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Ndidi Patience Iwuagwu  
*Rowan University*

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**STRESS AND COPING MECHANISMS OF NON-TRADITIONAL  
INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS**

by

Ndidi Patience Iwuagwu

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Research  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Higher Education

at

Rowan University

March 22, 2024

Thesis Chair: Stephanie Lezotte, Ph.D., Assistant Dean, School of Graduate Studies

Committee Members:

Andrew Tinnin, Ed.D., Associate Vice President for Student Life

Tyrone McCombs, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership,  
Administration and Research

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## **Dedications**

To my self-sacrificing mother Lolo Roseline B. Iwuagwu, and my supportive husband, Dr. Oluwayinka M. Adedeji.

## Acknowledgments

I am forever grateful to God who does beyond and above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

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## **Abstract**

Ndidi Patience Iwuagwu  
STRESS AND COPING MECHANISMS OF NON-TRADITIONAL  
INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS  
2023-2024  
Stephanie Lezotte, Ph.D.  
Master of Arts in Higher Education

Higher education institutions are battling with the shrinking enrollment rate of students and the various college alternatives (Drozdowski, 2022); however, it has been evidenced in the literature that these issues can be augmented with international student enrollments and adult learners (Donaldson, 2022). Pursuing a doctoral degree is a tedious move (Devonport & Lane, 2014), and leaving one's comfort zone to study in a different land for non-traditional international students can be exhausting due to the responsibilities at hand. Thus, this qualitative study examines the stressors experienced by non-traditional international doctoral students, the coping mechanisms utilized in the cause of these stressors, and their perception of doctoral stress. The study participants consisted of four non-traditional international students. The findings generated two major themes of stressors namely: personal stressors and academic stressors, alongside two sub-categories of coping strategies which include personal and institutional coping strategies. Overall, participants perceive doctoral stress as a temporal phase of life.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

It is often said that there is no place like home. But why do people leave home? Some will argue for greener pastures; others will argue for exploration or just for the sake of traveling. However, for international students, it is for educational reasons with diverse motivating factors (Hartwig et al., 2020; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). This paper focuses on the stress encountered by non-traditional international doctoral students and how they balance their academic pursuits with diverse life responsibilities. It also reveals some of the coping strategies and support systems employed by these students during their stay in a foreign land.

#### **Statement of the Research Problem**

According to a Chronicle of Higher Education report, 'Emotional stress' remains a top reason that students consider "stopping out" or temporarily withdrawing from higher education, therefore underlining a continuous concern for universities aiming to keep students enrolled and on track academically (Roberts-Grmela, 2023).

Indubitably, leaving one's own country to study abroad can be a daunting and challenging decision for international students as a whole and non-traditional international doctoral students in particular; such challenges could be due to the additional responsibilities at hand. Most of these students exhibit grit while faced with chronic academic challenges with extraneous responsibilities posing the risk of emotional, psychological, and mental stress (Devonport & Lane, 2014; Herzberg, 2013; Hunter-Johnson, 2022; Pappa et al., 2020).

Thus, there is a pressing need to serve these populations better by devising initiatives to mitigate the burnout risk to enhance a worthwhile home-away-from-home experience.

### **Significance of the Research Problem**

With the dwindling enrollment rate of students and the numerous college alternatives (Drozdowski, 2022), scholars have highlighted the need to mitigate these issues with international student enrollments and adult learners (Donaldson, 2022). Thus, the burden lies on higher education professionals to utilize diverse means to increase student enrollment, retention, and persistence rates knowing there is a direct impact on international students' contentment and institutional endorsement level (Ammigan, 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative research study aims to understand some of the stressors non-traditional international doctoral students face while studying in a foreign land at Rowan University, a public university in New Jersey, United States. This study also seeks to examine coping strategies non-traditional international doctoral students employ in balancing their academic responsibilities with other life responsibilities in the face of these stressors. The findings further recommend ways for institutions to support these populations in reducing mental stress and burnout while promoting holistic success.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

While this research represents a purposeful sampling of non-traditional international doctoral students, a limitation of this study could be the position of the researcher as a non-traditional international student, which may present bias in the

interpretation of findings. However, the researcher would enhance the study's credibility by engaging in member checking, which is an approach where participants read through my interview transcript as a way of preventing the researcher's bias and detecting any form of inconsistency in their given information, thereby enhancing the accuracy of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; McMillan, 2016).

Further, since the sampling only includes participants from Rowan University, the findings might only apply to this institution or institutions with similar contexts.

### **Operational Definitions**

1. *International Students*: are students that are not nationals of their present country of study, did not grow up in their current country of study, and received their prior education in another (OECD, 2023).
2. *Non-Traditional Students*: These are students with no specific age range, maybe 25 or more, those juggling work and studies either on a part-time or full-time academic basis, people with dependent alongside their spouse or children, single parents, those that are financially sufficient of themselves, people that never entered college/university the initial year they finished from high school (NCES, 2002).
3. *Non-Traditional International Students*: According to Barton et al. (2022), most international students have families and other work commitments, making them non-traditional.

## **Research Questions**

This research study seeks to examine the following questions:

1. What are the stresses encountered/experienced by non-traditional international doctoral students at Rowan University while pursuing higher education in the United States?
2. What are the coping strategies employed by non-traditional international doctoral students to assist them in being focused while fueling their drive to achieve academic excellence?
3. What support systems can non-traditional international doctoral students identify at their institution?
4. How do non-traditional international doctoral students describe or perceive stress in their educational experience?

## **Organization of the Study**

Chapter II presents an overview of the scholarly literature related to this study based on (1) the history of international students, (2) trends of international students, (3) non-traditional international students, (4) challenges/stress faced by non-traditional international students, (5) pull and push factors of international students, (6) impact of (non-traditional) international students, and (7) coping strategies.

Chapter III consists of the research methodology used to carry out this study at Rowan University, and it includes the study context, study purpose, data collection methods, and data analysis. Chapter IV presents the study findings and highlights the common themes that arose during data collection. Chapter V contains a summary of the

findings, a discussion of the research, a conclusion, and recommendations for further investigation.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **The History of International Students**

International students are those who are not from the country in which they are studying. They are not nationals, nor did they grow up in their current country of study, but instead acquired their previous education in another (OECD, 2023). The origin of international students can be dated back to the four distinct needs of the United States during the periods after World War II era to revamp its educational sector and cultural competency with other foreign nations (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). These four needs included, how to restore education in the previously captive states, how to support the freed nations to restructure their educational sectors, how to instill foreign institutional policies in educational matters, and how to provide technical support to the under-developed nations (Banjong, 2016; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Following these concerns, American universities have embraced a growing number of students from abroad since the Post-World War II era (Banjong, 2016; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998).

