

**Cultures of Support:
A Case Study of International Undergraduate Students
and International Center Staff Members**

Sonja Lind

Jonathan Alexander

Rebecca Black

Maria Estela Zarate

**A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty
of the School of Education of University of California, Irvine
in Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

2014

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	8
II. Background and Literature Review	10
International Students in the U.S.	10
Undergraduate International Student Enrollment	11
National Origin of Students	11
International Students After September 2001	11
Tuition Costs and International Students	12
Challenges for International Students	13
Cultural challenges.	13
Social challenges.	15
Academic challenges.	15
English language challenges.	16
Daily life challenges.	16
Peer Support and International Students	17
Universities Supporting Students	19
Types of Support	19
Sources of Support	19
Faculty support.	20
Staff support.	20
Relationship-Centered Support	21
Supporting Students through Facebook	22
The Internet as Support	22
Universities' Use of Facebook	24
Research Questions	25
Significance of the Study	25
III. Conceptual Framework	28
Complicating Definitions of Support	28
Limited Existing Definitions	28
Definitions in the Current Study	29
IV. Methodology	31

Research Approach	31
Rationale for Research Approach	31
Sampling	32
Focus group and interview sampling.	32
Survey sampling.	32
Site and Participants	32
Participants	34
Focus groups and interviews.	34
Staff survey.	36
Facebook group.	36
Procedures	36
Focus Groups and Interviews	38
Analysis.	38
Staff Survey	39
Analysis.	39
Facebook Group Documents	39
Analysis.	40
Trustworthiness	41
Credibility	41
Researcher Bias	41
V. Support, from the Voices of Students	43
Participants	43
Procedures	43
Results	44
1. Types of Support	45
Daily life support (common theme).	46
Academic support (general theme).	48
Financial support (general theme).	49
Spoken and written English support (general theme).	50
Cultural support (general theme).	52
Career support (variant theme).	53
2. Barriers and Difficulties	53

Cultural difficulties (general theme).	54
University barriers (general theme).	56
<i>Inconvenience (subtheme).</i>	56
<i>Bureaucracy (subtheme).</i>	57
<i>Too much and mixed information (subtheme).</i>	57
<i>Inflexible policies (subtheme).</i>	58
Career difficulties (variant theme).	59
Financial difficulties (variant theme).	60
3. Sources of Support	60
Support in the dorms (general theme).	61
Peer mentorship (variant theme).	62
Staff and faculty support (variant theme).	62
4. Communication and Support	63
Seeking information (general theme).	64
Staff-student communication forms and patterns (general theme).	64
5A. The International Center and Support	66
The international center as visa stop (general theme).	67
Participants' lack of knowledge about the international center (variant theme).	68
Negative experiences at the international center (variant theme).	68
Need for more publicity (variant theme).	69
5B. The Ideal International Center	69
The center as a student space (common theme).	70
The center as a cozy place (general theme).	71
Summary of Results	73
Types of Support	74
Barriers and Difficulties	76
Sources of Support	77
Communication and Support	79
The International Center and Support	80
Limitations	81
Looking Ahead	82

VI. Staff Perceptions of Support	83
Support through Services and Programs	84
Support through Needs Assessment	85
Support as the Responsibility of the Institution	85
Collaborative University Support	86
Types of Support	86
Discussion of Results	87
Staff Responses and The Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) Project	89
Limitations	90
Looking Ahead	91
VII. Seeking and Providing Support on Facebook	92
Interactions Among Staff and Students	93
Overview of Post Topics	95
Staff Providing Support	96
Topics Staff Discussed	98
Communicative Patterns by Staff	98
Students Seeking and Providing Support	101
Topics in Student Responses to Staff	104
Communicative Patterns in Student Responses to Staff	105
Topics in Student Responses to Students	107
Communicative Patterns in Student Responses to Students	110
Summary of Results	113
Other Notes	116
Perceptions on Facebook in the Interviews and Focus Groups	116
Limitations	120
VII. Discussion and Conclusion	122
Overview: Caring Support and the Institution	123
Recommendation: A caring culture of support.	125
1. A Need for Daily Life Support	126
Recommendation: Support the daily life needs of international students.	127

2. Communicating Support	128
Recommendation: A responsive model of communication.	131
3. The Ideal International Center	132
Recommendation: A comfortable, student-focused international center.	134
An Additional Note about Facebook	134
A Final Note on the Strength of Students	135
Future Research	136
Conclusion	137
IX. References	139
Appendix A. Top 25 countries of origin for international students in 2012/13	
Appendix B. Admissions selectivity of students at the University	
Appendix C. Staff survey	
Appendix D. Student focus group questioning route	
Appendix E. Student interview questions	
Appendix F. Results in focus groups and interviews	
Appendix G. Open-Ended Staff Survey Responses	
Appendix H. Staff initiations and responses in the Facebook group	
Appendix I1. Student initiations in the Facebook group	
Appendix I2. Student responses to staff in the Facebook group	
Appendix I3. Student responses to students in the Facebook group	

ABSTRACT

This case study explores institutional support of international undergraduate students at a public university in California. The paper examines the types of support students needed, their sources of support, the barriers and difficulties they faced, the ways in which staff and students communicated, students' opinions about the international center, and ways in which staff defined and provided support. I define support as "Information and services provided by one party in order for the other party to function in and outside the university. These information and services may also be sought." Research methods included student focus groups and interviews, an online survey for international center staff, and an analysis of Facebook group posts. In conclusion, this study conceptually develops two cultures of support: a bureaucratic culture of support and a caring, relational culture of support. Three main findings include: 1) a need for support of international students' daily life needs; 2) suggestions for communicating support; and 3) implications for international student centers. Implications for university professionals working with international students are included.

I. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, higher education is more and more internationalized, although academic internationalization is “predominantly an American phenomenon” (Altbach & Knight, 2007), as U.S. students increasingly study abroad and international students are recruited by and enroll in U.S. universities (IIE, 2013B). This approach to academic internationalization – introducing U.S. students to global cultures in order to prepare them for an international economy – is one reason why international students are seen as “powerful catalysts of campus internationalization since they provide most US students with their first contact with another culture” (Pandit, 2013, p. 133). Due to the increasing population of international students, international centers and staff “quickly became a ubiquitous presence on US campuses” (Pankit, 2013, p. 133). However, “while faculty and university administrators understand and value the benefits of international enrollees, they do not always know how to support international students” (Eland & Thomas, 2013, p. 146). Subsequently, how staff members provide support and how international students seek support are some of the objectives of this study.

For purposes of this study, I define “international students” as those who were born in another country and have temporarily migrated to the U.S. to enroll in a full-time degree program; in this study, I have excluded students who study here for short-term, non-degree programs (e.g., English language programs). Additionally, I define “staff members” as any full-time, non-faculty professional employed by a university; in particular, I focus on staff members who work at an international center, though the implications of this study can apply to any staff, or even faculty, who interact with international students.

Despite many recent studies on international students in the U.S. (e.g., Jones & Kim, 2013; Sümer, Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Ye, 2006; Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005), much of the research has not focused on institutional support¹, but largely on students' acculturative stress (e.g., Klomegah, 2006; Lacina, 2002; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland & Ramia, 2007; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Yeh & Inose, 2003) and the friendship patterns of international students (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Gill, 2007; Kim, Yun & Yoon, 2009; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker & Al-Timimi, 2004; Trice, 2004; Ying, 2002). In other words, former studies have focused on international students' affective experiences in the U.S. In this study, I examine the role of institutional support, through both the perceptions of international center staff members and international undergraduate students.

This study also explores support in the online context of an international center's Facebook group. Yet a review of literature on Internet studies (e.g., Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Hampton, Goulet, Rainie & Purcell, 2011; Junco, 2011; Reuben, 2008; Saw et al, 2013) revealed little research on international student users. In summary, this study examines perceptions of institutional support as well as support in an online space, both of which are under-explored avenues of research in higher education.

¹ Throughout this study, the terms “institutional support” and “university support” will often be used interchangeably.

II. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature is structured to establish a historical context and current need for a study of international students at U.S. public universities. First, I will address the financial impact of international students in U.S. higher education. Then I will discuss the historical and current context of international students, including the challenges they face. I also outline the need for institutional support, notably by international centers. In addition, I will discuss the use of Facebook as a support platform. Finally, I will list the research questions and significance of this study.

International Students in the U.S.

Globally, there are more than two million students studying in a host country on a student visa, yet the United States draws the largest number (IIE, 2013B) and “has the greatest potential for growth of international students in undergraduate programs” (Choudaha, Chang & Kono, 2013, p. 7). The Institute of International Education's recent *Open Doors* report (2013B) states that the U.S. has continued to enroll record highs of international students. For instance, in the 2012/13 academic year, there were 819,644 international students, comprising nearly 4% of all college and university students in the country (IIE, 2013B). In one study, most students reported interest in attending a U.S. institution because they felt that the overall quality of U.S. education was better than in their country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). This enrollment of international students greatly benefits not only public universities, who rely on this group as a revenue source, but also the country in general. According to one report, international students contributed \$24 billion to and supported 313,000 jobs in the U.S. economy in 2012-2013 (NAFSA, 2013).

Undergraduate International Student Enrollment

While graduate students formerly comprised a larger percentage of the nation's international students, undergraduate enrollment has recently risen, with over 28,000 more undergraduate international students than graduate international students enrolled at U.S. institutions in 2012-13 (IIE, 2013A). This places the study in a context in which international undergraduate students are likely to become an increasing presence on U.S. campuses, and in which research on this population will be crucial to the study of higher education.

National Origin of Students

This study includes focus groups and interviews with East and Southeast Asian students, who comprise one of the fastest-growing undergraduate student populations in the U.S., and are the subjects of increasing numbers of studies on international students (e.g., Ye, 2005; Tsai & Wong, 2012). The top 25 countries of origin are predominantly Asian, with nearly 30% of all U.S. international students being Chinese (Appendix A). Most students are from East Asia (i.e., South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan) though Southeast Asian countries are also well-represented (e.g., Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia) (Appendix A).

International Students after September 2001

The relationship between international students and the U.S. government has been terse at times, arguably no more so than after September 11. The U.S. government's treatment of international students in the years following 2001 could be defined as cautious: a few of the terrorists who conducted the attacks had entered the U.S. on student visas. One month after September 11, the president signed the USA

Patriot Act (“Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism”), securing greater information surveillance of student visa holders in the U.S. This was implemented through mandatory institutional use of SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System), an online database created by the Department of Homeland Security that required colleges and universities to report student activity, enrollment, country of origin, personal information, and other information the government saw relevant to collect in order to prevent terrorism. In January 2003 it was fully implemented (Romero, 2002). This implementation affected international student centers everywhere in the U.S., making visa monitoring one of their key responsibilities, shifting the focus to bureaucratic support.

Tuition Costs and International Students

Many public U.S. universities recruit and admit international undergraduate students who can provide the universities with several years of nonresident tuition fees (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011; Choudaha, Chang & Kono, 2013; Gordon, 2012). A few articles point out that international students are seen as “revenue-generating agents” (Abdullah, Aziz, & Ibrahim, 2013, p. 4). Altbach and Knight (2007) state that “many countries recruit international students to earn profits by charging high fees, including ... the United States” (p. 292). Yet students do not typically benefit financially from this exchange; U.S. student visas are considered “nonimmigrant” visas (“Student visas,” n.d.), which means international students cannot establish residency and must continue to pay nonresident tuition fees during their enrollment. At universities such as the one where this study took place, nonresident tuition may cost as much as over two and half

times the amount of resident tuition². Most international students in the U.S. (63.6%) are financially supported by themselves or their families (IIE, 2013A). Therefore, international students and their families are "the largest source of funds for international education – not governments, academic institutions, or philanthropies" (Altbach and Knight, 2007, p. 294).

Challenges for International Students

International students face a plurality of challenges upon arriving in the U.S., which can "range from academic issues to cultural differences, from personal to logistical matters" (Eland & Thomas, 2013, p. 147). Most research on international students has focused on these challenges, which this section examines: cultural challenges, social challenges, linguistic challenges, and daily life challenges.

Cultural challenges. Multiple studies (e.g., Bista & Foster, 2011; Jones & Kim, 2013; Lacina, 2002; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Yeh & Inose, 2003) attest that moving to a new country is a stressful cross-cultural experience, particularly if the "cultural distance" is greater between the students' passport country and the U.S. (e.g., distance between cultural collectivism and individualism; see The Hofstede Center, 2014; Ye, 2005). Language difficulties, financial difficulties, alienation and homesickness, culturally dissimilar educational backgrounds and "a loss of established social networks" (Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002, p. 2) all contribute to acculturative stress. Even U.S. eating habits were a challenge (Jones & Kim, 2013). More extremely, international students from most

² As of 2013-14, nonresident undergraduates pay \$37,386 and resident undergraduates pay \$14,506 annually. Source: UC Irvine University Registrar (2014).

regions³ may experience what Lee (2007) observes as “neo-racism,” which is “attributable to skin color as well as culture, national origin” and can be manifested as “an inability to obtain a job; difficulty in forming interpersonal relationships with instructors, advisors, and peers; negative stereotypes and inaccurate portrayals of one's culture; negative comments about foreign accents” and so on (p. 28; also see Jones & Kim, 2013). Tsai and Wong (2012) state:

Among Asian international students who belong to the dominant racial or ethnic group in their home country, becoming a racial and ethnic minority in the United States can also be a challenging experience ... they may experience conflicts between their culture of origin and the dominant European American culture. (p. 144)

Conversely, international students “often arrive with their own stereotypes and prejudices about Americans, particularly US minorities” (Pandit, 2013, p. 132), which may never be addressed. In conclusion, “many international students experience extreme challenges without adequate support” (Glass, 2011, p. 243). These stressful challenges are the concern of many researchers; for instance, one frequently-cited study addresses mental health concerns of international students and examines reasons why they under-use campus counseling services (Mori, 2011).

³ In general, studies have shown that international students from Canada and Europe do not have the same cultural adjustment issues as students from other regions (e.g., China, India, Saudi Arabia) (see Jones & Kim, 2013; Lee, 2007; Schmitt, Spears & Branscombe, 2002).

Social challenges. A majority of studies about international students have found that this group struggles to make friends, particularly with local (U.S.) students, which negatively impacts the acculturative process. This is all the more painful when we consider how important “being a friend” or being “friendly” is in U.S. society (Bochner, Buker & McLeod, 1976). For instance, Ramsay, Jones and Barker (2006) found that while international students made friends with other international students, “many do not appear to make viable links with local students, which can limit their access to support within and beyond the university and impeded the acquisition of important culturally specific information, with a negative impact on adjustment outcomes” (p. 250). One interviewee in Jones and Kim's (2013) study complained, “In the past seven years I only made one American true friend” (p. 93). The challenge of making an American friend was a common refrain in studies where researchers spoke with Asian international students; European students did not report the same challenge.

Academic challenges. Academic challenges are to be expected, and are the focus of many studies (e.g., Beykont & Daiute, 2010; Glass, 2012). As one study described it, a majority (62%) of potential international students were “not fully prepared to tackle the academic challenges of an U.S. education” (Choudaha, Orosz & Chang, 2012, p. 17). For instance, these challenges may relate to different cultural patterns of teaching and learning, such as the authority of the professor, formality of discussions, and expectations of the students (Beykont & Daiute, 2010). In her ethnographic interviews with international undergraduate students, Nathan (2005) revealed that international students criticized the “American approach” of

“frequent small short-answer tests sometimes coupled with study guides and lecture outlines” (p. 79), finding them too “pre-digested,” while they considered the ability to add or drop classes and change majors or minors “a luxury” (p. 83). Additionally, one French student claimed that teaching styles were “like a one-man show ... teacher tell jokes” (p. 80). Beykont and Daiute (2010) found that international students were uncomfortable with U.S. students' self-expressive discussion style. And Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) stated that international students' “academic experiences inside and outside the classroom with professors and advisors [played] a significant role in their adjustment process.”

English language challenges. If students are not native English speakers – most are not – challenges in reading and writing English are also to be expected (e.g., Eland & Thomas, 2013). There are many linguistic challenges for international students, although more so for Asian than European students, likely because European students have reported studying English for many years prior to arriving in the U.S. (Jones & Kim, 2013). One study found that East Asian students who were more proficient in English also reported higher life satisfaction and less acculturative stress (Ye, 2005). Academic and linguistic challenges are often interrelated for international students who are not native English speakers.

Daily life challenges. However, there are also other daily life challenges, beyond the classroom walls. These range from where to buy toilet paper to how to find on-campus employment. For instance, campus safety and security is a well-documented concern (e.g., Bista & Foster, 2011). And the practical, non-academic needs of international students are often overlooked: indeed, “many universities

attempt to provide services for international students on the surface, but fail to meet the real needs of the students at a more practical level” (Bista & Foster, 2011, p. 3).

Eland and Thomas (2013) write “Many students are away from their families for the first time and must learn how to deal with finding a residence, cooking and caring for themselves, and learning how to navigate the new environment” (p. 160). As

Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) noted,

When [international students] arrived in their new country students had the immediate task of satisfying basic needs such as accommodations, food and health care. In order to secure these needs they had to have access to transportation, understand the organization of the American health care system, and obtain the necessary documents to legitimize their presence, be able to work in the U.S, and find jobs. They had to learn to navigate the institution and the broader society.

