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**INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT'S INVOLVEMENT AND OVERALL  
SATISFACTION WITH THEIR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE**

by

Lauren Pollara

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Higher Education

at

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April 21, 2021

Thesis Chair: Andrew Tinnin, Ed.D.

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Tyrone McCombs, Ph.D.



## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all international students who courageously leave their homes to further their education in an unfamiliar place. I hope this study provides higher education administration insight to your needs and effective supportive services.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to recognize my partner, Timothy D'Ascenzo, who has been supportive, helpful, encouraging, and understanding during the last two years. Thank you for your love, caring, and compassion.

I would also like to thank you my colleagues for their support in my continuing education, as well as the international students from Rowan University for their contributions to this study.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Tinnin, who guided and helped me through each step in this research study.

## **Abstract**

Lauren Pollara

### **INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT'S INVOLVEMENT AND OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THEIR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE**

2020-2021

Drew Tinnin, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Higher Education

The goal of this mix method explanatory study was to examine the involvement patterns and priorities of Rowan University international graduate students and their overall college experience and satisfaction. The study further explored what services are most used from international graduate students at Rowan University. The survey sample included the available population of all international graduate students on an F-1 student visa studying at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey who were registered for classes during the 2020-2021 academic year. Of the 145 students, 33 responded to the survey in its entirety, yielding a 22.8% response rate. The explanatory sample included three international graduate students who had completed the survey portion of this study. One virtual focus group was conducted to gather data about participants' overall reflections about their social and academic integration, services and activities international graduate students are involved with the most on campus, and their level of college satisfaction. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis confirmed findings from previous studies that international graduate students have a higher focus on academic performance and lower involvement in extracurricular activities. Moreover, the data suggested that international graduate students were mostly satisfied with Rowan's college experience and institutional services.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

At U.S. higher education institutions, we are seeing a more diverse student population year after year, and college and universities must ensure they are supporting students from different ages, cultures, and backgrounds. International students offer great advantages to U.S. institutions, including cross cultural interaction and integration between domestic and international students; however, this does not mean they will automatically interact with each other. International students face a number of challenges integrating into a new culture that can affect their overall college experience. While they may feel supported during orientation, this feeling lessens as time goes on. There are few studies on international graduate students' experiences. Researching this population is crucial in order to help higher education administrators accurately recognize these students' needs and in turn effectively offer supportive campus services.

### **Statement of the Problem**

American higher education has continued to become increasingly diverse and the number of foreign students, who come to the U.S. voluntarily for a specific period in order to continue their education and achieve their career goals, continues to increase from year to year. In 2018-19, the total number of international students in the United States increased by 0.05% to 1,095,299 students, according to the 2019 *Open Doors Report*. At Rowan University, the total number of international students increased from 164 in 2018 to 219 in 2019, an increase of 33.53%. Today, the total number of international students at Rowan University is up by 50% since 2018 with a total of 246 international students.

As the international student population increases, two issues emerge. First, international students find it more challenging to succeed without social and academic support. In fact, many students perceive their college to be less, not more, supportive. Moreover, students feel that it is the institutions' responsibility to help with integration and alleviate feelings of isolation (Girmay et al., 2019). Research shows that factors such as unfamiliarity with classroom dynamics (e.g., keeping silent, shy, and passive in classroom or struggling to meet high expectation) and unfamiliarity with the nature of relationships between faculty and students contribute to feelings of isolation during international graduate students' first semester (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013). Second, colleges and universities may unsuccessfully serve the needs of foreign students (Zhao, et al., 2005; Parikh, 2008). Today's higher institutions have many pressures to compete for faculty, resources, and enrollment in addition to being expected to provide excellent service to all student groups (Parikh, 2008).

Relatively little is known about the extent to which international graduate students are satisfied with their experience, interact with peers and faculty members, and participate in a variety of other educational activities, services, and resources (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013). Literature lacks information on the extent to which international graduate students participate in other effective education practices that show evidence of increased levels of learning and development (Zhao, et al., 2005). Institutions need more information about international graduate students' priorities in college in order to know whether and where to intervene to improve their experience and, in the process, enhance the quality of education and their overall satisfaction with the institution.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the involvement patterns of international students and their overall satisfaction with Rowan University using an explanatory design. This research examines the priorities of international graduate students with the goal of providing recommendations on how to serve them more effectively.

## **Significance of the Study**

International students often face a variety of challenges above and beyond those encountered by their domestic peers, such as loneliness and isolation, mental health, professor and student dynamics, financial stability, and overall university support (Girmay et al., 2019). Rodriguez et al. (2019) also found that the majority of international students face difficulties with language barriers, academic differences, and finding resources. Research shows that most campus programs and services do not appropriately serve international students, as they primarily serve the benefit of domestic students (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). There is little-to-no research on international graduate students' priorities and involvement on campus (Zhao, et al., 2005). Increasing international student enrollment requires more multi-cultural programming and resources that serve all students in order to ensure that all students' needs are met. As the international graduate student population continues to grow at Rowan University, it is the goal of this study to provide recommendations to better serve Rowan's international students so that the students are satisfied with their overall experience.

## **Research Questions**

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What experiences do international graduate students have with social, academic, and cultural integration and involvement at Rowan University?
2. What are the international graduate students' social and academic priorities when studying in the United States, and more specifically at Rowan University?
3. What do international graduate students report about their general satisfaction with Rowan University?

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

The scope of this study was limited to international graduate students studying on an F-1 student visa at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey, which make up a small population of 145 students. International students who were studying at Rowan University on other visa classifications that allow legal study incidental to status, such as H-4 or L-2, were not included since Rowan University's International Center does not track these students. The sample size was therefore limited.

The study also relies on student perspectives provided through a focus group setting in respect to their social and academic integrations at Rowan University during the 2020-2021 academic year. The researcher also assumed that the subjects completed the survey by answering accurately and truthfully.

Another limitation is potential researcher bias. I am a graduate student and a full-time employee of Rowan University who works with international students on a daily basis, this may impact my view and possibly hinder participants' willingness to answer honestly.

## **Operational Definitions**

1. International Students: A student enrolled in a U.S. higher education institution, who arrive in America from another country. The student must not be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, and must be a holder of an F-1 student visa. In this study, I focused on international graduate students attending Rowan University during 2020-2021 academic year.
2. Student Satisfaction: Satisfaction of the international students with the overall college environment and it is also related to institutional social engagement efforts and academic support.
3. Acculturation: The cultural socialization that an international student goes through when adapting to a new environment. In this study, I focused on social and academic integrations of international graduate students.
4. Involvement: The term involvement is defined in this study, as participation by international graduate students in Rowan University's campus activities and resources, such as participation in clubs, attending events, on-campus job, graduate assistantship, interactions with faculty, library and writing center resources, technology usage, and other involvement with the campus.
5. Collectivism: A society that emphasizes the needs and goals of the group as a whole over the needs and desires of each individual.
6. Individualism: A society that stresses individual goals and the rights of the individual person over the entire group.

## **Overview of the Study**

Chapter II presents an overview of the scholarly literature related to this study. This chapter explores topics impacting international graduate students, including international student mobility to America, acculturation difficulties, common international student programming, and international graduate students' satisfaction.

Chapter III covers the methodology that was used to complete this study. The context of the study, selection process for the population sample, data collection methods, and data analysis are also discussed.

Chapter IV presents the study's findings using both statistics and narrative descriptions.

Chapter V provides a summary and further discussion of the findings outlined in Chapter IV and additionally offers conclusions and recommendations for further research and best practice going forward.



## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

While many higher education institutions are focused on increasing their international student enrollment, colleges and universities need to remain mindful of the importance of having a well-structured support system for when these students reach their campuses. It is important for institutions to recognize that student success and retention directly relates to students' experiences and overall satisfaction. It is also critical for multiple stakeholders to be involved in efforts that support the acculturation of international students (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017).

This literature review provides a discussion of topics affecting international graduate students. The major purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive analysis of four major themes related to international graduate students: international student mobility, acculturation, international student services, and international student satisfaction. This literature review also examines the needs of international graduate students, internal and external variables, and provides recommendations on how to serve them more effectively in the future.

#### **International Student Mobility**

There has been tremendous growth in the international student population over the last 70 years in higher education. The Institute of International Education (IIE) gather statistical data about international student mobility among countries. Today, international students make up 5.5% of all students in U.S. colleges and universities, according to the 2019 *Open Doors Report*. In 2018/19, the total number of international students in the United States increased by 0.05% to 1,095,299 students, and 34.5% are studying at the

graduate level. At the same time, new enrollment is down by 0.9% and overall enrollment is down by 1.6% (Open Doors, 2019). Still, it is projected that the global demand for international students in higher education will grow from 2.173 million in 2005 to 3.720 million in 2025 (Furukawa et. al., 2013). Additionally, there will be an increased need for talented graduate students who contribute scholarly research in the field as scientists and engineers to address regional, national, and global concerns.

A 2013 study by Furukawa et al. used the push-pull model to describe the flow of international students among countries. The study suggested that the major pull factor for research institutions is their rankings and position in the world, especially for those within the top 200. International graduate students are more likely to attend a university with high rankings over those without. In the 2019 *Open Doors Report*, IIE identified additional factors that are driving increased enrollment, including growing reputation and visibility of the institution; improved support services; increased support staff; and engagement with current international students or alumni.

Additionally, Furukawa et al. (2013) suggested that the employment opportunities within the host country after degree completion is an additional pull factor for international graduate students, especially for scientists and engineers. According to the 2019 *Open Doors Report*, 52% of international students tend to study in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) areas of study. As it pertains to higher education administration and policymaking, nurturing international graduate students and producing highly skilled workers to the labor market, especially essential contributors in research that solve real-world problems, are key issues (Furukawa et. al., 2013). The growth trend of foreign students in higher education is indicative of what the future looks

like, and the experiences of international graduate students is crucial to higher education institutions in their efforts to meet, if not exceed, their expectations.

