International Student Adjustment Framework: Improvement Through Educational Leadership

Hilda Cecilia Contreras Aguirre
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADJUSTMENT FRAMEWORK: IMPROVEMENT THROUGH EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Article by Hilda Cecilia Contreras Aguirre

Abstract

The ever-growing student population diversity in American universities demands better comprehension to meet international graduate students' academic, sociocultural, and personal needs. Based on prior international student adaptation models, this researcher proposed a conceptual framework of international students' adjustment in graduate studies. Such adaptation process was analyzed through four stages: vulnerability, self-awareness, alliances, and synergy. Additionally, the importance of student affairs professionals and faculty leadership in supporting this student population was addressed as well. Lastly, this paper included implications and recommendations to smooth the adjustment process of international students to the education settings in the United States; hence, helping in their sense of belonging to the campus community.

Introduction

Institutions of higher education represent contexts where students acquire knowledge and develop academic, social, cultural, and life skills (Bang & Montgomery, 2013; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2010). In college, students interact with classmates, professors, student affairs practitioners, and staff developing both academic and social skills (Kuh et al., 2010). These daily based exchanges enhance students' educational outcomes and strengthen their sense of belonging to the campus community. Diversity, however, plays a major role in universities' student population; therefore, human interactions are often conflictive and difficult to handle (Chang, Milem, & Antonio, 2011). In particular, intolerance toward race, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are the most common reasons for disputes and violent acts in American universities (Chang et al., 2011).

Conjointly, postsecondary institutions in the United States receive and educate a distinctive and unique student population: International students. According to the

Institute of International Education (2017), in 2016 / 2017 the population of international students consisted of 1,078,822 scholars with a growth of 10% in the past two years. Largely, international students come from five countries: China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada; 44% are enrolled in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields; 56.3% are males and 43.7% are females; and, 391,124 students pursue graduate studies (Institute of International Education, 2017). The purpose of this paper was to understand the adaptation process of international students in graduate studies based on prior international student adaptation models (Kim, 2012; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). As such, this paper presented an international students' adjustment framework, analyzed the leadership role of student affairs practitioners as well as faculty, and showed implications in implementing a student success theory on behalf of better serving graduate international students.

Literature Review

Multiple prominent universities, respected researchers, and influential scientific studies are commonly found in American universities (Lee & Rice, 2007). As a consequence, the growth of international students' enrollments in institutions in the United States is tight to students' perception of the United States as an important political, economic, and social influence in the global context. Accordingly, international students' presence in American colleges "enriches the cultural diversity of campuses with their home culture and ethnic experiences" (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015, p. 2). These characteristics provide significant value to the institutions' diversity and at the same time, call for major attention and better comprehension to meet international students' academic and sociocultural needs (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Liu, 2011; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009; Wu et al., 2015).

Likewise, international students contribute greatly to the American economy (Bradley, 2000; Lee & Rice, 2007; Wu et al., 2015). The Institute of International Education (2015) highlighted that financially, international students contributed to the US economy with $30.8 billion, from which 72.5% corresponds to non-American funding. This external capital mainly comes from personal and family savings along with foreign governments funds, foreign private sponsors, and international organizations funding. Therefore, local economies benefit from international students' expenses related to housing, educational items, transportation, and even, health insurance coverages (Institute of International Education, 2011)

Particularly, the decision to study in a foreign country brings challenges to students who must adapt and adjust academically, culturally, and socially to a new context (Wu et al., 2015). Not surprisingly, international students often suffer from a cultural shock (Bradley, 2000) and feel discriminated in several ways due to their English proficiency, country of origin, and status as foreign students (Fatima, 2001). Certainly, limited knowledge of the host culture (Jamaludin, Sam, Sandal, & Adam, 2018) along with a limited English proficiency triggers another difficulty for international students including, miscommunication with their peers, faculty, and staff (Liu, 2011; Terui, 2012). Often,

they struggle to understand courses' content and requirements contributing to increasing their stress and negative feelings concerning their academic performance (Özturgut & Murphy, 2009).