This set of challenges – the “basic needs” of international students – is examined peripherally in studies on international students, and as a result I examine daily life challenges in this study, in addition to the more commonly-examined academic, cultural, and social challenges these students face.

Peer Support and International Students

Many studies have focused on the peer support of international students, namely friendships (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Bochner, 1977; Gill, 2007; Kim, Yun & Yoon, 2009; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker & Al-Timimi, 2004; Trice, 2004; Ying, 2002). Studies have established how critical it is for university students to have strong peer support, particularly cross-cultural friendships (e.g., Taiwanese and

American students) which can predict successful acculturation (e.g., Bochner, 1977; Ying, 2002). Astin (1993) states that students see each other as peers when they are “in similar circumstances and with common needs and interests,” and that these shared characteristics create a “sense of community” (p. 415); Moores and Popadiuk (2011) call this “a shared status as student sojourners” (p. 296). This may explain why international students often befriend other international students, and may rely even more on this peer support. However, studies also reveal that many international students desire – yet do not have – friendships with American students. Positive peer interactions predict sense of belonging (Stebbleton et al, 2012), adjustment (Ramsay, Jones & Barker, 2006), persistence (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009), and help students “[ease] the transition to college and [reduce] academic stress levels,” enable students “to more easily access informal knowledge,” promote “a sense of self-worth,” and enhance students’ “commitment to the institution” (Tinto, 2012, p. 28). Astin (1993) noted that peers are “the single most potent source of influence” in the lives of college students” (as cited in Thomas, 2000, p. 591). One participant in Moore and Popadiuk’s (2011) study said, “This kind of support is invisible but it’s very strong” (p. 296). Peer support may also be provided institutionally, through student organizations (e.g., Tsai & Wong, 2012) and international peer mentorship programs (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Stebleton et al, 2012), the latter of which focus on students’ cultural adjustment (Kim & Egan, 2011) and can improve campus internationalization by “enhanc[ing] cultural awareness in domestic students” (Ward, 2001). The next section addresses institutional support of international students.

Universities Supporting Students

While the term “support” is not explicitly defined in the literature of higher education, I define support as “information and services provided by one party in order for the other party to function in and outside the university. These information and services may also be sought.” In other words, support is both a noun and a verb. This section addresses types of support offered by universities, and sources of support. Finally, I address relationship-centered support.

Types of Support

I define “types of support” as “categories of support that have common characteristics and encompass common needs.” In the literature, this typically includes academic and social support (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al, 2010; Tinto, 2012), but can also include financial support (Kuh et al, 2010; Tinto, 2012, p. 29), career support (Kuh et al, 2010, p. 389), psychological support (Astin, 1993, p. 393), and informational support (Ramsay, Jones & Barker, 2006).

Sources of Support

The next two sections examine two sources of university support that have been shown to impact students' experiences: relationships with faculty (e.g., professors) and staff (i.e., non-academic employees of the university). I define “sources of support” as “the people or programs from which support is sought or received.”

Faculty support. Studies have established that positive interactions with faculty contribute to student success. Conversely, students who do not have positive interactions often feel less connected to the institution and are less content with their campus (e.g., Astin, 1993; Stebleton et al, 2012; Tinto, 2012). While faculty support is

not a key focus in this study, it is expected that there will be some overlap between faculty and staff support.

Staff support. Feeling accepted by staff has been shown to help students feel a sense of belonging to their university. For instance, in their observations of strong-performing colleges and universities, Kuh et al. (2010) state that students at those schools “get warm, positive messages of welcome and support from [staff] along with suggestions – or, in some cases, instructions – for how to find resources when they need them” (p. 111). In other words, staff support encompassed both relational caring (which is discussed in the next section) and information (“how to find resources”). The authors concluded that strong staff support is “essential to a supportive campus culture committed to student success” (Kuh et al, 2010, p. 171). And Thomas (2002) stated that students are “more likely to feel that they are accepted and valued by staff” if staff know their names, “treat students as equals,” and show “other signs of friendship” (p. 432). Thomas (2002) continued, “Students who feel respected by staff are more able to take problems to staff, and thus sort them out” (p. 432). However, peers may still be most international students' first source of support: “Many international students have reported that because university officials rarely reach out to them, they had to rely on each other for support and advice on everything from academic issues to American culture” (Klomegah, 2006). However, while studies have been undertaken to examine the supportive role of counseling staff, librarians, and professors or teachers, there are no studies in which researchers examine the support of international center staff members. Yet it is this group that often interacts with international students first (upon checking in at the university) and last (upon applying for a work visa after graduation).

Relationship-Centered Support

A supportive institution may inspire “connectedness” (Smyth, 2006) by placing relationships at the center of support. Smyth (2006) claims that failing to place relationships “at the centre of schooling” may “allow the experiences of increasing numbers of students to be degraded, corroded, fractured, fragmented, and rendered meaningless” (p. 4). Indeed, Kuh et al (2010) emphasized that they observed an “ethic of care and belonging” on all successful campuses in their study (p. 242). Tinto (1975, 1998) suggests that connectedness is related to college persistence: “The more [students] interact with other student and faculty the more likely they are to persist” (Tinto, 1998, p. 168). Bean and Eaton (2001) explain:

The psychological response to the interaction of the student with the college environment is a sense of academic and social integration (“I am part of this group and I share its values”). Integration leads to a more specific set of attitudes: institutional fit (“I fit in at this school”) and institutional loyalty (“I feel I made the right choice to come here”). (p. 77)

In other words, integration is often about students' affective experiences of the university, and their subsequent enjoyment of and interest in remaining there. And Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) specifically point out that universities have a pivotal responsibility of caring for international students: “The institution has a very significant role in finding and implementing the resources needed to help international students have a successful adjustment experience.” The next section addresses ways to support students through social networking sites, specifically Facebook.

Supporting Students through Facebook

Social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook are websites in which there is a high level of multimodal interactivity between people. The early and mid 2000s were prolific years for emerging SNSs, including Facebook, which debuted in 2004. Most research on SNSs has been generally positive with educational researchers such as Junco (2011), who found that Facebook can benefit pedagogical practice, while another study found that students' use of Facebook was strongly associated with social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Although Chinese students, the largest group of international undergraduate students in the U.S., report using Facebook less frequently than other international students (Saw et al, 2013), it is still widely used by other international students. Researchers (e.g., Ye, 2006) have found that online support can benefit international students who might otherwise feel isolated. This section addresses the ways in which Facebook can serve as a support space for university staff communicating with international students by first addressing the supportive role of the Internet, and then by addressing universities' use of Facebook.

The Internet as Support

The Internet has been shown to mitigate acculturative stress among immigrants, including international students. Kim, Yun and Yoon (2009) reported that "physical disconnectedness from home ... increased the students' desire to communicate with others, thus making personal communication media more meaningful" (p. 158). The Internet "played an intermediary role" between these students and other co-nationals in Korea, and between these students and the surrounding dominant culture (Kim, Yun, & Yoon, 2009). In her study, Ye (2006) surveyed 135 Chinese international students in 23

different U.S. cities about their feelings about life in the U.S., social support networks, and the students' use of the Internet. Ye found that students who perceived stronger interpersonal and online support reported fewer social difficulties but when they perceived less support, they reported more difficulties (e.g., loneliness, stress or boredom). In particular, Ye (2006) noted that students who had more recently moved to the U.S. perceived greater support, stating that "It is likely that new arrivals in a culture rely more on these online groups for support" (p. 873). Bista and Foster (2011) found that international students "like to share their problems and comments related to university experiences through online forums" (p. 5). Another study (Saw et al, 2013) found that international students used Facebook to seek information and share academic information with their peers. Finally, but no less importantly, use of English-language sites was found to be positively related to English language proficiency, while international students who used native-language websites more often experienced culture shock (Ye, 2005).

Additionally, for students born into the Internet era, being online, particularly on social networking sites, is one more way to communicate with people in an extended network (boyd & Ellison, 2007). In a review of technologies commonly used by college students, Junco and Cole-Avent (2008) described students' use of social networking sites in this way: "[College students] rarely differentiate between real-world and online communication. They often discuss how they were 'talking to' a friend when they are actually referring to an online conversation. To them, online connections are merely an extension of their human ability to communicate" (p. 7). Barkhuus and Tashiro (2010) agree: "Facebook was in many ways seen as 'just another means of communication'"

(p. 136). In fact, one study found that domestic and international students used social networking sites nearly as frequently, and often in the same ways; namely, that they used Facebook both as a social and academic space (Saw et al, 2013). Given its use as a communication forum, Facebook can be a space in which international students communicate with and support each other.

Universities' Use of Facebook

In 1998, Hanna forecast that “the marketplace for learning is becoming global” (p. 88). The Internet had become widespread by that year, and Hanna (1998) predicted that new technologies could “change radically” or even replace universities in the 21st century (p. 70). On the contrary, universities have not been replaced. However, the Internet has become a supplementary form of communication between some university staff and students. While the institutional website should be the most important source of information for students, “still worthy of mention are the use of blogs, Facebook, and Twitter for outreach” (Choudaha, Chang & Kono, 2013, p. 11). Currently, Facebook is the second-most visited website worldwide after Google, and more university centers such as the one in this study use the popular site. In the field of library science, there have already been efforts to use Facebook; for instance, in 2009 one librarian (Connell) conducted a survey of 366 first-year students, asking how they felt about the libraries using Facebook to contact students; the response was receptive. While students would not actively add the library as a “friend” on Facebook, most (57.7%) would accept a friend request from the library profile. Tucciarone (2009) found that prospective university students searched for university websites, as well as official Facebook pages, “though most colleges do not feature links to these sites” (p. 22). Junco and Cole-Avent

(2008) suggest that university professionals “talk to students about how they are using technology and how they would like their institution to interact with them using technology” (p. 13). Yet universities' initial reactions to adopting Facebook was mixed; only half of the 148 colleges and universities in an early study by Reuben (2008) reported having an official Facebook group for their campus.

Research Questions

This study is based on the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of support do international undergraduate students need?

RQ2: Who or what are sources of support for these students?

RQ3: What barriers and difficulties do these students face?

RQ4: What are students' preferences and dislikes for the communication forms and communicative patterns with university staff and faculty?

RQ5: What are their experiences and opinions about the international center?

RQ6: How do international students define the “ideal” international center?

RQ7: How do staff at a major university's international student center define support?

RQ8: In what ways do staff provide support to students on the international center's Facebook group?

RQ9: In what ways do international students seek and provide support on the international center's Facebook group?

Significance of the Study

While research is often focused on the international student experience – few studies have sought the perspective of staff members – this study aims to evaluate the

university's support culture through interviews and focus groups with students, as well as a survey of international center staff members and an analysis of interactions on the center's Facebook group. Some researchers warn that in the midst of this rapid enrollment growth⁴, "many institutions ... have lacked the internal capacity and preparedness for this sudden shift" (Choudaha, Chang & Kono, 2013, p. 3). Indeed, there are no studies on the impact of international students' use of support services (Ward, 2001) and the consequences can be detrimental: "Poor service and unresponsiveness can cost institutions students at all stages of the enrollment funnel" (Choudaha, Chang & Kono, 2013, p. 11). Understanding how to better support international students is critical for universities and international centers such as this. Additionally, the dearth of studies on international center staff members will be addressed by this study.

Furthermore, the interaction between the use of the Internet and campus support is a rich one. While "the Internet can be an excellent tool for orienting international students to meet the expectation of academic life in a host country," universities may also "draw upon the Web and online communities to provide international students with ongoing [support]" (Ye, 2006, p. 874). Subsequently, this study examines support, both in campus-based and Facebook interactions.

This study also fills a methodological gap. Qualitative studies of international students are less common (for examples, see Andrade, 2006; Bista & Foster, 2011; Gill,

⁴ For example, recent university data reveals that nearly 6,000 more international undergraduate students applied to this university in fall 2013 than they did in fall 2008, five years before; a percentage increase of 368%. Reference: <http://www.oir.uci.edu/files/adm/IA32-fall-fr-select-yield-by-ethnicity.pdf>

2007; Kim, Yun & Yoon, 2009; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland & Ramia, 2007; and Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). In addition, focus groups are more infrequent than interviews (for examples of focus groups, see Kim, Yun & Yoon, 2009 and Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

Finally, acculturation to academic life can be difficult for most students, so support is critical (see Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland & Ramia, 2007). Tinto (1993) notes: "Students must separate from their former lives and integrate into the norms of the institution to persist. This poses challenges for students who do not share the dominant culture of the institution" (as cited in Andrade, 2006, p. 59). As international students do not share the dominant culture of either the university or their host country (the U.S.), they must adapt to both. Subsequently, a better understanding of the convergences and divergences between types, sources, and communication of support can aid institutions in providing better support for international students.

III. Conceptual Framework

This study is theoretically based on social constructivism, a belief that knowledge and culture are constructed through human interaction, and that meaning is created and negotiated through experience (Creswell, 2007). Constructivism is an humanistic inquiry and practice in which the researcher attempts to understand multiple, socially constructed realities – in this case, the experiences and perspectives of staff at an international center and the international students the staff support. This conceptual framework applies and develops emerging theories of support.

Complicating Definitions of Support

One goal of this study was to define institutional support. Even within the time of this study, I found myself expanding on the characteristics of support, agreeing with the statement that “support is a multi-dimensional construct that has often been treated too narrowly” (Ramsay, Jones & Barker, 2006, p. 249). I first discuss the limited existing definitions of support, then discuss my own definition based on the research conducted in this paper.

Limited Existing Definitions

To define support, I looked through both the research literature as well as the university's websites on support services. I found that the literature on student support primarily focused on three types of support: academic, social, and financial support (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al, 2010; Tinto, 2012) but also included other types such as “practical,” “informational,” and “emotional” support (Ramsay, Jones & Barker, 2006). Additionally, the university's undergraduate division had a “Student Support Services”

page,⁵ which listed types of support: financial (e.g., scholarships), social (e.g., peer mentoring programs), and academic (e.g., workshops on transitioning into college) support. Furthermore, the international center states in its mission⁶ that it provides academic and cultural support. In summary, the existing definitions of support were not *definitions*, but lists of types, or characteristics.

Definitions in the Current Study

During initial coding of the interview and focus group transcripts, I expanded upon these types – academic, social, and financial – to a cumulative seven types of support: daily life, language, cultural, career, social, immigration, and financial support (Figure 1). In the process of writing this paper, I also surmised that there could be other types I had overlooked, such as emotional support. However, I moved beyond a limited understanding of support as academic, social, and financial, and began to envision support as multi-dimensional (Figure 1).

⁵ <http://www.due.uci.edu/ssss/>

⁶ <http://www.ic.uci.edu/General/mission.php>

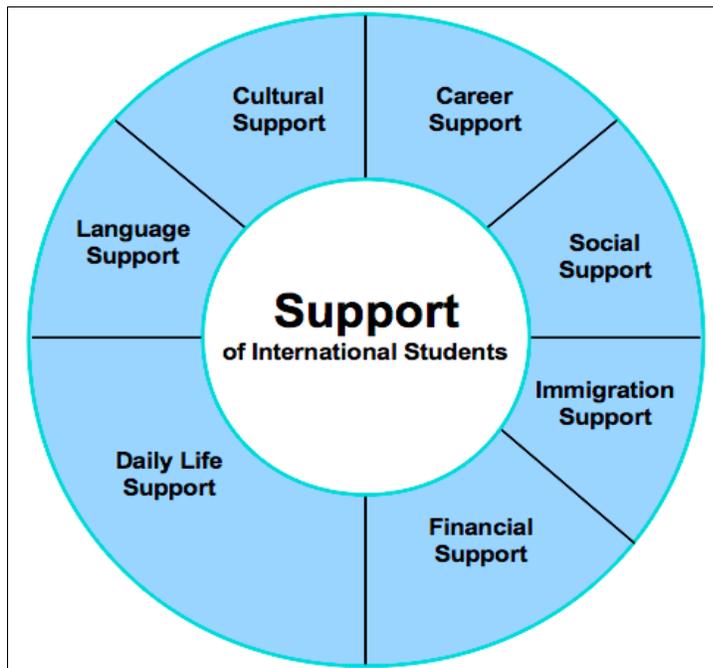


Figure 1. Types of Support

Finally, after a deeper analysis of data, I began to also examine barriers to support, sources of support, and ways support was communicated between people. I also revealed cultures of support, which I discuss at the end of this paper.

The findings in this study revealed that institutional support is often about providing *information* as much as it is about relationships. Information could be provided about immigration, language, or career topics, for instance, and could be provided by either a student, staff member, or faculty. Support is also about providing services (e.g., activities). In conclusion, I came to define support as this: "Information and services provided by one party in order for the other party to function in and outside the university. These information and services may also be sought."