### **Acculturation**

It is important for an institution to understand the challenges international graduate students face, and work to help ensure they acculturate into their new setting and continue to feel supported throughout their studies. Girmay et al. (2019) explained the acculturation process as the cultural socialization that a foreign student goes through when adapting to a new environment. The study found six main themes regarding international graduate students' experiences at their host universities and surrounding communities: loneliness and isolation, social media, mental health, professor and student dynamics, financial stability, and overall university support (Girmay et al., 2019).

### ***Social Integration***

When it comes to isolation and loneliness, Girmay et al. (2019) found that students mostly expressed feelings of social isolation, interpersonal isolation, new environment loneliness, and cultural loneliness. An example a student gave in Girmay et al. was that, much like many international students, they "migrated from societies that were more collectivist in nature and were forced to quickly adjust to American societal practices," (p. 14). In other words, many Americans may seem to appear friendly, but may not be interested. Whereas American culture promotes independence, many other cultures around the world are the opposite.

Zhou et al. (2011) suggested that besides student-faculty relationships, students also benefit from peer relationships, specifically collaboration in class and interactions outside of class. Similarly, their study found that participants from collectivistic countries

felt that American peers were not approachable. While participants from individualistic countries described having American friends outside of class (Zhou et al., 2011).

### ***Academic Integration***

There are many challenges international students face when adapting to the American education structure. Rodriguez et al. (2019) found that the majority of students face difficulties with language barriers, academic differences, and finding resources. The most prevalent theme regarding international student academic integration are the pedagogical differences in American classrooms (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Many international students come with expectations of a pedagogy, where information is transferred from professor to student. Participants noted not being use to classroom participation grades. Many international students struggle to speak up in class, especially with English as their second language (Rodriguez et al., 2019).

Click (2018) discussed the difficulties international graduate students face when conducting academic research. Specifically, the study described how graduate students complete research assignments and use library resources in the process. Most students described research difficulties, such as coming up with a research topic. Students who are given the freedom to select any area to research are often overwhelmed, while other students struggle with more specific skills like analyzing data. Only half of the participants had received some sort of library instruction or guidance. (Click, 2018).

Girmay et al. (2019) suggested that the university is primarily responsible for helping with acculturation and adaptation to alleviate feelings of isolation for international graduate students. While they may feel support during orientation, this

feeling lessens as time goes on. It is important that institutions begin to examine the ways in which they can bridge the gap and aid in acculturation.

### **International Student Programming**

International students and scholars offer great opportunities for cross-cultural learning and engagement, bringing different perspectives that enrich the education of all students, both in and out-of-the classroom. Research suggests that most campus programs and services primarily serve domestic students and do not appropriately serve international students (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). Increasing international student enrollment requires more consideration for providing multi-cultural programming and services open to all students.

While many colleges and universities have centralized offices that assist international students, not all offer dedicated services and programs that help with acculturation and social and academic integrations (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017). Briggs and Ammigan (2017) proposed four pillars of service to support international students: programs to support international student success; programs to understand government regulations; programs to promote international understanding; programs to connect with the local community. Structuring an international student support office, as well as support services and programs, through a collaborative model among various units and departments on campus is key to providing international students with a positive and successful U.S. college experience (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017).

The International Center is the department that closely works with all international students at most institutions. These offices typically assist international students with immigration laws, such as maintaining status in the United States,

employment options for international students, travel rules and regulations, and tax compliance (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017). In addition, these centers create opportunities for international students to increase their awareness and understanding of diverse cultures, values, beliefs, religions, and customs. The International Center can help to provide opportunities for international students to engage with domestic students to promote multi-cultural understanding (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017). Furthermore, the International Center can play a role in connecting international students to the wider community by sponsoring a variety of activities. These activities may include cultural and educational field trips, networking with community groups, community partnership events, events and reception, and organizing coffee hours and other social events within the community (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012).

Ren and Hagedorn (2012) noted that the International Center does not hold the entire responsibility of supporting international graduate students. The academic departments in which international students are enrolled are best suited to assist these students with their academic adjustments. For example, academic departments should consistently provide handouts or copies of lecture presentations, as well as avoid using slang or complex language in class. Faculty can also help international students become part of study groups with their classmates and provide opportunities for peer interaction outside of class (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012).

In addition, Ren and Hagedorn (2012) suggested that departments consider including master's level students in support programs such as library instruction, tutoring, and career services. In most cases, support services are only offered to the undergraduate

population. It would be beneficial to international graduate students to extend these services to master's and doctorate level students.

Most importantly, it is vital that all departments work together to support international graduate students, as well as maintain patience and an understanding for these students trying to adapt to a new environment (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). Despite the growing numbers, most colleges and universities have very-few policies, services and programs to meet the unique needs of international graduate students and to serve their academic, social and cultural needs.

### **International Graduate Student Satisfaction**

The number of international graduate students studying at U.S. colleges and universities continues to grow. Of the 2014-15 graduate students enrolled in higher education, 37.2% were international students (Hyun, 2019). While most studies focus on the challenges foreign students face with acculturation, a study by Hyun (2019) examined the involvement of international graduate students in relation to their satisfaction with their host institutions. The findings showed that the students focused on academic-centered relationships and interaction with their peers and faculty members to overcome their academic difficulties. Students find intellectual conversations regarding their research interests and academic experiences beneficial in expanding their knowledge and academic skills about the U.S. education system and context (Hyun, 2019). International graduate students often use their academic network to overcome their challenges adapting to U.S. academics.

The academic-centered solution, however, does not address all challenges. International graduate students also face non-academic challenges simultaneously such as

time management, mental stress, and loneliness. Hyun (2019) found that students struggled managing a non-academic life, and most of them spent their time focused on their academic success. While there are services and events offered for international students on campus, international graduate students are often too busy for school activities and do not have much time for a social life. It is important that international students have supporters who understand their circumstances and difficulties as international students (Hyun, 2019).

Arambewela et al. (2013) argued that the external environment, such as the social and physical dimensions of student experiences outside of the classroom, has a strong influence on their satisfaction with their overall educational experience. The study emphasized the importance of host community relationships, how students can enhance their international student experiences through interactions and engagement with the university community (Arambewela et al., 2013). Additionally, Arambewela et al. (2013) argued that internal environment factors also play a role in international graduate students' satisfaction. Internal factors, such as use of technology in teaching methods and university recognition, influence students' perceptions of the academic standards of an institution. Furthermore, the study suggests that personal values have an influence on international students' satisfaction, such as self-efficacy and hedonism. For example,

If international students have too much fun and enjoyment in community life, their academic achievements are likely to be less satisfactory, which defeats the primary goal of being an international student (i.e., to study and to achieve good results). This leads to a decrease in overall satisfaction with their academic experience. (Arambewela et al., 2013, p. 982)



Based on the growth of the international student population, this research suggests that universities are under pressure to provide a more satisfying learning experience. International student satisfaction with U.S. colleges and universities is a key measure of student engagement and student experience with the overall learning environment (Arambewela et al., 2013). This research explained that international students' satisfaction is based not only on their educational experience, but also on their relationships and community engagement. Institutions need to develop strategies that enhance greater student interactions and relationships with the community.

### **Summary**

This literature review discussed various important topics including international student mobility, acculturation, social and academic integration, international student services, and international student satisfaction, as it relates to international graduate students. Based on the research discussed, it seems safe to conclude that student involvement plays a key role in academic performance and satisfaction with international graduate students' college experience. International student satisfaction is an important topic in higher education institutions today because of the growth of international student enrollment and the increasing demand for international graduate students. To increase satisfaction among international students, higher education institutions have to improve their support services to assist with international graduate student needs. This research provides recommendations on how to serve international graduate students more effectively as well as provides greater knowledge of the external and internal factors affecting student success and satisfaction.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the involvement of Rowan University international graduate students and their overall satisfaction with the institution. A mixed method explanatory sequential approach was used to (a) explore international graduate students' social and academic involvement; (b) identify Rowan University's international graduate students' social and academic priorities; and (c) understand international graduate students' experiences with social, academic, and cultural integration. The research population of this study was international graduate students enrolled during the 2020-2021 academic year from Rowan University at Glassboro, New Jersey.

#### **Research Questions**

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What experiences do international graduate students have with social, academic, and cultural integration and involvement at Rowan University?
2. What are the international graduate students' social and academic priorities when studying in the United States, and more specifically at Rowan University?
3. What do international graduate students report about their general satisfaction with Rowan University?

#### **Context of the Study**

The study was conducted at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey. Rowan University is a nationally ranked, public research institution. Rowan

University also has two additional satellite campuses in Camden, New Jersey and Stratford, New Jersey, which house the institution's medical schools. Rowan University's colleges and schools include Business, Communication & Creative Arts, Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities & Social Sciences, Performing Arts, Science & Mathematics, Graduate and Continuing Education, Graduate School of Biomedical Science, School of Biomedical Sciences, Cooper Medical School of Rowan University, and School of Osteopathic Medicine. The university offers 85 bachelor's and 46 master's degree programs, six doctoral programs and two professional programs (Rowan University, 2020). The average class size is 20 students and the student to faculty ratio is 17 to 1 (Rowan University, 2020).

### **Research Design**

By definition, mixed methods is an approach for collecting, analyzing, and "mixing" or integrating both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Stick 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003; Creswell 2005). Most studies use either exclusively quantitative or qualitative methods. The rationale for mixing both kinds of data within one study is grounded in the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient by themselves. When used together, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for a more robust analysis (Creswell & Stick, 2006).

Ivankova, et al. (2006) list four different types of mixed method research designs: Triangulation, Explanatory, Exploratory, and Embedded. Additionally, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) provide a mixed methods research design framework of four groups: Concurrent, Sequential, Conversion, and Fully Integrated. In this study, a mixed-methods

sequential explanatory approach was used. This approach requires collecting and analyzing first quantitative and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within one study (Ivankova, et al. 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003).

## **Population and Sampling**

### ***Sampling for Quantitative Component***

There are approximately 19,600 students enrolled at Rowan University. During the 2020-2021 academic year, Rowan enrolled 245 international students. Approximately 96% of Rowan's international student population held an F-1 student visa and was not on an immigrant visa. Of these students, 167 were graduates and 79 were undergraduates. Indian students constitute 33% of the international student population on an F-1 student visa; 9% are Chinese; and 8% are Saudi Arabian.

