met by the institution, it enabled them to have a great learning experience and meet their goals. The need to get a job in the US post-graduation was expressed by all the
participants of the study. This need connected to the students’ desire for the institution to provide internship opportunities or assistance in securing internship opportunities. Tangential to internships, the need for financial support in the form of scholarships and graduate assistantship positions was verbalized by most of the participants. Providing the assistantship positions helped reduce their school fees to in-state rates, which were far less expensive than the international fees. However, many felt a full waiver was justified for graduate assistance due to the average number of hours they worked above the requisite 20 hours per week. This amount of work came at the detriment to their education and welfare. They felt that the work demands took away their opportunities to be more engaged on campus. The participants felt the institution should provide strategic and diverse career fairs tailored to the needs of graduate international students, keeping in mind the uniqueness of their visa status in the US. Housing needs were expressed by the students. Finally, the students observed a need for the International Student Office and the institution as a whole to be empathetic to their plight, including recognizing that they are far away from home and at risk for loneliness and isolation.

In addition to how the university at large can support graduate international students, the participants spoke to how the institution can contribute on a micro level, including professors exercising patience with students and paying closer attention to their needs. The students also expressed the need for their professors to provide more mentoring. They noted that professors came with what they referred to as the “three-fold experience,” the career experience because they have worked and are actually teaching in class; the academic experience because they are the professors directly teaching the international students; and the networking experience because they have a strong network
to call on or refer the students to. The participants stated that this three-fold experience can be used to propel a graduate international student to achieving their goals. Overall, they expressed the need for professors to recognize that language barriers exist and should put that into consideration while designing their curriculum and while teaching in class.

Beyond what professors can do for students, the participants discussed the need for fellowship among their peers. They felt that they needed to be socially integrated with domestic students. The needed their domestic peers to take their time and help them, get interested in them as people and help them get settled in their new environment. An example cited was the fact that in matters concerning affordable and safe housing, a domestic student would prove more resourceful than a professor. Connecting to domestic students would take the participants only so far. They felt a need for a gathering place where graduate international students could meet, discuss challenges and experiences, and learn how to effectively navigate these challenges as people with a shared need. Finally, giving back to future peers was noted as a need for the participants. They felt the institution should connect currently enrolled students to alumni who might prove to be helpful in their journey as foreign students. Alumni are assumed to have gone through the journey and may prove to be great resources. Overall, the students felt a need for acceptance and to be understood by the university, its professors and staff, and their peers.

**Research Question 3.** How do graduate international students perceive the support services offered by their host institutions and the community?
The participants provided an insight into how they perceived the support services already provided by the school. Most of the participants applauded the supportive nature of their professors and the academic support staff. Some felt that professors were too busy to create time for them or they were swamped with research, while yet another group were of the opinion that their professors were not interested and patient enough to understand them and their cultural differences. All the participants were of the opinion that domestic students kept to themselves and wanted nothing to do with them. Some participants attributed this to a difference in interests, while others verbalized that cultural and language barriers play a big role in this. A higher number of the participants stated that apart from efforts at maintaining their legal status as international students in the US, showing them where to get their groceries, and obtaining key documents like a driver’s license, they did not receive much individualized help from the office. They verbalized that the ISSS should try to be more empathetic to the plight of these students and more helpful to them. Some suggested that like the former Office of International Programs (OIP), the ISSS should be more vested in the success of graduate international students, their careers, and their adjustment in the US. The participants stated that their four-day orientation program from the International Student Office was fun but did not provide them with the survival kits they need as foreign students in the US. They insisted that the necessary information that would help a graduate international student succeed in the institution was not provided during the orientation. They verbalized that information such as how to get involved in internships, how to secure on-campus jobs, fundamental information on the specifics of the OPT and CPT programs, and how to navigate them to
secure employment post-graduation were not made available to them. Some had no knowledge at all about the CPT program.

**Research Question 4.** What recommendations do graduate international students have for their host institutions to better enable them have a great learning experience and reach their goals?

Finally, the students gave recommendations on appropriate support structures to enable them to have a great learning experiences and achieve their American dreams. They felt that institutional staff should be more supportive, patient, and more approachable to graduate international students. They also discussed that the institution should take measures to ensure that related institutional staff should be culturally literate and be schooled in the uniqueness of the F1 visa. The participants advised on the need for a seamless interaction between the ISS and other related departments. They also recommended that it is helpful for professors to prepare graduate international students for the job market post-graduation.