IV. Methodology

This study is qualitative in design, adopting a case study exploratory approach. This chapter describes the study's research methodology, including: (1) the research approach, (2) rationale for research approach, (3) site and participants, (4) sampling, (5) procedures, including subsections on the different research methods, (6) data analysis, and (7) trustworthiness.

Research Approach

The methodology for this case study was social constructivism, a lens with which I tried to understand human experience within a particular context. In this study, the experience is of support. Constructivist researchers like myself typically rely on participant-centered methods such as open-ended and semi-structured survey and focus group protocols (Creswell, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Rationale for Research Approach

A case study – a common qualitative research methodology – was selected for this study as institutional support is a contemporary phenomenon, where the behaviors cannot be manipulated (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). While the “single case” in this study is support, the institution's use of a Facebook group to offer support represents an embedded case (Yin, 2009). This case study included multiple forms of data collection, including: 1) student focus groups; 2) student interviews; 3) an online survey for staff; and 4) Facebook document collection. The use of multiple methods lends to a methodologically-triangulated study (Patton, 2002, as cited in Yin, 2009, p. 116) and a more holistic view of institutional support.

Sampling

This study applied both purposeful sampling and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling is typical of case study methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998) and focuses on participants who illuminate theory and practice.

Focus group and interview sampling. Most focus group and interview participants were selected if they met the participation criteria and had voluntarily agreed to participate in an interview, while others were convenience sampled after they directly contacted me by email to participate in the study. I excluded participants from European and English-speaking countries, as these students are less likely to experience challenges with cultural adaptation; other studies such as Schmitt, Spears and Branscombe (2002) also excluded European and native English speakers from their sample of international students. I also focused on sampling students from similar cultures (e.g., East Asian and Confucian cultures).

Survey sampling. I purposefully sampled staff members who were currently full-time employees at the international center; all respondents were eligible for inclusion.

Site and Participants

This study took place primarily at an international student center at a major public university in southern California where just under 9% of the undergraduate student population are international. The most recent data on international students at the university was released in Fall 2013, listing total undergraduate enrollment by country (UC Irvine Office of Institutional Research, 2013). In this report, there were 2,045 enrolled international undergraduate students. These international students are generally representative of the U.S.-wide population of international students. For

example, seven of the top ten countries of origin for U.S. international students – China, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, India, Canada, and Japan – are represented at the university (Appendix A; Table 1). The university's international undergraduates are overwhelmingly East Asian (Table 1), with Chinese undergraduate students alone comprising 5.6% of the entire undergraduate population⁷. Other Asians are also well-represented, including Southeast Asians (Vietnamese, Filipino, Indonesian) and South Asians (Indians). Note that this study focuses on the East Asian and Southeast Asian population, with an emphasis on Confucian cultures (i.e., China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Vietnam); these were the backgrounds of the focus group and interview participants, from whom the most data for this study was collected.

Table 1

Top Ten Countries of Origin for International Students at the University in Fall 2013

	Number of Undergraduate Students	Total Number Enrolled at University
China	1,324	1,817
South Korea	227	302
Taiwan	111	183
United Kingdom	59	63
Vietnam	43	54
India	29	207
Indonesia	29	29
Canada	23	76
Philippines	17	17

⁷ Few things are as staggering as the enrollment increase of Chinese students in the U.S. In the last few years of this study, the enrolled Chinese undergraduate student population increased rapidly from just over 200 students in Fall 2009 to over 1,000 undergraduate students – and nearly 2,000 undergraduate and graduate students – in Fall 2013, a growth unmatched by any other international student population.

Japan	17	35
-------	----	----

Note. Sources include “Total undergraduate enrollment by state or country: Fall quarter 2000 through fall quarter 2013” and “Total graduate enrollment by state or country: Fall quarter 2000 through fall quarter 2013” by University of California, Irvine, 2013.

Participants

Focus groups and interviews. I conducted focus groups and interviews (Appendices D and E) with 15 international undergraduate students. These participants were full-time, matriculated international students enrolled in an undergraduate degree, on a nonimmigrant (F-1 or J-1) visa. All students are proficient in listening and speaking English, as pre-established by the university's admissions requirement of a minimum TOEFL score of 80 on the Internet-based test (out of a possible top score of 120). All participants are citizens of non-English-speaking or non-European countries (Table 2).

Demographically, most students ($N = 10$; 66.7%) were female, and most ($N = 11$; 73.3%) were enrolled in their first two years at the university. All participants were fully-enrolled, matriculated undergraduate students, and only three were exchange (J-1) students. Most students ($N = 11$; 73.3%) had not attended another institution in the U.S., while four (26.7%) had attended either high school or another institution of higher education (e.g., community college).

All participants were citizens of East ($N = 11$; 73.3%) and Southeast Asian ($N = 4$; 26.7%) countries. The countries included, in this order, China, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines, with a majority ($N = 8$; 53.3%) from China specifically (Table 2). With exception to Indonesia and Philippines, there is some cultural congruity between most of these countries, which share Confucian values. In addition, all of these cultures have been defined as intermediate or highly collectivistic (e.g., The Hofstede

Centre, 2014).

Table 2

Focus Group and Interview Participant Demographics

Meeting	Initial	Gender	Region	Student Status	Length of Time in the U.S.	Attended Another Institution in the U.S.?
Focus Group 1	N	Female	Southeast Asia	J-1	8 months to 2 years	No
	G	Male	East Asia	F-1	Fewer than 8 months	No
	Z	Female	East Asia	J-1	Fewer than 8 months	No
	K	Male	East Asia	J-1	8 months to 2 years	Yes; high school
Focus Group 2	J	Male	Southeast Asia	F-1	3 or more years	Yes; high school
	N	Female	East Asia	F-1	Fewer than 8 months	No
	NR	Female	East Asia	F-1	3 or more years	No
	B	Female	East Asia	F-1	Fewer than 8 months	No
Interview 1	K	Male	East Asia	F-1	8 months to 2 years	No
Interview 2	N	Female	Southeast Asia	F-1	3 or more years	Yes; private college
Interview 3	M	Male	East Asia	F-1	8 months to 2 years	No
Interview 4	Z	Female	East Asia	F-1	8 months to 2 years	No
Interview 5	N	Female	East Asia	F-1	8 months to 2 years	No
Interview 6	C	Female	Southeast Asia	F-1	3 or more years	Yes; high school
Interview 7	L	Female	East Asia	F-1	Fewer than 8 months	No

Staff survey. I emailed an online survey (Appendix C) to seven international center staff members, and five staff completed it. These participants were female and full-time employees at the university's international center. Only two participants reported that they were U.S. citizens (the remaining three declined to say), though only U.S. citizens and U.S. permanent residents have access to SEVIS records – a necessary task for international center staff – implying that these respondents are either citizens or residents. All five reported having lived in the U.S. for over 10 years.

Facebook group. I analyzed 242 wall posts from a Facebook group for the university's international center, particularly focusing on the 57 “dialogue” excerpts, in which one or more people comment. There are also “monologues” in which no one comments on the post, and these were selected for analysis as I believe they did not address the eighth and ninth research questions. Participants included both three full-time staff members and one part-time staff member, as well as multiple international students, all of whom posted or commented on others' posts.

Procedures

Most of the study's research tools were semi-structured prior to data collection, and as research commenced, further research tools were adapted. For instance, the focus group questions (Appendix D) were written prior to the implementation of this study. However, the staff survey (Appendix C) and interview questions (Appendix E) were written after an initial stage of data collection. All procedures were approved by the university's institutional review board. A timeline of the data collection and analysis is portrayed in Table 3, and data analysis techniques are outlined in Table 4.

Table 3

Timeline of Data Collection and Analysis

	Spring 2012	Summer 2012	Fall 2012	Winter 2013	Spring 2013	Summer 2013	Fall 2013
Focus Groups	Institutional board review		Conducte d; complete d	Transcribe d		Analysis	
Interviews		N/A		Conducted; completed	Transcrib ed	Analysis	Institution al board review
Staff Survey		N/A		Conducted; completed	Transcrib ed	Analysis	Institution al board review
Facebook Group	Institutional board review				Analysis		
		Document collection					

For all of the data, the analysis was qualitative, based in a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and coded openly (Saldaña, 2009) (see Table 4). In the grounded theory approach, data is constantly and inductively coded, categorized and compared, starting with initial coding and leading into focused coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Maxwell, 2005; Saldaña, 2009). Although a literature review was conducted prior to the research in this study, the emphasis of this paper remains on the exploration of the data itself; in other words, a literature review is necessary but supplementary to the revealing and coding of data.

Table 4

Data Analysis Techniques

	Methods		Analysis
	Qualitative	Quantitative	
Focus Groups	X		Initial Coding, Emotion Coding, Evaluation Coding, Focused Coding
Interviews	X		Emotion Coding, Evaluation Coding, Focused Coding
Staff Survey	X		Initial Coding, Focused Coding
Facebook Documents	X		Provisional Coding, Focused Coding

Focus Groups and Interviews

I conducted a couple of two-hour focus groups – with four students in each group – in October 2012 and seven, one-hour interviews in March 2013. The focus group questions only slightly differed from the interview questions (see Appendices D and E).

Questions in the student focus groups and interviews were semi-structured and explored the importance of different types of support, participants' sources of support, and what an “ideal international center” would be. Additionally, questions addressed use and opinion of the international center Facebook group, and advantages and disadvantages to universities using Facebook to offer support.

Analysis. After transcribing and anonymizing them, interview and focus group transcripts from the first four conversations were read through by myself and research assistants through initial coding, which is defined as “breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 81). This was the first cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2009). In another set of coding, we decided to code for emotions too, which was unexpected

but warranted, as the participants sometimes spoke in affective ways about their experiences (Saldaña, 2009, p. 86). Additionally, evaluation coding – student participants evaluated campus programs and support – was also applied, as this fit the research questions of this study (Saldaña, 2009, p. 97). These initial codes were compiled in a codebook which included definitions and inclusive and exclusive characteristics. The second cycle of coding began after this codebook was completed, with an emphasis on focused coding, in which codes were clustered together into categories (Saldaña, 2009, p. 155), and the codebook was revised again to fit these focused categories. These codes are covered in the next chapter.

Staff Survey

In December 2012, after several unsuccessful attempts to schedule a focus group with them, I emailed an online survey to seven staff members at the international center, five of whom (71%) completed it. The 10-item survey was published through Google Forms, and asked participants to rate the importance of different types of support. It concluded with two open-ended questions: “How do you define 'school support'?” and “How can universities best support international students?” (see Appendix C).

Analysis. As the sample size was small, I conducted a frequency count of the most common words in these two sets of responses, while open-ended responses were coded with initial codes in the first cycle, and focused codes in the second cycle. Results are covered further in Chapter 6.

Facebook Group Documents

Facebook group posts were collected in July 2012 and again in the middle of the

subsequent quarter, in October 2012. Coincidentally, the group was closed – and replaced by a Facebook page – in late September 2012. Altogether, I collected 276 posts from the group's inception in January 2010 to its closure in late September 2012; in summary, 21 months of data were collected. As of its closure, there were 422 members.

These Facebook posts were copied and pasted into a text document. This text was anonymized to protect student and staff privacy, then coded by myself and six student research assistants. The research team observed four types of interactions: 1) students seeking support from staff; 2) students seeking support from other students; 3) staff providing support to students; and 4) students providing support to other students. Additionally, the team coded for the types of support provided and sought in the group.

Analysis. Prior to reading the data I created a “start list” of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58) with “provisional codes” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 120), in anticipation of the types of responses I expected to see in the Facebook group. This first set of codes was generated from the study's research questions, focusing in two code categories: Forms of Support and Support and Relationships. The provisional codes were compiled in a codebook which included definitions and inclusive and exclusive characteristics. This provisional coding was the first cycle, and after applying the codes, the second cycle of coding began. In the second cycle, we began focused coding, in which codes were clustered together into categories, and the codebook was revised again to fit these focused categories. The final list of categories and codes is in Appendix H and is covered in Chapter 7.

Trustworthiness

This study is qualitative in concept and design, and as a result was held accountable by standards common in qualitative research. For instance, it is critical that trustworthiness is established (Merriam, 1998, p. 198). The following discussion covers my approach to building credibility, as well as establishing my researcher bias. These sections have been written in response to the queries in Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 278, 279).

Credibility

In this study, strategies for internal validity, or credibility include triangulation and research auditing (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 125). Triangulation of data was sought, including the constant comparison of codes, categories and theories; these data should have produced “generally converging conclusions” but when they did not, rival explanations and negative evidence were considered (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279).

Researcher Bias

I am not only a researcher of international students; I am also an international student, and have been so since I was 16 years old. In addition to completing my Bachelor's degree in England, where I was an international student for four years, I have undertaken high school, undergraduate (one semester), and graduate (Master's and doctoral) studies in the U.S.

In addition, I am an active participant in the international community at the university, where I have served as a peer mentor for graduate international students, have sat on two international student committees in which I am the only

European/Canadian representative, and have been a cabinet member of an international student club in which I regularly interacted with international students. I have also taught academic writing to international undergraduate students at the university. This involvement has given me a unique position to communicate, face-to-face, and through social networking sites, with international students.

As an international student at the same university, my experience may resemble some of my students' experiences. However, I am a native English speaker and am European in heritage and appearance, both characteristics of which most of my participants did not share, and which may have unwillingly caused some discomfort in focus group and interview participants. I did reveal to a few participants that I was also an international student, and this occasionally led the conversations into what I felt was a shared discussion, not between researcher and participant, but between two international students. In summary, I did my best to lessen my presence as formal researcher as well as achieving a less-biased perspective on the data.

V. Support, from the Voices of Students

This chapter addresses the first six research questions: What types of support do international undergraduate students need? Who or what are sources of support for these students? What barriers and difficulties do these students face? What are their preferences for communicative forms and patterns? What are their experiences and opinions about the international center? And how do international students define the ideal international center?

Participants

Fifteen East Asian and Southeast Asian international students (10 females, four males) studying at a large public university in southern California were recruited through an online survey, emails, and the snowballing technique. The criterion for their selection was that they were currently enrolled in a full-time undergraduate degree at the university. Three students were exchange students, and four had attended either high school or another university in the U.S. Eight students were Chinese, two were Vietnamese, two were South Korean, one was Taiwanese, one was Indonesian, and one was Filipino. Participants' length of residence in the U.S. ranged from fewer than eight months to more than three years, though most had lived in the U.S. for fewer than two years (see Table 2 in the previous chapter).

Procedures

I facilitated two focus groups (four participants in each group) and seven interviews. In both focus groups and interviews, participants were asked about a) how they sought support; b) who or what their sources of support were; c) what their support needs were; d) their preferences and dislikes about communicative forms and patterns;

e) what barriers and difficulties they faced; f) what their experiences and opinions about the international center were; and g) what an “ideal” international center would look like. I gave participants pre-written definitions of support – academic support, social support, cultural support, daily life support, as well as career support, language support, and immigration support⁸ – which guided their responses. Throughout this chapter, I refer to these interviews and focus groups as “conversations.”

Results

From the conversations with participants, I observed 21 themes, which have been grouped into five theme categories: 1) Types of Support; 2) Barriers and Difficulties; 3) Sources of Support; 4) Communication and Support; 5A) The International Center and Support; and 5B) The Ideal International Center (see Table 5). All themes included subthemes, which are included in Appendix F.

Table 5

Results in Focus Groups and Interviews

	Representative	<i>N</i>
1. Types of Support		
Daily Life Support	Common	13
Academic Support	General	11
Financial Support	General	10
Spoken and Written English Support	General	9
Cultural Support	General	9
Career Support	Variant	6
2. Barriers and Difficulties		
Cultural Difficulties	General	12
University Barriers	General	10

⁸ These last three types of support were specifically asked about in the interview questions (Appendix E).

CULTURES OF SUPPORT		45
Career Difficulties	Variant	5
Financial Difficulties	Variant	4
<hr/>		
3. Sources of Support		
<hr/>		
Support in the Dorms	General	8
Peer Mentorship	Variant	6
Staff and Faculty Support	Variant	6
<hr/>		
4. Communication and Support		
<hr/>		
Seeking Information	General	12
Staff-Student Communicative Forms and Patterns	General	11
<hr/>		
5A. The International Center and Support		
<hr/>		
International Center as Visa Stop	General	12
Participants' Lack of Knowledge about International Center	Variant	7
Negative Experiences at the International Center	Variant	6
Need for More Publicity	Variant	4
<hr/>		
5B. The Ideal International Center		
<hr/>		
*Ideal International Center as a Student Space	Common	7
*Ideal International Center as a Cozy Place	General	5

Note. A theme is described as common if it applied to 13 to 15 participants, general if it applied to eight to 12 participants, and variant if it applied to four to seven participants.

*For the last two themes – “Ideal International Center” – a theme is described as common if it applied to all seven participants, general if it applied to four to six participants, and variant if it applied to one to three participants; this question - “What is the International Center like in [an] ideal world?” was only asked in interviews ($N=7$), not focus groups.