The target population for this study was 145 international graduate students on an F-1 student visa studying at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey. Given the small size of this demographic, the survey was administered to the total population and no sampling method was used. As an International Center staff member, I had access to this information through the International Center's "master list," an Excel spreadsheet that contains the names and contact information of every F-1 international student. See Appendix A for approved recruitment material.

### ***Sampling for Qualitative Component***

This study utilized the sequential mixed methods sampling in which the results obtained from the survey informed the focus group sample. Additionally, a quota sampling strategy was used for identifying the focus group participants. Quota sampling is a non-random sampling technique in which participants are selected based on

predetermined characteristics so that the total sample will have the same distribution of characteristics as the wider population (Taherdoost, 2016; Davis 2005). Students were first divided into two groups in terms of individualism and collectivism cultures. The largest sub-group on campus, India, was the largest population in participant recruitment. Also, the collectivism group had the largest portion, because there were more international graduate students from collectivistic cultures than from individualistic cultures on campus. Many other factors were considered as well, including academic major, gender, age, type of graduate assistantship, length of stay in the U.S., and marital status. See Appendix D for approved recruitment material.

### **Data Collection**

This study was based on a sequential approach using a survey and focus group to examine the priorities and general satisfaction of international graduate students. To boost the response rate and to encourage students to participate in the online survey, I provided a monetary incentive, where each student who participates in the online survey will be entered into a raffle to receive a \$50 visa gift cards. There will be no monetary incentive to participate in the focus group. While there may not be any direct benefit, student's participation will help us understand the variables that impact social, academic, and cultural integration of international students, leading to improve student success and satisfaction.

### ***Quantitative Instrument***

The quantitative data were collected through a web-based cross-sectional survey, consisting of three sections (see Appendix C for full instrument). The first section, Personal and Educational Demographics, collected information on international graduate

students' characteristics such as culture, gender, age, academic major, level of education, age, working/non-working, living on campus/off campus, type of graduate assistantship, length of stay in the U.S., and marital status. The second section was based student involvement information. Students were asked to rank how much time do they spend per week doing specific curricular and extracurricular activities. The third section on a Likert's Scale, where participants read a statement and indicate their agreement or disagreement selecting from a gradient of responses, as it related to their satisfaction with Rowan University, such as "very satisfactory," "somewhat satisfactory," "neutral," "somewhat unsatisfactory," and "very unsatisfactory".

Before engaging in data collection procedures, I completed the electronic Institutional Review Board process. See Appendix B for consent form(s). Upon approval, I distributed the survey to the total population. The survey was sent via email and remained open for two weeks. Two follow-up emails were sent to the students to remind them of the survey opportunity. The first follow-up email was sent one week after the survey was initially distributed. The second follow-up email was sent two days before the end of the survey.

Three students from the International Club at the university were asked to pre-test the online survey and provide their feedback. The pre-test ensured that the survey items were clear and concise to avoid any bias or misinterpretations. Changes were subsequently made based on feedback before data collection (Ivankova et al., 2006).

### ***Qualitative Instrument***

The focus group script was adapted from various literature sources, as well as from the quantitative results in the first phase of data collection, to specifically target the

research questions for this study; Rowan University's international graduate students' social and academic priorities; international graduate students' social and academic involvement; and international graduate students' social, academic, and cultural integrations. See Appendix E for the focus group script. In addition, one of the advantages of the focus group method was that it allowed me to observe the interaction among participants from different cultures regarding their perceptions within a short period of time (Ivankova et al., 2006).

To recruit participants, students who completed the online survey were divided into two sub-groups: individualistic and collectivistic. Then students with different academic majors and from different countries from each subgroup were emailed to solicit their participation in the focus groups (see Appendix D for recruitment material).

Throughout the research process, I ensured participants' confidentiality and privacy by conducting the focus groups using a password-protected virtual meeting platform that provided a private and confidential environment. The questions and responses during the focus group were recorded and transcribed verbatim after completing each focus group discussion. Each of the two focus groups lasted for about 60 minutes. A semi-structured, open-ended protocol was used. Participants were open to share their thoughts and experiences with social and academic integration with the researcher.

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Data Analysis for Quantitative Component***

The survey items were summarized using descriptive statistics. Personal and educational demographic characteristics were also collected and summarized for the purpose of describing the participants and dividing them into comparison subgroups. I

analyzed subgroups to investigate the differences in perceptions. I used frequency tables and descriptive statistics during the data analysis.

### ***Data Analysis for Qualitative Component***

Three validation strategies were used during data analysis in this study, including member checking, peer debriefing, and the primary researcher's reflexivity. The themes as well as a brief description of the findings were sent to participants in this study for them to confirm their accuracy. Two third-party peers reviewed the focus group transcripts. Finally, the primary researcher of this study had a strong understanding of participants' experiences because of their professional experiences in working with international students.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

#### **Profile of the Survey Sample**

The participants in this study were international graduate students on an F-1 student visa studying at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey who were registered for classes during the 2020-2021 academic year. The survey was distributed via Qualtrics to 145 international graduate students, representing the total population. Of the 145 students, 33 responded to the survey in its entirety, yielding a response rate of 22.8%. There were 18 partial responses recorded; these responses were incomplete as the respondents either did not adequately complete the consent process, which took them to the end of the survey, or they did not respond to all of the interview questions.

As illustrated in Table 1, the students' ages varied from 21 to 49, and 29% were between 25 or 26 years old. There was close to equal representation between male and female students. The majority of students surveyed were single. Of the students surveyed, 51% of subjects self-identified as Asian, with 33.3% of subjects being from India. Finally, 54.9% of subjects reported living in a residence within walking distance to campus, and 41.2% reported living within driving distance. Only two subjects (3.9%) reported living on campus.

**Table 1***Demographics of Sample (N=51)*

<i>Variable</i>		<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Student Type			
	International Graduate Student	51	100
Age			
	21	2	3.9
	23	1	2.0
	24	5	9.8
	25	8	15.7
	26	7	13.7
	27	4	7.8
	28	3	5.9
	29	4	7.8
	30	5	9.8
	31	4	7.8
	33	3	5.9
	36	1	2.0
	39	2	3.9
	40	1	2.0
	49	1	2.0
Gender			
	Male	25	49.0
	Female	26	51.0
Marital Status			
	Single	34	66.7
	Married	15	29.4
	Divorced	1	2.0
	Other	1	2.0
Ethnic Background			
	White/Caucasian	9	17.7
	Pacific Islander	0	0.0
	Other	6	11.8
	Native American/Alaskan	0	0.0
	Middle Eastern	5	9.8
	Hispanic/Latino	0	0.0
	Asian	26	51.0
	African American/Black	5	9.8

<i>Variable</i>		<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Country of Citizenship	Bangladesh	3	5.9
	Estonia	1	2.0
	Ghana	1	2.0
	India	17	33.3
	Iran	3	5.9
	Ireland	1	2.0
	Jamaica	1	2.0
	Jordan	4	7.8
	Kazakhstan	1	2.0
	Kenya	1	2.0
	Malaysia	1	2.0
	Morocco	2	3.9
	Nepal	2	3.9
	Nigeria	4	7.8
	Pakistan	1	2.0
	Philippines	2	3.9
	Saudi Arabia	2	3.9
	Tunisia	2	3.9
	Turkey	2	3.9
Ethnic Background (Other)	South East Asian	1	2.0
	North African	2	4.0
	Black	1	2.0
	Arabian	1	2.0
	African	1	2.0
Where International Students Reside	Dormitory or other campus housing	2	3.9
	Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within walking distance	28	54.9
	Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within driving distance	21	41.2

Illustrated in Table 2, 34 (66.7%) of respondents were master's students and 17 (33.3%) were doctoral students. Of the international students surveyed, 17 (33.3%) subjects had attended Rowan University for four semesters, while eight (15.7%) subjects responded as having only attended one semester at the time. Ninety percent of subjects reported that their overall GPA's were above 3.4. As for the majors reported, 17.6% of the subjects studied Civil and Environmental Engineering, 13.7% studied Computer Science, and 11.8% studied Mechanical Engineering. Twenty (60.6%) of the subjects reported being financially supported by a graduate assistantship or research fellowship.

**Table 2**

*Academic Background (N=51)*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Level of Study		
Master's (M.S. or M.A.)	34	66.7
Doctoral (Ph.D.)	17	33.3
Number of Semesters Completed		
1	8	15.7
2	5	9.8
3	10	19.6
4	17	33.3
5	1	2.0
6	3	5.9
7	3	5.9
8	4	7.8

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Overall		
College GPA		
4.0 to 3.7	33	64.7
3.6 to 3.4	13	25.5
3.3 to 3.0	5	9.8
2.9 to 2.7	0	0.0
2.6 to 2.4	0	0.0
2.3 to 2.0	0	0.0
1.9 to 1.7	0	0.0
1.6 to 1.4	0	0.0
1.3 & Below	0	0.0
Academic Major		
Biomedical Engineering	2	3.9
Business	5	9.8
Chemical Engineering	5	9.8
Civil and Environmental Engineering	9	17.6
Computer Science	7	13.7
Counseling	1	2.0
Data Analytics	1	2.0
Education	5	9.8
Electrical & Computer engineering	2	3.9
Engineering	2	3.9
Finance	1	2.0
Mechanical Engineering	6	11.8
Pharmaceutical Science	4	7.8
Strategic Communication	1	2.0
Are you financially supported by a graduate assistantship or research fellowship?		
Yes	20	60.6
No	13	39.4

## Analysis of Quantitative Data

RQ1: What experiences do international graduate students have with social, academic, and cultural integration and involvement at Rowan University?

Table 4.3 contains information describing how many hours per week international graduate students spent doing certain curricular and extracurricular activities. An overall look at the responses indicates that the majority of the international graduate students are mostly involved with curricular activities rather than extracurricular activities. Thirteen (39.4%) subjects reported spending 30 or more hours per week studying and working on assignments for classes. Additionally, 25 (75.8%) subjects reported not working an on-campus job, while six (18.2%) subjects reported working 12 to 30 hours per week.