Further, these new perspectives on U.S. foreign policy resulted in the passage of three acts in 1961 namely the Fulbright-Hays or Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, the Foreign Assistance Act, and the Peace Corps Act (Banjong, 2016; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Interestingly, these acts—which were all intended to strengthen the United States' international relations and assist emancipated nations (Banjong, 2016)—attracted many international students to the United States, most of whom were beneficiaries of scholarships to study at American universities (Banjong, 2016). The

program has successfully exported U.S. education to other countries while also attracting international students to study in the United States (Banjong, 2016).

### **The Trend of International Students**

International student mobility has steadily increased since the mid-twentieth century, owing to the opportunities associated with studying abroad. The overall number of students from other nations has gone up over the previous few decades (Banjong, 2016) with the United States among their top seven destinations (OECD, 2022). Despite a few fluctuations in nations of destination over the last decade, the main originating countries have remained largely steady, with China and India accounting for 22% and 10% of all international students, respectively (OECD, 2022).

Covid-19 had a drastic effect on the mobility of international students with about a 15% decline in foreign students enrollment (Fischer, 2022). Most significantly, an Open Doors report evidenced a 12% significant increase in international student enrollment in the 2022/2023 academic year with about a one million increase as against the previous years (Fischer, 2023), indicating that post-pandemic international student enrollment is on the rise.

While the pandemic also fostered anti-Asian bigotry, there was however a record-breaking increase as India surpassed China in international student enrollment for the first time in over a decade with a wide range of differences that could be ascribed in part to the gun epidemic in the United States and the emergence of Covid-19 as parents were concerned about the safety of their children (Fischer & Bauman, 2023). Additionally, in the Africa region, the two countries with the highest international student enrollment were recorded as Nigeria and Ghana (Fischer, 2023).

## **Non-Traditional Students**

Because this research focuses on non-traditional international doctoral students in the United States, it is crucial to know the various definitions of non-traditional students. According to Merriam and Bierema (2013), non-traditional students are adult learners with no specific age range. Still, they are people who see themselves as adults according to their years of age, position in society, or personality. These students have several duties and obligations aside from their academic pursuits.

On the other hand, following an NCES (2002) report, non-traditional students were distinguished based on the following features: those juggling work and studies either on a part-time or full-time academic basis, people with dependents alongside their spouse or children, single parents, those that are financially sufficient of themselves, and people that never entered college/university the initial year they finished from high school.

Additionally, Horn & Carroll (1996) further categorized those with two to three above outlined features as being moderately non-traditional, those with just a feature as minimally non-traditional, and lastly, four and above as highly non-traditional. Most significantly, the assertion of Barton et al. (2022) that many international students have families and other work commitments further establishes the argument that most doctoral international students may as well be non-traditional. Hunter-Johnson (2022) further suggested that “Despite differing reasons for obtaining higher education in the United States, a common thread of resilience tightly links international adult learners” (p.2).

## **Pull and Push Factors**

While most institutions have integrated plans to increase the acceptance rate of international students as tactics to augment their revenue streams vis-à-vis their accrued expenditure (Ammigan, 2019; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013), non-traditional international students are attracted or motivated to study abroad based on some factors regardless of the difficulty faced (Hunter-Johnson, 2022). According to Banjong (2016), these “pull and push factors” (p.6) include job opportunities, an institutional recommendation from colleagues emerging from students’ satisfaction, friendly immigration policies, English proficiency skills, cost of education, fees and accommodation cost, and health and safety reasons (Ammigan, 2019; Banjong, 2016).

According to Brown (2009), “international sojourn has the power to effect a growth in intercultural competence, as well as a shift in self-understanding, with long-term implications for personal and professional life” (p. 517). The study she conducted on the adaptation processes of international postgraduate students in England indicates the life-changing impact of the foreign student experience. She found that detaching students from their familiar home environment gave them autonomy from cultural and parental expectations, as well as an avenue for discovery of oneself, yet immersing them in unfamiliar cultures allowed them to build on their intercultural interaction abilities. These students were far from home for a year. The findings of the study showed that getting exposed to various cultures broadened tolerance and acceptance of new actions and mindsets (Brown, 2009; Hartwig, 2017).

## **The Benefits of (Non-Traditional) International Students**

Studying abroad provides numerous advantages for international students, the host country, and possibly their home countries (Banjong, 2016). According to the president of ACEI, (ACEI-GLOBAL, 2017), among other benefits, international students positively develop scientific innovation and technological advancement in the host country, probably because most of these students pursue STEM degrees as against their domestic counterparts (Banjong, 2016; Shih, 2015; Ung, 2015).

Additionally, the presence of international students in host countries enhances cultural competence and cultural diversity not only among domestic students but also among staff and faculty as well (Banjong, 2016; Briggs & Ammigan, 2017; Liebschutz-Roettger, 2020).

Besides these benefits, international students also help boost the economy of their host countries through tuition, and those who decide to stay back after graduation to be gainfully employed and invariably contribute their expertise to the system at large (Banjong, 2016).

## **Stressors Faced by Non-Traditional International Doctoral Students.**

A lot of research has reiterated that pursuing a doctoral study could be anxiety-ridden (Devonport & Lane, 2014). Ultimately, these stressors could be transferred to other significant people in the lives of postgraduate students when not adequately managed (Devonport & Lane, 2014). In a study carried out by Jenkins et al. (2018), stress was believed to have both a beneficial and or detrimental effect on people. However, these two implications in the face of students' innate features will either result in resilience or a burnout experience. In the same vein, when experienced positively, stress

is argued to be a stimulus for intellectual identity negotiation and professional progress (Pappa et al., 2020).

Pappa et al. (2020) delimit that for stress to become a beneficial and inspiring force, students would have to moderate its presence and implications through their resources, assign a purpose and significance to their studies, and place themselves within their academic and social setting. However, the same study conducted by Pappa et al. (2020), identified the key sources of stress as intrapersonal rules, challenges performing research, and the dearth of a supportive structure.

Additionally, financial difficulty, time conflicts, the fear of the unknown, poor supervisor-student relationships, little or no doctoral student community, and apathy with the program of study could represent stressors for doctoral students (Devonport & Lane, 2014). Non-traditional international students are faced with the difficult decision of leaving their country as employed individuals to study abroad while complementing household responsibilities with academic work (Hunter-Johnson, 2022).

