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Capstone Project

Assessing the Role of Academic Advisors in Retention of International Students

By Shreelekha Girish

April 29, 2016

Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Master of Education in Higher Education

Degree, Merrimack College

**Abstract**

The retention of international students should not be viewed as the responsibility of only international student advisors on the college campus. Instead, as suggested by Mamiseishvili (2012), it should become a joint responsibility of a broader campus community, including faculty, academic advisors, English language program staff, and student affairs professionals. Inspired by these ideas, this qualitative research study focused on international students' experiences during their advising sessions with their academic advisors at a four-year, post-secondary private institution in Massachusetts. The study was conducted by interviewing ten international students from different majors. This research explored the necessary information and resources international students require to be successful. The results showed that international students go through a period of struggle when they fail to integrate with the American education system. The findings also suggest that international students' needs more guidance from their academic advisors on course requirements, major requirements, and career information. Participants wanted their advising sessions to be focused on international students' needs. Recommendations include providing group advising, offering information sessions to help international students gain important skills and knowledge, and expanded training for advisors.

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### **Introduction**

The number of international students has increased in American colleges and universities in recent years. According to the "Open Door" report (2015) by the Institute of International Education, 886,052 international students were enrolled in the 2013-2014 academic year in American colleges and universities. These students need resources to help them to be successful and to graduate on time. The campus faculty, staff and administration must be aware of the needs of international students to provide them with services that enhance their college experience. Advisors can provide guidance for international students on campus knowledge, academics and social aspects of the college. They also help students to be engaged on campus by encouraging them to participate in several activities and giving them information on the resources they need.

In this project, research was conducted to assess the role of academic advising in international students' retention. There are an increasing number of international students on campuses in American colleges and universities, and additional resources are needed to help them stay enrolled and graduate on time. Hopkin (2011), in an article on the challenges faced by international students suggested that "the best recruitment strategy is a good retention strategy" (p.2). Recruitment of international students is important to provide diversity in the education system, but helping them to persist in college is equally important. The resources for all international students' needs on most of the campuses are found in the international office where students can get guidance with their visas and other regulations they need to follow. Academic advisors are able to guide students in understanding and following the education system. Advisors can also help international students with decisions such as course selection, major selection, changing major or adding/dropping a course. Information provided by the academic

advisors will help international students use the resources that are available to them, and help them to know how to get connected with those resources. Students can seek information from their advisors who will guide them with all the necessary resources to help them graduate on time.

In this study, I conducted qualitative research by interviewing international students. In the interviews, students were asked about their experiences with the advisor, how their advising sessions have helped them in their college experience, and what could be done to improve their advising sessions. These questions (see Appendix A for the full protocol) provided insights on the research question posed, on the role of academic advising for international students from the students' perspective. Participants were informed of the research project and were willing to share their experiences. The data was analyzed by coding the interviews. Recommendations were generated from the data and from a related journal article.

The interviews provided insight on how students perceive their advising sessions and what they hoped to gain from their advisors. Academic advising is an important resource that international students should be having as part of their college experience. This research provided an opportunity to reveal the academic advisor's role in guiding students. International students who transition into the American education system clearly benefited from the advising sessions with their advisors. The analysis of international students' experiences in advising sessions provided a deeper look into the factors that engage students to utilize campus resources through the guidance of their advisors. In higher education, the role of an academic advisor is not emphasized enough, and international student who needs extensive advising and assistance can be guided by their academic advisors. International students who are new to both the college

environment and the culture face difficulties in finding resources that could be obtained through guidance from their advisors.

### **Literature review**

Academic advising is an important resource that international students should be utilizing during their college experience. In this research, the academic advisor's role in guiding international students was explored. These students transitioning into the American education system are benefited by advising sessions with their advisors. Their experience with advising sessions provided a deeper look into the factors that engaged students and directed them to campus resources through their advisors. In higher education, the role of academic advisor is not emphasized enough and international student who needs advising could slip through those cracks, because advisors do not start working with them until they arrive on campus (Morgan & Pratt, 2011). International students who are new to the college environment and culture face difficulties in finding the resources and need guidance from advisors.

#### Role of academic advising and student success

A study by Mottarella, Fritzsche and Cerabino (2004) examined the satisfaction factors for students from their advisors. The study was designed to identify the factors which impacted advising and to determine if these factors were the same or different for a population of international students. The study also asked students to describe advising experiences before and after the advising session and to discuss if the type of advisor (peer, faculty or professional) made any difference in the satisfaction level. The sample for this study was 468 students (161 males, 305 females and 2 of unreported gender) who were undergraduate psychology students

from a southeastern university. The questions addressed their satisfaction with their advising sessions, their preferences and if those differed for different groups of students, and any preferences arising from experiences with previous advisors. Findings suggested that the gender of the advisor mattered among undergraduate students who reported that female advisors tended to be more sensitive and that these advisors would be recommended to their friends. The results showed that the emotive nature of the advising relationship had an impact on the students' satisfaction with their advising experience. Limitations in the study included use of hypothetical advising scenarios. The real advising sessions have differed somewhat from what was expressed in the study. The study also focused on the importance of the advisor establishing a relationship with his or her advisee. The research also noted that different approaches based on the need of the particular student could enhance the effectiveness of the advising.

The focus on student satisfaction and preference on advising discussed in Mottarella, Fritzsche, & Cerabino (2004) mentioned the approach of the academic advisor as a factor in effective advising. The study examined different strategies, such as implementing a developmental approach, assessing advisees' preferences and anticipating what would lead to the students' satisfaction. This gives a glimpse of an advising model which is different from a subsequent study by Allen and Smith (2008) about advising with faculty and professional advisors. In this study, researchers found that the advising model was different for every institution, such as models based on both faculty advising and professional advising. The study was conducted to understand the importance of faculty advising and how meaningful it is for the practice. The researchers conducted a study of 12 advising functions. There were 171 participants who were instructional faculty at a doctoral and research-intensive public urban



university whose enrollment of approximately 25,000 included many students from groups historically underrepresented in higher education. Participants were surveyed and rated their experience on 12 advising functions, detailing their satisfaction levels and if they agreed or disagreed with the statements presented. The result was that faculty advisors saw advising as an important factor for student success and they were moderately satisfied by the advising they provided. The faculty advisors also perceived that the non-academic problems were the domain of student affairs professionals. They recommend that there should be a second advisor who would serve as the student affairs professional to assist students with getting involved in co-curricular activities.

The strategies discussed by Allen and Smith (2008) for advising by faculty are important and also apply for academic advising, which is a key factor in student success. These advising factors were also discussed in a similar study where Drake (2011) reports on a faculty advisor helping a student through his advising session. This study also discussed how a good academic advising session can provide all students the opportunity to develop personal, consistent relationships with the institution. According to Drake (2011), the advisors can guide students through the education maze and inspire them to make good decisions about their futures, engaging them in ways that will encourage them to develop good academic skills and acquire the knowledge needed to be successful. These initiatives provide a path for advisors to connect the students to engage in their educational career, which is a key to the goal of retention, persistence and graduation. Student success is the aim for all institutional work and decision-making, and academic advising plays an important part of success in higher education. Drake (2011) discusses three elements for a student's persistence: a learning support system, first year

programming and solid academic advising. The case study conducted featured a student who wanted to drop out because he was not connecting with other students and was uncomfortable with his co-worker, both of which led him to believe that college was not for him. The researcher described him as shy and afraid, and as being a student who did not think that he was intellectually on par with other members of his class. During his advising session, he talked to Drake who helped him develop a strategy to find his voice in the classroom. After that session, the student was able to find the confidence to speak in front of his classmates. The finding from this case study is that communicating, mentoring and advising collectively play an important role in student success (Drake, 2011). It is important that advisors build relationships with their advisees so that the students feel they can discuss the problems they face and find solutions together.