International graduate students' involvement with extracurricular activities was low. The majority of subjects reported not participating in campus activities or events and were not members of a college club or organization.

**Table 3**

*Hours Spent Each Week on Curricular and Extracurricular Activities (N=33)*

Statement	0-4 Hours		5-10 Hours		12-30 Hours		30+ Hours	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Studying and/or working on assignments for classes	4	12.1	8	24.3	8	24.2	13	39.4
Member of a society fraternity or sorority	29	87.8	1	3.0	2	6.0	1	3.0
Member of a college club or organization	30	90.9	3	9.10	0	0.0	0	0.0

Statement	0-4 Hours		5-10 Hours		12-30 Hours		30+ Hours	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Member of a sport team or sport club	31	96.9	0	0.0	1	3.1	0	0.0
Student government	33	99.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
University publication	32	96.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	3.0
College productions or performances	32	97.0	1	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Professional or departmental clubs	32	97.0	1	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Social clubs	31	93.9	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Residential hall activities	33	99.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Religious organizations, religious or spiritual activities	28	84.8	5	15.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Volunteer service	28	87.5	2	6.3	2	6.3	0	0.0
Leadership programs	32	96.9	1	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Off-Campus part time job	30	93.7	0	0.0	2	6.2	0	0.0
On-Campus part time job	25	75.8	1	3.0	6	18.2	1	3.0
Internship	32	97.0	0	0.0	1	3.0	0	0.0
Field experience	32	96.9	1	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Participated in independent study	30	90.8	1	3.0	0	0.0	2	6.0
Participated in campus activities/events	30	90.9	1	3.0	2	6.0	0	0.0
Interaction with faculty outside of class	29	87.9	2	6.0	2	6.1	0	0.0

Table 4 contains information describing how often per month Rowan international students participated in other campus activities, such as worked with classmates outside of class, tutored other students, worked with faculty members, and interacted with American students, etc. Subjects reported spending an average of 8.6 hours per month working with classmates outside of class. Twenty-one (63.6%) subjects reported working with classmates outside of class less than five hours per month. While six (18.2%) subjects reported spending 5 to 10 hours working with classmates outside of class per month, and six (18.2%) subjects reported spending more than 10 hours. In regards to tutored or taught other students, 25 (75.8%) subjects reported being involved in tutoring or assisting other students less than five hours per month.

Seventy percent of international graduate students surveyed spent less than five hours establishing relationships with peers and staff. Additionally, 24 (72.7%) subjects reported spending less than five hours discussing grades, assignments, and communicating with their instructor. Moreover, four (12.1%) subjects reported spending 12 to 30 hours discussing ideas with faculty members, and nine (27.3%) subjects reported spending the same amount of time communicating with a faculty member via e-mail.

When it came to interactions with other students, only two (6.1%) subjects reported spending 12 to 30 hours going out with friends. Twenty-five (75.8%) students reported spending less than five hours going out with friends, and 31 (93.9%) students reported never attending a college party. International graduate students also reported interacting with international and American students. Nine (27.3%) subjects reported interacting with other international students 12 to 30 hours per month and 20 (60.6%) subjects reported interacting with other international students less than five hours per



month. Nineteen (57.6%) subjects reported interacting with American students less than five hours per month and eight (24.2%) subjects reported interacting with American students 12 to 30 hours per month.

Finally, 93.9% of international students surveyed very limited hours spent visiting the International Center.

**Table 4**

*Student Involvement per Month in Other Activities (N=33)*

Statement	0-4 Hours		5-10 Hours		12-30 Hours		30+ Hours	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Working with classmates outside of class	21	63.6	6	18.2	5	15.2	1	3.0
Tutoring or assisting other students	25	75.8	4	12.1	3	9.1	1	100.0
Attending an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance	30	90.9	2	6.1	1	3.0	0	0.0
Exercising or participating in physical activities	18	54.5	7	21.2	8	24.2	0	0.0
Establishing personal relationships with peers/staff at Rowan	23	69.7	6	18.2	4	12.1	0	0.0
Discussing grades or assignments with an instructor	24	72.7	6	18.2	3	9.1	0	0.0
Discussing ideas with faculty members	21	63.6	7	21.2	4	12.1	1	3.0
Communicating with a faculty member via e-mail	18	54.5	6	18.2	9	27.3	0	0.0

Statement	0-4 Hours		5-10 Hours		12-30 Hours		30+ Hours	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Attending cultural events on campus	31	96.9	1	3.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Going out with friends to bars/restaurants	25	75.8	6	18.2	2	6.1	0	0.0
Attending college parties	31	93.9	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Going out with friends shopping	25	75.8	8	24.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Interacted with International students	20	60.6	4	12.1	9	27.3	0	0.0
Interacting with American students	19	57.6	6	18.2	8	24.2	0	0.0
Interacting with People of Different Races	20	60.6	6	18.2	6	18.2	1	3.0
Using the library	25	75.8	7	21.2	1	3.0	0	0.0
Visiting the International Center	31	93.9	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0

RQ2: What are the international graduate students' social and academic priorities when studying in the United States, and more specifically at Rowan University?

Table 5 contains information describing international graduate students' social involvement priorities. A majority of the international graduate students found relationships with peers and faculty very important. In regards to establishing personal relationships with peers, 12 (63.6%) subjects rated this as very important to them. Establishing relationships with faculty was just as important, with 22 (66.7%) subjects rating this as very important. Additionally, international graduate students rated having a

job while enrolled as a priority to them, as 20 (60.6%) subjects rated this as very important.

Fewer students rated that it is important to get involved with student organizations (33.3%), campus activities (24.2%) and cultural events (24.2%).

**Table 5**

*Social Involvement Rank of Importance (N=33)*

*(Very Important=1, Somewhat Important=2, Neutral=3, Somewhat Not Important=4, Not At All Important=5)*

Statement	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Neutral		Somewhat Not Important		Not Important At All	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Establishing Personal Relationships w/ Peers at Rowan	21	63.6	6	18.2	4	12.1	1	3.0	1	3.0
Having Close Friends at Rowan	17	51.5	7	21.2	7	21.2	2	6.0	0	0.0
Establishing Relationships w/ Faculty at Rowan	22	66.7	5	15.2	4	12.1	1	3.0	1	3.0
Getting Involved in Student Organizations	11	33.3	8	24.2	8	24.2	2	6.1	4	12.1
Getting Involved in Campus Activities	8	24.2	9	27.3	11	33.3	4	12.1	1	3.0
Attending Cultural Events on Campus	8	24.2	10	30.3	8	24.2	4	12.1	3	9.1
Interacting with Other International Students	13	39.4	9	27.3	9	27.3	2	6.1	0	0.0
Interacting with American Students	13	39.4	10	30.3	9	27.3	1	3.0	0	0.0

(Very Important=1, Somewhat Important=2, Neutral=3, Somewhat Not Important=4, Not At All Important=5)

Statement	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Neutral		Somewhat Not Important		Not Important At All	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Getting Involved in Religious Activities	10	30.3	4	12.1	9	27.3	4	12.1	6	18.2
Having a Job while Enrolled	20	60.6	5	15.2	6	18.2	1	3.0	1	3.0

Table 6 contains information describing international graduate students' academic involvement priorities. According to the results, 26 (78.8%) subjects surveyed rated that academic advising as very important. Additionally, subjects rated faculty availability outside of class (54.6%) and social contacts with faculty (30.3%) as very important.

**Table 6**

*Academic Involvement Rank of Importance (N=33)*

(Very Important=1, Somewhat Important=2, Neutral=3, Somewhat Not Important=4, Not At All Important=5)

Statement	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Neutral		Somewhat Not Important		Not Important At All	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Faculty Availability Outside Class	18	54.6	9	27.3	3	9.1	1	3.0	2	6.1
Social Contacts with Faculty	10	30.3	16	48.5	2	6.1	3	9.1	2	6.1
Academic Advising	26	78.8	3	9.1	4	12.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
International Student Advising	25	75.8	4	12.1	4	12.1	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 7 contains information describing international graduate students' interactions with career services during their studies. In this section, the results varied. Twelve (36.4%) students reported not having consulted with their career advisor or participating in any career related programs. Meanwhile, seven (21.2%) students reported being involved with their career advisor or career program more than 10 times.

**Table 7**

*Student Involvement with Career Services (N=33)*

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Talked with a Career Advisor or Attended a Career Program	33	100
0	12	36.4
1	4	12.1
2	3	9.1
3	3	9.1
4	2	6.1
5	2	6.1
10	3	9.1
15	1	3.0
30	1	3.0
100	2	6.1

Table 8 contains information describing international graduate students' priorities as it pertains to the campus atmosphere. Overall, subjects reported that it is very important to have adequate security on campus (84.9%), an adequate physical campus environment (69.7%), an adequate social atmosphere (57.6%), and an adequate academic

and intellectual atmosphere. Subjects also reported that it was very important to feel like you fit in on campus (60.6%).

**Table 8**

*Campus Atmosphere Rank of Importance (N=33)*

*(Very Important=1, Somewhat Important=2, Neutral=3, Somewhat Not Important=4, Not At All Important=5)*

Statement	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Neutral		Somewhat Not Important		Not Important At All	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Adequate Personal Security	28	84.9	3	9.1	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adequate Physical Environment on Campus	23	69.7	6	18.2	4	12.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adequate Social Atmosphere	19	57.6	10	30.3	4	12.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adequate Academic/Intellectual Atmosphere	22	66.8	8	24.2	3	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Fitting into the Campus Community	20	60.6	11	33.3	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 9 contains information describing international graduate students' priorities towards personal goals. Of the international graduate students surveyed, 30 (90.9%) subjects rated that it is very important to make progress towards personal goals, and 31 (93.9%) rated that it is very important to progress toward academic and career goals. Six (18.2%) of subjects rated that adjusting emotionally to college was somewhat not

important to them, and one (3.0%) subject rated that adjusting socially to college was somewhat not important.