Nontraditional international students experience a longer adjustment period than traditional international and domestic students due to stark differences in their social roles, level of responsibilities, a prevalent need to move abroad with spouse and children, and, in most cases, the role of 'breadwinner' of their immediate family, all of which could be considered stressors (Hunter-Johnson, 2022).

Further, the pressure is increased for international nontraditional adult learners because of the impending consequences, such as employment after graduation in a foreign nation, job security, and the capacity to apply the knowledge they have learned in their studies to their work environments (Hunter-Johnson, 2022). Similarly, the inability

to reacclimate to their home country and its distinct working environment if the international student goes home might be stressful (Hunter-Johnson, 2022).

Language barriers were also identified as a source of stress for some non-traditional international students, resulting from variations in accents and fluency level of communication (Barton et al., 2022; Hartwig et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019). This is contrary to the postulation of The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), that foreign students are a distinct group in terms of migration policy (OECD, 2022), and that they are frequently regarded as ‘pre-integrated’ migrants, with easily recognizable domestic credentials and with no less than a basic understanding of the host country's language (OECD, 2022). As an aside, a comparative study of international students’ satisfaction based on four themes, discovered that they were least satisfied with eating options which may also be classified as cultural shock (Ammigan & Jones, 2018).

Further, another major source of stress for international students is the crisis in their home or host countries. A crisis is essentially a term used to describe a bothersome and unusual sociopolitical or cultural incident that throws our ideal state of mind at risk (McConnell, 2003). According to McConnell (2003), there are three main kinds of crisis and they include the sudden crisis, with the Covid-19 pandemic as an example; the creeping crisis like the September 11 attack or the Russian-Ukrainian war (McCarthy, 2022), and lastly, the chronic crisis such as the ongoing Israel-Palestine war. A crisis may cause racial discrimination and violence against international students whose home or host countries are affected by the crisis (Ramia, 2021). International students are surely

impacted academically and psychologically by the threats, uncertainty, and urgency attached to crises (Boin et al., 2005).

### **Coping Mechanisms**

In a study of the advantages and disadvantages of volunteering for foreign learners, it was discovered that these students exhibit grit when encountering difficulty (Barton et al., 2022). Similarly, Pappa et al. (2020), in a study of causes of stress and how international doctoral students make meaning of their scholarly identity, opined that international students are vulnerable to pressure that could result in mental health issues when these stressors are not viewed favorably as a stimulus. However, when viewed positively, some stressors could drive professional and intellectual identity negotiation.

Arguably, the importance of social support in managing and alleviating stress cannot be overstated. Regardless of the level of social support gained or recognized, social support helps lessen the detrimental consequences of stress (Lahey & Orehek, 2011; Uchino et al., 2012). Social support could take the form of establishing strong relationships, role models, and support networks across their educational community, especially among their instructors and other global peers and/or domestic students (Jenkins et al., 2018; Pappa et al., 2020). Guan et al. (2020) discovered that having more social support has a strong beneficial link with having fewer mental and physical health problems.

Comparably, there is a wide range of reports on the benefits of campus student recreational centers on the mental health and academic success of non-traditional students (Brock et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2020; Omar-fauzee et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2017). Evidence suggests that students who utilize this on-campus resource tend to exhibit some

of the following characteristics (if not all): higher self-esteem, enhanced mood and cognitive abilities, reduced stress, increased self-confidence, and a sense of fulfillment and belonging (Brock et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2020; Omar-fauzee et al., 2009).

The use of student recreational centers is concomitant with various educational and physical health outcomes. However, its consequences on interpersonal and psychological impacts may not be as widely recognized (Guan et al., 2020).

Also, in a TED interview, Walker (2020) highlighted the significance of sleep as an overnight therapy leading to human emotional first aid and acting as a restoration weapon that enhances a revised mind-wide web of information. Relatively, good sleep quality ultimately enhances wellness and minimizes ailments such as headaches, chest discomfort, fatigue, and poor sleep quality (Guan et al., 2020). Interestingly, Guan et al. (2020) opined that students may also use student recreational centers to increase their physical activity, thus enhancing their quality of sleep.

Herzberg (2013) on the other hand, opined that personal coping strategies are primarily employed to manage stressors. Therefore, individual strategies may include planning with emphasis on “goal intentions and implementation intentions” (Devonport & Lane, 2014, p. 133).

However, scholars have equally highlighted the tangibility of dyadic coping strategies by graduate students in mitigating stressors (Devonport & Lane, 2014; Herzberg, 2013). Dyadic coping is when one partner or spouse seeks to help his/her partner overcome a stressful situation or a source of stress (Devonport & Lane, 2014; Herzberg, 2013). Successful coping entails managing the situations that cause stress and the bad emotions caused by stress (Devonport & Lane, 2014). However, from a dyadic

standpoint, good coping also entails preserving interactions during difficult times, especially when stressors impact the partnership (Herzberg, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study dwells on Macia Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship.

According to Baxter Magolda (1998):

Self-authorship involves the integration of the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions of development. Self-authorship requires evaluating one's views in light of existing evidence and constructing a reasonable perspective as a result (the cognitive dimensions). However, doing so hinges on one's ability to be influenced rather than consumed by others' perspectives (the interpersonal dimensions). Being influenced but not consumed by others or being interdependent requires the possession of an internally generated belief system that regulates one's interpretations of experience (the intrapersonal dimensions) (p. 144).

Baxter's theory of self-authorship focuses on adults in the early stages of their lives that are embattled with diverse stress (Cooper, 2016). For these students, the developmental process of self-authorship is a way of developing an internal voice (Cooper, 2016) as they encounter challenges/stress while studying in a foreign land.

Additionally, adult students' professional formation characterizes self-authorship theory as a path toward logical and emotional maturity, which includes the ability to gather, understand, and critically assess information as well as ponder on one's convictions to generate cogent conclusions (Baxter Magolda, 1998; Del Prato, 2017).