#### Academic advising and international students

All college students have to go through the stage of adjusting to their new educational and social environment, and research suggests this is even more stressful for international students (US NEWS, 2012). They have to adjust to the differences in culture, language, academics, study habits and additionally, to being away from home. Misra, Crist, & Burant (2003) hypothesized both a direct and indirect relationship between factors like life stress, academic stress, and stress related to social integration. Their other hypothesis was that a higher level of social integration reduces academic and psychological stress. The study explored whether these hypotheses differed for male and female international students, in terms of the effects of social support, and different factors of academic and psychological stress. Data was collected in surveys of international students at two Midwestern universities. Participants returned 143 completed

questionnaires, 62 men and 81 women, with an average age of 24.7 years. The results of this study supported the hypothesis that international students have academic and psychological stress stemming from difficulty adjusting and adapting to life at American universities.

International students had greater stress and frustration, due to lack of resources and their failure to achieve goals. Policy-related issues also arose for international education programs because these programs have few resources compared to those for American students. With the growing number of international students on college campuses, there is a need for additional resources.

Misra, Crist, & Burant's (2003) study can be better understood when compared to the resources provided for American students. In comparison, a study by Zhao, Kuh, & Carini (2005) showed that international students' needs are different and should be accounted in international programs. Higher education needs to prepare advisors to effectively work with people from different backgrounds. The students who have social support during transition periods adjust to college life more quickly and effectively. International students tend to make friends with students from their own country rather than with students from their host country and international students direct their efforts into their academics when they feel less involved in college social life. In this study, researchers focused on the educational practices that help international student to engage in effective educational practices. One comparison between the activities of American students and international students shows that student success related to student learning, personal development and satisfaction with college which included support in both academic and social areas. The research questions sought to discover how international students' engagement in effective educational practices differed from American students, and what factors international students employed to shape their satisfaction. They also focused on

what American students and international students spent time doing in order to make progress. The sample was 71,260 first year and senior undergraduate students, 2,780 of which were international students. The limitation of this study was that the student samples were drawn from a general representation of only four-year colleges. If students from different colleges were included, then the results would have been different.

The findings showed that international students were more engaged in some areas than American students. The suggestion from this study were that institutions with large subgroups of international students should invest their time in helping those students to engage in educationally purposeful activities that would enhance their experience and satisfaction.

#### Academic Advising and Advisors

Clark & Kalionzes (2008) describe in detail the steps an international student advisor can take to be more prepared for their advising sessions. They mention that the academic situation (changes in curriculum, and inclusion of a program), the social and cultural environment, immigration issues, and transitions are few of the challenges that students of color and international students deal with in college. These students were discussed and distinguished as two distinct populations with different needs, concerns and backgrounds. Clarke & Kalionzes (2008) found that it was important that advisors tried to use different approaches and demonstrate cultural awareness while working with both of these student populations. The attention given to recruit these students should be appreciated, but it should not be forgotten that emphasis on guiding them to organized and effective resources would help them to graduate.

The study also showed that institutions should include specific strategic plans to foster inclusion and promote diversity on campus; this could be accomplished with a revised mission statement, campus climate studies, newly created statements on diversity, and required department and campus-wide diversity training and equity. In addition, many international students attend colleges on student visas, and advisors should have the knowledge of the changing visa rules. International student advisor who has a basic understanding of stages of cultural adjustment and differences in cultural assumption would have successful advising sessions with international students. A newly arriving international student faces cross-cultural adjustment that varies for each student and each takes his or her own time to adjust. Clarke & Kalionzes (2008) recommended some strategies for advisors: To be more aware of campus efforts towards internationalization, to promote events during international education week which helps to further internationalization effort, to engage in group-oriented activities used by international educators, and to join professional organizations that focus on internationalization and advocate for international students on campus. The issues international students face require that advisors and campus leaders reevaluate their practices and programs in an effort to create a more enriched community of learners.

The strategies discussed in Clark & Kalionzes' (2008) study provided an overview of the preparedness an advisor should have to work with international students. This effort from advisors also required a closer look into the advising of other populations of international students. A study by Rice et.al (2009) differed from this earlier study as it focused on graduate-level advising for international students. This research provided data that showed that it was important for an advisor to implement intrusive advising to get a beneficial outcome for their

advising sessions. International student faces the challenge of transitioning into American education system. The retention and success within graduate programs and their advising relationship is not very well researched or represented. The researchers conducted a university-wide survey with 367 diverse students and were able to obtain quantitative and qualitative data to compare the results of advising relationships for international students. The study consisted of graduate students attending the University of Florida who were invited to participate in an online survey. The survey was anonymous and administered through a web survey tool accessible with the collaboration of a department on campus; the survey was also announced at a regular gathering of international students. Four reminders were sent, a week apart, to remind all international graduate students to complete the survey. The sample of 399 international students completed the survey at which time 2,672 international students were attending the university. The survey had three parts that posed questions related to the length of the advising relationship, the reason if their advisor had been changed, their concerns with the new advisor and what could improve their advising experience. The study found that international graduate students wanted their advisors to be aware of their cultural values, their special needs and their language problems. The recommendation from the researchers was that awareness of international student perceptions of these factors constituted good advising and would help advisors to be more effective.

The study by Rice et.al (2009) presented the perspective of international students and their experiences from advising during their transition period into the American education system. To understand more, international students should be looked at in their first year. The study by Mamiseishvili (2012) was conducted on first-year international students. In this study,

the researcher isolated factors that helped international students persist in their first year of college. It was discovered that the major issues they experienced were culture shock, language anxiety, and psychological changes. It was also found that a positive attitude such as open-mindedness to understand a different culture, motivation and time management skills were some of the abilities that helped them to be successful. The student affairs offices in many institutions have focused on international student advising, scholar exchange programs and study abroad programs, depending on the number of international students enrolled. The participants polled were 200 racially and gender-diverse international students who were guided to provide information and respond to questions regarding their profiles, social integration and other factors affecting their persistence. The findings indicated that there should be extensive collaboration between the office of international programs, academic departments and campus support services. The findings also suggested that the strength of the academic programs in the college played an important role in the persistence of international students. If international students were able to integrate well into the academic programs on campus, they were more likely to stay enrolled in the institution. Academic offices should work closely with international student advisors to make sure that international students get appropriate guidance and direction on academic matters. Rice, et al (2009) also noted that faculty can use cooperative learning activities so that international students gain the confidence to develop friendships with not just fellow international classmates but also other students, which can facilitate their language immersion and help alleviate some of their language problems. The summary of the study was that the retention of international students was a joint responsibility of all the offices, a combined effort of faculty, staff, professors, international offices and academic offices, working together to help these students succeed.