Common trends were found among several studies (Liu, 2011; Terui, 2012; Wu et al., 2015; Yang, Zhang, & Sheldon, 2018) regarding how international students could overcome smoothly the difficulties faced to accommodate to a new environment. To achieve international students' smoother adjustment to American universities, institutions should take some actions to assure international students meet appropriate college-level English proficiency and feel supported academically and psychologically (Liu, 2011). In addition, the promotion of the positive aspects of diversity within the university setting would help embrace international students successfully (Wu et al., 2015). In turn, Bradley (2000) proposed a 'buddy scheme," (p. 430), that is, other students could help international students in dealing with early adjustment steps. The idea is that, international students who got used to the host country environment support the new arrivals in order to avoid isolation. Additionally, Özturgut and Murphy (2009) suggested hiring faculty and staff with experience in "multicultural and intercultural communication" (p. 380). Having multicultural people on campus may help reach an effective one-on-one connection with students whose cultural and ethnic background are diverse.

The admission of international students, however, did not guarantee their success once they are enrolled (Lee & Rice, 2007), a collaborative work between faculty and staff should help raise awareness of the difficulties faced by international students (Kuh et al., 2010; Pope & Mueller, 2011). Consequently, this awareness should help avoid prejudging and create a secure and friendly environment for international students (Lee & Rice, 2007; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009). A collaborative effort is, therefore, a key element in an educational setting, where all departments should work on creating connections and possibilities, enhancing interdisciplinary actions, taking risks on behalf of students, and showing concern for others. Lastly, leadership consists of "human communication that modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs" (Hackman & Johnson, 2013, p. 11). Therefore, postsecondary institutions through their educational leaders and especially, student affairs practitioners should work on meeting better the academic, social, cultural, and personal needs of international students. Often international students' communication limitations and inability to express themselves efficiently are interpreted as lack of academic competency (Lee & Rice, 2007); hence, institutions should not only enhance communications' channels but also develop support programs to guarantee their academic success.

Analysis of the Adjustment Concept Components

According to Chang et al. (2011), international students often come from countries that are not as diverse as the United States (e.g. in terms of race and ethnicity). As a result, international students can feel overwhelmed when they find out such people diversity at American universities. Hence, the aspect of diversity is a key component in the

adjustment process for international students, either as undergraduate or graduate students (Wu et al., 2015). Certainly, despite diversity has been a fundamental component of education since the early 20th century (Chang et al., 2011); institutions of higher education still struggle to offer a fair and equitable service to all students. Yet, White and Nonnamaker (2008) pointed out that college contexts are highly shaped by formal and informal communication between peers, which are directly related to students' social interactions and their learning.

In particular, both students' experiences during the college pathway and the university environment play a major role in their academic success both inside and outside of classrooms (Chang et al., 2011). In this sense, Schlossberg et al. (1995) developed a transition theory in which personal major changes and students' transition period from high school to college is addressed. Such a transition is experienced through four aspects: "situation, self, support, and strategies" (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 47). Indeed, this transition theory can be seen as a framework that connects the student, the transition period, and the environment altogether.

In turn, Oberg (1960) noted that international students experience a "cultural shock" (p. 177) when trying to adjust to a new setting. Markedly, Furnham and Bochner (1986) pointed out that several aspects provoke students' high levels of stress and isolation, including cultural differences between students' home country and the current host nation, changes in their social network, and even feelings of frustration related to personal assumptions of the host country (as cited in Bradley, 2000). In this sense, international students can have either feeling of repudiation or exaltation regarding the mainstream culture.

In addition, Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) developed an acculturational model underlining individuals' feelings, behaviors, thoughts, and perceptions based on the exposition to a different culture (Bochner, 2003). The acculturation model encompasses three components: Affect, Behavior, and Cognitions (ABC) that can be useful to examine the "psychological" and "sociocultural adaptation" of international students (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008, p. 68). First, the affective component highlights the positive side of culture shock in which people are rather active agents, constantly adapting and interacting. Second, the behavioral aspect points out the importance of building social networks including other international students both who share their nationality and who are from other countries. This networking may include interactions with locals. Such interplay would help international students in their psychological well-being and academic progress. And, third, the cognitive component which has to do with how both sojourners and hosts deal with cultural differences (Bochner, 2003; Zhou et al., 2008). Accordingly, Masgoret and Ward (2006) identified the importance of "communication competence and effective social interaction" (p.60) to help improve individuals' sociocultural adjustment.