Baxter's theory encompasses four meaning-making phases, namely: the following formulas phase, the crossroads phase, becoming the author of one's life phase, and the internal foundation phase (Patton et al., 2016). The meaning-making phase corroborates that the growth stage of adult students is shifting from relying on outside influences for information and identity to an introspective outlook marked by multifaceted thinking and autonomy (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

### **Conclusion**

With an increased concentration on improving students' recruitment and enrollment, most of the challenges faced by these students arise from the negligence of the institution to incorporate and assimilate them into the system on campus (Spencer-Oatey, 2018). While it may be tempting to presume that non-traditional international doctoral students are adults who can care for themselves (Fischer, 2023), institutions, however, must not conceal the fact that getting a doctorate is an uphill struggle as not all of these students finish their programs due to the stressors encountered (Devonport & Lane, 2014; Gao, 2021). Using a qualitative approach, this study seeks to understand the experiences of non-traditional international doctoral students at Rowan University.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

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

The research was carried out on the main campus of Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. Rowan University is a public research university with a national reputation. Additionally, Rowan University has two additional satellite campuses in Camden and Stratford, New Jersey. The medical schools are in Stratford and Camden (Rowan University, 2022). Rowan University has 1228 international students and 73% of those are graduate students pursuing a non-medical grad degree (S. Lezotte, personal communication, March 24, 2024).

#### **Population and Sample of Study**

The participants of this study are non-traditional international doctoral students at Rowan University. Purposeful sampling was used to choose the participants. Purposeful sampling involves the selection of study participants based on some features (McMillan, 2016). Having the population of interest as non-traditional international doctoral students, participants include doctoral international students with one or more of the following non-traditional characteristics as identified by NCES (2002) below:

1. Those juggling work and studies either on a part-time or full-time academic basis,
2. People with dependent alongside their spouse or children,
3. Single parents,
4. Those who are financially sufficient themselves,

5. People who never entered college/university the initial year they finished high school.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The study employs a qualitative approach since it is more interested in the participants' own experiences (Habib et al., 2014). Also, narrative inquiry was used to capture the stories behind participants' experiences (McMillan, 2016) and partly phenomenological research design (McMillan, 2016).

Also, because the study aims to make some recommendations to the institution on better serving the group of study based on the participants' narrative, the research design is termed a descriptive applied and action-based methodology (Habib et al., 2014). The interview questions utilized consisted of a set of 13 questions devised by the researcher while equally engaging participants to see if their responses could be explored further.

In addition to generating useful insights and improving the turnout, emergent sampling techniques were implemented. Emergent sampling occurs when the investigator identifies someone who was not part of the study previously and decides to include them because they fall within the categories of the study's participants (McMillan, 2016,).

### **The Procedure of Gathering Data**

Having received consent from Rowan University's Institutional Review Board to conduct the inquiry, an initial notice was distributed through the Rowan Daily Announcer to solicit volunteers to participate in the interviews.

The Rowan Announcer gave an outline of the study, emphasizing that participation is completely voluntary. Rowan Announcers were delivered from the Rowan University server to guarantee maximum data security.

The interview, either conducted in person or virtually, was no more than one hour and was conducted based on participants' availability upon completing the consent forms. Participants are addressed in this study by the pseudonym of their choice. Data obtained was retained on a password-protected device and destroyed immediately after the study was completed.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using phenomenology data analysis which Merriam and Tisdell (2015) define as the process of “focusing on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness” (pp. 25–26). This approach was employed to capture the stories behind participants' experiences while I sought to understand their daily life situations just as they described (McMillan, 2016).

Data were manually coded using inductive thematic, which is a careful search across a data set resulting in the emergence of relevant themes/patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The qualitative data set was divided into smaller samples. Codes were generated after a comprehensive examination of the samples, including comments and questions until all data were coded. Also, just as Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested, the researcher equally embraced the cutting and sorting (which is searching for repetitions among narratives) method in identifying themes.

Further, after assessing the data and describing the themes that emerged, member-checking procedures that allowed participants to validate whether they were correctly

understood was initiated, as this helped minimize study biases and validate the analysis of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; McMillan, 2016).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

This qualitative research study aims to understand some of the stressors non-traditional international doctoral students face while studying in a foreign land at Rowan University, a public university in New Jersey, United States. This study also seeks to examine the coping strategies non-traditional international doctoral students maximize in balancing their academic responsibilities with other life responsibilities in the face of these stressors.

This chapter provides a thick description of the profile of the population while analyzing the data from the interview questions in a manner that the voices of the participants will be adequate (Ponterotto, 2006). Thus, the findings from the interviews were depicted in a verisimilitude manner with a combination of both etic and emic data (McMillan, 2016).

#### **Profile of the Population/Sample**

The participants were four non-traditional doctoral students, consisting of two male students and two female students. All participants were engineering students, which can be explained by the overrepresentation of international students in the doctoral engineering program at Rowan University for the Fall 2023 semester when participants were recruited. According to Rowan dashboards, international students made up 31.6% of Rowan's Ph.D. programs (i.e. excludes Ed.D. students) in Fall 2023, with 50.4% being doctoral students in the College of Engineering. Also, two out of the four participants were in their first year, second semester as at the time of the interview with the other two in their second year, second semester (as at the time of data collection). All four

participants were research assistants. Their pseudonyms are Hyman, Amona, Summer, and Alphonse. Lastly, two of the participants are from South America, and the other two are from Africa.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), If you can answer the research question, you have discovered a theme. Thus, in analyzing the generated data, themes, and subthemes were derived from participants' narratives as answers to the study research questions. The three themes identified were personal stressors, academic stressors, and coping strategies.

### ***Personal Stressors***

Participants acknowledged that leaving one's country for another to study is stressful because it is a journey of the unknown. Especially where cultures and educational systems differ. The personal stressors identified by participants include language barriers, cultural shock – both in the United States and at home (i.e. war), financial and housing stress, transportation stress, and conflict of identity.

**Language Barrier.** Two of the participants had communication barriers. Hyman explained that during their first semester, the lecturer's accent was stressful to understand. According to Hyman "... you need to strain your ear to understand their accents...because theirs is quite different from ours..." Also, Alphonse had similar issues as he stated:

...I understand English language, but I don't get the context of words. I don't understand why something is funny or not? Why is it important or not? Their conversational English is different...when talking to people you hear them talking

in abbreviations...acronyms. Lots of colloquial language...what's that? That was one of my biggest troubles.

**Cultural Shock.** Two of the study participants explained their experiences with cultural shock both in the United States and in their home country. Amona's cultural shock was partly concerning their hesitation to ask their supervisor for help. Amona's culture tends to limit the way you ask people for help, especially non-family members. In the face of her financial stress, Amona specifically said:

my supervisor kept asking me if you have any problem...do you have problem with your cash flow.... common, I felt I couldn't tell him, I couldn't even ask him because I was not free to do that, it's strange...it's frustrating... while you need to focus on your studies to maintain your visa status.