The important aspects of retention found by Mamiseishvili (2012) research for first year international students can provide advisors with the necessary data to focus on the needs for effective advising. Similarly, a study by Bista (2015) supported the earlier study on how the duties of international advisors have changed over time. In American higher education, the international student advisors assumed a vital role in the welfare of international students. A meta-analysis was conducted of the literature, where the author reviewed 384 sources which included books, doctoral dissertations and research articles. The details addressed in those articles included the change in the role of international student advisors who currently have to work with immigration documentation and the challenges they face with a work overload that is often underpaid and invisible to other departments. International student advisor should understand the problems these students have like language problems, isolation, academic concerns, culture shock and difficulties accessing resources. Bista (2015) recommended that advisors must be up to date with the issues and risks that international students encounter. Advisors should also understand the cross cultural issues, religious factors and language difficulties these students face and how to deal with this diverse group. Finally, advisors can help bridge the gap between the academic and social support they need.

#### Efforts to improve academic advising

Researchers Museus and Ravello (2010) explored the role of academic advisors in the success of students of color and students identifying as ethnic minorities in predominantly white institutions. The three main findings were that students recognized the importance of advisors, the approach of advisors, and the importance of proactive advising. The advisors can encourage faculty-student interaction with students of color and minority students which contributes to their



success. The research questions were contributions of academic advisors working toward the success of minority students at GEMS (Generating Ethnic Minority Success). The institutions selected in this study were from the College Result Online (CRO) database of selected 4-year institutions. The samples included 45 individuals, consisting of 14 academic advisors and 31 racially diverse/ethnic minority students across three institutions. The student sample consisted of 21 female and 10 male undergraduates, ranging in age from 18 to 32 years. White students were excluded because they cannot always provide accurate assessments of their minority counterparts. Native Americans were also excluded because it is difficult to acquire participants from this population. The data collection was through face-to-face interviews of 1 to 1.5 hours in duration. The limitation of this study was the inclusion of only three institutions, each existing in its own unique political, cultural, economic and geographic context. The students also noted that the advisors who humanized the academic advising practice with a different approach and who were proactive in their advising contributed to their success. Museus and Ravello (2010) recommended that advisors learn students' backgrounds and provide holistic and proactive advising; these methods can help them to be effective advisors to students of color and ethnic minority students.

In addition to presenting data, Museus and Ravello (2010) also presented ideas about the kinds of efforts that can be put forth for the success of minority students. The discussion centered on the need for quality advising; the earlier study focused on what the faculty needed to do. Whereas the study by Young-Jones et.al (2012) discussed the approaches students wanted from their advisors. This study evaluated the academic advising sessions based on what students perceived they needed, and their expectations and success, when advising took place that did not

just follow a traditional approach. The researchers conducted a survey with 611 mostly white, mostly first generation students across all four class years which focused on the experiences and expectations of academic advising. The assessments involved students evaluating their own behaviors and attitudes, completed a survey about their expectations of advising sessions, and provided demographic information, such as the students' frequency of meetings with the advisor, their gender, their classification and their GPA.

Young-Jones et.al (2012) helped to illuminate the elements students perceived were lacking during their advising sessions. Findings from the study were that factors such as advisor accountability, student responsibility, student self-efficacy, study skills and support related to good academic advising and student success. Results suggested that the advising practices should be improved for specific demographics of the student population, namely first generation and second generation students. Young-Jones et.al (2012) recommended that advisors gain knowledge about their responsibilities through research that extended beyond student satisfaction and how these methods would impact student success. Improved academic advising can help students to engage at initial stages in their academic careers and continue to help them stay focused. It was also suggested that advising impacted on a student's academic success and that it was important to give attention to academic advising, as the emphasis on student retention has grown in recent years. Young-Jones et.al (2012) demonstrated that internships, service learning and undergraduate research were some student engagement factors that could benefit international students. Meaningful academic advising would be able to provide all these opportunities to students and help them establish their goals.

The study by Young-Jones et.al (2012) clearly stated that academic advisors who encouraged students initially to engage impacted their success positively. This approach could also be beneficial for students on probation, similarly discussed in a study by Schwebel et. al (2012). The study focused on the at-risk students, who were often also on probation and who could be helped by advising outreach, proactive advising and intrusive advising techniques. The researcher used a case-control experimental design and followed a cohort of students for four years, examining advising outreach methods that were less intensive. The participants in this study were racially diverse first year students from a variety of majors at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). The advising outreach methods were not intrusive or proactive enough to benefit students. The findings suggested that the advising outreach encouraged students to attend advising and helped them to want to continue to meet with their advisors, but this had only a small impact on student retention. Schwebel et. al (2012) found that the increase in advising contact alone did not increase retention; advising strategies needed to be considered based on the requirements of the student body. The study was with a large sample and with different academic units for a duration of four years; there were different styles of advising outreach and advisors were both faculty advisors and professional advisors. The results from this study suggested that advising outreach encourages students to attend advising appointments, but the efforts did not result in positive effects beyond that, and also suggested future research should be conducted beyond the limitations of this study to find the benefit from advising outreach and intrusive advising.

The benefit of intrusive and proactive advising in this generation of students who use technology to stay connected was discussed in a study by Schwebel et. al (2012) and mentioned

the different style of advising outreach that can impact student retention. The study by Whisett, Suell & Ratchford (2014) also noted that same concept of advising to be effective, with academic advising playing an integral part. The academic advising was considered an important part in student success and overall college experience. The researchers wanted to study the components of an effective academic advising system. In this study, they surveyed students and faculty to answer their research questions about advising needs, the importance of advising, and the professor's perspective on advising. The survey was given to 72 students from diverse majors, and required participants to rank nine components of advising from most to least essential. The focus of the study was to determine if there was a need to change advising practices imparted during teacher preparation sessions. The study also had limitations; it was conducted in a small liberal arts university and participants were all students majoring in education. Thus, these methods may not be as effective for other universities or for students with different majors. The results showed that in-service training on advising, and student satisfaction surveys to monitor the effectiveness of advising can help to address the retention rate of undergraduate and graduate education students.

In summary, through the literature reviewed for this study, advising was shown to be one of the most important factors in retention of international, as well as domestic, students. International students faced challenges during their transition into a new education system and needed more resources than domestic students to survive those challenges. The utilization of resources depended on students and their academic advisors who guided these international students, based on their major, to utilize those resources. This guidance was helpful to students attempting to navigate through academic issues and endeavors as well and provided a positive

impact on their overall college experience. These strategies helped international students be successful and make full use of the resources available to them.