1. Types of Support

In this first theme category, participants talked about the types of support they sought and received (e.g., “daily life support” includes public transportation needs, advice on which cell phones to buy, and advice from a roommate on where to buy a favorite Chinese food item). The types of support participants spoke about included: daily life support ($N=13$); academic support ($N=11$); financial support ($N=10$); spoken

and written English support ($N=9$); cultural support ($N=9$); and career support ($N=6$). All themes and subthemes are listed in detail in Appendix F.

Daily life support (common theme). The need for daily life support is defined as a type of support for students' non-academic, non-social lives, including a need for assistance with public transportation, cell phones, and shopping options, among others. Most participants ($N=13$) discussed a need for this type of support, some reporting difficulties in their first few months, and others repeatedly throughout their years in the U.S. As one first-year student stated in a characteristic quotation: "I don't know how to live in here [the U.S.], so [daily life support is] first one that I should have" (Z, Focus Group 1). Three participants suggested that the university provide international students with support upon arriving in the U.S. For instance, N said,

When I first come [to this university], there's no people to kind of guide me, like what I should do. So I can get a little bit confused [during the] first week. I just expect like there will be more support about that. (Focus Group 2)

Five participants reported that they experienced difficulties with public transportation. All participants lived in southern California, where many residents own cars. Yet most of the participants I spoke to did not own a car, certainly none of the three short-term exchange students. Public transportation is subsequently necessary. As one participant put it, public transportation was an unexpected need: "I experienced something that I didn't expect to happen here: the public transportation. [Everyone laughs] Beijing is a big city [and the U.S.] is a developed country. [So] I didn't expect the transportation is this [bad]" (N, Focus Group 1).

To intensify the issue, the local bus company was expensive for some of the

participants, and due to their unfamiliarity with the system, security could be a concern.

For example, N and her friend became stranded one night when they misunderstood the bus schedule:

I trying to get on the [local] bus before, I got lost. 'Cause I don't understand, like, how the whole system works. Like, it goes this way, it goes that way. It's like it stops at a certain time. And last time, [I was meeting my friend in another city]. We got stranded once because the [local bus] stopped, well, going, 'cause she said that the last bus is at 11:00 [p.m.]. So turns out that 11:00 was not the last bus, it's when the bus stops working! So we were stranded. We had to actually stay at [my friend's] house and that's a big no-no in my family. (N, Interview 2)

Furthermore, while carpooling would seem like a natural solution, a couple of participants felt it was inconvenient to do so. In order to carpool, "we have to make friend [who has a car]" said N (Focus Group 1). Another participant also expressed the same feeling, of being a burden for car-owning friends: "My friends, they have car but I still feel very inconvenient [because I have to ask them]" (L, Interview 7).

When I asked them who they sought support from about these daily matters, five participants reported receiving advice on these needs from peers, usually co-national peers, a roommate, or their peer mentor. For instance, one focus group participant reported that he received support from his co-national (Chinese) peers online, prior to his arriving in California:

For Chinese people, we need some information about the bank card, and the phone card, the phone number, how to have a new phone number in America, or [public transportation or] how to create my student ID, or something else.

Fortunately we have met some friends [at this university before we arrived in the U.S.] online. So ... in the first few days in America I lived in my friend's house, even if I have never met this friend before ... Chinese people will help each other, that will help a little bit. (G, Focus Group 1)

In addition to receiving support from their peers, others ($N=2$) reported faculty support for daily life needs. However, no participants received daily life support from a staff member.

Academic support (general theme). Most participants ($N=11$) reported receiving academic support, typically from their academic advisor ($N=8$), while others were advised by their international peer mentor ($N=1$), professor ($N=1$), or dormitory tutor ($N=1$). Academic support is advice on which classes, academic majors, or academic minors to enroll in; these participants often contacted these staff, faculty, or peers through email, to ask about which classes to enroll in, or which academic major to take. For example, N spoke highly about her academic advisor, who she emailed with questions "almost every two weeks" (Interview 5). Another participant was an undeclared major and visited her advisor to ask "a lot of questions about major, minor and what classes I want to apply and how to balance the classes" (L, Interview 7).

Three participants also reported other sources of academic support. For instance, NR reported relying on multiple people: her research lab colleagues, a professor she did an internship with in China, and two other doctors that she built "two of my most solid friendships with." She explained, "The most [academic] support I received [is] pretty much from [my lab]. All the people there, they're very knowledgeable and they're willing to share their knowledge" (NR, Focus Group 2). NR's positive

academic mentoring experiences inspired her to apply for graduate school. K discovered that his mentor was a source of academic support: “[The peer mentors] might give you some advice to decide [your major]. [For instance, my mentor] suggest me to not take double major” (K, Interview 1).

All participants reported receiving academic support from institutionalized sources of support, including academic advisors, peer mentors, professors, or tutors. No participants reported receiving academic support from other peers (e.g., roommates or classmates).

Financial support (general theme). Most participants ($N=10$) reported receiving financial support through their families ($N=7$), a university scholarship ($N=6$), or both ($N=3$); the university scholarship was a merit-based scholarship provided to some incoming Chinese students. No participants reported applying for extra funding. Most of these participants, like L, reported that their families financially supported them:

L: For me, my family, my parents, they can support me. Yeah, and I don't worry about [financial support] and I think a lot of international student their family can support them, like very well.

S: Most of your [international] friends ... are supported by their family?

L: Yeah. (Interview 7)

Other participants – notably, most of the first-year Chinese students I spoke with – reported receiving the scholarship. This scholarship was not a deciding factor for any of the participants in deciding to move to the U.S., but for some it swayed their decision to attend this university. One participant noted that while the tuition was more expensive at this university than another one she had also been accepted to, she attended this

university after they offered her the scholarship. “Well,” she said, “it’s not that much but it’s still important to me” (N, Interview 5).

Most other participants did not report working on campus, and no participants worked off campus. Consequently, participants were financially supported entirely or almost entirely by their families, with supplementary financial support offered by the university. Some participants did experience financial difficulties, however, and this is covered in a later section.

Spoken and written English support (general theme). None of these participants spoke English as a first language, and only one studied it as a child (N, Interview 2). As could be expected, many participants reported that they struggled with writing and speaking English, and spoke about the ways in which they were supported. Nine participants said they received university support in English, particularly in spoken English ($N=7$), written English ($N=7$), or both ($N=5$); these sources of support included teaching assistants, tutors, peer mentors, roommates, or U.S. students. Additionally, six participants reported attending a university program: required academic writing courses, the campus writing center, an English pronunciation course, or a weekly English conversation club at the international center. All but one encounter – with a writing tutor at a dormitory’s academic center – were reported to be effective at supporting the participants’ English language skills.

Spoken English – conversation, vocabulary, and pronunciation – was just as much of a concern as written English for many participants. For instance, L reported that learning how to speak English more fluently was important to her because it was a way to make friends with U.S. students:

Here is America and English is the most important thing. Like, you can't communicate with people if you don't know the language [and then] you don't know American people's life. You don't know their joke, you don't know their culture. So you cannot be friends with them. (L, Interview 7)

Subsequently, L received help from her peer mentor, not only with her grammar, but also with her accent: "So I said, 'If I say something wrong please help me, and tell me how to correct my mistakes'" (Interview 7).

Likewise, written English, which included academic writing assignments, also posed a challenge, as N pointed out: "We never write a formal paper before, so writing can be hard and [we need to] have some writing classes. [In fact], most students can't pass their writing classes [during the first quarter]" (Interview 5). Even N, an Indonesian citizen who had been studying English since she was nine years old, reported struggling with written English, comparing her writing struggles with surfing:

I have this tendency to write like a surfer ... because when you surf, right, you have to wait for the wave to come, right? And then you just ride the wave ... so what happens is when I'm writing on an idea I'm riding on a wave. So I have to keep on going. Now, the problem is, I get stopped abruptly. That's when like ... you're surfing and an accident happens. You have to start all over again ... when I am writing a paper, I get so pissed off. Like, I can't get this idea straight so I can't write anything. But once my mindset is there it's like blah blah blah, 10 whole pages, 20 whole pages. I can write it down like that! But when my mindset is not there, it's like I still couldn't get there. (N, Interview 2)

Participants reported receiving written English support from institutionalized locations

and sources of support, including academic writing courses, the campus writing center's tutors, teaching assistants, and peer mentors. No participants reported receiving written support from peers who were not hired by the university (e.g., roommates or classmates). However, when they spoke about their sources of support for spoken English, these sources included both institutionalized sources (e.g., a pronunciation course, an English conversation club) and non-institutionalized sources (i.e., roommates and U.S. student friends).

Cultural support (general theme). Many participants ($N=9$) reported being culturally supported, typically through transition classes during the summer, the summer orientation, the peer mentor program, or cultural classes and workshops at the international center or multicultural center. One participant said that the summer transition class was “really valuable” to her because:

They talk about [being] homesick, cultural difference, and all those stuff ... like, they tell us, “Oh you probably will be homesick and how like probably you will have like six months cultural difference,” that kind of thing. So I kind of get prepared for it. So when I experience it, I thought, “It’s normal, it’s common, I’ll get through it.” So I think that class helped. (N, Focus Group 2)

Two participants reported that the summer orientation program also included tips on adjusting to U.S. culture. N was also happy to speak with Americans during the orientation, which was her “first opportunity that I talk with American students. Because during the summer I live and study with Chinese [students], so [then] I get the chance to talk with [American students]. I get really excited about it” (Focus Group 2).

Additionally, a couple of participants mentioned the international peer mentors as

sources of support. One participant said, “I think [the program] is one of the most lovely [programs] here at [this university]” (N, Interview 5), and another participant echoed, “I think [the program] is one of the most lovely here ... the thing is I know that someone will support me ... *I know someone is there* so I feel better” (N, Focus Group 2, emphasis mine). Other participants spoke about the peer mentorship program, which I cover in a later section.

With the exception of one participant who said she learned about U.S. culture online (N, Interview 5), all participants reported receiving cultural support from institutionalized locations and sources of support, including summer transition classes, the summer orientation, cultural workshops and classes at the international and multicultural centers, and peer mentors.

Career support (variant theme). Six participants reported using the university's career center; four participants reported attending workshops, while two reported visiting career center staff. The international center also provided career workshops, which two participants said they were aware of, although they had not attended these workshops.

2. Barriers and Difficulties

In the second theme category, participants talked about the barriers and difficulties they experienced both at the university and in their social lives. I define “difficulties” as experiences that participants reported as hard to deal with or understand. I define “barriers” as the impediments in a student’s search for university support. In other words, difficulties become barriers when they externally impede the participant's search for support (e.g., I coded “bureaucracy” as a barrier rather than a general

difficulty, because the bureaucratic process is created by the university, and impedes some participants unfamiliar with the process). The barriers and difficulties participants spoke about included: cultural difficulties ($N=12$); university barriers ($N=10$); career difficulties ($N=5$); and financial difficulties ($N=4$). All themes and subthemes are listed in detail in Appendix F.

Cultural difficulties (general theme). Most participants ($N=12$) reported experiencing cultural difficulties, which I define as participants' experiences with U.S. culture that are hard to deal with or understand. These difficulties were often related to culture shock and at their most extreme, cultural difficulties also included isolation and racism. For instance, seven participants reported feeling left out of conversations with U.S. students, due to cultural references, jokes, or speed of speech, including one participant who stated that she felt left out of conversations with Asian-American students at the university: "There are lots of [English-speaking Americans and] they are not caring about me ... because they don't know I'm a foreigner. They speak so fast and they think I know everything, but actually I know nothing" (Z, Focus Group 1). Additionally, G talked about two situations where "cultural disconnect" occurred for him: First, in his dorm the conversation time was filled with cultural references or slang he did not know, and second, one of his teachers discussed the U.S. election and asked questions about it, but as a Chinese citizen, G did not know much about U.S. politics and did not contribute (Focus Group 1).

In the preceding comments, there is a sense of cultural disconnect and difficulties.

These cultural difficulties could lead to isolation, as three participants reported: many of their Asian friends isolated themselves from other students, and from campus

life, because of culture shock and an inability to make friendships with others. One participant told me about her lonely Chinese friends: “They feel they’re lonely, they feel they’re isolated. They don’t have friend, so they just close the door and stay in their room. A lot of Chinese students” (L, Interview 7). More extremely, a few participants reported experiencing racism. Two participants, both of whom had lived in the U.S. for more than three years, reported experiencing racism. They said,

NR: I remember when I just first came here ... I reached a point that I figured out that Caucasian-American [faculty] are very rude to non-Caucasian people, especially international students. And [that's why] for a very long period, I [experienced] social phobia ... until I joined my research lab and found people in my lab [who] are generally very nice to everyone regardless of their color, their race and where they’re from ...

J: Regarding that matter, I feel the same thing 'cause when I came here as an 11th grader. In [my Idaho] high school, most students are not as mature [as] when you go university, so I don’t want use the word “racism,” but there are several racist act during high school against race. I don’t see any of that ever since I came to [this university] maybe because this area is more diverse ... especially southern California is much better than a lot of places in the U.S.

(Focus Group 2)

These two participants prompted a third participant, N, to tell us about another incident, although she shared J's reticence in calling the incident “racism”:

I think once in my hall, a white girl, I talked to her. We [were] introduced to each other but she’s like “Uh, I don’t want to talk to you.” [I'm not sure if that was

racism] 'cause I know that happens a lot, even when we are in the same culture: Sometimes you just don't want to talk to someone. I think being an international student ... sometimes we are just overwhelmed. Like if someone doesn't want to talk to us, [maybe] we will think it is racism. (N, Focus Group 2)

In addition to experiencing these cultural difficulties – isolation, racism, misunderstanding U.S. culture – many ($N=10$) of these participants also experienced university barriers, which I cover next.

University barriers (general theme). Most participants ($N=10$) reported experiencing barriers at the university. The university support existed, yet the participants had difficulties seeking it, which prompted them to report frustration, and – in one case – giving up on using the support resources available to them at the university (NR, Focus Group 2). These barriers included inconvenience ($N=6$), bureaucracy ($N=4$), too much information ($N=5$), mixed information ($N=2$), and inflexible university policies ($N=2$).

Inconvenience (subtheme). In this subtheme, six participants reported having experiencing inconvenience seeking that support. For instance, N was advised by some of her teachers to visit the disability center, but decided against it when she saw “there's this long wait line to do it ... [so I didn't] want to do it” (Interview 2). Another participant talked about trying to make an appointment at the international center:

Last time I sent an email to [the international center] I need to make an appointment with [immigration advisor's name]. They gave me a phone number and I need to call the number and make an appointment [to see the advisor]. So I think it's not very convenient to meet 'cause I need to send an email and then I

need to call again to make an appointment. (N, Interview 5)

The inconvenience of seeking university support – such as long lines or needing to use multiple communication methods – was perceived as a barrier to support.

Bureaucracy (subtheme). Similarly, four participants reported experiencing bureaucratic barriers – deadlines and paperwork – at the university. C explained that it's “difficult for [international students] because of documentation and bureaucracy” (C, Interview 6). Likewise, another participant felt “overwhelmed” by bureaucracy:

I think when we have a problem, [the international center staff] try to help us with it as much as they could. But as I guess it's protocol or they keep with the rules ... like sometimes they emphasize [doing something] too much, so I go, “Oh dear, what am I supposed to do?” and I get overwhelmed. (N, Interview 2)

In fact, one participant did not change his major because of the paperwork required: “When I do the changing my major I have to do the form and have a copy of my transcript [and] imagine, [I've already changed my] major like five to six times! [So] I don't really want to [change majors anymore]” (J, Focus Group 2).

Too much and mixed information (subtheme). In this category, participants reported being overwhelmed by too much information, or mixed information from more than one person. One participant, Z, said she did not mind receiving information in multiple ways (e.g., email, websites, Facebook) but later admitted it was “a little too much” information (Focus Group 1). One participant said that paper handouts like fliers and pamphlets were “overwhelming” (N, Focus Group 1), while another described how she had been confused by too much information on the international center's website:

Sometimes [the website has] a long paragraph of immigration information, so it

would be better if they have small bullet points so it's straightforward and people can see it: "Ah! Right there." ... People [who] are not familiar with all the immigration terminologies and stuff like that ... it's like there's one huge page where [all the information is together]. (N, Interview 2)

Additionally, a participant reported receiving conflicting information from academic counselors:

Sometimes they give mixed information. Like, I have two of my friends [and] they complained that, "They are giving me mixed information! Sometimes I have to go back" ... and then another person's like, "I don't know you can do that! They didn't tell me anything about that!" (N, Interview 2)

Receiving too much information overwhelmed participants, while receiving mixed information confused them. Either way, these two barriers slowed participants' search for information.

Inflexible policies (subtheme). Finally, when international paperwork was also involved, as it was in G's case with his Chinese high school transcripts being sent to the university, two participants reported that the university's policies were inflexible. In G's case, his degree application was incomplete and he was nearly unfunded by the university because of a snafu:

[In Chinese high school transcripts] the date you graduate will not match the the date on your gradebook. So [that caused] a problem with [this university]. So they send a hold on names and a hold on my application [unless I brought them all my] documents from my high school, [or] I cannot get the entire offer from [the university]. So finally I brought all the [documents] from China, which is very

troublesome. But I think the [university should] make some changes, some adjustments [to their policy] for international situations. (G, Focus Group 1)

In summary, these university barriers – inconvenience, bureaucracy, too much information, mixed information, and inflexible policies – were challenging for participants. In addition to facing cultural difficulties upon arriving the U.S., participants also experienced these university barriers. Combined, these sets of barriers were overwhelming for most participants.