Amona also experienced another cultural shock while living in the campus housing as they were shocked to see roommates bring in their male friends to the dormitory.

According to Amona's narrative, they were surprised to see roommates bring in their boyfriends inside the campus housing. This is something Amona's culture frowns at.

Alphonse as well in his words had both societal and academic shock, they said:

...people here are distant, they don't want to lose time...having a small chat. So, when you go to the office or when I say hi, people look at you like, so what's up, what do you need? Nothing, okay, so see you later...they are not inviting...I like when people are direct, but you can be direct, warm, and kind in a way...

Further, while war was only mentioned by Amona, Amona elucidated more on the effect war in their home country had on them. Amona further said,

...one of my problems is that my passport validity will expire soon and because of the war situation there's no possibility to renew it. So, I will be without a valid I.D here, even I will not be able to travel to visit my family...so the door for me is to do my driver's license exams because I need to have a valid I.D that will enable me to travel across the state.

**Financial and Housing Stress.** All the participants experienced financial stress, but only three of the four participants raised the issue of getting accommodation during their first year, with two of the four participants dwelling on late stipend payments. In Hyman's words:

It took about three months for them to start paying me...it made me emotional because back home I was running a business, and I wasn't cashless like what I experienced here...very depressing...I came in August, and I got paid in November...the paperwork took time...and the department/graduate coordinator said they were not expecting us, they didn't know we were given a visa...they were surprised to see us and surprised we were given visas.

In the same vein, Amona had an encounter with financial stress, and as a result, they could not pay for their housing fees. Amona's narrative goes thus:

I got to the U.S. four months after the war...I lost everything. I came with a carry-on... I came with two thousand and something dollars...I needed to purchase health insurance with a thousand plus...I just limited myself to everything...I wanted to eat ice cream, but I said no because I needed to focus the rest of the money on buying jackets... I was feeling fatigued all the time ... food, I wasn't able to buy good food...I expected to receive my first stipend as soon as

possible...but it took two months and a half...the day that I received the first payment, I had only \$50 left...I was already in trouble with the accommodation department as I received many late payments on my account...I wasn't able to pay so I left the campus house. I was so stressed about these issues because I received my stipend very late...I couldn't ask my family back home for money because we are survivors of the war, I can't tell something like this...

Summer and Alphonse had similar experiences with housing and financial stress. Summer, being a single parent, explained that they spent almost 1/3 of their stipend on childcare, and another 1/3 on housing rent leaving them with few dollars to fend for themselves. According to Summer, "what you get paid in a Ph.D. program is a stipend, is worth for a single person, not for someone with family." Summer further explained their housing stress thus:

...difficulty in finding an apartment...they ask for your financial records and since you are an international student, you don't have financial records in the U.S., so you can't find an apartment. And they ask you for a sponsor or someone to sign the lease on your behalf...but you don't know anyone here in the U.S. It is so difficult to find...you can't come to the U.S 30 days before the start of class so I came in 15 days before...in 15 days I had to figure out everything, settling down with my son...bank account, SSN... for domestic students this is just trivial, but for us, it's not, it's very stressful.

**Transportation Stress.** All participants admitted to have experienced transportation stress with an emphasis on the poor public system in Glassboro, New Jersey. Poor public transportation was a form of stress for Amoda:

...here there's no good public transportation. If you want to go to the bank, grocery, any place nearby you need to walk at least 20 minutes in this kind of weather which is like snow...so you walk 20 minutes just to get food for yourself...I wasn't feeling too good in my first semester, I had low iron because I wasn't able to get good food for myself.

Alphonse also shared their experience with transportation stress by stating that “the grocery store, that part was a little stressful because I don't have a car. You have to pay for Lyft or Uber, that's kind of stressful...trying to balance your budget and your finance...”

Summer shared that in their first year, they lived in Glassboro with their child but due to the poor transportation system in Glassboro particularly, and New Jersey in general, they decided to move to Philadelphia. Summer's narrative goes thus:

...first year I lived in Glassboro, I didn't like that there was nothing to do with my child and we didn't have any entertainment, we didn't have a car because it was expensive. I can't afford a car and here there is no public transportation, so I was kind of stuck here. So, I moved to Philly. In Philly, they have good public transportation. I have more things to do, and I can go to various places with my child...

Amona on the other hand, said transportation is a big issue when trying to get groceries and because they have no car, they tend to go for the most expensive stuff due to the delivery option attached to the purchase.

**Conflict of Identity.** Three out of the four participants reported having experienced a conflict of identity. Amona's experience of identity crises is that people

think they are from other racial groups due to their looks. However, Alphonse and Summer seemed to have similar experiences. Alphonse narrative depicts that:

This is one of the stressful things that I do not like...I worked for a year and then I had my Masters, then worked again, and now doing my Ph.D. My fellow graduate students are like 24 years thereabout...I have life experience and work experience, so sometimes that makes it hard to relate...suddenly you come, and you have this graduate label. They see you just like a student, they don't recognize your other identities, your experience, your past, your professional title.

### *Academic Stressors*

The sub-themes identified from participants' narratives are course load and poor advisor relationships.

**Course Load.** Most significantly, participants appreciate the differences in their home country's education and their country of study, however, they all mentioned the stress of numerous coursework, alongside the workloads of assignments in the face of their research work. Hyman specifically said:

combining research with coursework has been so tedious, sometimes it makes me run mad...sometimes it causes emotional trauma... it is very stressful...I was skeptical if I was going to repeat a course because I had a very low score in the first test we had...I was full of worries considering the fact that I had lots of presentations and a bunch of assignments...I sometimes sleep in the lab overnight...

In addition, Summer, another participant in the study, also shared a similar perspective. Being a single parent, Summer made it known that:

...as a non-traditional student starting my Ph.D. program 16 years after my master's program, I was not used to doing assignments, and meeting deadlines...it's not such a big deal but when you are just not used to that...being a student again.

**Poor Advisor Relationship.** Two of the participants had a hostile student-supervisor relationship in their transitioning year but were given a change of supervisor by the institution when the cases were reported. One of them experienced workplace harassment, while the other explained that it was a stressful situation, and whose? narrative goes thus:

...I was losing my time. We had biweekly meetings, and I didn't feel that I was advancing, I didn't feel that he was supporting me how he should, neither understanding my subject nor what I wanted to pursue. I think he was just dragging me and the way he treats me, like the hidden threats, the tone in the language...I just had enough...it's making me not productive at all because I don't sleep well, and sometimes I overthink, so I don't rest...I then decided to speak out...I don't want him anymore.