### **Method**

This research was conducted to understand the effect academic advising has on international students' retention at a small Catholic liberal arts college in the Northeast. Academic advising has been considered an integral part in student retention but has not been researched extensively. The research provides a clearer perspective of international students as they transition into the American education system. This was a qualitative study, and data were collected through interviews with international students. The college attended by these students are identified in the research under the pseudonym "Newcome College" to protect participant confidentiality. Students were selected by referrals given by the academic counselor for international students. The sample for this study was international students (Appendix B) who have visited their advisors and the selection of students was drawn from the international student population at Newcome College. Each participant was invited to take part in a 45-50 minute recorded interview, in person and in a location of the participant's choosing. Prior to conducting the interview, each participant was presented with a consent form that detailed how the study would be conducted and how data from the interviews would be used. All identifying information for the participants was removed before the data was made public. The data analysis was conducted by using standard qualitative data analysis techniques. The outcome of this study would be the production of a valuable source for analysis and the provision of recommendations for future references.

The human subjects involved in the research were students who had been to their advisor and were willing to share their experiences. Before the interviews, students were contacted by email to ask them if they were interested in being interviewed and sharing their experiences. The email also contained information about the study, its purpose, and what was hoped to be gained from the interviews. Students were informed that the invitation to take part in the study was an opportunity to shed light on the different aspects of their advising experiences and also to help guide future international students.

The paradigm in the study was the constructivist paradigm, as the research was based on the experience of international students who have participated in advising sessions. Mertens (2009) explained that the constructivist paradigm is best for explaining the lived experience of a group of individuals having a similar experience. In my research listened and made efforts to, understand, and try to analyze the factors that had helped those students in their persistence in college. The factors that had helped those students to persist in college were collected, reviewed and analyzed. Questions pertaining to the advising process (Appendix A) allowed participants to reflect on their unique experiences with academic advising. As discussed in Mertens (2009), “Qualitative methods are used in research that is designed to provide an in-depth description of a specific program, practice, or setting” (p.236). The open-ended questions allowed students to elaborate on their experiences. The questions focused on their college experiences and how academic advising affected their ability to survive the challenges they faced attempting to adjust to a new system. The other important question required them to elaborate on how their experiences could be useful for future students to help them to persist in college. The questions in the study did not involve any information that could potentially harm the subjects and their

identity was masked. The interviews were conducted in a place that was comfortable to the participants and determined by their input. The information provided by the students was used only for the purpose of understanding the current body of knowledge and for improving the study.

The data collected were sensitive and had the potential to cause issues with participants who did not want to share their experiences because they thought others may know and recognize them. To combat this potential risk, participants were assured that information was not shared with any of the advisors on campus, that all information was confidential, and that their identities would not be revealed. Confidentiality was further protected by assigning participants pseudonyms (Appendix B). The data collection method was interviewing, which provided information on the perspectives of students who had experienced advising and about what their advisor had done to improve their experience. These interviews allowed face-to-face interaction with the participants and an understanding of how these students viewed their advising experience and if the sessions helped in their persistence.

The interviewed participants were international students who needed help from their academic advisors to guide them in their course selection and other decisions related to their academics. The results of the study provided some recommendations for future research and could help future advisors for international students and the researchers to better understand the role of the academic advisor in enhancing the college experience for international students. The information could help future researchers to understand what international students need from their advising sessions and from their academic advisor and whether these factors help in the retention of international students, as well as to improve their college experience.

This study was beneficial in providing more information about the international students' experience with academic advising and also the factors related to their advising and retention. They expressed that they needed help from their advisors to help them navigate through the education system which was new to them. This study provided essential information about what was important for international students to receive during academic advising that would help them succeed in college, academically. The factors identified were those that affected their educational experience and could be used to enhance advising sessions. The study also procured information from the students about their overall college experience and how certain factors relating to academic advising affected their persistence. Thus, the outcome from this research could allow future researchers to compare the findings and use the recommendations for improving the advising experience for international students.

In order to analyze my data, I used standard methods of coding qualitative data (Saldana, 2015). I transcribed each interview then conducted line by line coding to identify themes and patterns, which helped in generating recommendations. I also conducted member checking with each participant by sending them the data they provided that I used in my study for comments, additions or clarifications.

## **Findings**

### Reasons for selecting Newcome College

Participants in this study, traveling from a wide variety of countries (Appendix B) came to the United States in search of new academic opportunities and wanted to experience the world outside of their respective countries. Some participants chose Newcome for the academic



programs and others, for the college's offer of athletic scholarships. The students said that the feel of the small community of Newcome College gave them a good chance for growth and to experience college life in the United States. These students always sought someone who could guide them in their freshman year, and they mentioned that student volunteers, such as international assistants and orientation leaders, tried to do a good job to help them. The student athletes in this study found help from their teammates, getting advice on campus. For example, participant Nina shared:

I always look for small school. Most of the people like a big school because they want to meet more people. But I think that in small schools you get to meet all people, whereas in big schools you don't get to introduce yourself to so many people. Also the team feels like family. They are not just teammates; they are like family to each other. When I saw that, I thought I would love to be part of something like that ... sports was a factor also in choosing Newcome.

Some participants decided to pursue an education in the U.S. because they did not have the same opportunities in their own countries. The participants felt overwhelmed at first, but the environment of Newcome College, located not far from Boston, and the diversity of the campus made them feel comfortable.

Students reported that the specific orientation for international students, after just after the main orientation, was very beneficial to many students. But during interviews, it was discovered that some participants had missed the second orientation for some reason, and as a result, they felt lost and needed help navigating the school. Participant Marti shared:

I did get most of the basic information from my friends...for international students, about financial aid and job possibilities. I was here pre-season for soccer, so in orientation, I was not able to attend all sessions, but I knew where most of the offices were situated. Orientation was helpful, but if I had...attended all sessions, that would have been good.

These students reported that they often felt that their advisor could fill them in on the important information missed during their orientation. But some students said that they wanted more than just academic information because they were not familiar with the norms and rules of the new country. The participants who had attended orientation felt that orientation leaders and the international assistant had helped them to get comfortable and provided them with beneficial information. Participants also found help from the international office, but they wanted more information, such as advice about how to get a driver's license, how to interpret the rules about whether they could work, how they could manage their work hours and how to waive insurance coverage. The students primarily obtained all this information from their friends or teammates who were already studying in the United States. The students sought advice from an international academic advisor and said they felt connected to her when discussing their concerns. Dina stated:

I did check the website online but I did not know much about college. So I got all my information after coming here after orientation. I found lot of information from my friends as I did not know that we have to change classes. In Venezuela, we sit in the same classroom and teachers come to class. My advisor did not know that I was not aware of these thing so I got all that information through friends. I was a little confused but the international academic advisor tried to explain a few things in orientation. I like the international students' orientation better...and get to bond with other international students because they are also going through the same stuff.

Participant said that the resources provided to them were able to assist them in having a good college experience and to gain the knowledge they sought. The result from the study Mamiseishvili (2012) showed that “if international students successfully integrate in the academic system of campus, they will more likely stay enrolled in the institution” (p.13). International students always look for institutions that can enhance their college experience, academically and socially.

### Experiences of international students at Newcome

The participants in this study were all attracted to the fact that Newcome College has a small community and the fact that they could be comfortable asking questions to their professors. The college being the right size, a comparatively smaller college than many, was important for them because some have compared their experiences with those of friends attending larger universities. Those friends have mentioned that they do not get the feeling that the staff was being helpful because it seemed to them they were treated as “one more in the bunch.” Participants mentioned that they compared the campuses and the schools that could provide long-term growth for them, and that Newcome College fit that description. The diversity in the school also played a factor for some students because they definitely wanted to study with American students, but also did not want to feel isolated. Newcome College's location, just north of Boston, was also a main factor for many participants picking the college. Andy shared:

And also I wanted something in Boston or ... near Boston. I wanted a school that had some diversity. My advisor in Venezuela advised me that living in the city might not be best... so if the school is not very far away from city that would be good choice. I like Newcome because of the education program.