Career difficulties (variant theme). Five participants reported experiencing career difficulties. For instance, three participants reported that it was difficult to find jobs off campus, two reported that when they applied for jobs on campus they could not find any or were unable to apply for them, and one said she wanted more on-campus job opportunities. One participant, C, held an on-campus job, yet she stated that she was “really lucky” to have the job, which was a desirable position among her peers. She worked at the campus IT department, “which is really good 'cause it was my first job ever and ... it was really related to my major so I got really lucky with that one” (Interview 6). While on-campus employment was the primary alternate source of financial support⁹, more than one participant stated that these jobs were difficult to find, so international students had to rely on their families' funding:

S: Most international students are supported by their families in the U.S.?

M: There's no other way. It's hard to find a job here when you are studying.

(Interview 3)

⁹ International students in the U.S. are not permitted to work off campus unless they apply for an exemption through a part-time work visa called the Curricular Practical Training (CPT). On-campus jobs are permitted.

This quotation (“there's no other way”) indicates one reason for these participants' nonchalance about receiving financial aid (e.g., “I don't worry about it”): there are limited options for funding. This point is discussed further in the next section.

Financial difficulties (variant theme). In this theme, four participants said that there was limited financial support available to international students at the university, and two said they wanted the university to offer more financial aid for international students. A couple of participants expressed a resigned attitude about financial support on campus. For instance, J said, “Financial support is technically hopeless. One of the first requirements for [other university scholarships] is you have to be a [U.S.] citizen. OK, so it's not open” (Focus Group 2). Another participant visited the university's financial aid office, only to discover that, after applying, he might only receive \$500 or \$1,000; larger awards were for U.S. citizens or permanent residents, he said. As he was already funded by his family, he said he decided not to apply for any additional financial aid (G, Focus Group 1). A few students whose families could not afford to fully fund their studies complained about the university's lack of financial aid, or had to find a part-time job. Additionally, one participant said she felt pressure from her family to do well at her studies, because her family was paying for her tuition.

3. Sources of Support

In the third theme category, participants talked about the people that were their sources of support. I define “sources of support” as the people or programs from which support was sought or received by participants (e.g., a roommate who corrects an international student's English pronunciation; a center that provides a career preparation workshop). The sources of support participants spoke about included: support in the

dorms ($N=8$); peer mentorship ($N=6$); and staff and faculty support ($N=6$). All themes and subthemes are listed in detail in Appendix F.

Support in the dorms (general theme). Many participants ($N=8$) reported experiencing support from others in their dormitories, an ecosystem of institutionalized support (the dorms are university property). The students' dormitory peers – roommates and resident assistants – were a prominent part of our conversation about social support, which I define as support for meeting and making friends with other students. One participant said, “I like the people in my dormitory” (L, Interview 7). Even the only participant who reported not making many friends mentioned, “I get more social support from [my] housing community” (K, Interview 1). Once, when I asked one participant to describe what social support was, her first response was, “[It's] only provided by the dorms, right?” (N, Interview 2).

Seven participants reported speaking with their roommates or others in the dorm. N mentioned that her first source of support was to ask her dormitory friends “some questions like daily life support or help. ... and I can also ask my RA” (Interview 5). And L spoke of two “very nice” American students in her dormitory who:

know there are a lot of Chinese students in our hall [and these Americans] provide help, like every day one hour [they talk with international students]. I talk to you about my culture and you talk to me about your culture ... I think it's good.
(L, Interview 7)

Additionally, G provided an anecdote about his resident assistant:

If we miss some information, we can just walk downstairs to knock my RA's door and ask something [like] “Hey [RA name] do you know something? Do you know

where to buy some cheesecake around the campus?" [Everyone laughs] She will tell you that and maybe she will come with me. (Focus Group 1)

The dormitories were spaces in which participants reported receiving different types of support – daily life, cultural, social, career, spoken English, and emotional – by roommates, hallmates, and resident assistants, many of whom were U.S. citizens. Participants attended events, spoke to others, received advice about daily life needs from roommates, and even found out where to buy cheesecake.

Peer mentorship (variant theme). In this theme, six participants talked about their peer mentor. At the university, all incoming international students can participate in a peer mentorship program in which second-, third-, and fourth-year undergraduate students mentor the international students through their first year. All six participants talked about the ways in which the mentor supported them. For instance, five participants said the mentor provided cultural support, while one said his mentor provided him with daily life support. Three participants said their mentor provided written and spoken English support, and another participant said his mentor provided academic support. Two participants also reported that they considered their mentors friends. All participants reported positive experiences with the mentors.

Staff and faculty support (variant theme). This theme only includes when participants spoke about the ways in which staff and faculty at the university supported them. The counterpoints – that is, participants reporting *unhelpful* support – are covered later, in the discussion of international center staff support. Of the six participants who talked about staff and faculty support in their university experiences, four spoke about individual staff members, and two spoke about individual faculty, referring to these

people as what I call “beacons of support.” In other words, these were individuals who appeared as helpful, often friendly, guides in the participants' university experience.

For instance, one participant, who called her professors “friends,” spoke positively about support she had received from her writing teacher: “Not only she walked me through all the grammatical stuff, but also she walked me through all the difficulties I encountered [in my] daily life about America, about American culture ... and *she knows me very well personally*” (NR, Focus Group 2, emphasis mine). In this excerpt, NR emphasized being supported, both academically and culturally, as well as being known “very well” by this authority figure. It was this type of relationship that led me to create the concept of a beacon of support, a person who would be responsive, providing information even if it was not “a part of his job,” like this participant's academic counselor:

I sent [my academic counselor] email almost every two weeks ... I think is not a part of his job but he always gave me information that he think I can get some information from other people ... [And sometimes he tells me] he doesn't know about this kind of information and then he gave me some information ... so I asked so and he always reply my email very fast. (N, Interview 5)

This participant, like the others who mentioned supportive individuals, reported that these beacons of support did work that went beyond their job requirements, whether that meant replying quickly or providing information about other departments. It was these qualities – warmth and responsiveness – that made these individual staff and faculty to stand out.

4. Communication and Support

In the fourth theme category, participants talked about their preferences for communication, including written and online communication transmitting information. The communication participants spoke about included seeking information ($N=12$) and staff-student communicative forms and patterns ($N=11$). All themes and subthemes are listed in detail in Appendix F.

Seeking information (general theme). Most participants ($N=12$) reported a self-guided approach to seeking information. Reading was a primary way to seek information. Seven participants reported seeking information online (e.g., “If I need to look where to buy something, I just Google”), four reported reading emails from university centers, four reported reading books and pamphlets, and four reported reading Facebook pages and groups for information. One reported also stopping by the international center to speak with the staff there.

Staff-student communicative forms and patterns (general theme). Most participants ($N=11$) talked about the ways in which they preferred and disliked communicating with staff and faculty at the university. For instance there was an emphasis on communication forms, namely emails. One participant said, “[to] some of the international students [other communication forms] might not as efficient as using email” (K, Interview 1). Seven participants said they preferred emails, while two of those participants also stated a preference for receiving text messages from university staff.

However, more participants discussed communicative patterns, which I define as ways in which people communicate with each other. First, four participants said they preferred that staff were available to communicate (e.g., “ask anything”). When recalling an experience with a university center she liked, N said, “You can pretty much ask them

about almost anything” (Interview 2). When describing her helpful peer mentor, M said, “you can ask [her] anything” (Interview 3). Another participant suggested that the international center staff offer an opportunity to international students “just to talk” to the staff, to “share their problems”:

Z: I think the international center can offer more chances to communicate with us, and to share our trouble or experience or something with them ... understand their trouble.

S: ... How can they understand?

Z: Just to [let students] talk. I mean [the staff can] set a specific period of time in a week and let international students come in and talk with them, share their problems. (Z, Interview 4)

Additionally, participants preferred immediate email responses from staff. N told me about her academic counselor: “He always reply my email very fast. Like if I send him the email tonight he can reply me tomorrow morning” (Interview 5), and L told me about her peer mentor, “If I send her message or email she will reply me very fast” (Interview 7). In contrast, late or no email responses – typically characterized as a few days late – were reportedly disliked. One participant had difficulty registering for classes, so “I had contacted them three times but they never give me an answer for, like, two months” (K, Focus Group 1). Another participant had a paperwork problem, and tried to contact the staff at the international center. She said,

I called them but they didn’t reply and I emailed them and they just replied maybe three or four days later. And they were saying that I missed – that my due date is almost gone – 'cause they reply me really late ... why didn’t they get replied more

faster than that? (Z, Focus Group 1)

Frequently, participants asking for more complete information on topics that they had only partial knowledge of. For instance, participants may know that they had a certain number of required classes, but did not know which ones would be best to sign up for. Or they knew that they needed to renew their student visa, but did not know the details of how. Consequently, it was important that staff be available, these participants reported. One participant said that the international center “should have like support for us in case we need to know something or in case we don't understand something” (C, Interview 6).

Redirection, the communicative pattern I defined as staff telling an inquiring student to find information elsewhere, was disliked. Though many participants looked for information online, a few reported visiting a university center to ask questions in person. During one incident, though, one participant experienced redirection from the international center staff, who told him to visit the center's website instead: “I don't bunderstand. That's why I came! So they said ‘Just go online, everything is on there. You will find all explanation on there.’” (J, Focus Group 2). This communicative pattern also appears in Chapter 7.

In summary, participants reported that they preferred to be able to ask anything from staff, that they preferred immediate email responses, and that they disliked being redirected by staff. Additionally, some participants reported preferring email as a communicative form.

5A. The International Center and Support

In the first part of the fifth theme category, participants talked about their support

experiences with and perspectives on the international center. The experiences and perspectives participants shared included: the international center as a visa stop ($N=12$); participants' lack of knowledge about the international center ($N=7$); negative experiences at the international center ($N=6$); and a need for more publicity ($N=4$). All themes and subthemes are listed in detail in Appendix F.

The international center as a visa stop (general theme). Most participants ($N=12$) reported that when they did visit the international center, it had to do with their student visas. Most of these participants expressed positive opinions about the center's immigration support; they felt the international center was successful at this form of support. However, many interviewees such as Z (Interview 4) said they only visited for immigration support, and when I asked one participant where she received support for immigration issues, she replied, "It's always the international center" (L, Interview 7). Additionally, when I asked another participant if she ever went to the center to meet with friends, she said no, and added, "I don't think me or friends see it as a social center." I continued, "So what kind of center do you see it as? An immigration [support] space?" "Yeah," she said (M, Interview 3). Similarly, C stated:

They're knowledgeable and they do help me. So if I'm just ... confused about my visa or my I-20 [student visa] I'll call them and I'll be like, "Hey I don't know what I'm doing" or something. They'll help me out. I like that because they also give out reminders and stuff for international students. So they're like, "Hey, um, we need your I-20" or whatever. It's not like "Hey you're on your own and if you don't get it to us you're going to be deported." So yeah, they're great. They help me out a lot. (C, Interview 6)

In her statement, C reported that she felt the center was “knowledgeable” about student visas. However, when I asked her “Do you ever go for any other reason?” she replied, “No.” These participants knew that the international center was the place they would need to visit if they had any concerns with their student visas, and most did not visit for other reasons.

Participants' lack of knowledge about the international center (variant theme). In this theme, seven participants reported that they did not visit the center much, if at all. Additionally, four of those participants stated confusion about what services the center offered, or confused the center's services with another center. In her interview Z said, “I rarely go there. I think I have never gone there except I have to do something with my visa or to renew it or something like that” (Z, Interview 4). Another participant admitted, “I don’t even know what [they] do except for immigration status” (N, Interview 2).

Negative experiences at the international center (variant theme). In this theme, six participants spoke about the negative interactions they had experienced at the center. These included reporting that the center's staff were unhelpful ($N=6$), the information about student visas, particularly on the center's website, was unclear ($N=2$), and that the participant ($N=1$) was “scared” to see the international center staff. For instance, one transfer student who had reported experiencing dismissive behavior from the center's staff, stated, “Sometimes I’m just too scared to see this [international center] counselor, you know? I thought, I’m going to get chewed [out] by this counselor” (N, Interview 2). Another participant complained:

The international center will be the [worst] experience in the world for me ...

when I came to [the center] and [I had difficulty understanding the immigration laws] so I came to them and ask. So they said, “Just go and read online.”

[Everyone mumbles in agreement] I don’t understand. That’s why I came [but] they said “Just go online, everything is on there, you will find all explanation on there.” (I, Focus Group 2)

This redirective communicative pattern (“Just go online”) was something that the participant reported as unhelpful, while the other participants listed other reasons, such as staff unfriendliness (e.g., Interview 2). How they felt about the staff also impacted some of these participants’ interest in visiting the international center.

Need for more publicity (variant theme). Because many participants did not know much about the international center, four participants stated that they would like the center to advertise its services more. One participant stated “I feel like if [the center] were able to kind of publicize and reach out to more international students that they’d do better ... I just feel like they don’t have really good publicity” (C, Interview 6). Another participant said that the center had to “make people realize that they have such kind of information ... [to make others notice] what kind of support they have” (K, Interview 1). A third participant stated, “I just feel like it needs more advertisements ... international center sounds really big [and] because it sounds big, people are probably kind of confused about what it actually is” (M, Interview 3). In summary, the participants noted that it would be more effective for the international center to publicly advertise its services.

5B. The Ideal International Center

Finally, one of the questions I asked interview participants was to describe what

their “ideal international center” would look like. Two main themes emerged in their responses: the concept of the international center as a student space ($N=7$), and of the center as a cozy place ($N=5$). All themes and subthemes are listed in detail in Appendix F.

The center as a student space (common theme). All participants¹⁰ ($N=7$) described the ideal international center as a space in which international students met and worked together. As one participant stated, the ideal international center should be “like a large [lounge] for international students ... where international students can go there and share information about their experiences and stuff like that (N, Interview 2). Another participant described the center as a space “for international [students because] we want to communicate with people from different backgrounds ... Chinese Korean, Italian [students], if they can be together, they have group studying time, they have party time, they can travel together. That would be good” (L, Interview 7). When asked to describe her ideal international center, one participant compared it to a Starbucks:

[My ideal international center would be a] place like Starbucks for international students. You know, where people would just go and like in between two classes. They have a couple of hours, they would just go there and chill and talk to people ... they feel comfortable there. And they can find all the information [there]. (M, Interview 3)

M's description is of a center in which students visit to meet each other (a social space) and find information (a source of information), but ultimately a space “for international

¹⁰ In this section, “all participants” refers to the seven participants who were asked this question in their interviews: “What is the International Center like in [an] ideal world?” This question was not asked in the focus groups.

students.” One participant suggested that the international center reach out to students, providing them with a space in which to have friends and feel cared for, a center that encourages “a closer relationship [with the staff and each other]” (N, Interview 2). This vision of care overlapped with the next concept that emerged in these conversations: The center as a “cozy” place.

The center as a cozy place (general theme). Many participants ($N=5$) described the ideal international center in affective terms. In fact, the exact terms “cozy place,” “welcoming environment,” and even “family” emerged in these conversations. One participant said, “I want to be in a better, more welcoming environment for all of us [international students]” (C, Interview 6), and another said, “It would be nicer if it’s more *inviting* to international students” (N, Interview 2, emphasis mine). Still another described the ideal international center as a lounge-like place where students can drop by to talk with each other:

If the international center is more of, like, a cozy place, where international students can gather, and share their experience, and talk about their life here, or share their—I think it’s more [profitable]. More beneficial, I guess, for the international center itself. (M, Interview 3)

M defined this “cozy place” as one in which students can meet (a physical location) and “talk about their life” (emotional support). She also saw this cozy center as benefitting both staff and students. One participant contrasted the campus tutoring center – a place she called “very cozy” – to the international center. In her words, the tutoring center was “cozy” because it was inviting, while the center was “not that kind of place”:

Coziness [at the tutoring center] is very important, I guess, just because a lot of

students will just go there and they will help each other. That place has like a lot of tables that are around and you can, like, help each other and you can also get some help from another person. It's like this place that invites you in, and it became a gathering of some sort. [The international center is] just not that kind of place. (N, Interview 2)

To be clear, this "cozy" concept was less about a physical atmosphere as it was about an *emotional* one, in which students could feel welcome to enter and to socialize with each other, as this excerpt indicates:

I don't think that place needs to have couches or TV or coffee. I think it just needs some people there. Because if there's no people there and maybe when I go there and I see there's no people sitting around maybe I'm afraid to walk in. So there should always be people there talking, laughing and maybe watching TV. And when I walk by and I saw some of my friends maybe or some new friends and I just want to walk in and talk with the others. (N, Interview 5)

N went on to call this ideal center "like family for international students" (Interview 5). And in another use of words, Z extended this emotional metaphor to the international center being like a second "home":

I think [the international center can be a] home to many international students [to] feel [like they're] back home ... some of us have relatives in the U.S. but not all of us. So, I think if it can be kind of place like your home and provide us with cultural exchange events or something like that will make you feel it's more warmer. (Z, Interview 4)

In summary, this concept of home, family, and coziness was present in many of the

interview conversations, as was the similar concept of the center as a student space.