In turn, Kim (2012) developed a conceptual framework to understand how international students develop their identities in an unknown setting, shape their psychosocial status, and redefine their identity multiple times along their college journey. Kim's (2012)

international student identity model consisted of six phases: "Phase 1: Pre-exposure," (p.108) in this stage students start becoming familiar with the target institution, the language, and the country. Students' identity is strongly influenced by their culture. "Phase 2: exposure" (p. 108) reveals marked differences between students' and the American culture. Once in the United States, students could start making their own decisions and behaving more independently. "Phase 3: enclosure," (p.109) in this stage students focus mainly on their studies and may feel a strong connection between their identity and their ethnicity, culture, and values. "Phase 4: emergence," (p.109) it is an experimental period where students are more aware of the cultural richness as it relates to the new setting. "Phase 5: integration," (p.109) in this stage students take more risks to learn from other people and even adopt other people's ideas and concepts into their own identity. And "phase 6: internationalization" (p.110) provides students with a complete vision and the maturity to appreciate and respect racial, cultural, ethnic, religion, economic status, and sexual preference differences. In a final stage, students are finally able to value pluralistic views and multicultural competence as well as the richness of a diverse society (Kim, 2012). All six aforementioned phases encompass a dynamic process, directly influenced by the environment and experiences that international students encounter at each phase.

Based on the literature on international students' adjustment and acculturation, this researcher proposed a conceptual framework regarding the adjustment process of graduate international students, which consisted of four categories: (1) Vulnerability; (2) self-awareness; (3) alliances; and (4) synergy. The categories are flexible and progressive because people's experiences are different as it relates to studying overseas. Accordingly, students' willingness to adapt is the result of their acquaintances, personal traits, self-assurance, social support, length in the country, and participation in college student support programs (Bochner, 2003; Kim, 2012). Figure 1 shows the relationship between the different adjustment process stages experienced by international students in graduate college studies.
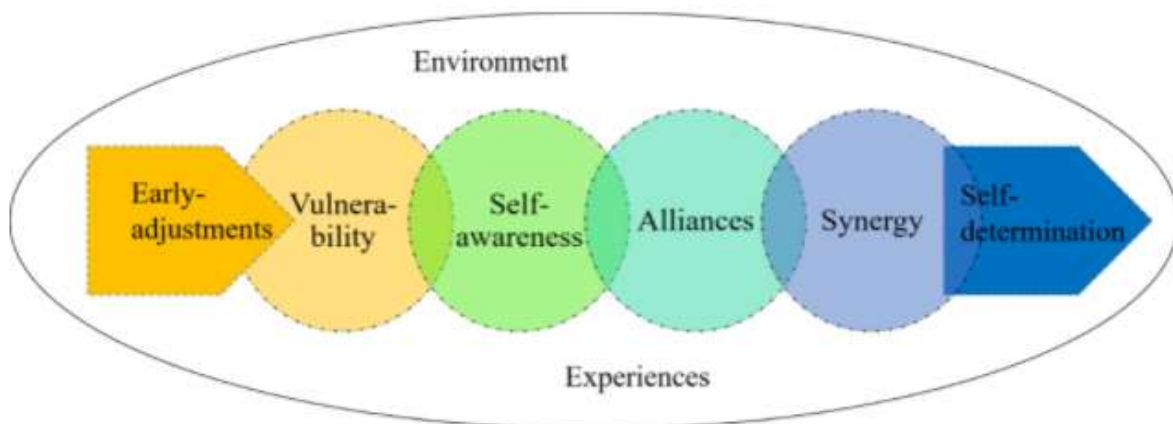

Figure 1. Adjustment of international students in graduate studies.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the four stages and the influence of students' experiences and the environment. Beginning with *early-adjustments*, international students go through a process which consists of vulnerability, self-awareness, alliances, and synergy until reaching *self-determination*, a phase in which international students achieve maturity and recognition of other cultural values.

Conceptual Framework: International Students' Adjustment

The first phase addresses the *early-adjustments* of students, that is, the first steps toward becoming international students. This initial process requires high levels of motivation and determination based on students' own feelings, thoughts, and concerns (Kim, 2012; Yang et al., 2018). The following phases show the adjustment process of international students in which students should overcome barriers, difficulties, and setbacks to successfully adjust to the new academic environment.

(1) Vulnerability

Academic stress. Once international students start attending classes, they feel vulnerable, in particular to the unknown. In addition, international students may have feelings of incompetence and lack of motivation, especially if they struggle to perform well academically (Lee & Rice, 2007). Academic stress is one of the major challenges of graduate international students in college. As noted by Zhai's (2004) study, international students highlighted that the academic stress of classes in the United States was far more stressful than back in their countries. Specifically, these concerns were related to the courses' workload, including more presentations, hands-on activities, readings, writings, homework, and presentations. As a result, students were expected to take a more active role in American classrooms, increasing international students' difficulties to perform satisfactorily and participate in all class activities (Wu et al., 2015; Zhai, 2004).