The campus was a place where international students learned something new every day and being comfortable with professors made them feel that they were a part of the college. One participant commented that for academic problems, they had an academic advisor, and for any visa or documentation or campus-related problems, they could go to the international office. Allen and Smith (2008) also stated that the faculty advisor and the student's affair professional advisor working together would help in developmental advising for students. International students interviewed for this study wanted the opportunity to ask for feedback from their professors to make improvements on their assignments. For example, Andy stated:

I wanted a small school and wanted to be in touch with the teacher because if you have a question or concern, you can directly talk to the teacher or email them. I have heard from students from big colleges and universities that they feel like another one in the bunch; they don't feel they can reach their teachers to get answers to their questions. They have big classrooms; it would be hard to participate in class. You would raise your hand, but your teacher might not see it. I was always in a small classroom setting and was comfortable with that setting. I like a small school. My teacher has helped me a lot and I am always asking questions...and asking for feedback and checks on my drafts and I wanted that. Newcome was one of the schools that had that.

Participants also felt the resources provided to them were helpful because coming from different countries and different cultures, they found it difficult to navigate everything. The resources such as the writing center, the math center, and career center proved to be very beneficial. The researchers Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino (2004) suggested that "Advising approaches may be better defined solely by the advising tasks conducted than by the theory on which they are based" (p.57). The advisors could decide to provide the information or discuss it and not just follow a template; this depended on approach of the advisors. The students who had no knowledge of life in the U.S. would be able to get information on the culture and way of life from their peers. Related to this, Nia shared:

When I came to Newcome College, I was so worried that I did not know anybody here. But the environment was so welcoming. There was this group called international assistants who mentor international students, so when I came here, a mentor took me around campus and introduced me to people making me feel at home. Girls on my floor were also welcoming and nice. It was very convenient but I also felt homesick. I came after orientation and met my mentor on moving day. She met me in my dorm ...she must have checked with the RA's.

Participants who received information and guidance early during their transitional period were able to feel more comfortable on campus. The orientation where they met international assistants and other international students helped them to connect with others also going through the same transition.

### Advising experiences

One important aspect of this study was to thoroughly explore students' experiences with their academic advisors. They meet regularly with this person, so it is crucial to know what happens in these meetings. Students in this study reported that the advising sessions were short, but long enough to discuss the course requirements, organize classes and clear any concerns students had with their academics. The students also needed to come prepared to these meetings, which had positive and effective results in their advising sessions. Linda shared:

Usually they the sessions are a maximum of 30 minutes but we are able to do so much in 30 minutes. He the advisor will make sure everything is all set and I have my classes in order. He will start emailing a couple of weeks before classes to see how we are and how our classes are...to see if we need anything....

Participants in this study felt more connected to their advisor if the advisor established check-ins with them to keep them informed and to ask if they needed anything. These check-ins allowed them to reach out to their advisors if they had any problems. They always wanted to know if the academic advisors could help them figure out if the classes they were taking would be a good fit with their major. The academic advisor who just followed the course selection that fit all would not be able to help international students because these students wanted to understand more about the requirements and courses before choosing the courses. Some of the international students who were interviewed wanted their academic advisor to discuss the requirements in detail and recommend courses which would fulfill those requirements during their advising session. Jeremy shared:

I didn't know at first what I wanted to do, so I started to take any classes. Then, I liked the finance courses so decided to take that as a concentration. I talked to my finance professor for advice. She was not my academic advisor but I took her as my advisor.

This participant hesitated to ask his former advisor about adding his concentration because the advisor had not made an effort to know his interests during the advising sessions. The study by Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino (2004) highlighted “the importance of an advisor establishing a relationship with an advisee and conveying warmth and support in this relationship” (p.59). International students were more comfortable talking with the international academic advisor about their interests. Leo shared:

I don't have that kind of relationship with my primary advisor, but I talk with the international academic advisor about courses and how they will help me in my major.... like today I talked about my project and she was more interested; She is more open to talk. She talks about courses and how it will relate to my social life. My primary advisor is just to pick courses but she is easier to talk to about the social side of courses.

The participants felt that having an international academic advisor was very helpful for them. The study Zaho et.al (2005) suggested that “Faculty members and academic and student affairs administrators can use the findings of this study to better understand, advise, and assist international students in making a successful transition to college life in the U.S. and in finding ways to get involved in a range of educationally productive activities that will help students attain their educational goal in a satisfying manner” (p.226). Thus, having another academic advisor would be helpful because the international students find an international academic advisor to be very helpful in addition to their primary advisor. She provided them with information that specifically helped them as international students. Participants felt connected to her because she helped them academically and also in making connections with the campus. They were advised by her to use resources such as the writing center, the math center and many workshops conducted for international students such as note-taking skills, time management, navigating the American classroom, navigating the library, and academic integrity.

Challenges international students had during the advising sessions

International students in this study have expressed confusion about the U.S. education system, and they reported that they did do some research before coming to the United States, but a few things still presented problems. Registration for classes was a confusing process for many participants because the system was different from the one in their countries. The students wanted their advisors to explain the course requirements and also provide guidance in understanding and following the system. Andy shared:

Yes, they need to not assume you know everything. Like my MTEL exam-- I did not know about this until my sophomore year. My advisor should have let us know.... as a reminder like "You need this, this and this and you know that, right?" so if I don't have the information we can go over it again.

Participants expressed that their advisors could have reminded them about all the information that international students needed, related to academics. Some may have missed pertinent information during orientation or during their online research about the course or classes. The students could be reminded about the important information concerning courses they were taking. Some of the processes were confusing for international students compared to domestic students. The Allen and Smith (2008) study emphasized the importance of faculty advisors to provide holistic advising, and students appreciated advisors who took time to develop quality advising strategies. Manny stated:

Picking classes is not difficult...The thing is that you need to consider... next semester or next year as well. Because if I take these classes...can I take the other one next semester? Or if this one is offered this semester... is it not offered next semester? This kind of stuff was really confusing ...for all those reason having my academic advisor was very helpful.

The students felt that confusing registration processes could result in them taking unnecessary courses which would lead to them graduating late. Needing extra time to graduate would be a waste of money and time for students. The academic advisor could help them stay on track by helping them choose the courses that were required by or boosted their major because many students just applied for a major without researching the requirements needed for that major. International students needed help in understanding the course requirements because some classes fulfilled several different requirements, allowing them to take just one class instead of three. Bista (2015) study stated that “Many international students do not clearly understand American college culture and faculty expectations” (p.95). Academic advisor should consider that international students need a little more help than domestic students and that they look up to their advisors to guide them. Participant Linda, whose friend had a different experience, shared:

I just think for us international students...our advisors need to be more personal...I want to say nicer, but more in touch, because a lot of students...don't know about their career opportunities from their major. My friend didn't meet her advisor... just a secretary... Whenever I talk about my advisor, she always says “oh...that's not what I got”.... I think it's important to meet the student you are advising, even if you are busy.

