Social Support Influences in Graduate International Student Engagement

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Social Support Influences in Graduate International Student Engagement  
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Abstract
Changes that graduate international students face in acculturating to U.S. educational environments can often impact the ways they engage on campus, and their subsequent personal and career success. What are the key themes that institutions can build upon to better support and encourage their growth? In conducting a mixed-methods study on graduate international students at the University of Dayton, main findings suggested mentoring relationships, social ties, and factors of perception were crucial in students’ academic and social engagement.

Research Questions
What factors influence graduate international student adjustment?  
How do these factors impact interactions with peers and faculty, participation in campus social & educational initiatives, and sense of belonging?

Relevant Literature
- Academic success, increased persistence, retention rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Schreiner, 2010; Tinto, 1998)
- Engagement coping (Frey & Roysircar, 2006); Acculturative pressures (Rahman & Rollock, 2004)
- Concept of adulthood (Huang, 2012)
- Relationships with advisors (Lechuga, 2011)

Methodology
Research Paradigm  
Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008)

Data Collection  
Semi-structured interviews: 16 graduate students from India  
Purposeful & theoretical sampling  
Quantitative survey: 33 responses

Data Analysis  
Coding: constant comparative analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015; Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003)  
Use of SPSS

Findings
Staff-Student Pairing Program  
Cultural adjustment  
Academic engagement  
Lower social involvement  
Ethnic factors

Faculty-Student  
Work Supervisors  
Parental significance

Mentoring Relationships  
Student Engagement  
Academic success, increased persistence, retention rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Schreiner, 2010; Tinto, 1998)

South Asian Student Adjustment  
Engagement coping (Frey & Roysircar, 2006); Acculturative pressures (Rahman & Rollock, 2004)

Graduate Student Experience  
Concept of adulthood (Huang, 2012)  
Relationships with advisors (Lechuga, 2011)

Factors of Perception
- Self-efficacy  
- Communication barriers

Friendship Networks
- Cultural majority  
- Student organization  
- Frequency of contact  
- Perceived cultural differences  
- Academic influences

Value of Engagement
- U.S. students  
- Academic emphasis  
- Limited ability  
- Dietary restrictions  
- Living off-campus

Implications
Enhance
- Faculty and staff roles as advocates/mentors
- Staff-student pairing programs

Improve
- Current intercultural programming
- Academic peer-mentoring program
- Tutoring/learning resources

Create
- Graduate student orientation
- Supervisor development

Research
- Multi-campus study
- Supporting cultural minorities within international student groups

References

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