Language issues. One of the main difficulties of international students whose native language is other than English lies in the high levels of stress when attending classes in institutions in the United States (Liu, 2011; Wu et al., 2015), as it is expected that all students show similar skills in terms of English proficiency. According to Fatima (2001), the connection between the accomplishment of adequate academic performance in classes and the level of English international students has are directly related. Some international students went further by mentioning the accent (Fatima, 2001; Lee & Rice, 2007), along with speech pace and articulation (Wu et al., 2015) as compelling reasons that influence international students' behavior in classrooms. Those international students who think they have a strong accent when they speak English decide to participate less in class discussions (Fatima, 2001). Furthermore, these students take a more passive role than those students who learn English from childhood and have had multiple opportunities to practice it. In this sense, Contreras- Aguirre and Gonzalez

(2017) found that international students with prior full education in English were more likely to easily adjust to the American culture.

Gender and major. In some cases, international students' gender and major make even harder to feel included and face vulnerability (Fatima, 2001). Notably, females in engineering fields experience more challenging academic settings due to females' low representation in engineering (Banda, 2012). Indeed, when international students are females and enroll in male-dominated fields, the interactions with males become more problematic as females might feel excluded inside and outside of the classroom setting (Clark Blickenstaff, 2005; Dutta, 2015). Furthermore, according to Dutta (2015), female international students feel that people do not expect that foreign females have the intellectual capacity to compete with males in engineering majors. Yet, female international students must take an active role to be more vocal and demonstrate their abilities and competencies as scholars.

(2) SELF-AWARENESS

Culture. Another important aspect to feel included in a new social context has to do with culture (Bang & Montgomery, 2013; Bradley, 2000; Lee & Rice, 2007). Because culture is a major component of one's identity, often international students focus their attention in cultural differences between their own culture and the one that is perceived to be the American (Bradley, 2000). On a regular basis, foreign students deal with difficulties and face new challenges regarding the new culture, often adopting a behavior based on what is familiar to them, a phase Adler (1975) called "reintegration" (p. 16). In particular, international students utilize recognizable cultural resources associated with their own legacy. Promptly, they are aware of the wide array of possibilities to solve a problem as they start to encounter people who are culturally distinct to them (Kim, 2012). At some point, international students realize how individualistic the American culture is comparing to other cultures, where collectivism prevails (Wu et al., 2015; Zhai, 2004). Such discovery can trigger feelings of isolation and difficulties to understand the American culture. In effect, international students must be able to identify and learn what American people value and how they communicate (e.g. use of specific signs and gestures). Hence, communication becomes more effective (Wu et al., 2015).

High expectations. Regardless both international students' status and lack of knowledge on important local, state, and national historical events of the United States, international students in graduate studies are expected to perform at high intellectual level similar than their American peers (Bang & Montgomery, 2013). In addition, Terui (2012) found that international students often pretend to understand native English speakers as a means to cope with tough academic and social requirements. As it is expected that international students are completely fluent in English, oftentimes, they refuse to ask for clarifications and let the conversation goes, especially when interacting with people in formal situations (Terui, 2012).

Prejudgment. In terms of preconception, the ethnicity and cultural background of international students seem to impact them greatly (Wu et al., 2015). Lee and Rice (2007) found that there is a noticeable difference between prejudice experiences of "White international students" and "color international scholars" (p. 393). While international students who came from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand underwent different situations and were less likely to encounter unfair practices, students whose home countries were in Asia, Africa, or Latin America experienced more negative behaviors toward them. In particular, non-white students a characteristics that can trigger conflictive relationships and feelings of exclusion (Kim & Kim, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007).

(3) ALLIANCES

International colleagues. In general, international students prefer discussing personal issues with other foreign students, who might have faced similar difficulties and overcame such barriers, developing a social network (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011; White & Nonnamaker, 2008). According to Erichsen and Bolliger (2011), through networking international students "find means and support for their academic and personal needs" (p. 312). In particular, international students feel better comprehended by other international peers (Bradley, 2000; Fatima, 2001; Zhai, 2004) with whom often stay together and form a community. In addition, Fatima (2001) found that oftentimes international students connect positively with Americans, including academic advisors and professors.