The students advised that financial aid in the form of scholarship opportunities should be provided for students, especially those who fall on hard times. In order to provide further financial help to graduate international students, the participants suggested that GA, TA, and RA offers be made to these students, if possible, since they are not eligible for loans and any form of government financial assistance.

In addition, the participants recommended that career fairs should be organized around the notion that the career needs of domestic and international students vary. They discussed that there is a need for the institution to partner with select organizations that may be able to provide internship opportunities or hire F1 students post-graduation.
In the area of housing and accommodation, the participants recommended that the institution should be more vested in foreign students’ housing needs and, if possible, make pre-arrival arrangements toward this. They discussed that the school should make arrangements for housing before foreign students arrive on campus. They also recommended that it would be helpful for the institution to partner with select housing projects to ensure that the students have housing options when they arrive. This, they said, would prevent the students from being stranded, as well as prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation among them.

Furthermore, to avoid feelings of loneliness and isolation, the participants discussed that there is a need for institutional staff, especially the OISS, to be empathetic toward international students. They recommended that institutional staff should be able to empathize with international students who are so far away from home and may have no source of social support in the US.

The participants recommended that every graduate international student should be assigned to a faculty mentor who can provide career, academic, and networking guidance for the student. They insisted that it is especially important that faculty come with the “three-fold” experience: the academic experience, the career experience, and the networking experience which can best propel a foreign student toward achieving their American dream.

Finally, they recommended that orientation programs should better equip all international students with strategic information for survival in the US. They verbalized that though they enjoyed their four-day orientation programs, it did not adequately equip them with survival kits for life as graduate international students in the US. They
recommended that information such as CPT, OPT, internship opportunities, and how to apply for on-campus jobs should be explored during orientation programs. Overall, the students provided good insights and recommended, without inhibitions, appropriate support structures that could enable them have a good learning experience and achieve their goals.

**Researcher’s Recommendations for Institutional Support Services**

Taking into considerations the participants’ responses to the different research questions, the researcher offers the following recommendations for institutional consideration:

**Orientation**

Orientation programs have many advantages and are necessary for graduate international students as they seek guidance on how to best approach and embrace their new environment. There is a need for orientation programs which are organized by the institution to set the tone of the institution. The school should provide relevant information which facilitates the successful adjustment and retention of international students into their host community. Orientations must be intentionally designed, focusing on the unique needs of international students and keeping in mind that their needs differ from those of the domestic students. Orientation programs should equip students with survival tips to enable them succeed as foreign students, considering the uniqueness of their F1 status. These programs should include information on the CPT and OPT programs, how they function, and how to use these programs to get permanent employment in the US. As was indicated earlier, it is fundamental that the institution step in to assist graduate international students in gaining internship opportunities, especially
from their different departments. Finally, orientation programs should provide information on how to secure on-campus jobs, as their visa status disqualifies them from working outside the school.

**Careers**

Looking at research and recommendations of the participants, it is advisable that the institution consider a mandatory course which all foreign students, graduate and undergraduate, must take in their first semester of their academic journey in the institution. This course should directly target career concerns of foreign students and should include the intricacies of the F1 visa, the OPT and CPT programs covered in depth, and revealing how the students can take advantage of these programs to achieve their American dream. The course should also address how to look out for and identify internship opportunities, how to come up with an effective resume, and how to apply for a job and prepare for a job interview, as well as how to secure graduate assistant, research assistant, teaching assistant, and other student employment positions. Most importantly, there is a need for this course to address the students’ career plans post-graduation, both for those who want to go back to their home counter, those who decide to seek employment in another host country, and those who want to remain and work in the US. It is advised that this course be taught by an individual who is seasoned in immigration matters that concern the F1 status, or an immigration attorney who is conversant and highly knowledgeable about the F1 visa and all work visas linked to it. In addition, OPT and CPT workshops should be set up at least once or twice a semester and should be made a mandatory event through which the students can earn academic credits. By this, the students swipe and are given credits for attendance. Overall, ISS or the hosting
department should consider students’ schedule before fixing the days or times for these workshops.