**Table 9**

*Personal Goals Rank of Importance (N=33)*

*(Very Important=1, Somewhat Important=2, Neutral=3, Somewhat Not Important=4, Not At All Important=5)*

Statement	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Neutral		Somewhat Not Important		Not Important At All	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Making Progress Toward Personal Goals	30	90.9	2	6.1	1	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Making Progress Toward Academic Goals	31	93.9	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Making Progress Toward Career Goals	31	93.9	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adjusting Academically to College	25	75.8	5	15.2	3	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adjusting Socially to College	16	48.5	10	30.3	6	18.2	1	3.0	0	0.0
Adjusting Emotionally to College	17	51.5	10	30.3	3	9.1	3	9.1	0	0.0
Managing Personal Stress	27	81.8	4	12.1	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Developing My Self-Esteem & Confidence	24	72.7	8	24.2	1	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Developing Personal Values & Beliefs	26	78.8	5	15.2	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
My Personal Motivation for Academic Success	29	87.9	4	12.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

(Very Important=1, Somewhat Important=2, Neutral=3, Somewhat Not Important=4, Not At All Important=5)

Statement	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Neutral		Somewhat Not Important		Not Important At All	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
My Personal Achievement of Academic Success	30	90.9	3	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Being Interested in My Studies	31	93.9	2	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

RQ3: What do international graduate students report about their general satisfaction with Rowan University?

Table 10 contains information regarding international graduate students' satisfaction with the institution's quality of instruction. Nineteen (57.6%) of subjects reported that they are very satisfied with Rowan's quality of instruction and one (3.0%) subject reported being somewhat unsatisfied.

**Table 10**

*Rowan University Rank of Satisfaction: Quality of Instruction (N=33)*

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Quality of Instruction	33	100
Very Satisfactory	19	57.6
Somewhat Satisfactory	10	30.3
Neutral	3	9.1
Somewhat Unsatisfactory	1	3.0
Very Unsatisfactory	0	0.0



Table 11 contains information describing international graduate students' level of satisfaction towards social and academic involvement. Of the international graduate students surveyed, 22 (66.7%) subjects report being very satisfied with the international student services offered by the institution, and 21 (63.6%) subjects reported being very satisfied with the quality of education. Sixteen (48.5%) subjects reported being very satisfied with their relationships with faculty members, and 11 (33.3%) subjects reported being very satisfied with their relationships with American students.

However, subjects did not report positively on campus events, resources, clubs, and organizations. Thirteen (39.4%) subjects reported being neither satisfied nor unsatisfied with campus events and activities, while three (9.1%) subjects reported being somewhat not satisfied. Additionally, 13 (39.4%) subjects reported being neither satisfied nor unsatisfied with clubs and organizations, while one (3%) subject reported being somewhat not satisfied and two (6.1%) subjects reported being not satisfied at all.

**Table 11**

*Rowan University Rank of Satisfaction: Social and Academic Involvement (N=33)*

*(Very Satisfied=1, Somewhat Satisfied=2, Neutral=3, Somewhat Not Satisfied=4, Not At All Satisfied=5)*

Variable	Very Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Neither Satisfied nor Unsatisfied		Somewhat Not Satisfied		Not Satisfied At All	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Campus Events and Activities	6	18.2	11	33.3	13	39.4	3	9.1	0	0.0
Clubs and Organizations	6	18.2	11	33.3	13	39.4	1	3.0	2	6.1

*(Very Satisfied=1, Somewhat Satisfied=2, Neutral=3, Somewhat Not Satisfied=4, Not At All Satisfied=5)*

Variable	Very Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Neither Satisfied nor Unsatisfied		Somewhat Not Satisfied		Not Satisfied At All	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Relationships with Other International Students	7	21.2	14	42.4	11	33.3	1	3.0	0	0.0
Relationships with American Students	11	33.3	13	39.4	8	24.2	1	3.0	0	0.0
Relationships with Faculty	16	48.5	13	39.4	4	12.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
International Student Services	22	66.7	9	27.3	1	3.0	1	3.0	0	0.0
Quality of Education	21	63.6	9	27.3	3	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Career Resources	17	51.5	6	18.2	5	15.2	4	12.1	1	3.0

Table 12 contains information in regards to Rowan University's international graduate students recommending the institution to friends or family. Nineteen (57.6%) of subjects reported that they would definitely recommend the institution and eight (24.2%) would probably recommend Rowan University. However, four (12.1%) subjects were not certain if they would recommend the institution to friends or family, and one (6.1%) subject reported they would probably not recommend Rowan University.

**Table 12***Rowan University Rank of Satisfaction: Recommendation (N=33)*

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Recommend Institution to Friends/Family	33	100
Definitely Yes	19	57.6
Probably Yes	8	24.2
Might or Might Not	4	12.1
Probably Not	1	6.1
Definitely Not	0	0.0

**Profile of the Focus Group Sample**

Subjects for the qualitative portion of the study were selected from the students who completed the online survey. Subjects were divided into two sub-groups based on culture: collectivistic and individualistic. Then, students were selected for each subgroup from different academic majors and countries that represented the full international graduate student population. Subjects could only be recruited for one focus group. Three students participated in the qualitative portion of this study.

All three international graduate students who participated in the focus group were from countries in Asia, which are collectivistic cultures in nature. The collectivism group represented the majority of the international graduate student population, as there were more international graduate students from collectivistic cultures than from individualistic cultures enrolled at Rowan University. All three subjects were male. The subjects were 28 years old, 31 years old and 32 years old. One subject had been studying remotely in their home country, one lived in a residence within walking distance to Rowan's main

campus and one lived in a residence within driving distance to Rowan's main campus. The subject's responses are referred to under pseudonyms.

Ian from India, came to the United States in September 2020. He was enrolled in his second semester of the Data Science M.S. program with a cumulative GPA ranging from 3.0 to 3.3. Ian was not financially supported by a graduate research assistantship.

Malan from Malaysia, came to the United States in August 2007 for his bachelor's degree, later going on to working in the field. He was enrolled in his second semester of the Pharmaceutical Science M.S. program with a cumulative GPA ranging from 3.7 to 4.0. Malan was financially supported by a graduate research assistantship.

Jordan from Jordan, came to the United States in January 2019. He first studied intensive academic-English before joining a graduate program. He was enrolled in his final semester of the Pharmaceutical Science M.S. program with a cumulative GPA ranging from 3.7 to 4.0. Jordan was also financially supported by a graduate research assistantship.

Each participant made enormous contributions to this research study. Table 13 contains participant's background information including pseudonym, age, gender, country of citizenship, level of study, major, and GPA range.

**Table 13***Participant's Background Information*

Participant	Age	Gender	Country of Citizenship	Level of Study	Major	GPA Range
Ian	30	Male	India	Master's	Data Science	3.0 to 3.3
Malan	31	Male	Malaysia	Master's	Pharmaceutical Science	3.7 to 4.0
Jordan	27	Male	Jordan	Master's	Pharmaceutical Science	3.7 to 4.0

**Analysis of Qualitative Data**

In order to analyze the qualitative data, the thematic content analysis technique was used to code the focus group transcript, allowing categories to emerge and be identified. Content analysis developed two themes and two sub-themes from the international student data. The two themes are higher academic priorities and lower social priorities. The two sub-themes are support for international graduate students and satisfaction among international graduate students.

RQ1: What experiences do international graduate students have with social, academic, and cultural integration and involvement at Rowan University?

When it comes to academic experiences, overall subjects reported positive experiences at Rowan University. Ian and Malan stated that the faculty and staff are very helpful. Jordan explained that his experience was different because he first started as an English language learner. Jordan stated, “When I came here it was very hard to me, but

the International Center helped me a lot. After a few months of learning English, I started to understand how the culture is different from my country. After that, things got easier.”

When asked about the hardest things that they experienced when studying abroad in the United States, Malan stated that the academic structure was much different from in his home country. Jordan also stated that there are hardships that international student deal with that domestic students do not. He went on to describe, “As an international student, you have to work hard. In order to have a place in this country, you are not only competing with American students, but you need a work visa and [employment] sponsor in order begin a career in the United States or you have to go back to your home country.” Malan agreed and stated that many companies are not willing to sponsor your work after graduation.

Ian went on to explain the difficulties of studying abroad virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained, “The hardest thing for me was that I was in India taking the virtual classes, so I had to log on early in the morning at 4:00 AM (IST). It was very hard for me. Maybe that's one of the reasons I got very low grades. Physically, it had a lot of strain on me.”

In terms of social integration, all three subjects stated they did not have American friends. Jordan described American students as “unfriendly.” When asked if he was able to make friends at Rowan, he stated he did not have many friends, besides other international students. He explained that American students are not very welcoming to international students. Malan also explained that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the university campus closed and all classes went virtual. Therefore, there was limited opportunities to meet friends outside of class.

RQ2: What are the international graduate students' social and academic priorities when studying in the United States, and more specifically at Rowan University?

Content analysis indicated participants' opinions about the most important support services on campus. The most common used were the Writing Center, Career Management Center, and the International Center services.

The most prominent theme among all three subjects was that they were more focused on their academics and less on extracurricular activities. Ian stated that academics was his first priority, and he is really not involved with extracurricular activities.

When asked how they spent their time on the weekends, all three subjects stated they spent most of their time at home catching up on schoolwork or studying. Subjects reported spending an average of 30 hours per week studying or working on assignments for classes. Malan mentioned when he is not studying, he would try to go out with his family for lunch. Jordan explained he often does not leave his computer for more than two or three hours a day.

RQ3: What do international graduate students report about their general satisfaction with Rowan University?

When it comes to services and extracurricular activities, all three subjects expressed lower satisfaction levels. Subjects described the Writing Center and Career Management Center as most beneficial. Jordan felt that Rowan University offers more services and activities for undergraduate students than for graduate students. He explained international graduate students do not have many opportunities for social experiences at Rowan University. Jordan stated, "There are many [social events] for

undergraduate students; however, they do not allow graduate students to attend, but they also do not offer events specific for graduate students.”

In terms of support from their academic departments, all three subjects reported having strong relationships with faculty outside of class. In regards to interaction with faculty, all three participants claimed they contact their advisors often, and the advisors are very responsive; however, Jordan stated that some international graduate students in different departments have expressed they are struggling to gain support from their advisors.