Classmates. International students are not always able to build effective alliances with classmates and can suffer unfairness as a result (Lee & Rice, 2007). For instance, when international students work in teams, they experience that local students refuse to invite them to join their groups (Lee & Rice, 2007; Wu et al., 2015). In this sense, Lee and Rice (2007) noticed that students even suffer for problems related to "individualist attitudes and lack of classroom interaction" (p.393). This situation might happen due to a negative perception of incompetence and lack of knowledge of other cultures from local students, which some international students defined as ignorance (Fatima, 2001). Moreover, international students are frequently stereotyped based on their appearance, religious beliefs, and home country's economic status (Lee & Rice, 2007; Oberg, 2006; Wu et al., 2015)

Supportive network. International students try to cope with difficult situations either academic, social, or cultural by developing strong and supportive relationships with people they can trust and feel more connected with (Dutta, 2015; Fatima, 2001). The idea of building a supportive network could be beneficial, not only when dealing with academic issues, but especially and more useful in developing professional connections beyond the educational sphere (White & Nonnamaker, 2008). Consequently, this network could help learn about possible obstacles regarding their profession, find strategies to handle academic situations, and acquire knowledge related to the labor market when trying to find a job with a graduate degree (Dutta, 2015).

(4) SYNERGY

American students. Reaching meaningful and enriching interactions between international students and their American counterparts seems to positively influence international students (Liu, 2011; Zhai, 2004). Such influence includes quicker language acquisition, improvement of their communication skills, and contribution of more opportunities to adapt to the American culture and norms. Yet, international students face prejudice issues either by keeping silent (Fatima, 2001) or discussing cultural differences with local people, to whom international students perceive as with important lack of knowledge regarding other cultures (Fatima, 2001; Lee & Rice, 2007). Although universities are settings highly diverse, often international students feel excluded, unheard, and stereotyped not only by American students but also by professors and staff (Fatima, 2001; Lee & Rice, 2007).

American people. International students perceive different kinds of synergies when it comes to interacting with American people (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011). In terms of acculturation, international students feel that they should learn all about the United States, but not vice versa (Fatima, 2001). Notably, international students highlighted the lack of interest of local people to know and understand the struggles and difficulties that international students face during their stay. Accordingly, when there are considerable differences between students' own culture and the host one, international students start reflecting upon themselves as individuals in a different context regarding their ethnicity and the social problems associated with the mainstream culture (Fried, 2011; Oberg, 2006).

University environment. International students equally expressed a sense of invisibility, lack of fit in the learning community, and even, unvalued opinions in class discussions (Özturgut & Murphy, 2009). The aforementioned perspectives of international students create a negative effect in which less available options for graduate students to engage in the campus community make the adaptation process even more difficult (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011). In this sense, White and Nonnamaker (2008) noted that the perseverance of doctoral students in achieving their degree is strongly related, not only to personal interests and skills but also to effective social interactions and academic support. Moreover, Guentzel and Nesheim (2006) argued the importance of "offering opportunities for social interactions as well as general professional development" (p. 102). Hence, students can easily relate theory and practice in real life situations. Another important factor consists of creating an interdisciplinarity community as a measure to weaken feelings of isolation of international students in graduate studies (Guentzel & Nesheim, 2006).

Ultimately, after international students experienced all the previous stages (vulnerability, self-awareness, alliances, and synergy), they start experiencing more comfortable feelings as it relates to their academic performance, building stronger relationships, and looking for other strategies to improve their English skills (as cited in Fatima, 2001). The next step involves the need to practice the knowledge acquired beyond the classroom setting. In this regard, Liu (2011) pointed out that students often seek part-time jobs,

volunteer collaborations, and a more active role in recreational activities. It is more likely that international students improve their English skills, communication ability, and consequently, self-efficacy if they interact more with locals and widen their social network (Bang & Montgomery, 2013; Liu, 2011, Terui, 2012).

The aforementioned statement corroborated how international students achieve *self-determination* concerning their own learning and development (Kim, 2012), in addition of the importance of "self-determined motivation" (Yang et al., 2018, p.7) to feel more easily adjusted. Usually, such self-determination has to do with the assimilation of behaviors which include, get more involved with the community, be more open to learning about other cultures and languages, and take advantage of the resources offered by the university. For instance, participate in mentoring programs, tutoring services, and language support (Kim, 2012, Liu, 2011). As a result, international students might trigger feelings of deep engagement in their daily activities and more multicultural competency along with taking full advantage of the institution academic support.