These participants largely envisioned an ideal international center as a lounge-like environment in which they could meet and talk with other students.

Summary of Results

This chapter addressed the ways in which international undergraduate students spoke about support: their sources of support, the ways they sought support, what types of support they needed, the barriers and difficulties they faced, and their preferences for communicative forms and patterns. Additionally, this chapter addressed the participants' opinions about and experiences with the international center, the only campus center uniquely focused on supporting them. In summary, there are 13 findings under five categories: 1) Types of Support; 2) Barriers and Difficulties; 3) Sources of Support; 4) Communication and Support; and 5) The International Center and Support. The findings of this study are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Findings in the Focus Groups and Interviews

Types of Support	
Finding 1	Academic support is offered by the university and daily life support is unaddressed by the university, but needed by participants.
Finding 2	There is a limited need for financial or career support.
Finding 3	Spoken and written English is important to participants, and most support is offered by the university.
Finding 4	Cultural support is important to participants, and most support is offered by the university.
Barriers and Difficulties	
Finding 5	Most participants reported experiencing cultural and linguistic barriers and difficulties, and some experienced racism.
Finding 6	Most participants reported experiencing university barriers and difficulties,

while a few also experienced financial and career barriers and difficulties at the university.

Sources of Support

- Finding 7 Many participants experienced support “ecosystems,” namely university classes, university centers, and especially the dormitories.
- Finding 8 Many participants spoke about certain individuals, or “beacons of support,” who supported them.

Communication and Support

- Finding 9 Most participants sought information on their own, and frequently sought information online.
- Finding 10 Many participants stated specific ways in which staff members could communicate more clearly with students.

The International Center and Support

- Finding 11 Most participants visited the international center only for immigration support, and many did not know what other types of support it offered.
- Finding 12 Some participants reported negative, unhelpful experiences with the international center website and staff members.
- Finding 13 The ideal international center was seen as a cozy, student-centered space.
-

Types of Support

My first primary finding was the dichotomy between academic and daily life support. Most participants stated that they had daily life needs, which are currently unaddressed by the university. These participants reported that they received advice on these needs from peers or peer mentors, and in a couple of cases from faculty. However, participants did not receive support on daily life needs from staff. In contrast, many participants received academic support from the university, particularly from their academic advisor, while a few others were advised by their tutor, professor, or peer mentor. Academic support is a type of support addressed by the university through the establishment of academic mentoring offices, and consequently participants received

most of their academic support from these staff. The international center was not a source of either academic or daily life support.

My second finding was that the participants expressed limited need for financial or career support. When speaking about finances, most participants reported that they were funded by their families, and that financial support was either unnecessary, and even if they wished to apply for grants or scholarships, “hopeless” to do so. Additionally, participants reported that on campus jobs were difficult to find. As a result, most of these participants did not see a need for financial support. Similarly, when talking about career support, less than half of the participants attended career workshops at the career center, and only two participants were aware of the international center’s career workshops. In other words, among these participants there was little need for financial or career support. While the international center provided career support (e.g., workshops such as “Professional Networking for International Students”), the center did not provide financial support. Yet in one large-scale study, as many as 45% of prospective students seek financial aid opportunities (Choudaha, Orosz & Chang, 2012).

My third finding was that spoken and written English was important to many participants, and that they received support for these skills mostly through university resources. Participants reported attending academic writing courses, English pronunciation courses, and weekly English conversation club meetings at the international center. They also received language support from tutors, teaching assistants, peer mentors, and other peers. While written English support was institutionalized – academic courses, typically – spoken English support was both

institutionalized and peer-based (e.g., receiving corrective feedback on English pronunciation from a roommate). The international center offered both spoken and written English support through workshops.

My fourth finding was that cultural support – that is, support for adapting to U.S. culture – was important to many participants, and that they received support from both university classes and peers. In particular, summer transition classes, the summer orientation, cultural classes and workshops at the international center or multicultural center, and peer mentors were sources of cultural support, a type of support frequently associated with international student support (e.g., Kim & Egan, 2011).

Barriers and Difficulties

My fifth finding was that participants reported experiencing many barriers and difficulties. Most participants experienced cultural difficulties, sometimes as extreme as racism. Given that this study's participants are Asian students, like the majority of international students nationwide, this discrimination may point to a systemic concern about “neo-racism,” which includes discrimination against students of different cultures and national origins, in addition to skin color (addressed in Lee, 2007). The cultural support currently offered by the international center does not address racism, instead addressing U.S. culture more generally (e.g., a recent workshop on hip-hop dance).

My sixth finding was that most participants reported experiencing university barriers, which included inconvenience of seeking support, bureaucracy, too much information, mixed information, and inflexible university policies. Similarly, some participants reported experiencing difficulties when applying for on-campus jobs, while other participants reported the difficulties in applying for financial support at the

university. In fact, one participant said she experienced family pressure to academically succeed due to her family paying for her tuition. Although only a few students in this study expressed concern about finances, other studies (e.g., Bista & Foster, 2011; Choudaha, Orosz & Chang, 2012) have found that many international students, particularly from developing countries, worry about the costs to their families, and seek for illegal, off-campus work to fund their studies; many work full-time before arriving in the U.S. to support themselves. These barriers and difficulties cumulatively presented an image of the university in which at least a few participants experienced obstacles both on and off campus.

Sources of Support

My seventh finding was about what I call the “ecosystems of support,” or the locations in which students most experienced support. First, participants spoke about the multiple ways in which the university supported them, through cultural and academic classes and through centers such as the international center, writing center, multicultural center, and career center. Furthermore, the dormitories were perhaps the richest support ecosystems in which peers (i.e., roommates, hallmates, and resident assistants) were sources of language, social, cultural, career, and daily life support. In particular, living with U.S. students (e.g., roommates or hallmates) was mostly seen as positive, perhaps because participants already had so many co-national friends. Though I did not ask participants about emotional support, I am certain that these dormitory peers were also sources of emotional support. This finding indicates room for future research, as there is little research on international student residences (see Ward, 2001). However, another study (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011) found that the international

students they spoke with also reported the dormitories as “a significant asset,” especially in the first few days of studying in the U.S. (p. 296).

My eighth finding was that many participants spoke about certain individuals, or “beacons of support,” who supported them. In addition to relying on their peers (e.g., roommates, classmates, and friends), some participants spoke positively about their peer mentor, and the ways in which the mentor supported them: cultural, daily life, language, and academic support. Additionally, some participants spoke about individual staff and faculty who appeared as responsive, helpful, and often friendly, guides in the participants' university experience. Some participants called these mentors, staff, and faculty their *friends*. In their review of several high-performing universities and colleges, Kuh et al (2010) discovered that every institution “have individuals who do remarkable things [and] stand out because they add a special dimension to students' experiences” (p. 170). Moores and Popadiuk (2011) also found that the international students they interviewed spoke highly of these “guides” or “dedicated contact” people, which included other international students but also faculty and sometimes staff members. The authors write:

A dedicated contact person, such as a program coordinator or staff member, helped participants to sort out the potentially overwhelming practical and administrative details of attending a foreign university. This type of support was especially beneficial during the early days of the transition. In several instances, participants spoke of their coordinator almost like a surrogate parent: “She is like a mommy. . . . She takes care of us and when we have problems we can ask her and she gives us some suggestions.” Participants expressed the quality of the

relationships between faculty members and their students and the genuine support and caring expressed by professors. Incidents in this category highlight how support from the university community may be more meaningful for many international students than their domestic peers. (p. 298)

Though several participants reported positive experiences with international center staff members, none reported that these staff were beacons of support, a contrast with the ways in which some participants spoke about their faculty, academic advisors, or peer mentors.

Communication and Support

My ninth finding was that most participants were self-guided in seeking information, and that they frequently sought information online (e.g., Google, the university website). Other participants read emails or university pamphlets, while some read Facebook pages and groups for information. One participant also visited the international center to speak with the staff there. However, most participants sought information online, on their own. This could be a problem if, as some participants reported, there was too much information online, or mixed information. Finally, the importance of institutional websites cannot be underestimated: one set of interviews with nearly 1,600 prospective international students found that these websites were “the single most popular source of information in the top three sending countries” (Choudaha, Orosz & Chang, 2012, p. 11). Another study stated that “the institutional website is a powerful – if not *the* most powerful – tool for student [outreach and support]” (Choudaha, Chang & Kono, 2013, p. 11).

Similarly, my tenth finding was that many participants stated ways in which staff

members could communicate more clearly with students. Participants preferred that staff remain available for communication, that staff respond quickly to emails, that staff reply with more complete information, and that emails were the favored form of communication. This is confirmed in one study in which the authors note that “younger international students [expect] fast turn-around service” (Choudaha, Chang & Kono, 2013, p. 11). In addition, redirection by staff members was disliked by participants. This was one focal finding in Bista and Foster's (2011) study, in which an African student “stated her frustration” at being redirected: “This student was told by the office staff to come back later, which was an inconvenience.” The authors added that “Many international students have time-sensitive problems relating to visas and other papers that need to be addressed quickly” (p. 5). In other words, this study confirms that responsive – and not redirective – communication was favored.

The International Center and Support

My eleventh finding was that, while many participants spoke positively about their experiences at the international center, the center was seen primarily as a “visa stop,” or a place in which students could renew their student visas, update their travel signatures, or apply for a student work visa. Only a few participants visited the center for non-immigration-related activities. In fact, a few participants did not know what other services the center offered “except for immigration.”

My twelfth finding was that some participants reported negative experiences at the international center. In particular, some students found the interactions with staff members to be unhelpful and in one case, a participant said she was “scared” to speak with the center staff. Two participants also reported that they found the center website's

information to be unclear.

Finally, my thirteenth finding was that most participants viewed a hypothetically ideal international center as a cozy, student-centered space in which students met and worked together in a lounge-like “welcoming environment.” This finding correlates with studies on student-centered learning spaces; one example is Riddle and Souter's (2012) study in which the authors included student input in learning space design, finding that students wanted to study together, at tables “facing each other.” Were I to include emotional support in this study, the participants would note that this ideal center would be a place in which emotional support was provided between students, as well as from the staff members.

Limitations

While most of this chapter's findings complement and expand upon other studies' findings, one contradicted them. My second finding was that the participants expressed limited need for financial or career support, yet this contradicted with a few studies (e.g., Choudaha, Orosz & Chang, 2012) in which many international students expressed a need for both financial and career support. This contradiction may say more about the research population I worked with – mostly East Asian students – than it does about the need or lack of need for types of support. The students I spoke with may have come from wealthier families than ones surveyed elsewhere. In conclusion, I agree with the statement “not all international students are the same” (Choudaha, Orosz & Chang, 2012, p. 17). In other words, the findings in this chapter are not generalizable, but rather they are unique to this particular population of international students.

Looking Ahead

The next chapter, Chapter 6, addresses the results of open-ended staff survey responses, in answering the seventh research question, “How do staff at a major university's international student center define support?”

VI. Staff Perceptions of Support

While the last chapter addressed students' perceptions of and interactions with staff members, this chapter explores the ways in which the international center staff define support and perceive best practices in supporting international students. It is important to include staff input, as they provide an essential perspective on institutional support. As a result, I examine staff survey responses (Appendix C) to answer the research question: "How do staff at a major university's international student center perceive and define support?" In addition, I also analyze the international center's mission statement.

The five staff members who completed the online survey were female, full-time international center employees who had lived in the U.S. for more than 10 years. The survey concluded with two open-ended questions about institutional support: "How would you define 'school support'?" and "How can universities best support international students?" These two questions were also posed to students in the focus groups. The five themes observed in staff members' answers are exhibited in Table 7. Staff answers indicated that most of them saw support as: 1) provided through services and programs; 2) based on needs assessment; 3) the responsibility of the institution; and 4) a collaboration between university offices. Additionally, I did further analysis of the most commonly-occurring words in the staff members' responses; these words supplied a supplementary perspective on support that also emphasized the providing of services and programs and needs assessment, as demonstrated in Table 7 (see Appendix G for more).

Table 7

Results of Open-Ended Staff Survey Responses

Theme	Representative
Support through Services and Programs	General
Support through Needs Assessment	General
Support the Responsibility of the Institution	General
Collaborative University Support	Variant
Types of Support	Variant

Note. A theme is described as common if it applied to all five participants (not observed), general if it applied to three or four participants, and variant if it applied to one to two participants. See detailed table in Appendix G.

Support through Services and Programs

Most ($N=4$) staff responses stated that support was about providing services and programs to students (Table 7). One participant said that the university should “continue or improve existing services” and that any additional “programs should be created to facilitate [students’] education” if necessary. Another participant posited that programs should “advocat[e] for [students’] needs and concerns,” providing a specific example: “programs on how to improve their English skills.” A third participant stated that the university should support students by providing “relevant student services.” Additionally, the words “program” and “services” were among the most common nouns, used by three of the five respondents, while “provide” was also one of the most common verbs. This is affirmed again in the center’s mission statement, which states twice that they are “providing services” (and “providing quality services”).¹¹ In other words, staff members

¹¹ “The International Center promotes and facilitates international education by providing services to advance the university’s mission and support the academic goals and objectives of international students, faculty, and researchers. The International_Center Staff is committed to providing quality services to comply with government regulations and promote intercultural understanding.”

imply that providing services is synonymous with providing support; services are support. In practice, the center does offer many services for international students; a glance at their website¹² shows that they provide career workshops, coffee hours, an English conversation program, English language workshops, tax information sessions, and international holiday celebrations.

Support through Needs Assessment

Most ($N=4$) staff responses emphasized basing support on needs assessment (Table 7). For instance, one staff member suggested that “the university should assess common trends among these students,” while another suggested that “it should first be determined the type of support that the student needs and then followed up with needs assessments and other data to see if this is being met.” A third staff member said that universities ought to “assess needs and provide programs and services to address needs.” The word “needs” – both as noun and verb – was one of the most common, used by four of the five respondents, while “assess” was also one of the most common verbs. Therefore, in order to provide services and programs, staff members believed that support could be provided only after making an assessment of students' needs, and then addressing those needs through services and programs. While services and programs are being offered at the center, it is unclear if or how needs assessments are being implemented, and if so, how they are being evaluated.

Support as the Responsibility of the Institution

Many ($N=3$) staff members stated that university support was about taking responsibility in supporting international students (Table 7). As one staff member wrote,

¹² <http://www.ic.uci.edu/index.php>

“support for an international student is an institutional charge.” Another called support “an institutional endeavor.” A third staff member said that “[school support is about] advocating for student’s needs.” These statements place the university as the one responsible for providing support. What this means is that staff members believed that providing support was the responsibility of the university and not, say, the students. However, it is unclear what is meant by the “institution” (the international center? the university generally?), and what this responsibility may include, other than assessment and the provision of services and programs.

Collaborative University Support

Two staff members suggested that student support be a shared responsibility across many offices at the university (Table 7). One wrote, “I believe that more than one office needs to share the responsibility and collaborate towards this common goal ... support may be provided through various campus entities” while the other said that “a combination of various offices (academic and student affairs) services is critical to provide options and support that ultimately will aid students.” This indicates that staff members believed that supporting international students was not only the sole responsibility of the international center, but also of other offices and staff members on campus. To paraphrase a common idiom, these staff members believed it would take a village to support a student. However, based on the responses, it is once again unclear how this type of collaboration may take place, how staff might share responsibilities with other offices, and how this collaborative support may be assessed.

Types of Support

Additionally, two staff members listed types of support students needed (Table 7).

These staff members wrote about the specific types of support students needed, which included social support, financial support, language support, and academic support. One of these staff members also added that one of students' needs was to “feel welcomed” (Table 7), which I might code as social or emotional support. On a similar note, the staff members also ranked the importance of types of support in the closed-ended portion of the survey (Appendix C). Unanimously, they ranked academic support as “very important,” while four staff members ranked social and cultural support as “very important.” Only three staff members ranked financial support as “very important.” In other words, while all types of support were ranked as important, academic support was the rated the highest and financial support the lowest.

In their responses, staff members ranked some types of support more highly than others. Namely, academic, cultural, and social support were the most highly-ranked in the survey responses, while academic support (“support the academic goals and objectives of international students”) and cultural support (“promote intercultural understanding”) were the types specifically mentioned in the center's mission statement.¹³ In contrast, other types of support could include language and daily life support, neither of which are mentioned in the staff responses or mission statement.