Jordan expressed slight dissatisfaction with the International Center services. “The International Center is very helpful in general, but they can be better. Not just saying, ‘If you need anything just let us know.’ There are other things they can do to support us throughout our studies.” All three subjects reported never participating in the International Center’s activities.

Subjects provided recommendations for improving services for international students on campus. The most common theme was improving the Career Management Center. Malan suggested that the Career Management Center should provide a better support system to international students’ job search needs. Ian recommended more internship and Certified Practical Training (CPT) opportunities for international graduate students. He stated that international graduate students have a very hard time finding internship opportunities for course credit as well as finding part-time jobs. Jordan proposed the idea for a program designed for “exceptional international graduate students.” He explained that it is hard for international students to maintain a strong GPA with the different academic system, and not every program can provide assistantships. He



recommended a scholarship program specifically for international graduate students based on GPA.

## **Chapter V**

### **Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

#### **Summary of the Study**

This study investigated the involvement patterns of international graduate students and their overall satisfaction with their college experience at Rowan University. The study further explored what services or activities are a priority for the international graduate student population.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the involvement of Rowan University international graduate students and how it relates to their overall satisfaction with the institution. A mixed method explanatory sequential approach was used to (a) explore international graduate students' social and academic involvement; (b) identify Rowan University's international graduate students' social and academic priorities; and (c) understand international graduate students' experiences with social, academic, and cultural integration. The research population of this study was international graduate students on an F-1 student visa studying at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey who were registered for classes during 2020-2021 academic year.

#### **Methodology**

In this study, a mixed-methods approach was used by first collecting and analyzing quantitative data, and then an explanatory sequential method was used to inform, collect and analyze the qualitative data. The total population of 145 international graduate students studying on Rowan University's Glassboro campus were surveyed through a web-based cross-sectional survey. The instrument consisting of three sections:

personal and educational demographics, student involvement information, and overall satisfaction with college experience. The survey instrument was administered using the software, Qualtrics. All 145 international graduate students received three instructional emails with information about the optional survey over a period of two weeks. Of the 145 international graduate students, 33 responded to the survey in its entirety, yielding a response rate of 22.8%.

The focus group script was adapted from various literature sources specifically designed to capture students' overall reflections about their social and academic integration, services and activities international graduate students are involved with the most on campus, and their level of college satisfaction. To recruit participants, students who completed the online survey were divided into two sub-groups based on culture and geographical continents. Focus group one included students of collectivistic cultures from Asia, which represents the majority population of the international graduate students at Rowan University. Focus group two included students of both individual and collectivistic cultures from Nigeria, Estonia, and Turkey – which represents the minority population of international graduate students at Rowan University. Students from each subgroup were emailed to solicit their voluntary participation in the focus groups. Only three subjects were able to be recruited for one focus group. Participants' confidentiality and privacy was ensured by using a password-protected virtual meeting platform to conduct the focus groups. The questions and responses during the focus group were recorded and transcribed. The focus group lasted for 60 minutes. A semi-structured, open-ended protocol was used. Participants were open to share their thoughts and experiences with social and academic integration with the researcher.

## **Data Analysis**

The survey data from Qualtrics were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The thematic content analysis technique was used to code the transcribed focus group allowing categories to emerge and be identified. Content analysis developed two themes and two sub-themes from the international student data. The two themes are higher academic priorities and lower social priorities. The two sub-themes are support for international graduate students and satisfaction among international graduate students.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis revealed that international graduate students affirmed the expected paradox: higher focus on academic performance and lower involvement in extracurricular activities.

### ***Social & Academic Integration***

An overall look at the survey responses dealing with student involvement levels at Rowan University indicate that the majority of the international graduate students were more involved with curricular activities than extracurricular activities as well. Thirteen (39.4%) subjects reported spending 30 or more hours per week studying and working on assignments for classes. Additionally, 25 (75.8%) subjects reported not working an on-campus job, while six (18.2%) subjects reported working 12 to 30 hours per week. The majority of subjects reported not participating in campus activities or events and were not members of a college club or organization. Only two (6.1%) subjects reported spending 12 to 30 hours per month going out with friends and 25 (75.8%) subjects reported spending less than five hours per month going out with friends.

Girmay et al. (2019) found several themes regarding international graduate students' experiences with acculturation at their host universities and surrounding communities, involving mental health, professor and student dynamics, financial stability, and overall university support. Findings indicate that academic involvement behaviors can negatively impact students' mental health in terms of loneliness and isolation, financial stability, as well as feeling unsupported. In this study, students who reported higher priorities on academics also reported less satisfaction levels related to support services, events and activities, and relationships with other students, both international and American.

The participants in the study were mostly collectivist in nature and were forced to quickly adjust to American societal practices (Girmay et al., 2019). In other words, subjects reported that Americans appear to be unfriendly, and may not be interested in interacting with international students. Survey results indicate low satisfaction levels related to relationships with Americans and focus group participants reported not having any American friends.

### ***International Student Programming***

Ren and Hagedorn (2012) suggested that departments consider including master's level students in support programs and activities. In most cases, support services, activities and organizations are only offered to the undergraduate population. According to the focus group findings, international graduate student participants explained they would get involved in more if there were support services, activities and organizations targeted to the graduate population.

Briggs and Ammigan (2017) proposed four pillars of service to support international students: programs to support international student success; programs to understand government regulations; programs to promote international understanding; programs to connect with the local community. Structuring an international student support office, as well as support services and programs, through a collaborative model among various units and departments on campus is key to providing them with a positive and successful U.S. college experience (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017).

In addition, international students expressed an interest in increasing their awareness and understanding of diverse cultures, values, beliefs, religions, and customs. The International Center can provide opportunities for international students to engage with domestic students to promote multi-cultural understanding (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017). Furthermore, the International Center can play a role in connecting international students to the wider community. These activities may include cultural and educational field trips, networking with community groups, community partnership events, events and receptions, and organizing coffee hours and other social events within the community (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012).

### ***International Graduate Student Satisfaction***

A study by Hyun (2019) examined the involvement of international graduate students in relation to their satisfaction of their host institution. The findings showed that the students focused on academic-centered relationships and interaction with their peers and faculty members to overcome their difficulties with integration. Students find intellectual conversations regarding their research interests and academic experiences

beneficial in expanding their knowledge and academic skills about the U.S. education system and context (Hyun, 2019).

This academic-centered solution, however, does not address all challenges. International graduate students also face non-academic challenges simultaneously such as time management, mental stress, and loneliness. Hyun (2019) found that students struggled managing a non-academic life, and most of them spent their time focused on their academic success. While there are services and events offered for international students on campus, international graduate students are often too busy for school activities and do not have much time for a social life. It is important that international students have supporters who understand their circumstance and difficulties as international students (Hyun, 2019).

Overall participants are satisfied with the support they receive from the International Center and staff at Rowan University. Despite international graduate students' lack of social involvement, participants confessed that they are satisfied with their decision to attend Rowan University and that they would recommend this institution to friends and family in their home country.

According to the survey findings, 19 (57.8%) of the subjects surveyed responded that they would definitely recommend Rowan University to their friends and family, while 13 (39.4%) of the subjects reported that they may or may not recommend Rowan University. The overall response is an indicator that international students are mostly satisfied with their college experience and with Rowan's institutional services.

## **Conclusions**

The results of this study confirmed findings from previous studies. The data analysis indicated that international graduate students' priorities are with their academic performance. Participants revealed that they spend more time and put more effort into their academic work than in social activities. Based on the findings of this study, it is safe to conclude that students' focus on their academics limits their involvement in social activities; however, the findings suggest that students are mostly satisfied with their overall college experience. Additionally, subjects recommended that the International Center can play a role in connecting international graduate students to the wider community.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

Based upon the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are presented:

1. Higher education institutions should improve graduate students' support services, programs and activities to meet the needs of the adult learner student population.
2. Rowan University needs programming that supports international graduate students' academic priorities throughout their studies.
3. Rowan University needs programming that promotes and increases cross-cultural interactions between international and American students.
4. Rowan University's Writing Center needs to become more international focused and should improve their services to better support international graduate student needs. The Center should consider adding focus areas such as



adjusting to the academic system in the United States, conducting a research study and writing a Thesis or dissertation.

5. Rowan University's Career Management Center needs to become more international focused. The Center should look into providing more opportunities for internships for international graduate students, as well as participating in international job search databases, international career fairs, and building relationship with international companies to provide more opportunities for graduate students after graduation.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was limited in its scope and could not examine other variables such as culture or gender. The goal of this research study was to examine students' perspective from both collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Since this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was difficulty in recruiting students to participate in a virtual research study while they are also working and attending classes remotely. The assumption can be made that since most of their time was spent behind a computer, students were less willing to participate in a research study also conducted online. Based upon the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. A replication of this mixed-method study should be conducted when the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic have expired.
2. A replication of this mixed-method study should be conducted with international graduate students from different cultures.

3. Further research could examine whether there are differences in international students' social and academic priorities based on gender.
4. Further research could be done to directly compare international graduate students' and American graduate students' social and academic priorities.
5. A replication study should be developed to see if there are any changes in the population's priorities in the future.

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## Appendix A

### Online Survey Recruitment Email

Dear International Student,

I would like to invite you to participate a [survey](#) being administered as part of my Master's thesis in Higher Education Administration at Rowan University titled "International Graduate Student's Involvement and Overall Satisfaction with Their College Experience." The purpose of this research is to examine the priorities of international graduate students with the goal of providing recommendations on how to serve them more effectively so that the students are satisfied with their overall experience.

Participation in this study is voluntary. The nature of this study is extremely specific to the international graduate student population. If students are not part of the targeted population, they will be excluded from the study.

Please select this link to start the [survey](#). It will take no more than 15 minutes of your time to complete this survey.

This study has been approved by Rowan University IRB (Study #Pro2020-226). The Principal Investigator of the study is Dr. Andrew Tinnin. The Co-Investigator of the study is Lauren Pollara. For any questions, please contact Lauren Pollara at [pollara@rowan.edu](mailto:pollara@rowan.edu).