Leadership Role of Student Affairs Practitioners

With a focus on student learning and personal development, student affairs professionals strive to address academic and personal needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Kuh et al., 2010). In particular, through collaborative work, practitioners of student affairs seek that students acquire both heuristic and formal knowledge (Padilla, 1991); hence, students can develop holistically (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). As such, being multicultural competent have been and continue being critical for university professionals (Pope & Mueller, 2011; Pope, Mueller, & Reynolds, 2009).

In their study, Sue, Bernier, Durran, Feinberg, Pedersen, Smith, and Vasquez-Nuttall (1982) highlighted the pressing need for addressing the requirements of a multicultural society. At that time, a call for people to be cross-culturally competent and having a broad perspective when it came to interacting with diverse people started being urgent (Sue et al., 1982). The idea of cross-cultural competence is well applied to any other kind of interactions between student affairs professionals and students with different cultural, religious, educational, and ethnic background. In this sense, the idea of becoming culturally skilled is an intense work that must weaken the stereotypes and biases of practitioners. Northouse (2015) highlighted the skills all leaders need to be effective, including technical, human, and conceptual skills. The use of one or another is closely related to their position in an organization, but at the core of any organizational position is the ability to learn the human skill. This skill describes how leaders require to be attentive to the followers' need and motivations to accomplish goals and include them in organizational decision making (Northouse, 2015). Additionally, student affairs professionals should perceive the interactions with distinct people as positive and meaningful. There are compelling reasons to change the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of university professionals toward more fair and unbiased relationships (Sue et al., 1982).

In turn, Pope and Mueller (2005) in another study noted that individual characteristics, personal experiences, and features of institutional departments are important factors to be more multiculturally competent. In addition, Pope and Mueller's (2005) study found that faculty members who collaborated in student affairs programs and were part of the minorities (e.g. women, homosexuals, and Hispanic) tend to show a strong culturally competency. Namely, minority faculty and staff's assimilation is better when dealing with issues of multiculturalism. Yet, Pope et al. (2009) highlighted that awareness of diversity issues was not enough, it is essential to challenge the current educational system status quo which benefits certain groups and disregards others. Notably, confronting negative actions of high-ranking academic authorities who make important decisions would help the American education system implement effective changes on behalf of the needs of more vulnerable students (Pope et al., 2009).

Certainly, the work of student affairs professionals goes beyond being multiculturally competent (Pope et al., 2009). Practitioners of student affairs departments must implement innovative approaches through collaboration. It is critical that student affairs professionals collaborate with other university departments, programs, and services, such as career service and financial aid programs, health and wellness resources, and tutoring and writing services (Guentzel, & Nesheim, 2006; White & Nonnamaker, 2008). Such collaborations may help students in graduate studies, who often feel less immersed in the college environment due to: (1) personal and professional duties; (2) multiple responsibilities as graduate students, including courses, research, and teaching; and (3) employment duties often as research assistants (White & Nonnamaker, 2008). These activities keep them busy and alienated from the main activities and events organized by and for students on college campuses.

Implications and Recommendations

Educational leaders must foster an equity climate in institutions where every student can succeed (Kuh et al., 2010). Developing equity consciousness among faculty members is of vital importance in an educational environment where all students regardless of their background can academically succeed (Grogan, 2013; Northouse, 2015). Therefore, faculty members might implement pedagogical approaches to encourage students to participate in class activities addressing the importance of multiculturalism, form group projects with students from different ethnicities, and openly discuss in class racial and ethnic matters (Pope et al., 2009). The aforementioned aspects might change deeply the attitudes of students who are more likely to be tolerant and sensitive in diversity and multiculturalism issues (Hurtado, Milem, & Clayton-Pedersen, 1999; Kuh et al., 2010). In turn, the value system and mission of the university could equally help foster a welcoming atmosphere for students who are different from the mainstream student body (Kuh et al., 2010). In this regard, the message sent from institutions to faculty concerning its level of engagement to diversity issues will determine professors attitudes to include multicultural aspects in their teaching and research (Hurtado et al., 1999; Jamaludin et al., 2018; Kuh et al., 2010).

Markedly, Whitt (2011) and Kuh (2011) highlighted the importance of linking academics to student affairs programs with the aim to contribute positively to the academic development of all students. While the university context influences, to some extent, students' performance outcomes, a few strategies could help promote an advantageous partnership between academics and student affairs departments (Jamaludin et al., 2018). Such strategies might yield better results with the implementation of international students' adaptation frameworks as following: (1) The promotion of students' learning through an effective institutional mission; (2) the advocacy for students and professors' academic and professional development; (3) the improvement of the academic and student affairs relationship by reducing individual responsibilities; (4) the acknowledgement of unique university characteristics in terms of its legacy, culture, and student body characteristics; (5) the eagerness of working often with limited resources but limitless creativity and innovation; and, (6) the effectiveness to achieve and share strong leadership which contributes to reinforce students' development (Whitt, 2011).