Discussion of Results

To many of these staff members, support was the responsibility of the institution to provide services and programs based on needs assessment, collaboratively provided

¹³ “The International Center promotes and facilitates international education by providing services to advance the university's mission and support the academic goals and objectives of international students, faculty, and researchers. The International_Center Staff is committed to providing quality services to comply with government regulations and promote intercultural understanding.”

through multiple university offices. As these responses indicate, the institution is rhetorically placed at the center of support; it is the institution who assesses and provides support driven by student data. This rhetoric defines an institution responsible for providing support – “an institutional charge” – placing the institution in a place of support-*provider*, while implying a linear relationship of support; students seek and receive support. Furthermore, this phenomenon resembles a business model in which support is an *exchange* (students seek support; staff provide support through the provision of services). These themes built what I call a “rhetoric of the institution.” This rhetoric emphasizes institutional analysis, or needs assessment, before support is provided. In other words, student input is to be formally assessed, yet no one describes how this should be done, or how it should be evaluated. Finally, support is seen as collaborative by some staff, a shared goal between multiple centers on campus. However, this finding prompts questions about what types of support the international center sees itself best fit to provide, and what types of support the center sees best for *other* offices to provide. The center's mission statement reveals that the center is primarily focused on providing services, supporting the academic goals of students, complying with government regulations (i.e., student visas), and promoting international education and intercultural understanding.

The language in staff members' responses also affirm this rhetoric. Staff members spoke about support in a corporate-like, analytical tone, which differs, as I point out later, with the tone in student responses. The most commonly-occurring words in the staff members' open-ended responses included words like “assessment,” “programs,” and “services,” and the mission statement includes the phrase “providing

services” twice. The staff members' rhetoric of support resembles a business model in which students stand in as customers and staff members stand in as service professionals. One interviewee called this a “transaction relationship”: “I went to the international center, but then it’s always like this transaction kind of a relationship. I have a problem so I need something, you know. I need help so I go there” (N, Interview 2). Altogether, this builds on what I define in the discussion chapter (Chapter 8) as an institutional *culture of support*.

Staff Responses and The Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) Project

Some of this rhetoric aligns – and some does not – with Kuh et al (2010)'s study of high-performing, educationally-effective universities and colleges, in which the authors suggested several principles for student success. For instance, the authors asserted that “making programs and resources available is necessary but not sufficient to promote student success,” adding that “schools must induce large numbers of students to use them” (Kuh et al, 2010, p. 268). In other words, merely providing programs and services is not enough to support international students; they must also publicize and incentivize students to participate, a point some participants made in the previous chapter (see themes “Participants' lack of knowledge of the international center” and “Need for more publicity”).

Additionally, the authors found that “data were used to guide institutional reflection and action” (p. 278) and that “assessment serves many important institutional purposes” (p. 279). These two principles correspond with the staff members' assertions that student input be formally assessed. This has potential for support, if it serves as a

way for staff members to reflect on their support, and to enact any necessary changes. However, as mentioned before, no one describes how needs assessment should be done, and on a personal note as an international student at this university, I have never been asked to participate in formal assessment of the center's support services.

Furthermore, Kuh et al (2010) found that high-performing institutions provided student support “from multiple sources,” working in partnerships; in other words, collaborative support *is* important (p. 285), something these staff members also state. Yet staff members did not state what types of support they saw themselves best fit to provide or what types of support they saw best for other campus staff to provide.

Finally, however, what was *not* said is more poignant than what was. Staff members did not mention anything about the ways in which they cared for international students. In contrast, these high-performing institutions “value and embrace all students” and espouse an “ethic of care and belonging [that was] stitched into the institutional fabric” as a core value in supporting students (Kuh et al, 2010, p. 242).

Limitations

One of the limitations of this part of the study is also one of its findings: when I asked to conduct a focus group with staff members, they refused to participate due to having too little time. A couple of months before, I had met with a few staff members in person, and explained the purpose of the study: partially, to evaluate the ways in which the center supported international students. As a result, they had told me they would help me with my study, so their refusal was a surprise. When I revised the student focus group questions as interview questions, shortening the length of time from two hours to 30 minutes, they once again refused to participate as interviewees. After being refused

twice, I created an online survey for staff members, concluding with two open-ended questions in order to collect as much rich data as I could. Upon emailing the online survey (Appendix C) to the seven full-time staff members, I noted that five staff members completed the survey (a response rate of 71%). However, the responses were short, lacking in detail and often no longer than a couple of sentences. In short, this story of their resistance is not only a limitation but also a finding that indicates reticence towards staff participating in a project that would provide the international center with rich feedback on how they might improve their support to students. With little of their input in this study, an understanding the role of institutional support is modest.

Looking Ahead

The next chapter, Chapter 7, analyzes the discourse between staff and students on the international center's Facebook group.

VII. Seeking and Providing Support on Facebook

Given the university international center's use of a Facebook group and the rising role of Facebook as way for universities to reach students, this study explores the ways in which a university's international center staff interact and communicate with international students and the ways in which students interact and communicate with each other in the university's international center Facebook group. As a result, the following research questions are discussed in this chapter:

RQ8: In what ways do staff provide support to students on the international center's Facebook group?

RQ9: In what ways do international students seek and provide support on the international center's Facebook group?

In order to answer these questions, I analyzed 242 wall posts, or “excerpts,” on the university international center's Facebook group. These excerpts included posted text, photos, and website links on the Facebook group “wall,” which was publicly viewable and could be commented on by any member of the group. In particular, I focus my analysis on the 57 “dialogues,” which I defined as posts on which one or more people comment. There are also “monologues,” which I defined as posts on which no one comments. Shortly, this chapter is about discourse.

Staff-initiated monologues were typically announcements (e.g., “Don't forget to attend our English conversation program today at 4:00”), but not questions which were not likely to open a dialogue. In fact, most dialogues were opened by questions students posted in the group. Student-initiated monologues also comprised mostly of statements, which looked like this: “If anyone is interested I know someone who is subletting her

room for the winter quarter on campus at [graduate housing] for 480\$ per month. Let me know !” while questions looked like this: “does anyone know where I can buy passport holder near campus??” I only analyzed dialogues since my focus is on discourse that provides and seeks support.

In this chapter, I examine the topics in these dialogues – what staff and students communicated about – and the communicative patterns (e.g., “Seeking Information,” “Link Redirection”). I wanted to know why some topics elicited lengthier and more dialogic responses while others did not. Additionally, I coded communicative patterns in order to understand the ways in which support was communicated between staff and students. In other words, how did students vocalize their support needs, and how did staff and students provide support for these needs?

Interactions Among Staff and Students

In this chapter, I discuss four observed types of discursive interactions: 1) students seeking support from staff; 2) students seeking support from other students; 3) staff providing support to students; and 4) students providing support to other students. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

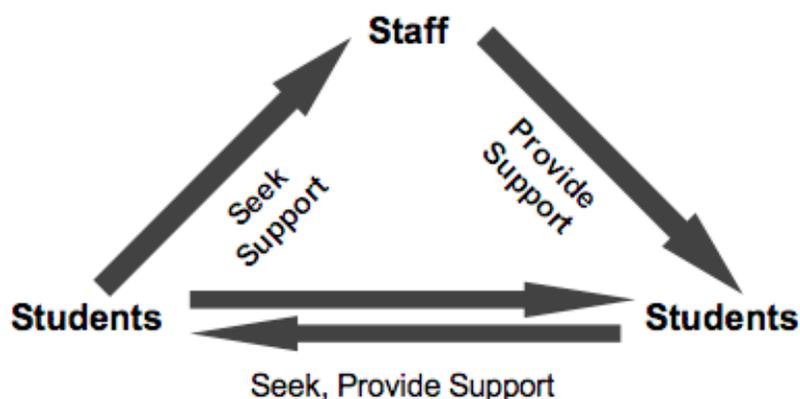


Figure 2: A model of the observed types of interactions and support in the Facebook group.

This figure illustrates what I observed in this study: students seeking support from staff, while staff provided support to students. However, I also observed lengthy interactions between students in which students both sought from and provided support to each other on the Facebook group. As I mentioned earlier, this chapter focuses on dialogues, which make visible the interactions between both students and staff. In the dialogues, a majority ($N=48$; 84.2%) were student-initiated¹⁴ (Table 8). What topics did participants initiate dialogues about? I discuss this next.

Table 8

Dialogues in the Facebook Group

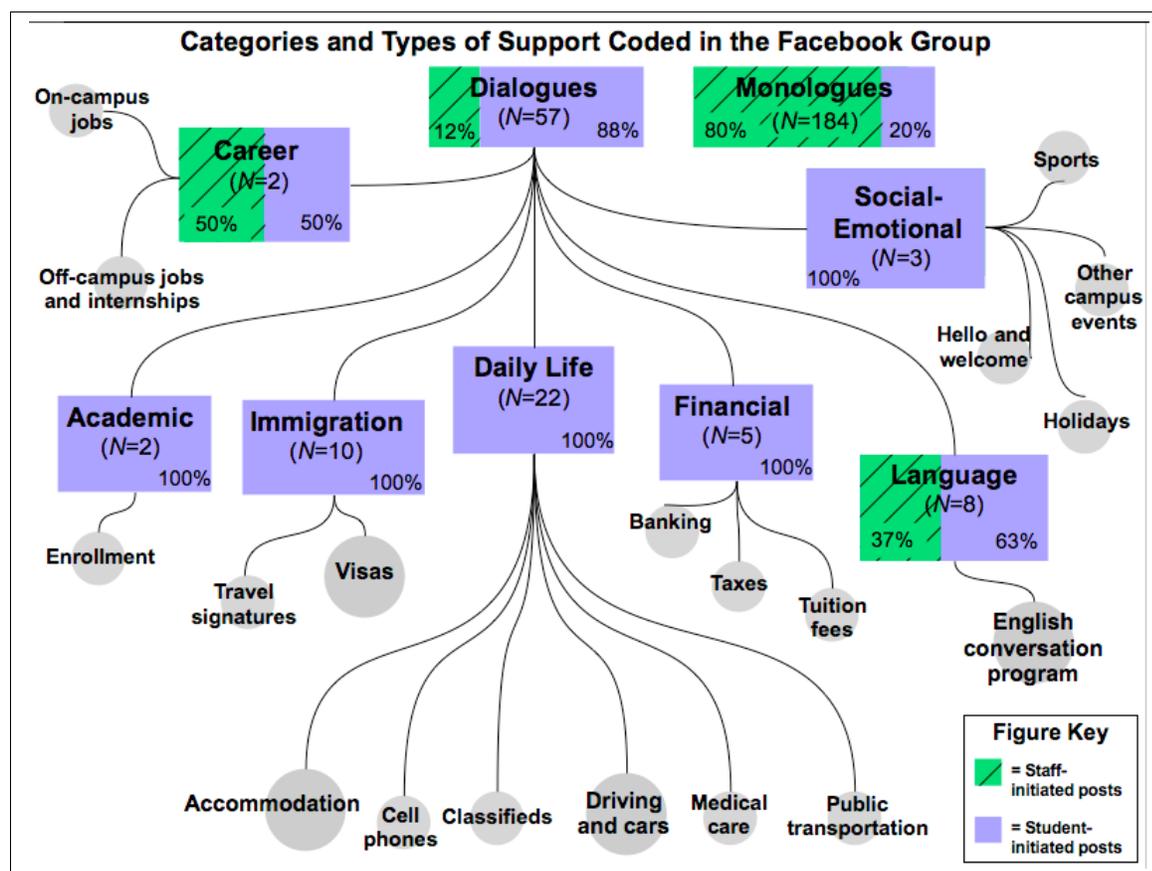
	<i>N</i>	Percentage of Dialogues
Student-initiated posts		
Student-Staff	20	35.1
Student-Staff-Student(s)	8	14.0

¹⁴ Initiation is defined as the act of posting on a Facebook group wall, in contrast to responding to someone else's post.

Student-Student(s)	20	35.1
Staff-initiated posts		
Staff-Student(s)	9	15.8
Total	57	100.0

Overview of Post Topics

In the dialogues, seven topic categories and 19 topic codes emerged. These categories and codes represented what students and staff talked about, and are illustrated in Figure 3.



Note. Monologues are included in this figure, but only to provide context.

As this figure illustrates, staff initiated more monologues while students initiated more dialogues, but also that students and staff both initiated an equal or nearly-equal

amount of dialogues about career and language (Figure 3). Additionally, students initiated all dialogues on immigration, academic, financial, and daily life topics. Codes are illustrated by circles, with larger and darker circles representing a greater number of codes on that topic (e.g., “Accommodation” was coded the most, 10 times). In other words, students initiated more dialogues on more topics, with the exception of language and career topics. To put it another way, in this chapter, staff only initiated dialogues about the English conversation program ($N=3$), or about an internship at the center ($N=1$). In contrast, staff members initiated the majority of monologues, typically announcements.

Note that while this figure illustrates the initiated dialogues, this chapter examines both the initiations and responses in the dialogues. In the next sections, I discuss the ways staff provided support to students, and the ways students sought from and provided support to each other.

Staff Providing Support

This section addresses the question, “In what ways do staff provide support on the international center's Facebook group?” First, I address what topics staff members initiated and responded to. In other words, what types of support did the staff members provide? Secondly, I address how staff members communicated support – their communicative patterns – to students in the group. Table 9 displays both topics and communicative patterns by staff (see Appendix H for more details).

Table 9

Staff Initiation and Responses in Dialogues

Topic / Type	Support-Providing Communicative Pattern	<i>N</i>
--------------	---	----------

CULTURES OF SUPPORT

97

Staff Initiation (N=9)	Unique	N/A (Documentation)	5
	Language	Announcement	3
	Career	Announcement	1
Staff Response (N=28)	Language	Information	3
	Language	Information	2
	Language	Information, Information about International Center	2
	Academic	Information, Link Redirection	1
	Immigration, Academic	International Center Redirection	1
	Immigration	Information, Information about International Center	1
	Immigration	Off-Group Contact Redirection	1
	Daily Life	Link Redirection	1
	Daily Life	Link Redirection, Information	1
	Financial	Link Redirection	1
	Daily Life	University Redirection	1
	Career	Off-Group Contact Redirection, Information	1
	Immigration	Information, Information about International Center	1
	Immigration, Academic	Information about International Center, Link Redirection	1
	Career	International Center Redirection	1
	Daily Life	Link Redirection	1
	Daily Life	International Center Redirection	1
	Financial	Link Redirection	1
	Financial	Information about International Center	1
	Daily Life	Link Redirection	1
	Immigration	Information	1
	Immigration	Information about International Center, International Center Redirection	1
	Daily Life	Information, Personal Recommendation	1
	Daily Life	Link Redirection, Off-Group Contact Redirection	1

Note. See detailed descriptions of support-providing communicative patterns in Appendix H.

Topics Staff Discussed

Altogether, only nine staff-initiated posts were interactive; in other words, these were the only staff-initiated posts that were commented on by students. In these dialogues, the staff initiated posts on language ($N=3$) and career ($N=1$) topics (Figure 3). In their responses, however, staff answered more diverse questions in student posts, including daily life ($N=8$), immigration ($N=7$), language ($N=7$), financial ($N=3$), academic ($N=3$), and career ($N=2$) topics (Table 9). Immigration posts mostly comprised students' questions about student visas, while language posts entirely comprised questions about the English conversation program. Dialogues about daily life topics varied from accommodation, parking, and public transportation, among others (Appendix H). Posts about the English conversation program and career (i.e., an internship at the international center) were the only posts staff members both initiated and responded to (Table 9). And while they responded to many student-initiated posts about daily life topics, the staff members primarily interacted with students on posts about student visas and the English conversation program.

Communicative Patterns by Staff

Altogether, I read 37 posts in which staff members interacted with students, coding for the ways staff members communicated support-providing in their posts or responses. I noted 10 different communicative patterns staff used in providing support to students, with two primary communicative patterns: informative support ($N=26$) and redirective support ($N=17$) (Tables 9 and 10). This meant that most staff provided support through providing information in response to a student's inquiry, or redirecting students to another website link, typically another university center's or office's website.

Staff also redirected students by telling them to come into the center in person and speak with an immigration advisor ($N=4$).

Table 10

Communicative Patterns in Staff Responses to Student-Initiated Dialogues

Support-Providing Communicative Pattern	<i>N</i>
Providing Information ($N=26$)	
Information	14
Information about International Center	7
Announcement	4
Personal Recommendation	1
Redirecting ($N=17$)	
Link Redirection	9
International Center Redirection	4
Off-Group Contact Redirection	3
University Redirection	1

In these results, staff members mostly provided support through information, and sometimes through redirection of students to another source of information. Here is one example of a dialogue in which the staff member responds with more information:

Staff: TODAY: English Conversation Program at the International Center.

International Students and Scholars are welcome to attend. You will be paired with a English native speaker. Topics today: Important personalities in your home country and Lunar New year and more....

[photo of group]

Student: I have an accent problem. Can you guys help

Staff: Hi [student's name], participating in the [English conversation program] can help you improve your English skills. We match English native

speakers with internationals. the English facilitators can help you with pronunciation. Hope to see you next monday.

In this dialogue, the staff member posts information about the English conversation program hosted at the center, and a student responds, stating a problem (“I have an accent problem”) and asking if there is support (“Can you guys help”). The staff member responds to the student with additional information about the conversation program, thereby providing support in response to the student (i.e., “Yes, we can help you”).