Thank you in advance for completing the survey.

Sincerely,

**Lauren Pollara**

International Admissions Specialist, Rowan University  
M.A. Highe Education Administration, May 2021

RESERVED FOR IRB APPROVAL STAMP
DO NOT REMOVE
Creation/Revision Date: 02/07/2018
Rowan University PRO-2020-226 Approved on 1-22-2021 Expires on 1-21-2022

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent for Participants

**TITLE OF STUDY:** International Graduate Student's Involvement and Overall Satisfaction With Their College Experience

**Principal Investigator:** Andrew Tinnin, Ed.D.

**Co-Investigators:** Lauren Pollara

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

You are being asked to take part in a research study about international graduate students' involvement and their overall college experience. This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide key information that will help you decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study.

Please carefully read the key information provided in questions 1-9 and 14 below. The purpose behind those questions is to provide clear information about the purpose of the study, study specific information about what will happen in the course of the study, what are the anticipated risks and benefits, and what alternatives are available to you if you do not wish to participate in this research study.

The study team will explain the study to you and they will answer any question you might have before volunteering to take part in this study. It is important that you take your time to make your decision. You may take this consent form with you to ask a family member or anyone else before agreeing to participate in the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask the study team and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

The Principal Investigator, Dr. Andrew Tinnin, or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent.

**1. What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this study is to examine the involvement patterns of international graduate students and the relation to their overall satisfaction with Rowan University. Specific aims of the study are:

- A. To understand international graduate students' social and academic priorities
- B. To identify the types of experiences international graduate students have with social, academic, and cultural integration.

**2. Why have you been asked to take part in this study?**

Our study population is primarily consist of 145 international graduate students on an F-1 student visa studying at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey.

**3. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?**

All 145 international graduate students on an F-1 student visa studying at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey will be asked to complete the online survey. The students who completed the online survey will be divided into two sub-groups: individualistic and collectivistic. Then students with different academic majors and personal backgrounds from each subgroup will be emailed to solicit their participation in the two focus groups.

**4. Who may take part in this research study? And who may not?**

The nature of this study is extremely specific to the international graduate student population. If students are not part of the targeted population, they will be excluded from the study.

**5. How long will the study take and where will the research study be conducted?**

We anticipate that this study will take approximately six months to complete. Three of those months are associated with the length of the course and remaining two months will be for data analysis purposes. It will take approximately 15 minutes for subjects to complete the online survey and approximately 1 hour for those to participate in the focus group. This study will be conducted in the College of Education at Rowan University's main campus at Glassboro, New Jersey. The address is follows: James Hall, 201 Mullica Hill Rd, Glassboro, NJ 08028.

**6. How many visits may take to complete the study?**

Subject participation in this study will be conducted virtually in secure, password-protected Webex meetings.

**7. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?**

There are no risks to subjects' health, safety, education, or employment by

participating in this study. The study includes questions about your social, academic, and cultural integration and the student services you use – there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers.

**8. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?**

There may not be any direct benefit, but it will help us understand the variables that impact social, academic, and cultural integration of international students, leading to improve student success and satisfaction.

**9. What are the alternatives if you do not wish to participate in the study?**

Your alternative is not to participate in the study.

**10. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?**

The survey will be administered to all international graduate students on an F-1 student visa studying at Rowan University’s main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey. A total of 10 students are needed for the focus groups (5 students for each of the two sessions).

**11. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?**

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

**12. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?**

There will not be any cost for participating in this research project.

**13. Will you be paid to take part in this study?**

To boost the response rate and to encourage students to participate in the online survey, all participants will be entered into a raffle to receive a \$50 visa gift card. Participants will not be paid for their participation in the focus group.

**14. Are you providing any identifiable private information as part of this research study?** We are collecting identifiable private information in this research study. After collecting your identifiable private information, we may remove the identifiers, and after such removal, we may use your information for future research studies or we may distribute the de-identified information to another researcher for future studies without additional consent from you.

**15. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?**

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential. Your personal information will be de-identified. De-identified means that any research data collected during the course of this study will not include any personal information collected or be linked in any way where your identity can be known. Any future use and analysis of the research data collected about you in this study will be de-identified, as permitted by law.



**16. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Dr. Andrew Tinnin at [tinnin@rowan.edu](mailto:tinnin@rowan.edu).

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

**17. Who can you call if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Drew Tinnin, Ed.D.  
Instructor, Educational Services & Leadership  
College of Education  
(856) 256-4909

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:  
Office of Research Compliance  
(856) 256-4058– Glassboro/CMSRU

**18. What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?**

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

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**Agreement to Participate**

I have read the entire information about the research study, research risks, benefits and the alternatives, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed.

All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered and I agree to volunteer to participate in the study.

Subject Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Rowan University Institutional  
Review Board Audio/Videotape Addendum to Consent Form**

In order to help ensure that I have captured what you intended to say and also for transcription purposes, we are asking for your permission to allow us to include an audio and visual recording as part of the research study. After each focus group session, I will replay the tapes and compare them with the handwritten notes that I took during the sessions. Additionally, quotes shared during the sessions and/or interviews will be used, again, only for the purposes of providing a clearer picture of participant experiences. Furthermore, in using quotes I will be able to provide a more detailed explanation to the reader about what you, as the participant, are attempting to explain through your own words.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked external hard drive with no link to subjects' identity and will be destroyed upon completion of the study procedures. Throughout the study, I will strive to maintain an environment that is safe for welcoming for all participants.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

**Agreement to Audio/Visual Recordings**

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to audio or video tape me as part of this research.

Subject Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This study has been approved by Rowan University IRB (Study #Pro2020-226).

### Online Survey (Alternate Consent)

You are invited to participate in this online research survey entitled International Graduate Students' Involvement and Their Overall College Experience. You are included in this survey because you are a current Rowan University international graduate student. The number of subjects to be enrolled in this survey study will be 145 international graduate students. The Principal Investigator of the study is Dr. Andrew Tinnin. The Co-Investigator of the study is Lauren Pollara.

The survey may take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, do not respond to this online survey. Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

The purpose of this research study is to examine involvement patterns of international students, which means the participation of international students in the use of campus services, and their in-and out-of-class experiences.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey. There may be no direct benefit to you; however, by participating in this study, you may help us understand the variables that impact academic performances of international students, leading to improve student success.

Your response will be kept confidential. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file will be destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information. If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Dr. Tinnin at [tinnin@rowan.edu](mailto:tinnin@rowan.edu) or Lauren Pollara at [pollara@rowan.edu](mailto:pollara@rowan.edu).

This study has been approved by Rowan University IRB (Study #Pro2020-226).

Please complete the checkbox below.

To participate in this survey, you must be 18 years or older.

Place a check box here:

☐

Completing this form indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

Place a check box here:

☐

**Appendix C**  
**Survey Instrument**  
**Section I - Background**

1. Are you an international graduate student? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. What is your age? [\_\_\_\_\_]
3. What is your gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female
4. What is your martial status? ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Other
5. What is your country of citizenship? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Are you:

<input type="checkbox"/> White/Caucasian	<input type="checkbox"/> African American/Black
<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian
<input type="checkbox"/> Middle eastern	<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander
<input type="checkbox"/> Native American/Alaskan	Other: _____
7. Which of the following best describes where you are living?

<input type="checkbox"/> Dormitory or other campus housing
<input type="checkbox"/> Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within walking distance
<input type="checkbox"/> Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within driving distance
8. What is your current level of study: ☐ Master's ☐ Doctoral
9. Number of semesters currently taking at Rowan: \_\_\_\_\_
10. What is your cumulative GPA?

a. <input type="checkbox"/> 4.0 to 3.7	<input type="checkbox"/> 3.6 to 3.4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3.3 to 3.0
b. <input type="checkbox"/> 2.9 to 2.7	<input type="checkbox"/> 2.6 to 2.4	<input type="checkbox"/> 2.3 to 2.0
c. <input type="checkbox"/> 1.9 to 1.7	<input type="checkbox"/> 1.6 to 1.4	<input type="checkbox"/> 1.3 & Below
11. Please print your major(s) below:  
  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Section II - Student Involvement Information

12. Are you currently financially supported by a graduate assistantship or research fellowship? ☐ Yes ☐ No

13. On average, how many hours each day do you spend on a computer?  
\_\_\_\_\_ For academic and course work (research, writing papers, programming, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_ For personal use (e-mail to friends, games, Internet surfing, etc.)

14. In your experience at Rowan University, how much time do you spend per week doing certain curricular and extracurricular activities?

### HOURS PER WEEK

- ☐ Studying and/or working on assignments for classes
- ☐ Member of a society fraternity or sorority
- ☐ Member of a college club or organization
- ☐ Member of a sport team or sport club
- ☐ Student government
- ☐ University publication
- ☐ College productions or performances
- ☐ Professional or departmental clubs
- ☐ Social clubs
- ☐ Residential hall activities
- ☐ Religious organizations, religious or spiritual activities
- ☐ Volunteer service
- ☐ Leadership programs
- ☐ Off-Campus part time job
- ☐ On-Campus part time job
- ☐ Internship
- ☐ Field experience
- ☐ Participated in independent study
- ☐ Participated in campus activities/events
- ☐ Interaction with faculty outside of class

15. In your experience at Rowan University, on average how often have you participated monthly in any of the activities below?

HOW OFTEN/PER MONTH

- ☐ Worked with classmates outside of class
- ☐ Tutored or taught other students
- ☐ Attended an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance
- ☐ Exercised or participated in physical activities
- ☐ Established personal relationships with peers/staff at Rowan
- ☐ Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- ☐ Discussed ideas with faculty members
- ☐ Communicate with a faculty member via e-mail
- ☐ Attended cultural events on campus
- ☐ Went out with friends
- ☐ Attended on-campus parties
- ☐ Interacting with International students
- ☐ Interacting with American students
- ☐ Interacting with People of Different Races
- ☐ Used the library
- ☐ Went to the International Center

16. \_\_\_\_\_ How many times have you talked with a career advisor or attended a program concerning your career during this academic year?