Accordingly, universities and colleges should implement innovative English programs that support academically international students (Liu, 2011). Teaching reading and writing strategies along with effective methods to communicate formally and informally with local people (Liu, 2011; Schartner & Young, 2016; Wu et al., 2015), preferably throughout the entire academic program (Özturgut & Murphy, 2009) could be beneficial for international students. In particular, informal language programs might help improve international students' English skills, including volunteering activities, peer exchanges, and community interactions (Liu, 2011). Additionally, institutions should be aware of international students' needs in receiving tutoring, mentoring, and counseling due to they should overcome multiple difficulties, including the adaptation process, academic stress, and often, loneliness (Bradley, 2000; Schartner & Young, 2016; Wu et al., 2015).

Given the importance of international students both at the undergraduate and graduate level in American universities, a call for embracing and welcoming this student population should not be treated lightly. Institutions of higher education are in an urgent need of shifting practices that could fairly integrate students from diverse backgrounds into the education realm. The aforementioned can only be possible by highlighting the significant contributions that international students make to the university environment (e.g. in cultural, racial, ethnic, academic, and financial terms). The proposed conceptual framework and prior research studies demonstrated the innumerable challenges international students face when they decide to study in the United States. In addition, it showed the important role of institutional agents to smooth international students' adaptation in a timely manner. Ultimately, the goal for postsecondary institutions is to achieve a more welcoming atmosphere that guarantees international students' social integration, and, consequently, academic success.

References

Adler, P. S. (1975). The transitional experience: An alternative view of culture shock. *Journal of humanistic psychology, 15*(4), 13-23.

Banda, R. M. (2012). *Perceptions of social support networks and climate in the persistence of Latinas pursuing an undergraduate engineering degree* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (Order No. 3537067)

Bang, H., & Montgomery, D. (2013). Understanding international graduate students' acculturation using Q methodology. *Journal of College Student Development, 54*(4), 343-360.

Bochner, S. (2003). Culture shock due to contact with unfamiliar cultures. *Online readings in psychology and culture, 8*(1), 7.

Bradley, G. (2000). Responding effectively to the mental health needs of international students. *Higher Education,* 39(4), 417-433.

Chang, M. J., Milem, J. F., & Antonio, A. L. (2011). Campus climate and diversity. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, S. R. Harper, & Associates. (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession,* (5th ed.) (pp. 43-58). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Clark Blickenstaff, J. (2005). Women and science careers: leaky pipeline or gender filter? *Gender and education,* 17(4), 369-386.

Contreras-Aguirre, H.C., & Gonzalez y Gonzalez, E. (2017). Experiences of International Female Students in U.S. Graduate Programs. *College Student Journal, 52*(1), 33-46.

Dungy, G., & Gordon, S. A. (2011). The development of student affairs. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, S. R. Harper, & Associates. (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession,* (5th ed.) (pp. 61-79). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dutta, D. (2015). Sustaining the pipeline: Experiences of international female engineers in U.S. graduate programs. *Journal Of Engineering Education,* 104(3), 326-344.

Erichsen, E. A., & Bolliger, D. U. (2011). Towards understanding international graduate student isolation in traditional and online environments. *Education Technology Research Development,* 59(1), 309-326. doi 10.1007/s11423-010-9161-6.

Fatima, N. (2001). International female graduate students' perceptions of their adjustment experiences and coping strategies at an urban research university. *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.* Seattle, WA.

Fried, J. (2011). Ethical standards and principles. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, S. R. Harper, & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession,* (5th ed.) (pp. 96-119). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Furnham, A., & Bochner, A. (1986). *Culture shock.* London, EN: Methuen.

Grogan, M. (Ed.).(2013). *Educational leadership* (3rd ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Guentzel, M. J., & Nesheim, B. E. (2006). Throwing pebbles at Stonehenge: Advocating for graduate and professional students. *New Directions For Student Services, 115*, 5-106.