**Career Fairs**

From the standpoint of the participants of the study, career fairs which are organized by the institution do not take into account the career needs of graduate international students. Students in this study felt that these career fairs are targeted at the career needs of domestic students, not taking into consideration the uniqueness of the F1 visa. Taking these observations into consideration, there is a need for organized career fairs to be diversified. The career needs of graduate international students must be considered when these career fairs are planned. It would be beneficial if the school could form partnerships with organizations that are willing to hire international students. In addition, these companies must be willing to file their work permit and take steps to ensure that their F1 status is not jeopardized. Most importantly, the companies should understand and be willing to abide by the laws and requirements of the F1 status and the laws guiding them as employers. This way, these organizations can work better with the students, and the employers will benefit from the students’ expertise and cultural diversity.

**Financial Needs**

Rubin (2014) stated that some institutions have come up with hardship funds, which allows international students with a family, medical, or financial emergency to apply for a one-time scholarship. The author supports that when it comes to financial aid for international students, host universities need to put some thought in this, as cost can lead to international student attrition or transfer to another college they perceive will
support them financially. The students complained that there are no scholarships available for graduate international students in the US. In addition, research and information gathered from these students reveals that these students are not eligible for FAFSA or any form of government assistance. Bearing these facts in mind, the researcher came up with some recommendations targeted at alleviating these financial difficulties.

It is recommended that merit-based and need-based scholarships should be set aside by the school for the students who might need them. Just as recommended by the participants, GA, TA, and RA positions should be available to these students, as their status does not allow them to work outside their institution of study. By doing so, the international fees are reduced to in-state tuition and make it easier for them to pay. These might hopefully strengthen their loyalty to the institution and might make it possible for them to recruit their peers into the school.

Mentors

Ozturgurt (2013) supported that faculty members are crucial in the sense that they have the most contact with students and are the most sought after for questions these students may have. It is fundamental that graduate international students are assigned to a faculty mentor who can provide career, academic, and networking guidance. It is advisable that these mentors should be faculty. However, if they are not faculty, they must be someone who is conversant with the university terrain and who can motivate the students to successfully navigate their terrain and also expose them to opportunities that lie ahead. These mentors must understand the intricacies of the F1 status and must realize the difference between the life of a foreign student in the US and that of a domestic student in the US. There is a need for these mentors to be culturally literate and be able to
help the students to successfully navigate the uniqueness of their F1 status and achieve their goals. Fusani (1994) supported that as educational institutions continue to serve diverse populations, there is a need for them to be responsive to the changing racial, age, and socio-economics of the new multicultural demographics of academic institutions.

**Differentiating Services for International and Domestic Students**

Research has supported that most student services found on campus are primarily designed for domestic students without giving much thought to the needs of the international students (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). There is a need for the school to understand and demarcate the difference between the needs of graduate international students and that of domestic students. It is recommended that the institution assess the needs of international students to ensure that support services that meet those needs are provided. Also, the support services already in place should be assessed to find out whether they are meeting the needs of the students, or if the students are even aware that these services exist. If they are not aware, then awareness should be created. Also, assessing the efficacy of the support services already in place prevents duplication of services, which might just need some adjustments to fulfill the functions for which they were designed.

**International Students as a Heterogeneous Group**

International students arrive from an increasing number of locations, bringing with them diverse cultural foundations for learning, contrasting expectations for forming intercultural friendships, and a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. One of the challenges faced by international students is the fact that institutions see them as a homogeneous group, yet these students are the most heterogeneous group of students on
any campus (Glass et al., 2015; Urban, 2012). Both qualitative and quantitative studies identify country of origin as a significant factor in the international student experience (Glass et al., 2015). Urban (2012) also supported that there is a need for higher institutions to refrain from treating the international student population as one group. I recommend that the school should take steps to assess the needs of this diverse group so that they are well positioned to provide support structures to meet these needs. These assessments can be done in the form of surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus group meetings. The results likely would reveal the needs of these students, and schools will be in a better position to provide targeted support structures geared at meeting these needs.

**Sense of Belonging**

“Belonging” for international students assumes greater importance in places like college campuses where individuals are more likely to experience isolation or loneliness or to feel invisible as they reconstruct support networks in a new cultural and linguistic environment. Kwon (2009) supported the need for educators, office staff, and the whole community surrounding universities to work together to facilitate the development of multicultural and intellectual environments in universities. Ozturgurt (2013) argued that when international students have a strong social support system, they tend to adjust to college life in the US more effectively and quickly. It is important that the institution understand their role in the acculturation and, thus, the retention of international students on their campuses. Also, there is a need for faculty to understand the impact they can make on these, students as they have the most contact with them. The school can achieve this by setting up sessions between graduate international students and faculty. This
likely would encourage clearer understanding between the faculty and the students and also enable the faculty to better understand their needs. These sessions should focus on areas like academic and cultural sensitivity, as faculty (and staff) need to know how best to interact with these students to obtain the best results. Likewise, there should be activities for international and domestic students to encourage social integration of international students in their new environment. Some examples of such programs can be seen as follows.

