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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
- Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008)
- Semi-structured interviews: 16 graduate students from India
- Purposeful & theoretical sampling
- Quantitative survey: 33 responses
- Use of SPSS

Coding: constant comparative analysis (Burks & Mills, 2015; Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003)

Mentoring Relationships
- Staff-Student Pairing Program
- Cultural adjustment
- Academic engagement
- Lower social involvement
- Ethnic factors
- Work Supervisors
- Parental significance

Findings
- Staff-Student Pairing Program
- Cultural adjustment
- Academic engagement
- U.S. students
- Academic influences
- Parental significance

Implications
- Enhance
  - Faculty and staff roles as advocates/mentors
  - Current intercultural programming
  - Academic peer-mentoring program
  - Tutoring/learning resources

- Improve
  - Multi-campus study
  - Academic emphasis
  - Graduate student mentoring relationships: Mentors' perceived
  - Faculty-Student
  - Fear
  - Communication barriers
  - Value of engagement
  - Limited ability
  - Academic emphasis

- Create
  - Supervisor development

- Research
  - Examine ways to improve self-efficacy
  - Supporting cultural minorities within international student groups

References

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