The students looked forward to discussing their interests and academic concerns with their advisors, and if the advisors were not making an effort to have a conversation, that discouraged the students. The same issue was discussed in a study by Bista (2012), who noted that “With adequate knowledge of cross-cultural understanding, international student advisors may deal with students from diverse cultures, religions, and languages successfully” (p.99). The participants wanted their advisors to be more personally invested in them, and have an interest in their culture. The small subtle things such as pronouncing their names correctly and wanting to know about their cultures and the lifestyles of their countries made a big impact. The study by



Museus and Ravello (2010) also mentioned in their recommendation that “ When asked about the role that academic advising plays in fostering success among college students of color on their campuses, several student participants referred to the positive impact of key academic advisors who were friends or mentors” (p.53). The advisor who understood the difference between domestic students and international students was best able to help this population of students.

#### Improvements in academic advising:

International students in this study did come to the United States prepared to work hard but they had some obstacles, such as not being familiar with the education system. The academic advisors should discuss with students what information they already knew and if they wanted to know more about anything from their advisors. The participants said that they expected that the requirements for their courses would be discussed by their advisors during advising sessions. Some students did not have all the information they needed about the requirements for their courses, and they needed help in figuring that out. There were some requirements, such as the one course in their major fulfilling several different requirements for their concentration, which needed to be explained. Betsy shared:

Last semester our meeting took ...an hour and a half because we were trying to figure out how I could graduate early. I took an exam (I speak Spanish)...a CLEP exam for credit and also took classes in the summer to boost my credit. My advisor gave me a plan...and said it's up to you to follow it or not. She pretty much gave me the option to graduate early... or if not; I still had one extra semester, so it wasn't a big deal. It's always good to talk with your advisor because they have lot of information that you don't know about the requirements. By taking one course at Newcome you fulfilled a bunch of requirements and some people don't know that. I took a US women's history course which satisfies the other two requirements for diversity and history. There are lot of things that some people don't know, so by asking your advisor, you can have that information.

Academic advisors should bring up and discuss these requirements in meetings because international students tended to be shy and did not ask for help. The requirements that could be customized according to each student's needs could be explained by advisors early in the semester, so that students could consider and discuss their options early on. The staff needed to be a little more compassionate and willing to provide information about resources to help students experience their college life more easily without stressing out about being alone and lonely. The Bista (2012) study stated that "Skilled international advisors with a good work ethic always provide appropriate services to students and scholars during their stay at college or universities" (p.98). The participants in this study also thought that the students should demonstrate a willingness to be helped. Students who did not come forward and ask to discuss their concerns ended up stressed and confused. The academic advisors could also help them in planning their long-term goals by discussing future plans after graduation. Orientation, initially, provided a good platform for imparting this information, but by the time students reached their sophomore year, they needed to be reminded again. This could be possible if the students and academic advisors have a good relationship to talk openly about future plans.

Academic advisors should also be aware of the limitations international students have in this country concerning work and internships. A documentation process must be done; they cannot just start an internship like domestic students. They have very little control over what they can do but with the help of their advisors, they could figure out a way to stay within their limitations and work toward their future. Betsy also shared:

As an international student, it is not easy to find opportunities here, not easy at all...especially if you are full time student and you want to work off campus...Having an advisor telling you that you can do this or you can do that is very helpful. Something that

I have seen that most of the advisors do not know the international students' limitations. They say you can go out and look in hospitals for doctors you can work with. However, I cannot; school has to do that for me. ... There are a bunch of government things that I have to do....they treat you like an American student which is fine, like normal students...Sadly, we are not.

The academic advisor could make sure that students know how to get their internships or refer them to career services, where they could be guided on either internships or working options. The study by Allen and Smith (2008) suggested that, "Faculty apparently believed their time is better invested in addressing the overall integration of students' academic, career, and life goals connecting options in the major to these goals, and referring students to resources that help them become better learners" (p.408). Better information and guidance could help these students to choose their paths and plan better. The advisor who takes extra time to understand what the students' interests are and what could help them to reach their goals would be able to help these students better. Museus and Ravello (2010) discussed this: "Advisors should provide holistic academic advising. This means that advisors should try to understand nonacademic challenges faced by students of color that might be influencing their academic experiences" (p.56).

Academic advisors who have good insight on which courses could best serve a student's major could make an outstanding difference in international students' futures. Information, such as how many credits they need to graduate, how they could earn extra credits and how they could earn credit from online courses would be valuable and helpful to students. The international academic advisor at Newcome College did help international students by providing information on earning extra credits. She helped them with the process of taking the CLEP exam, which gave them 12 credits, allowing some students to graduate early. The international academic advisor

organized many workshops for international students to help them understand the system and work with it. Nia shared:

In my freshman year, the international academic advisor emailed me. That's why I went to meet her. Had she not sent me those emails, I would not have gone to meet her. She helps me with my social life. She helps me to plan how to prepare for test and readings. I do attend her workshops and it has helped me...My college writing was not good. I was failing. The professor emailed her and then she advised me to use the writing center. My primary advisor did not advise me to go to the writing center for help.

The international academic advisor worked hard to organize workshops and sessions to help international students. This trusting relationship was maintained because of her continued work with them, from orientation until they graduated. The students were familiar with her from the start and knew how to contact her. All these factors made a difference for students, and this was why they reach out to her for help. The participants also mentioned that they had the advantage of having two advisors, an academic advisor and an international academic advisor; both improved their college experience. Getting help in academics and integration from both advisors helped international students to be successful.

Findings from this research have shown that international students come to US institution for the experiences of being away from their country and also to explore their educational opportunities. Participants wanted from detailed information on their major selection, courses and how can be adding a minor be helpful to them in future. Because they are not as familiar with the educational system and guidance on such information will be helpful to them. International students who were senior and about to graduate wanted their advisor to help them explore their career opportunities and help them to gain experience on the field they have selected through internships and off campus jobs. Participants have noted that advisors need

training when it comes to advise international students as their requirements are different from domestic students.

### **Recommendations**

A review of the literature and responses to student interviews revealed that Newcome College offered important advising and related support for international students, but needed enhanced programming. The interviews presented international students' perspectives and noted the areas that needed to be improved. Based on the research and interviews, the following suggestions can be made: conduct group advising sessions, expand training for academic advisors who work with international students, create workshop for advisors to get more insight on the needs of international students, hold information sessions for international students to gain important skills and knowledge and offer workshops for international students to explore their employment opportunities.

***Recommendation 1: Academic advisors should offer group advising sessions for students with the same major that can provide all the necessary information relating to their major.***

The participants in this study (Appendix B) mentioned that they needed more information and also more detailed information about their major's requirements. International students lack information about college and courses that domestic students already know. Some of the questions they had concerned how they would find internships, how many courses would be enough to add a minor, how useful a minor would be added to their major, and information on graduating early by taking courses that fulfill more than one requirement. The course "History of U.S. Women," for example, fulfills the requirement for both a gender course and a history

course. Adding certain minors could add value to their major, and students need to know which minors serve that purpose and how they can stay on track to complete the minor requirements. To address these areas, it is recommended that academic advisors hold group advising sessions for all students with the same major. This will help international students maintain a connection with their major and engage in discussion with other students and advisors about topics related to their major and what steps are needed to graduate on time. This advising model is already being used in the Business School of Newcome College and can be adopted by other schools within the college.