At the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), the “Global Siblings” program pairs one international student to a domestic student for the academic year (The Center for Global Education, 2014). Participating domestic students are encouraged to help facilitate their international sibling’s transition and experience at UCLA according to his or her needs. In turn, the domestic sibling gains the benefit of learning about a new culture and different perspectives. Similarly, the Pioneer to Pioneer Partnership Program is a student-led organization in the University of Denver. The program aims to bridge the gap between international and domestic students. The participants are matched in a one-on-one partnership at the start of each quarter and meet throughout, either on their own time or by attending monthly events by the committees. The University of Kansas is not left out, as the “Global Partners” program matches international and domestic students in semester-long groups of four. This program gives students an opportunity to get to know each other’s culture on a personal level. The groups are formed based on members’ interests, academic majors, and languages. Finally, ‘INTERLINK” is a mentoring program by the university of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In this program, A University of Illinois student, faculty, or staff member provides support to an international student in
adjusting to the American culture. Mentors and mentees are expected to have regular contact with each other.

Researcher’s Recommendations on Recruitment

In addition to the recommendations from the participants, research, and the researcher, the study sought ways to encourage recruitment and retention of graduate international students in the US. Ruiz (2014) stated that foreign students are concentrated in U.S. metropolitan areas, and institutions not located in metropolitan areas have a need to go the extra mile to recruit and retain foreign students. These recommendations may be applied to all institutions in the US, with the recorded deteriorating number of foreign students. However, they may just apply to institutions that are not located in the metropolitan cities of the US.

Recruitment Agents

It is highly recommended that recruitment agents are involved in the recruitment of graduate international students into the institution. As earlier mentioned in Chapter I, recruitment agents are stationed in the countries of origin of the students and have the advantage of being more effective at recruiting international students, as they have a stronger grip on the terrain than any foreigner.

Education Fairs

Attending education fairs remains one of the best practices to recruit international students. Education fairs have the advantage of connecting the students and recruiters and helping to establish relationships. I can confidently speak on this because I was recruited through an education fair that was organized by recruitments agents who are third-party agents in Nigeria.
Ozturgurt (2013) supports that at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte (UNC-C), the international student undergraduate numbers increased by 42% between 2005 and 2007, and international graduate students now represent 16% of the institution’s total number of students. The author states that a staff of the international graduate admissions revealed that this success can be attributed to the institution’s clear and strong commitment, as well as establishing mutually beneficial partnerships around the world through academic fairs, agents, and any means possible.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

One thing stands out in the course of this study and this is the fact that in as much as there is a lot of research on the needs of international students, there is not enough research on the needs of graduate international students. In addition, there is not enough understanding of the role of the institution in the success of these graduate students. There is a need for further research to focus on uncovering the needs of graduate international students through their lenses. In addition, the role of the institution in the success of graduate international students should be further researched. Finally, there should be extensive and intense research on the career aspirations of graduate international students in the US and how best they can achieve their American dream.

**Closing Thoughts**

This study revealed the lived realities of graduate international students in a Mid-South university, their pains, their struggles, and the factors that motivate them to stay focused despite the odds they face each day. It also revealed how these expressed needs for appropriate support structures receive attention from their host institution. Tas (2013) supported that resources on most campuses are tailored toward the needs of domestic
students without much consideration for the needs of international students. Since research has supported that international students are economic drivers and multicultural providers (Kwon, 2009; Trice, 2003), there is a need for higher education institutions and administrators to leave no stone unturned in ensuring that the expectations of the students are met and they have a satisfying all-round experience in their host institutions and in the US as a whole. In addition, institutions struggling with the recruitment and retention of international students need to examine what institutions with great populations of this diverse group are doing to recruit and retain international students.