### ***Coping Strategies***

Interestingly, despite these stressors, participants have been able to identify a few coping mechanisms used in mitigating the stressors, based on institutional contexts and personal contexts.

**Institutional Contexts.** A few coping strategies highlighted here include the international center, good relationships with advisors, wellness center, library, pantry, and recreational center.

***International Center.*** While all the participants acknowledged the importance of the international center, only three out of the four participants had good experiences with Rowan International Center. Hyman made it clear that the international center had been very helpful and very easy to access, leaving only Amona with the narrative that they hardly responded to their emails, thus Amona had to go to their office and to make inquiries.

***Wellness Center.*** All participants confirmed the usefulness of the wellness center in mitigating their stressors. Amona appreciated the service of the wellness center, Amona said the wellness center provided them with good treatment and attended to their swollen lips and face and irregular periods while they were sick despite them not having insurance with the university as these assisted them in settling down and focus on their studies.

***Recreational Center.*** All four participants mentioned the use of the Rowan recreational center as a place of rejuvenation. The recreational center is a space where students go to exercise. All the participants utilize this space. Amona, having been affected by war in their home country, experienced panic attacks, and utilizing the wellness center resources like going to yoga classes two days per week, and Zumba classes two days per week, has helped to deal with these attacks. In Amona's words, "...these are my priorities and I know that anytime I miss one of these, the next day I will not perform well."

Alphonse on the other hand, prides himself on Aikido exercise. Also, Summer on the other hand goes for body pump exercises and swimming every week.

***Library & Pantry.*** All participants acknowledged the usefulness of these resources. Hyman has practically lost count of their visits to the library and the pantry. According to Hyman, Rowan's library is a place where students tend to ease their stress because of the conducive environment. Hyman described the library as a quiet and serene environment, and the pantry as being 100% helpful.

Similarly, Amona loves the dissertation writing retreat “hootcamp” resources provided in the library. Amona said she loves the connections available, and the food provided during the hootcamp periods. As an aside, Amona acknowledges that their financial stress was a bit mitigated by Rowan Shop, a free food pantry for students:

The first two months I depended on the shop, although not everything was provided...it reduced the cost of living, I mostly depended on it for my period supplies, and I couldn't take the meat because I saw that there was something wrong.

***Student-Advisor Relationship.*** Two of the four participants reiterated how helpful and supportive their supervisors had been. Amona had a supportive and warm relationship with their research advisor as their fear of being homeless was sorted by this supervisor who provided them with a place to stay on their first day at Rowan. Amona elucidated by saying:

...so, imagine I don't have a supervisor like this, what was I going to do...he followed me up, picked me up...provided a place for me to sleep that night, took me to the university...offered me two meals like his family, then I moved to the campus housing.

**Personal Contexts.** As an aside, the participants mentioned numerous personal coping strategies, some of which include music, time management, faith, friends, and family. Alphonse enjoys playing guitar as a form of stress mediation, while Hyman listens to music/ songs.

Relationships with families and friends were also mentioned as coping resources. Hyman mentioned their mom, fiancé, and roommates as a source of encouragement. Alphonse also acknowledged the importance of their neighbor.

Time management was equally included as a coping strategy. Participants said they are organized and meticulous with the use of their time. A participant explained time management as “I know I need to allocate time to these responsibilities to balance up, so I allocate time.” Two other participants reiterated they make plans for the next day the night before. Summer wakes up late at night to study while the child is asleep.

Hyman and Amona also recognize faith as a coping mechanism. For Hyman, they stated “... I draw my inspiration from God, knowing that sorrow may last for a night but joy cometh in the morning...” In addition, from Amona’s point of view, aside from having good food, good sleep, and good drinks, Amona prides themselves on their relationship with God and never misses their prayer times. Amona also added that “Muslims Club MSA is one of the good things that made my experience better” here on campus.

Alphonse further said as a way of coping they “disconnect from the things that make me stressed...take a break...watch a movie...biking, sleep...go for a walk...”

## **Non-Traditional International Doctoral Students' Perception of Stress**

Interestingly, the perception of participants about stress is positive. According to Hyman, the doctoral journey is “A refining process of life... it is natural and normal in life... it is indispensable...I know that it’s also temporal knowing that in the next four or five years I will be done with it...I will not quit or bow down.”

Amona also shared a positive perception of stress despite all the stressors encountered, they opined that:

...I’m a positive person...a believer, I do not focus on negative things because I know that life is not easy...life is tough. So, I will think about the positive things. I would rather say that if what I mentioned would be available for me, my experience would be better... Having motivation and interest in the research field is very important. It wakes up me every day in the morning to continue working on my area of interest.

Alphonse and Summer at some point, thought of leaving the doctoral journey for a master’s degree. While Alphonse had in the past thought of transferring to another institution due to the stressors encountered, Summer had a similar encounter and further detailed their perception of stress by saying:

I have had many times of leaving...I see stress as something that doesn’t motivate me...those times when I thought of quitting, two things that kept me on track despite the stress are, first, I have already invested so much in being here...my savings... I left my job back home...so I have put so much in...the other is my research project. I like what I’m researching, and that motivates me.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, all participants experienced stress and devised some coping mechanisms as a way of balancing their academic responsibilities with other life responsibilities.

Interestingly, while two of the participants had sometimes thought of leaving the doctoral journey due to the encountered stressors, all participants had positive perceptions about stress. Therefore, the next chapter will discuss the findings of the investigation and recommendations in line with enhancing a home-away-from-home experience for non-traditional international doctoral students.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary, Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study concludes with a discussion of the research topics that informed the interview procedure as they apply to the research findings. The study also presents some recommendations for improving non-traditional doctoral students' experiences at Rowan University and other higher education institutions.

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

This qualitative research study attempts to better understand some of the stressors that non-traditional international doctoral students experience while studying in a foreign country at Rowan University, a public university in New Jersey, USA. This study aimed to know non-traditional international doctoral students' coping methods for balancing their academic and other life duties in the face of these challenges. Also, the study attempts to recommend to institutions how to effectively serve these populations to reduce mental stress and burnout while striving for holistic success.

Through narrative inquiry and a slightly phenomenological qualitative research design, I was able to interview four non-traditional doctoral international students at Rowan University, giving me the insight I needed to perform the study. The stressors faced by non-traditional international doctoral students and their coping strategies were revealed. Finally, an insight into the institutional support resources utilized by non-traditional international doctoral students at Rowan University, as well as their overall perceptions of stress was known.