17. Please rate how important each item is to you and then rate how satisfied you are with each item here at Rowan University.

Importance					Satisfaction				
Very Important 1 2 3 4 5					Not at all Important				
Very Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5					Not at all Satisfied				
Importance					Satisfaction				
<b>Social Involvement</b>									
Establishing Personal Relationships w/ Peers at Rowan					1 2 3 4 5				
Having Close Friends at Rowan					1 2 3 4 5				
Getting Involved in Student Organizations					1 2 3 4 5				
Getting Involved in Campus Activities					1 2 3 4 5				
Attending Cultural Events on Campus					1 2 3 4 5				
Interacting with International Students					1 2 3 4 5				
Interacting with People of Different Races					1 2 3 4 5				
Getting Involved in Religious Activities					1 2 3 4 5				
Having a Job while Enrolled					1 2 3 4 5				
<b>Academic Involvement</b>									
Faculty Availability Outside Class					1 2 3 4 5				
Social Contacts with Faculty					1 2 3 4 5				
Academic Advising					1 2 3 4 5				
International Student Advising					1 2 3 4 5				
<b>Campus Atmosphere</b>									
Adequate Personal Security					1 2 3 4 5				
Adequate Physical Environment on Campus					1 2 3 4 5				
Adequate Social Atmosphere					1 2 3 4 5				
Adequate Academic/Intellectual Atmosphere					1 2 3 4 5				
Fitting into the Campus Community					1 2 3 4 5				
<b>Personal Goals</b>									
Making Progress Toward Personal Goals					1 2 3 4 5				
Making Progress Toward Academic Goals					1 2 3 4 5				
Making Progress Toward Career Goals					1 2 3 4 5				
Adjusting Academically to College					1 2 3 4 5				
Adjusting Socially to College					1 2 3 4 5				
Adjusting Emotionally to College					1 2 3 4 5				
Managing Personal Stress					1 2 3 4 5				
Developing My Self-Esteem & Confidence					1 2 3 4 5				
Developing Personal Values & Beliefs					1 2 3 4 5				
My Personal Motivation for Academic Success					1 2 3 4 5				
My Personal Achievement of Academic Success					1 2 3 4 5				
Being Interested in My Studies					1 2 3 4 5				

### Section III - Rowan Satisfaction Information

18. Did you made the right choice in attending Rowan University?

- ☐ Definitely Right Choice
- ☐ Probably Right Choice
- ☐ Not Sure
- ☐ Probably Wrong Choice
- ☐ Definitely Wrong Choice

19. How important is it to you that you graduate from Rowan University?

- ☐ Extremely Important
- ☐ Very Important
- ☐ Somewhat Important
- ☐ Neither Important nor Unimportant
- ☐ Not At All Important

20. How would you rate the quality of instruction at Rowan University?

- ☐ Very Satisfactory
- ☐ Somewhat Satisfactory
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Unsatisfactory
- ☐ Very Unsatisfactory

21. Would you recommend this institution to friends/family?

- ☐ Definitely Yes
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Definitely Not

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE SURVEY.



**From:** [Costa-String, Kesiane C](#)  
**To:** [Pollara, Lauren N](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Important Request  
**Date:** Tuesday, November 24, 2020 9:33:00 AM

---

Hi Lauren,

I hope all is well. Thank you for your feedback regarding my thesis. You have my full approval to modify my instrument as you need it. Good luck with your thesis.

Kind Regards,

**Kesiane String**

Assistant Director - International Admissions  
Division of Student Affairs  
Rowan University

305 Hawthorn Hall, International Center  
201 Mullica Hill Rd., Glassboro, NJ 08028  
T: 856-256-5190 | WhatsApp: +1 856-371-9971  
[string@rowan.edu](mailto:string@rowan.edu) | <https://admissions.rowan.edu/international.html>  
[Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#)

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**From:** Pollara, Lauren N <[pollara@rowan.edu](mailto:pollara@rowan.edu)>  
**Sent:** Monday, November 23, 2020 3:55 PM  
**To:** Costa-String, Kesiane C <[string@rowan.edu](mailto:string@rowan.edu)>  
**Subject:** Important Request

Hello Kesiane,

I hope this email finds you well. This is in regarding myself completing my masters in Higher Education at Rowan. I loved your thesis and how you explored international students' experiences and performance. I am conducting a similar study about the social and academic priorities of international graduate students' as it relates to their involvement on campus at Rowan University. I am exploring how their social and academic integration impacts to their overall satisfaction with our institution.

I really liked your interview instrument and I would like to ask you if you can give me approval to use your interview instrument and modify the questions to fit my study purpose? This would also be included on my study appendix.

Thank you,

**Lauren Pollara**

International Admissions Specialist  
International Center

Rowan University  
Hawthorn Hall, Room 310A  
201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, New Jersey 08028  
Office: +1 (856) 256-5748  
WhatsApp: +1 (856) 628-1766

## Appendix D

### Focus Group Recruitment Email

Dear International Student,

Thank you so much for completing the online survey as part of my Master's thesis in Higher Education Administration at Rowan University titled "International Graduate Student's Involvement and Overall Satisfaction with Their College Experience." This study will contribute to existing literature by exploring the needs of this population and gaining an understanding of how these needs might affect the overall satisfaction of the students. The primary objective for this study is to allow the voices of international graduate students to be heard and for their experiences to be shared in the hopes of addressing any gaps in services that might be present.

In conjunction to the survey, I will be holding two focus group sessions. The first one will consist of all international graduate students from individualistic cultures, and the second collectivistic cultures. I would like to invite you to participate in the focus group being held on [date] at [time]. This focus group will be conducted in a password protected virtual setting to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Participation in this study is voluntary. The nature of this study is extremely specific to the international graduate student population. If students are not part of the targeted population, they will be excluded from the study.

If you would be willing to participate in this study, please reply to this email at your earliest convenience that includes your contact information. Should you at any time feel the need to contact the Principal Investigator of the study, Dr. Andrew Tinnin, please email [tinnin@rowan.edu](mailto:tinnin@rowan.edu).

This study has been approved by Rowan University IRB (Study #Pro2020-226).

I sincerely thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**Lauren Pollara**

International Admissions Specialist, Rowan University

M.A. Higher Education Administration, May 2021

Version #: 2

Version Date: 01-12-2021

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## Appendix E

### Focus Group Instrument

#### Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this discussion group. My name is Lauren Pollara, and I will be leading the discussion today. Before we get started, I want to take a few minutes to tell you what to expect from the discussion and to go over a few things with you. After that, we will have an opportunity to introduce ourselves.

The specific purpose of this focus group is to understand the experiences international graduate students have with social, academic, and cultural integration and involvement at Rowan University, with the goal to provide recommendations to better serve their international students so that the students are satisfied with their overall experience.

The discussion today is confidential. We will not attribute your name with any comments made or have any identifiable information in any reports we produce. We will keep your specific responses in confidence, and would ask that you respect one another's privacy in the same way.

We ask that you be frank and honest about issues of concern and importance to you. We do not expect you to tell us anything that you would be uncomfortable sharing with the group, nor do we expect everyone to answer every question. We are interested in all perspectives and appreciate your input, as it will inform other components of this study as well as other communities about the variables that impact social, academic, and cultural integration of international graduate students, with the goal of providing recommendations on how to better serve international graduate students.

#### Informed Consent

This study has been approved by Rowan University IRB (Study #Pro2020-226). You have already agreed to participate in this study conducted by the College of Education Department of Educational Services and Leadership. If not, please let us know and we will review the informed consent with you in private before we begin. As the informed consent indicates, your participation is completely voluntary and you may leave at any time. Also, we will be audio-taping the discussion today. Be assured that the tapes will be reviewed to gather data only, and will be transcribed without the use of your names.

#### Ground Rules

In order to make our discussion more comfortable and run smoothly for everyone, there are a few ground rules that we will need to follow:

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<div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"><b>Rowan University</b> <b>PRO-2020-226</b> <b>Approved on 1-22-2021</b> <b>Expires on 1-21-2022</b></div>

- Everyone's input is important and I will work hard to make sure everyone has a chance to speak.
- Allow one person to speak at a time.
- I may need to cut a discussion short in the interest of time.
- Show respect to everyone at all times. It is ok to disagree with someone's opinion.
- All responses are confidential, and the names of others who are participating in the discussion is also confidential, so feel free to speak your mind.
- Everyone is on a first name basis, so please use only your first name.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Let's start with introductions. Please tell us your first name.

### Discussion Questions

RQ#1: What are the international graduate students' social and academic priorities when studying in the United States, and more specifically at Rowan University?

1. Tell me about your background.
  - a. When did you arrive to Rowan?
  - b. Which graduate program are you in?
  - c. What is your marital status?
  - d. Are you financially support with a graduate assistantship or research fellowship?
2. Please explain what your overall experience has been in adjusting at Rowan.
3. How easy has it been for you to make friends at Rowan?
4. How often do you speak with your family/friends in your home country?
5. How do you spend your free times or weekends (activities that you do, with whom)?Who do you mostly hang out with?

RQ#2: What experiences do international graduate students have with social, academic, and cultural integration and involvement at Rowan University?

1. While the saying goes that "college is the best time of your life," it also can be very stressful and sometimes lonely. What are some of the hardest things about studying abroad in the United States?
  - a. Please share your most stressful experiences in adjusting to Rowan.
  - b. What things do you deal with that other domestic students, who aren't here on a student visa, don't have to?
2. Has the adjustment process affected you emotionally? If so, how?
3. Has the adjustment process affected you physically? If so, how?
4. Have these experiences affected your overall adjustment to Rowan?

RQ#3: What do international graduate students report about their general satisfaction with Rowan University?

1. How supportive was your academic department or academic counselor been in helping with your adjustment?
  - a. Do you feel that you have enough support within your academic program?
2. What are some programs or events that Rowan has offered that have made you feel a part of the campus community?
  - a. How did you hear about those?
3. Do you believe Rowan does a good job of welcoming and making international graduate students feel a part of the campus community?
  - a. Do you feel supported throughout your studies?
  - b. Do you feel that there are adequate support services in place on campus for international students?

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