Just as the earlier sections in this chapter reveal how some institutions have increased the sense of belonging for international students, there is a need for the institution under study to come up with strategies for creating an inclusive, connected, and purposeful campus environment that supports the success of international students. In addition, there is a need for the institution to partner with designated private organizations to further the recruitment and retention of international students into the institution. I am referring to organizations such as the Navitas group. Research has supported that the involvement of this group facilitated recruitment, retention, and made for an easier adjustment of these students into the American life. Also, the number of international students started decreasing significantly following the exit of the Navitas group in 2015. This was furthered worsened by the Trump presidency and the actions of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In addition, despite the stringent rules being employed by the USCIS under the Trump administration, the institution must partner with organizations that can employ these students for internship opportunities,
OPT opportunities which may finally lead to permanent employment in the US following graduation.

On the part of the Congress, NAFSA (2018) recommended that Congress set up a national recruitment strategy to proactively attract talented foreign students. In order to make this a reality, they further recommended that Congress should pass a bill that allows international student visa applicants to express interest in staying in the U.S. post-graduation. Most importantly, Congress should support bills that make the United States a more welcoming nation, and make green cards more available for skilled hands that graduate from US universities. This action from Congress will surely guarantee that institutions in the US fulfill an important diversity goal. In addition, international students are full-paying students and contribute significantly to institutions’ revenues. Finally, in an atmosphere of cutbacks in state funding, higher institutions and the U.S. economy as a whole will not lose the significant financial contributions by these foreign students.
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https://wenr.wes.org/2017/11/new-open-doors-bracing-for-changes-to-
international-students-flows


Hi,

I am conducting a research on the needs of graduate international students in [REDACTED]. This study will serve as a phenomenological study of the needs of graduate international students and their perceptions of the services provided to them by their host institution. Hopefully, this will go a long way to help the institution make more informed decisions about improving and expanding services offered to international students. The interviews will be strictly confidential and will be kept anonymous. The interview will be for 45 minutes and will take place at my office at [REDACTED]. Every participant will receive a $25 gift card.

Best regards,

[REDACTED]

Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] - Office

[REDACTED] – Cell
Appendix B

QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. What is your country of citizenship and how did you get recruited into WKU?

2. Looking back at your orientation, how did that prepare you for life as an international student in the US?

3. In what ways would you describe your communications with your professors and peers in class and out of class. How supportive have they been? Discuss ways in which their support will help you have a greater learning experience in the US.

4. In what ways has the International Student Office (ISO) been helpful in supporting your success? What kinds of support have you needed that they might have provided/not provided?

5. In what ways has WKU been helpful in supporting your success? What kinds of support have you needed that they might have provided/not provided?

6. What goals do you have for your studies and in what ways has the university supported your achieving those goals? What kinds of support did you need that you did not receive?

7. Tell me about your career goals. How would you describe your plans after you graduate? In what ways have you been supported in helping you to achieve those goals? Have you received the support you need to achieve these goals, and if not what have you needed?

8. To what extent has the university supported your financial needs as a student? What kinds of support have you needed?
9. What will you say is the singular greatest need you have which when taken care of, you will achieve the reason you came to the US to study and also enable you reach your goals.
APPENDIX C

IRB INFORMED CONSENT FORM
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Meeting the needs of graduate international students in a mid-south university: A descriptive phenomenology study

Investigator: Ifeyinwa Onwelumadu, WKU Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, 270-745-5691

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project: The purpose of this project is to examine the needs of graduate international students at WKU.

2. Explanation of Procedures: Participants wishing to participate will be interviewed face-to-face for approximately 45 minutes. This will be done via audio recording and will be done at my office at Gary Ransdell Hall Room 1021, or at a place convenient for the participant. The interview will be semi-structured in order to allow the researcher adequately explore the feelings and perceptions of the participants.

3. Discomfort and Risks: There is no known discomfort or risk associated with participating in this project.

4. Benefits: This research may allow the University to improve upon its graduate international student recruitment and retention. In addition, other universities and colleges may find this dissertation helpful in determining the needs of their graduate international students and strategically putting up appropriate support structures to meet those needs.

5. Confidentiality: Names and any identifying information will not be shared in any records, publication, or presentations related to this data collection. Your identifiable data will be confidential.
6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

______________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant                  Date

______________________________  ______________________
Witness                  Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the research. *(Initial here)* __________

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129
DATE: September 5, 2018

TO: Ifeyinwa Onwelumadu
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1316018-1] Meeting the needs of graduate international students in a mid-south university: A descriptive phenomenology study
REFERENCE #: IRB 19-047
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 5, 2018
EXPIRATION DATE: August 31, 2019
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of August 31, 2019.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Moorey at (270) 745-2129 or irb@wku.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.
This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB's records.