After receiving permission from Rowan University's Institutional Review Board to conduct the study, volunteers were recruited by sending a recruitment email via the

Rowan Announcer. Three non-traditional international doctoral students expressed their willingness to participate in the study and were contacted to schedule an introductory meeting, after which interview dates were agreed upon based on the availability of the participants. However, three interviews were conducted in person, while one was conducted virtually on Rowan Webex.

In addition to generating useful insights and improving the turnout, emergent or opportunistic sampling techniques were implemented in recruiting an additional participant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed via Rowan Webex. The interview findings were summarized after reading through the transcripts more than 10 times and forwarded to the participants so that I could confirm the accuracy of my findings through member checks. Direct quotes were used in the data analysis. This provided insight into student impressions of real-life occurrences, which helped me create themes and code data.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

### ***Research Question 1***

- 1) What are the stresses encountered/experienced by non-traditional international doctoral students at Rowan University while pursuing higher education in the United States?

In line with the literature review in chapter two, two main categories of stressors were generated from this study, and they include personal stressors and academic stressors. Personal stressors consists of five sub-themes of stressors i.e., language barrier, cultural shock, financial & housing stress, transportation stress, and conflict of identity. While the academic stressors entail course load and poor advisor relationships.

Interestingly, all these stressors except the conflict of identity, transportation stress, and housing stress have been highlighted directly or indirectly by scholars in the literature review. Pappa et al. (2020) touched on academic challenges, also just to reiterate, that the negativity of poor advisor relationships, financial constraints, and cultural shock were all equally mentioned as stressors (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Barton et al., 2022; Devonport & Lane, 2014; Hartwig et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019).

Most significantly, the outbreak of conflict of identity, transportation stress, and housing stress could be attributed to Rowan University's location, post-pandemic housing inflation costs that did not exist when older studies were conducted, or the non-traditional characteristics of this population of international doctoral students. Regardless, this further corroborates that non-traditional international doctoral students are faced with a lot of stressors in their doctoral journey, which could also metamorphose into mental stress if not carefully managed.

### ***Research Question 2***

- 2) What are the coping strategies employed by non-traditional international doctoral students to assist them in being focused while fueling their drive to achieve academic excellence?

Following Herzberg's (2013) postulation that personal coping methods are largely used to manage stressors, non-traditional international doctoral students in this current study employed the following personal approaches in managing stressors namely: religion/faith, time management, music, sleep, and relationship with families and friends. While all these personal coping mechanisms identified by participants are in line with the reviews of literature in chapter two, it is worth emphasizing the vantage point of Guan et

al. (2020) that having more interaction and positive relationships with people has a direct correlation with having fewer mental and physical health problems.

### ***Research Question 3***

- 3) What support systems can non-traditional international doctoral students identify at their institution?

From the institutional context, scholars have reiterated that students who maximize institutional resources are highly likely to possess stronger self-worth, enhanced emotional and mental functioning, lower stress levels, better self-confidence, and an aura of sense of belonging (Brock et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2020; Omar-fauzee et al., 2009). Thus, the institutional support systems identified and utilized by non-traditional international doctoral students in this present study are the international center, wellness center, recreational center, library & pantry, and student-advisor relationship. Although only one participant from this current study mentioned that Rowan International Center hardly responds to their email, the rest of the participants were satisfied with the services received from the international center.

### ***Research Question 4***

- 4) How do non-traditional international doctoral students describe or perceive stress in their educational experience?

From the literature, the doctoral journey is a journey of the unknown that still fascinates non-traditional international students to study abroad (Devonport & Lane, 2014; Hunter-Johnson, 2022). Despite the stressors encountered and experienced, study participants ascribe a sense of purpose and value to their phase of life (Pappa et al, 2020). This is, however, commensurate with Macia Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship

as explained in the literature review that the path of self-authorship is the journey to develop an internal voice regardless of crossroads or stressors encountered by adult learners while studying in a foreign land (Cooper, 2016). For this current study participants, there has been a shift in their psychological and rational growth (Baxter Magolda, 1998; Del Prato, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

Following the literature review in the second chapter, non-traditional international learners who participated in this study are confronted with stressors. These stresses, if not properly addressed, can have a psychological toll on students and diminish the persistence rate of international doctoral students, as seen in this study as two study participants had thought about transferring to another university or compromising for a master's degree. Another effect of these stressors is international students' institutional recommendation rates, which, according to Ammigan (2019), has a direct impact on international students' contentment.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings, I will propose the following recommendations for future studies:

1. A quantitative research design should be utilized in determining non-traditional international doctoral students' stress and coping mechanisms.
2. Since the participants in this study were all from the College of Engineering, an inter-collegial approach should be carried out in determining the stressors and coping mechanisms of these populations of study.

3. An inter-racial approach to determining the stressors and coping mechanisms of non-traditional international doctoral students should be examined.
4. A gender difference approach should be examined in determining the stressors of the female and male gender.
5. A holistic approach should be used in analyzing the stressors and coping mechanisms of all international students.
6. Lastly, a study on graduate student-advisor relationship should be examined.

### **Recommendations for Rowan University**

In line with the narrative and experiences of the study participants, Rowan University should see to the following recommendations in enhancing a home away from home experiences for non-traditional international doctoral students:

1. There should be a public forum for family housing discussion to determine an affordable cost and a suitable off-campus or on-campus location for non-traditional international students.
2. To further integrate international students into the system, the international center should develop a calendar of when they will be available to assist new international students with creating bank accounts, obtaining social security numbers, and visiting nearby grocery stores, as this will alleviate transitioning and transportation stressors.
3. A healthy advisor-student relationship is very important for students' motivation and persistence; thus, advisors should be ethical, conscious, and warm in their dealings with students. Additionally, international graduate students should be

adequately enlightened on the consequences of lackadaisical attitudes toward their research studies.

4. Language and accent immersion classes should be organized by the library in conjunction with the international center, this avenue will introduce interested or new international students to the conversational or colloquial language and thus reduce communication barriers or accent issues.
5. For international students to know more about mental health resources on campus, the wellness center can devise a mandated wellness 101 course at the beginning or end of every semester or session. This way, students will be familiar with the resources at their disposal.
6. Since the international student club is for undergraduate students, a graduate international students club can be created or should be merged with the undergraduates. Also, the international center should be actively involved in the international students' association as this will further send a reassuring message to this population of students.
7. Rowan shop should ensure that the food supplies available to students are not expired. To limit the expiration dates, a first-in-first-out (FIFO) or last-in-first-out (LIFO) approach can be consciously maintained.
8. While we know that the course works are essential in all programs of study and may not be reduced, the assignment workload on the other hand can be reduced, or the time frame be extended or prolonged.
9. Poor public transportation was equally a concern for non-traditional international doctoral students; thus, Rowan University should see to reducing this stressor.