The success of these advising session depends on the cooperation from students also, because if students do not participate in group advising, the session will not have the intended result. Faculty advisors need to work with the academic support office to organize these sessions and students from the same major have to be informed about the sessions. They should be held at a time when students do not have classes, such as in the evening, or groups of five to seven students taking the same courses could be formed. After they participate in the group session, students should have a one-on-one meeting with their faculty advisor. This meeting could be conducted in the faculty advisor's office and include the staff from academic support office or from the department of the student's major.

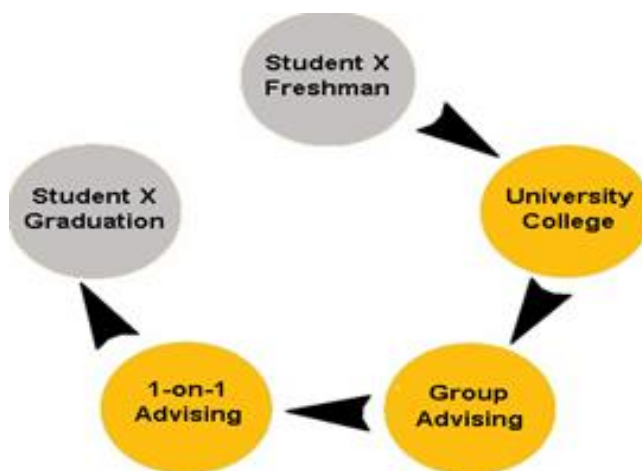


Figure 1: Advising Model (Virginia Commonwealth University)

This advising model, similar to the one recommended, is utilized by VCU (Virginia Commonwealth University, n.d) for their undergraduate advising program for students majoring in chemistry. The sophomore and transfer students have group advising, and then they meet one-on-one with faculty advisors. Those students who want more information can utilize these advising sessions for their benefit. In this way, the students with the same major will get all the information they need in one place. Group sessions would also be helpful for advisors to reach out to many students and a follow-up assessment to check progress can be implemented with a survey taken by the students who participated in the group advising session, before and after the session. By comparing the survey of group advising with one administered after individual advising, advisors can determine whether the group sessions were successful or not. This can help faculty advisors implement improvements needed to benefit incoming students.

***Recommendation 2: Newcome should institute training for academic advisors to help them hold effective advising sessions with international students.***

In this study, the participants shared information regarding their advisor's knowledge of how to advise international students, and understand that international students' needs will be different than domestic students. It is recommended that academic advisors, especially faculty advisors, be provided training so that they can better help international students. An example of this is the training session offered at the University of Utah Valley (UVU) for their advisors, which includes three sessions that cover all the necessary information (University of Utah Valley, n.d). The sessions are categorized into three types: new advisor training, specialty training and skill development workshop. The new advisor training concentrates on specialty areas such as depression, anxiety, lack of social integration, and cultural differences. The skill development workshops are for advisors who need skills to help students set goals and develop a positive attitude for service. These sessions and workshops specifically target advisors, but other staff members at UVU who are interested can join and are accommodated in the training. These training will allow academic advisors working with international students to gain the skill needed to guide them and understand about the factors that can impact international students when they come from different country and are trying to adjust into new system.

The academic advisor should have all the information needed about international students' requirements and the limitations these students have, such as the documentation process for international students doing internships, the details about their authorization to work in the U.S. and the time they are allowed to stay in the U.S. after their graduation. The training would give advisors the necessary knowledge to have an effective advising session with international students. A study by Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) showed that international students' needs are different and should be included in international program. Higher education



needs to prepare advisors that can effectively work with people from different backgrounds. NACADA (The National Academic Advising Association) has also suggested that training academic advisors is essential (n.d). Keeping current in the area of professional development is important for advisors who need to be cognizant of new information, skills and best practices in the field of advising. A development program is essential for all advisors, so that they can use the information from workshops to enhance their advising sessions. The training and development program should include information on the limitations of finding internships for international students, how students can find jobs, immigration regulations, the long documentation process international students require for off-campus jobs, the changing visa rules and employment eligibility. The Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) has some information on immigration, employment eligibility and resources for international students on the school's website for faculty advisors who advise undergraduate students (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, n.d).

The International program office, admissions office and academic support office need to collaborate to organize these workshops. The academic support office can send email invitations to all faculty advisors to join the training. The event should be planned so that it will be convenient for advisors to attend and with a budget for the space, training material and food for the event. The assessment of the training program should be done twice, once before the training to assess the requirements of the advisors, and again, after the training, to determine if the requirements have been met.

***Recommendation 3: Workshops should be held for academic advisors to increase their insight on the different requirements for international students and domestic students in their advising sessions.***

International students come to the United States with little knowledge about the country and often feel overwhelmed. In interviews, participants in this study revealed that they tried to find the information they needed to survive in the U.S. from their friends and teammates. It is recommended that workshops be held to increase awareness among academic advisors of the recurring issues for international students. Faculty and staff who advise international students would be provided information on Visa documents and I-20, cross-cultural information, tips on communicating with non-native English speakers and employment eligibility. This is similar to the workshop conducted at the University of Denver (University of Denver, n.d) for faculty and staff. They have sessions that include admission processing for international students, communicating with non-native English speakers, cross-cultural communication and employment eligibility for international students. This workshop should include all advisors as well as staff members who work with international students and include information the students will seek on these pertinent topics.

The workshop should also include training in communication skills for academic advisors, similar to those taught at Missouri State University, using the tips developed by Boston University's International Students and Scholars office for successful communication with international students (Missouri State University, n.d). These tips include skilled listening, limiting of acronyms, understanding cultural differences, helping students understand how the system works, learning to pronounce students' names and not assuming that all students know what advisors can do for them. International students often expect that advisors will provide them with all the information they need, even if that information is also available online and on the college's website.

These informational workshops can be organized by the international program office because they will be able to provide detailed information on the requirements and paperwork needed for international students to work in the U.S. The workshops would ensure that faculty and staff are kept current about the requirements and rules that apply for international students. Most of the information is already available in the international office, ready to be shared with staff and faculty advisors, so all that is needed is a budget for space, materials and a light snack for the event. The space can be organized on the college campus so that it will be convenient for faculty and staff to join in. An assessment can be done by a survey at end of the semester. By improving advising practices for specific demographic populations, faculty advisors will be better able to support international students.

***Recommendation 4: Newcome College should offer information sessions for international students that can help them gain knowledge about the requirements for their major such as prerequisites, internships, and credit requirements, and assist them in exploring their major.***

Participants in this study revealed in their interviews that they wanted their academic advisors to explain to them the requirements of their major and career paths that exist within their major. International students wanted more information on these requirements because they are not familiar with the system, and are not aware which courses will fulfill more than one requirement in their major. Academic advisors should help students find courses that fulfill major requirements as well as other institutional requirements, thus reducing the number of courses not related to the students' interests. This also provides an opportunity for conversations about the students' interests and pathways to the job skills they need for future careers within the major. It is recommended that organized information sessions be held for international students

about course requirements, careers, internships and career options. The faculty advisors can provide information on the requirements of the major and clarify any issues students are unclear about. These information sessions can be organized by the office of student success and the academic support office.