Hackman, M. Z., & Johnson, C. E. (2013). *Leadership: A communication perspective* (6th ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Hurtado, S., Milem, J. F., & Clayton-Pedersen, A. (1999). *Enacting diverse learning environments: Improving the climate for racial/ethnic diversity in higher education.* ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report.

Institute of International Education. (2011). *Open doors 2011: International student enrollment increased by 5 percent in 2010 / 11.* Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/ Who-We-Are/News-and-Events/Press-Center/Press-Releases/2011/2011-11-14-Open-Doors-International-Students

Institute of International Education. (2015, Nov.). *Open doors 2015.* Report on international educational exchange. Washington, DC: National Press Club.

Institute of International Education. (2017). International student enrollment trends, 1948/49-2016/17. Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/opendoors

Jamaludin, N. L., Sam, D. L., Sandal, G. M., & Adam, A. A. (2018). The influence of perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction on destination loyalty intentions: the case of international students. *Current Issues in Tourism,* 21(8), 934-949.

Kim, E. (2012). An alternative theoretical model: Examining psychosocial identity development of international students in the United States. *College Student Journal, 46*(1), 99-113.

Kim, S., & Kim, R. H. (2010). Microaggressions experienced by international students attending US institutions of higher education. *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact,* 171-191.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., & Associates. (2010). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D. (2011). Student success. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, S. R. Harper, & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession,* (5th ed.) (pp. 257-269). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lee, J. J., & Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education, 53*(3), 381-409. doi 10.1007/s10734-005-4508-3.

Liu, L. (2011). An international graduate student's ESL learning experience beyond the classroom. *TESL Canada Journal, 29*(1), 77-92.

Masgoret, A. M., & Ward, C. (2006). Culture learning approach to acculturation. *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology,* 58-77.

Northouse, P. G. (2015). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7th ed). San Francisco, CA: Sage.

Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology,* 7, 177-182.

Oberg, K. (2006). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments 1. *Curare, 29*(2), 3.

Özturgut, O., & Murphy, C. (2009). Literature vs. practice: Challenges for international students in the US. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 22*(3), 374-385. Retrieved from http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/pdf/ IJTLHE780.pdf

Padilla R. V. (1991). Assessing heuristic knowledge to enhance college students' success. In Keller G. D., Deneen J. R., & Magallán R. J. (Eds.), *Assessment and access: Hispanics in higher education* (pp. 81–92). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Pope, R. L., & Mueller, J. A. (2005). Faculty and curriculum: Examining multicultural competence and inclusion. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(6), 679-688.

Pope, R. L., & Mueller, J. A. (2011). Multicultural competence. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, S. R. Harper, & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession,* (5th ed.) (pp. 337-352). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pope, R. L., Mueller, J. A., & Reynolds, A. L. (2009). Looking back and moving forward: Future directions for diversity research in student affairs. *Journal of College Student Development,* 50(6), 640-658.

Schartner, A., & Young, T. J. (2016). Towards an integrated conceptual model of international student adjustment and adaptation. *European Journal of Higher Education, 6*(4), 372-386

Schlossberg N. K., Waters E. B., & Goodman, J. (1995). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Springer.

Sue, D. W., Bernier, J. E., Durran, A., Feinberg, L., Pedersen, P., Smith, E. J., & Vasquez-Nuttall, E. (1982). Cross-cultural counseling competencies. *The Counseling Psychologist, 10*(2), 45-52.

Terui, S. (2012). Second language learners' coping strategy in conversations with native speakers. *Journal of International Students, 2*(2), 168-183. Retrieved from http://www.researchgate.net/publication/231334299

Ward, C., S. Bochner, and A. Furnham. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock.* 2nd ed. Hove: Routledge

White, J., & Nonnamaker, J. (2008). Belonging and mattering: How science doctoral students experience community. *NASPA Journal, 45*(3), 350-372.

Whitt, E. J. (2011). Academic and student affairs partnerships. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, S. R. Harper, & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession,* (5th ed.) (pp. 482-496). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wu, H. P., Garza, E., & Guzman, N. (2015). International student's challenge and adjustment to college. *Education Research International,* (1), 1-9. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2015/202753

Yang, Y., Zhang, Y., & Sheldon, K. M. (2018). Self-determined motivation for studying abroad predicts lower culture shock and greater well-being among international students: The mediating role of basic psychological needs satisfaction. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 63,* 95-104.

Zhai, L. (2004). Studying international students: Adjustment issues and social support. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education, 11*(1). doi:10.5191/jiaee.2004.11111

Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in higher education, 33*(1), 63-75.