The institution can make buses available for these populations for weekend grocery shopping, campus pick up, and drop off within the school premises and its neighboring community.

10. There should also be classes for those internationals who want to obtain their driver's licenses but do not have a means of transportation. These classes should be preparatory classes for the knowledge test and the road test.
11. There should be at least one off-campus activity towards the end of each semester for this population of students, just to ease their stress and to connect with other counterparts.

Overall, this study elucidates the stresses experienced by non-traditional international doctoral students as personal and academic stressors, as well as their coping techniques in personal and institutional contexts. However, with a mindful and service-oriented perspective, higher education professionals can alleviate some of these stresses faced by this population of students by taking into account the recommendations outlined above.

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## Appendix A

### Institutional Review Board Approval



**DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier:** FWA00007111  
**Rowan IORG/IRB:** Glassboro/CMSRU  
**IRB Chair Person:** Dr. Ane Johnson  
**IRB Director:** Eric Gregory  
**Effective Date:** November 15, 2023

#### Notice of Approval - Initial

**Study ID:** PRO-2023-349  
**Title:** Stress and Coping Mechanism(s)  
**Principal Investigator:** Stephanie Lezotte  
**Study Coordinator:** Ndidi Iwuagwu  
**Co-Investigator(s):** Ndidi Iwuagwu  
**Sponsor:** Internal

**Submission Type:** Initial  
**Submission Status:** Approved

**Approval Date:** November 15, 2023  
**Expiration Date:** November 14, 2024  
**Approval Cycle:** 12 months  
**Continuation Review Required:** Yes  
**Closure Required:** Yes

**Review Type:** Expedited  
**Expedited Category:** 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.  
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

**Pregnant Women, Human Fetus, and Neonates Code:** N/A

Pediatric/Children Code: N/A  
Prisoner(s) – Biomedical or Behavioral: N/A

**Study Performance Sites:**  
Rowan University, Glassboro Campus

**ALL APPROVED INVESTIGATOR(S) MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING:**

1. Conduct the research in accordance with the protocol, applicable laws and regulations, and the principles of research ethics as set forth in the Belmont Report.
- 2a. Continuing Review: Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses in approval, submit a continuation application at least eight weeks before the study expiration date.
- 2b. Progress Report: Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses, an annual progress report is required at least 21 days prior to the expiration date.
- 3a. Expiration of IRB Approval: If IRB approval expires, effective the date of expiration and until the continuing review approval is issued: All research activities must stop unless the IRB finds that it is in the best interest of individual subjects to continue. (This determination shall be based on a separate written request from the PI to the IRB.) No new subjects may be enrolled and no samples/charts/surveys may be collected, reviewed, and/or analyzed.
- 3b. Human Subjects Research Training: Proper training in the conduct of human subjects research must be current and not expired. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator and the investigator to complete training when expired. Any modifications and renewals will not be approved until training is not expired and current.
4. Amendments/Modifications/Revisions: If you wish to change any aspect of this study after the approval date mentioned in this letter, including but not limited to, study procedures, consent form(s), investigators, advertisements, the protocol document, investigator drug brochure, or accrual goals, you are required to obtain IRB review and approval prior to implementation of these changes unless necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects. This policy is also applicable to progress reports.
5. Unanticipated Problems: Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <https://research.rowan.edu/officeofresearch/compliance/irb/index.html>
6. Protocol Deviations and Violations: Deviations from/violations of the approved study protocol must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <https://research.rowan.edu/officeofresearch/compliance/irb/index.html>
7. Consent/Assent: The IRB has reviewed and approved the consent and/or assent process, waiver and/or alteration described in this protocol as required by 45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 50, 56, (if FDA regulated research). Only the versions of the documents included in the approved process may be used to document informed consent and/or assent of study subjects; each subject must receive a copy of the approved form(s); and a copy of each signed form must be filed in a secure place in the subject's medical/patient/research record.
8. Completion of Study: Notify the IRB when your study has been completed or stopped for any reason. Neither study closure by the sponsor nor the investigator removes the obligation for submission of timely continuing review application, progress report or final report.
9. The Investigator(s) did not participate in the review, discussion, or vote of this protocol.
10. Research protocol and study documentation and instruments is approved as of the Approval Date on this letter. All final approved versions of the study documentation, including but not limited to the protocol, advertisements and recruitment instruments, pre-screening instruments, surveys, interviews, scripts, data collection documents, all manner of consent forms, and all other documentation attached to this submission are approved for final use by the investigators up to the expiration date listed above (Expiration Date) in this letter.

11. Letter Comments: There are no additional comments.

12. **NJDOH Approved Studies**: IRB approval granted per the Data Use Agreement. Upon receipt of the fully executed Data Use Agreement (DUA) from NJDOH, the Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring an electronic, fully signed DUA is emailed to the Rowan University IRB.

**CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This email communication may contain private, confidential, or legally privileged information intended for the sole use of the designated and/or duly authorized recipients(s). If you are not the intended recipient or have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately by email and permanently delete all copies of this email including all attachments without reading them. If you are the intended recipient, secure the contents in a manner that conforms to all applicable state and/or federal requirements related to privacy and confidentiality of such information.**

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions**

- 1.) What pseudonym would you like to be addressed by?
- 2.) What is your continent and or country of origin?
- 3.) What year are you in your doctoral program, and what year were you admitted?
- 4.) What are you presently doing as a student right now?
- 5.) Could you tell me as much as possible about the details of your experience at work as a Doctoral student in a foreign land?
- 6.) Could you please take me through the stress experienced from your first year till date if any?
- 7.) How do you perceive stress in your doctoral journey?
- 8.) What was that like to you?
- 9.) In the face of all of these, what have been your coping strategies?
- 10.) What other means do you employ in balancing your life as a student/researcher, and as a non-traditional student?
- 11.) What do you perceive to be the impact of stress on you or other foreign students?
- 12.) What coping strategies or support systems do you utilize in the face of all of these?
- 13.) As a non-traditional international student, how do you balance your academics with other life responsibilities?
- 14.) What institutional coping resources can you identify, and how often do you utilize them?
- 15.) What can be done to make the experience better for you on campus?

16.) Is there anything else you would like to share or add to this interview about stress?