These information sessions need to be advertised through emails to international students and verbally introduced to them during orientation. The academic advisors can review the information when they meet students for their next registration appointment. The assessment of these sessions can be included in the survey about orientation, at the end of the semester. These survey results can be useful in creating better information sessions for future incoming international students.

The study by Mamiseishvili (2011) discussed that if international students were able to integrate into the academic system on campus then they would stay enrolled in the institution. These information sessions helped them understand the system better, persist in the institution and, if they got the information early enough, helped them graduate on time.

***Recommendation 5: Newcome College should organize workshops for international students to explain about career options and explore opportunities for employment.***

The participants in this study wanted their advisors to help them explore options within their major. International students wanted to have more information on career options such as campus jobs, off-campus opportunities, internships and information about opportunities to explore their interests. The student success office does help students research employment opportunities, set up on-campus interviews and schedule one-on-one advising sessions to help them explore their

interests. They also support internships and cooperative education programs for students to get hands-on experience in their fields of interest. International students need to be encouraged to use the resources available to them at the student success office. Academic advisors can ascertain during advising session if students are utilizing the student success services. The academic advisor could also try to understand the reason students are interested in their major, so that international students could be guided to the proper resources on campus. International students who want to pursue higher education or employment will be able to consider their options and utilize the resources provided to them on campus.

The participants in this study wanted information about subsequent steps to take after graduation. The study by Bista (2015) discussed the changing duties of international students' advisors from earlier times. The role of academic advisor for international students has become increasingly important in helping international students access all the resources available to them. It is recommended that the student success office that provides career services should organize a workshop for international students who want information about careers, off-campus and on-campus jobs and preparing for their job search. Students might have different majors, but the information about pursuing post-graduate education would help them discover the options of internships and campus jobs. The workshop can focus on junior and senior students, but also include interested sophomore students. The budget could be created by both the academic support office and career services, and the space for the workshop should be designated on the college campus and at a time when students of all majors can attend, such as a weekend. Assessments need to be done with advisors before the workshop to determine what kind of workshop sessions students will be interested in. The survey taken after the workshop can be

used to enhance workshops for future students. Skidmore College (Skidmore College, n.d) has a similar program called academic and career exploration where students can explore options to take part in research projects, internships or off-campus jobs, and service learning programs. It would be very beneficial for international students to understand the working environment and system of the country before working in the mainstream job market.

### **Conclusion**

This research clearly demonstrates that the academic advisor plays an important role in international students' retention. This study was able to provide valuable insight on the advising sessions and the experiences of international students at Newcome College and was very helpful in understanding the perspective of international students and the resources they needed to stay on track. Additionally, this study will be able to assist those working in higher education to examine the resources to be developed for the benefit of international students. The orientation session for international students does provide them with a lot of information about the American academic system. It is absolutely essential that international students who are transitioning from the education of their country to the education system in the U.S. be prepared for both their time in college and their time post- graduation. The interviews shed light on the information these students wanted from their academic advisors.

The academic support office of Newcome College is doing its best to provide international students with the necessary resources to be successful. It is recommended that a focus be placed on providing more information that international students need to navigate through the education system, as well as enhanced training for academic advisors who are charged with supporting international students in their academic success. The most essential

recommendation is the implementation of training sessions and workshops for academic advisors because professional development plays a significant role in helping advisors to best serve international students. They further need to understand that advising international students and domestic students' requires different approaches. International students have different limitations and requirements than domestic students. The advising sessions with international students should be more informative and based on students' interests. International students want guidance from their academic advisors in exploring their major and career options.

The findings in this study suggested that advisors have a significant impact on the international students' academic integration into the institution. Advisors can help international students persist in the institution by helping them through the academic process. International students are also new to the culture and area, and struggle during their adjustment into the system, seeking information primarily from their friends. The recommendations made can be implemented into the existing advising programs and can be helpful for future incoming students, as they were derived by interviewing participants who already have been meeting with their academic advisors and may have benefitted if their advisors had followed some of the recommendations. Newcome College has an effective advising program for international students that could be enhanced by the recommendations made in this study. The suggestions center on academic advisors being provided with the right kinds of information to assist international students and to guide them in all aspects of their college experience.

According to the "Open Door" (2015) report on International Educational Exchange, international students contribute more than an estimated \$30 billion to US economy in all 50 states. These revenue produced from international students coming to US colleges and

universities definitely need more attention to help them survive on campuses. Institution leaders should also consider the factor that these international students brings diversity to our campuses. It is important that we help them survive and be successful in our colleges and universities. A college campus is like opening the door to the entire world without traveling anywhere else (USNEWS, 2009). The diversity will help expand world experience to all the students on campus, enhance their social development, and prepare them for future career success to work in global society. These exchange of knowledge and outlook through experiences shared by international students will beneficial for US students understand the world together with them.

The conclusions drawn from this study highlight the needs of international students as revealed in interviews and provide the necessary information and recommendations to enhance the advising program currently in place at Newcome College. International students require information on their major and minor requirements, prerequisites, and careers and internships. Departments and offices need to work collaboratively to create the resources necessary to help international students navigate their college experience successfully. These offices, working together with academic advisors, will be able to guide international students in their struggle to adjust and assimilate into the new system. The US colleges and universities which attracts many international students to pursue their education and as Higher Education professionals we are obligated for their success. The success of these international students will help us create many successful businessmen's, engineers, educators and social activists that can change the world.



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## Appendix A

### International Students Interview Protocol

- 1) How did you decide to travel to the US to study?
- 2) How did you come to decide to attend Newcome? What factors attracted you to study here?
- 3) Do you find Newcome College to be a welcoming and accepting place? Why or why not?
- 4) How did you make an appointment to meet your academic advisor for the first time?
- 5) Tell me about an experience that you have had with your academic advisor.
- 6) Did you find the advising session helped you to get engage in campus activities?
- 7) How did the academic advisor help you with your major selection or in making decisions about your courses?
- 8) What did you like the most in your advising session?
- 9) Did you have any challenges during your advising session? Can you explain what kind of challenges?
- 10) Do you feel that academic advising can help future international students at Newcome College?
- 11) Do you think that current advising program in Newcome needs any improvement to be able to help students?
- 12) Would you recommend making a visit to an academic advisor to your friends who do not make appointments to meet with their advisors?
- 13) Do you feel that Newcome College has an effective advising program? If yes, can you say little more about why? If no, can you say why?

**Appendix B**

Name(pseudonym)	Student's Year	Country
Nina	Freshman	Canada
Marti	Freshman	Venezuela
Dina	Freshman	Columbia
Linda	Freshman	Saudi Arabia
Manny	Junior	Japan
Betsy	Junior	Venezuela
Nia	Sophomore	Ghana
Jermi	Senior	Spain
Andy	Senior	Venezuela
Leo	Senior	Mexico