The second most common communicative pattern by staff members was to redirect students to another resource, such as a website or campus center. For instance, when one student asked about tuition fees at the university, a staff member responded by redirecting him to another center's website for more information:

Student: hi guys, im an international student from Vietnam im plannign to transfer to [this university] in 1 & a half years i wonder how much it costs per year for the tuitions fees? please let me know thanks very much guys!!!

Staff: Hi [student's name]! Please visit [this university registrar's website] to get more information about fees, as this information changes from year to year.

Cumulatively, the staff provided support through information or redirection. However, there were a few other instances in which staff did not provide information in response to a student's question. One such interaction occurs below:

Staff: Wall Photos [posted link]

Student: I can't find the [job] applications.

In this case, a student responds to an unrelated post (a link to a photo album) with a question about a job application – the international center had previously announced student internships at the center – yet the question received no responses. Another interaction was observed in which the staff did not respond to a follow-up question:

Student: What is winter english conversation programme ?

Staff: Hello [student's name], The [English conversation program] is an English practice forum which encourages English language development through casual discussion in a friendly environment. The ECP meets every Monday 4:30 to 5:30 pm at the [center].

Student: How can I join this programme? I wanna to join:)

In both these instances, the staff did not respond to the student's question – in the first dialogue, an implied question, and in the second dialogue, a follow-up question – and thereby did not provide complete information to students. This may be considered an instance in which the staff did not support the student.

The next section covers how students seek and provide support, to staff and to each other.

Students Seeking and Providing Support

This section addresses the question, “In what ways do international students seek from, and provide support to, each other on the international center's Facebook group?” First, I discuss the topics in student-initiated dialogues; what topic prompted interactions between the student and others? I also discuss the communicative patterns students used when seeking support in their posts. Second, I address what topics students discussed with staff members, and which communicative patterns they used

when interacting with staff. Third, I address what topics and communicative patterns students used with each other. Table 11 displays both topics and communicative patterns in student-initiated posts, while Tables 12 and 13 display the topics and communicative patterns in student responses to staff. Tables 14 and 15 display the topics and communicative patterns in student responses to students (see Appendices I1, I2, and I3 for more details).

Table 11

Student-Initiated Dialogues with Staff and Students

	Topic / Type	Support-Seeking Communicative Pattern	N
Students (N=48) initiating posts:	Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	4
	Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	2
	Language	Seeking Complete Information	2
	Social-Emotional	Greeting	2
	Daily Life	Seeking Recommendation	1
	Daily Life	Seeking Recommendation	1
	Financial	Seeking New Information	1
	Daily Life	Seeking New Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
	Career	Seeking Complete Information	1
	Immigration	Seeking Complete Information	1
	Immigration	Seeking New Information	1
	Language	Seeking Alternate Information	1
	Unique	Seeking New Information	1
	Immigration	Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
	Immigration	Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
	Language	Seeking New information	1
	Daily Life	Seeking Alternate Information, Seeking Recommendation, Seeking Daily Life Service	1
	Daily Life	Seeking New Information, Seeking Daily Life Service	1
	Language	Seeking Complete Information	1
	Unique	Seeking Complete Information	1

CULTURES OF SUPPORT

103

Financial	Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
Financial	Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Financial Service	1
Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Academic	Seeking Detailed Information	1
Immigration, Academic	Seeking Complete Information	1
Immigration	Seeking Complete Information, Seeking Immigration Service	1
Daily Life	Seeking New Information	1
Daily Life	Seeking New Information	1
Financial	Seeking Detailed Information	1
Daily Life	Greeting	1
Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Unique	Seeking New Information	1
Daily Life	Seeking Detailed Information	1
Daily Life	Seeking Complete Information	1
Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Financial	Seeking New Information	1
Unique	Greeting	1
Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Daily Life	Seeking New Information	1
Daily Life	Seeking New Information	1
Social-Emotional	Seeking Complete Information	1
Daily Life	Seeking Detailed Information	1

Note. See detailed descriptions of support-seeking communicative patterns in Appendix I1.

In this table (Table 11), I analyzed 48 student-initiated posts and the topics they addressed, both to staff and other students. Students initiated posts on multiple topics: daily life ($N=23$), immigration ($N=6$), language ($N=5$), financial ($N=5$), social-emotional ($N=3$), academic ($N=2$), and career ($N=1$) topics. Posts about daily life topics ($N=23$) varied from accommodation, parking, and public transportation, while posts about immigration posts ($N=6$) focused on travel signatures and visas (Appendix I1). I noted

eight different communicative patterns students used to seek support in their posts, mostly seeking information ($N=38$), which included seeking new information, seeking complete information, seeking detailed information, seeking alternate information, and seeking recommendations. Students also sought service ($N=14$), mostly daily life service (e.g., finding an apartment to live in; buying a car), financial service, or immigration service. The remaining pattern included greeting others in the group (Table 11). Cumulatively, in student-initiated posts, students were seeking information or service and initiated posts on daily life and immigration topics. One example is this post, which I coded as “Seeking Daily Life Service”:

Hello, I'm [name], I am going to come to [the university] in August and will stay there till Feb '11. I will do a six month internship [...] I want to buy a used car and sell it when I leave. Are there students who want to sell their car? Where can I find postings? Can the IC help me with that?

It was unclear in these posts, however, who these students' audience might be: staff or students (Table 11, Appendix I1). The next section addresses students' interactions specifically with staff members.

Topics in Student Responses to Staff

Some students responded directly to staff, and I analyzed 18 of these interactions (Table 12). Students responded to staff posts about daily life ($N=4$), language ($N=4$), immigration ($N=2$), financial ($N=2$), and career ($N=1$) topics. Other excluded posts included student's general responses to posts (e.g., explaining “I can't make it to today's conversation program” or complimenting “Nice photo!”), and were not coded as communicative patterns demonstrating support seeking or support providing. In

summary, the students interacted with staff members on a variety of topics, such as recommended cell phone companies, required vaccines, details about student visas, doing taxes in the U.S., or international banking.

Table 12

Student Responses to Staff

	Topic / Type	Support-Seeking Communicative Pattern	N
Students (N=18) responding to staff:	Unique	N/A	3
	Language	N/A	2
	Immigration	Thanks, Seeking Complete Information	2
	Career	Seeking Complete Information	1
	Unique	Question of Permission	1
	Unique	Seeking Complete Information	1
	Language	Follow-up Question	1
	Language	Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1
	Financial	Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1
	Financial	Follow-up Question, Seeking Financial Service	1
	Daily Life	Thanks, Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
	Daily Life	Follow-up Question, Seeking Recommendation, Seeking Complete Information	1
	Daily Life	Seeking Complete Information	1
Daily Life	Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1	

Note. See detailed descriptions of support-seeking communicative patterns in Appendix I2.

Communicative Patterns in Student Responses to Staff

Additionally, I noted four different communicative patterns students used to seek support in their responses to staff, and two other patterns unrelated to seeking support (Table 13). Typically, these students would either respond to the staff by thanking them and adding an additional (“follow-up”) question to seek more complete information on

the topic. Cumulatively, these students mostly sought information ($N=10$) in their interactions with staff, including seeking complete information, seeking detailed information, and seeking recommendations. Additionally, one student sought a financial service (tax consultations for international students).

Additionally, two communicative patterns I named “discourse functions”¹⁵ indicated politeness towards the staff. Typically, students might thank the staff member for their response, as a way to close the dialogue (e.g., “Thanks, that helps!”) or as a way to continue the dialogue (e.g., “Thanks, but I'd like to know more”)¹⁶. Students might also add a follow-up question to continue the dialogue and seek information. The observation of follow-up questions hinted that the students sought more information.

Table 13

Communicative Patterns in Student Responses to Staff-Initiated Dialogues

Support-Seeking Communicative Pattern	<i>N</i>
Seeking Information ($N=10$)	
Seeking Complete Information	7
Seeking Recommendation	2
Seeking Detailed Information	1
Seeking Service ($N=1$)	
Seeking Financial Service	1
Discourse Functions	<i>N</i>
Follow-up Questions	5
Thanks	2

¹⁵ I define “discourse functions” as a communicative pattern separate from support seeking or support providing. These functions included opening a dialogue (usually “Greeting”), continuing a dialogue (usually “Follow-up Question”), or closing a dialogue (usually “Thanks”).

¹⁶ Note that “Thanks” in this paper sometimes resembles the function of “Acknowledgement” in Halliday's (1984) dialogic structure “Question – Answer – Acknowledgement.”

This type of coding (Table 13) is demonstrated in the following post. In this dialogue, two students sought support from a staff member:

Student 1: Can new graduate international students (I am from India), pay their tuition fee for Fall 11 quarter by way of a Demand Draft (aka: DD) from a bank in India. If Yes, the DD should be in whose name ?

Staff: Please visit the [University] Cashier's Office website: [link] for detailed information about paying tuition and fees.

Student 1: Thanks a lot.

Student 2: [Name of staff] Could you provide details for wire transfer....could not find it in the link...

I coded this post as “Seeking Detailed Information” (the first student asks a detailed question about an international bank transfer; this dialogue was coded under the “Financial” topic. In response, the staff redirects the student to a website for the cashier, after which the first student thanks the staff member (coded as “Thanks”). A second student adds a follow-up question, which I coded as “Seeking Complete Information,” since he states that he opened the link but did not find the information, and would like the staff member to provide the details. The second student's follow-up question suggests that the provided information was incomplete for him.

Topics in Student Responses to Students

I analyzed 40 students responding to other students (Table 14). Students responded to their peers about daily life ($N=29$), immigration ($N=3$), social-emotional ($N=3$), academic ($N=2$), and financial ($N=1$) topics. Daily life topics comprised a majority

(72.5%) of the dialogues between students, whether providing or seeking support. When providing support ($N=24$), a majority ($N=17$; 70.8%) of students' responses were about daily life topics. Additionally, when seeking support ($N=16$), a majority ($N=12$; 75%) of students' posts were also about daily life topics, which ranged from discussions about finding accommodation to selling furniture to local public transportation options (Table 14; Appendix I3).

Table 14

Student Responses to Students

	Topic / Type	Support-Providing Communicative Pattern	Support-Seeking Communicative Pattern	<i>N</i>
Students ($N=40$) responding to students:	Daily Life		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	2
		Information, Link Redirection		1
	Daily Life	Off-Group Contact Redirection		2
	Social-Emotional		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	2
		Personal Recommendation		1
	Immigration	Information, Information about International Center		1
			Follow-Up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1
	Daily Life	Personal Recommendation		1
	Academic	Information		1
	Academic		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1
	Daily Life	Information, Personal Recommendation		1
	Daily Life	Off-Group Contact		1

	Redirection		
Immigration	Information		1
Daily Life	Information, University Redirection, Off-Group Contact Redirection		1
		Seeking Daily Life Service, Seeking Complete Information	1
Daily Life	Link Redirection		1
Unique	Personal Recommendation		1
Daily Life	Information, Link Redirection		1
		Thanks, Seeking Alternate Information	1
Daily Life		Question of Permission, Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Daily Life		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1
Daily Life		Greeting, Personal Questions	1
	Link Redirection		1
Daily Life	Information, Personal Recommendation, University Redirection	Seeking Complete Information	1
		Follow-up Question, Greeting, Personal Questions	1
Financial	Information, Personal Recommendation		1
Daily Life	Information, Off-Group Contact Redirection		1
		Seeking Complete Information	1
Daily Life		Question of Permission, Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Unique	Link Redirection		1
Daily Life	Personal Recommendation		1
Daily Life	Information, University Redirection, Detailed Information		1
Daily Life		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1
Daily Life	Detailed Information, Personal Recommendation, Link Redirection		1

	Seeking Complete Information	1
	Information	1
Daily Life	Detailed Information, Personal Recommendation, Link Redirection	1

Note. Some dialogues included two or more student participants. As a result, every other dialogue is marked in a grey color to distinguish between them. See detailed descriptions of support-seeking and support-providing communicative patterns in Appendix I3.

Communicative Patterns in Student Responses to Students

In contrast to their responses to staff, students both provided support to ($N=24$; 60%) and sought support from ($N=16$; 40%) each other. While staff members only provided support to students, and students only sought support from staff members, students occupied a dual role with each other. In fact, students mostly provided rather than sought information ($N=21$) in their interactions with peers. The four different communicative patterns students used to seek support to students and five different patterns they used to provide support to other students are listed in Table 15.

Additionally, I coded three discourse functions here: follow-up questions, greetings, and thanks. Much like with staff, some students thanked another student for their response or added a follow-up question, usually to seek complete information. Students sought information not only from staff members, but also from each other. In summary, students not only provided support in a similar way to the staff, but they also similarly sought support from each other as they had from the staff.

Table 15

Communicative Patterns in Student Responses to Students

Support-Seeking Communicative Pattern	<i>N</i>
Seeking Information ($N=13$):	

Seeking Complete Information	12
Seeking Alternate Information	1
Seeking Service ($N=3$):	
Seeking Daily Life Service	3
Personal ($N=2$):	
Personal Questions	2
<hr/>	
Support-Providing Communicative Pattern	N
<hr/>	
Providing Information ($N=21$):	
Information	12
Personal Recommendation	9
Redirecting ($N=15$):	
Link Redirection	7
Off-Group Contact Redirection	5
University Redirection	3
<hr/>	
Discourse Functions	N
<hr/>	
Follow-up Questions	9
Greeting	2
Thanks	1
<hr/>	

Additionally, I observed that interactions between students were more personal than between staff and students. In their responses to their peers, students posted personal information such as email addresses or cell phone numbers, provided more personal recommendations, or announced that they had sent the other student a private message (e.g., "I've PMed you"). The greeting function was unique to student interactions, as were personal questions, and more students provided personal recommendations ($N=9$) than staff members ($N=1$). Here is a dialogue between two students that I characterized as personal, about accommodation:

Student 1: Hello All, I am [name], from [a university in Finland]. I am coming to

[this university] for three months starting July 1st till 30th Sept. I am looking for accommodation during this time. Can someone please advice me on this one?

Student 2: Hey [Student 1], we have a room to offer starting June 22 till Sept 14, drop me a [personal Facebook message] if interested.

Student 1: Hey can u please send details?? I am interested also u can email me at [email address].

Student 2: [Student 1], check ur [Facebook message inbox].

This post exemplifies the personalized language patterns in many of the student-student dialogues. The first student specifically asks for a recommendation (“Can someone please advice me”), one or more students respond personally, reaching out to the first student, and the first student posts a personal email address, which is followed up by a private message.

Additionally, the language in student-student dialogues was often informal, characterized by the use of emoticons (“-_____ -lll”), multiple punctuation marks (“!!!”), or abbreviations (“lol”). Following is a dialogue between three students, about an advertised beach excursion held by the international center. In this dialogue, all three students attempted to look for the information about the excursion, but were unsuccessful. The three relied on each other for information, and the first student concluded by inviting the other two students on another beach day:

Student 1: Hello, fellows International students, Anyone would confirm if there is a beach fun time this weekend? I remember I read somthin in the first week ,but not sure tho. Any clarification would be appreciated :)

thx

Student 2: yeah i have the same question...because now it isnt on the website :(

Dont know to go there or not...

Student 3: me too... we were supposed to meet at [the] parking lot at 12,30 but

there's nothing on the web

Student 1: if i knew that you guys were down , we should have gone all together

:) let's do it .. Beach day :)

In this post, there is both the use of informal language (e.g., emoticons, “thx”) that was characteristic of some student dialogues. Additionally, after the first student announces that she cannot find the complete information anywhere, the second and third students echo this point. This dialogue in particular also confirms that because these three students rely on the international center's website for their information, the website itself is an important source of information, something that most students seek. Finally, in both posts, the students employed patterns of support-seeking and support-providing.

Summary of Results

In this chapter, I examined how support is communicated through a Facebook group. The three main findings of this study were that: 1) students wrote mostly about daily life topics, while staff members wrote mostly about immigration and language topics; 2) staff distinctly positioned themselves as support-providers while students positioned themselves as both support-seekers and support-providers (to other students); and 3) staff members never sought student input through questions or follow-up questions.

My first finding was that contrary to staff, students wrote mostly about daily life

topics. Daily Life was the most-coded topic category in all student dialogues (Tables 11 and 14). Daily life topics also comprised most ($N=25$; 64.9%) student monologues, although these were not included in this chapter's analysis. Staff, on the other hand, initiated more posts about immigration and language topics, namely about student visas, work visas, and the English conversation program (Table 9). This finding indicates that these students directly supported their peers' non-academic lives. In contrast, with all but one exception, staff members responded to questions about daily life topics by redirecting students to website links or campus locations (Table 9), rather than answering them with the requested information, as students had.

My second finding was that communicative patterns differed between students and staff, particularly in providing support. In interactions between staff and students I observed what I define as *one-way* communicative patterns; that is, precise positions of support-providers (i.e., the staff members) and support-seekers (i.e., the students). In contrast, the interactions between students were reciprocal; that is, students were both support-providers and support-seekers. Additionally, students used more informal and personal language when supporting each other. This finding is demonstrated in Table 16, and was illustrated earlier in Figure 2.

Table 16

All Communicative Strategies in Facebook Group Dialogues

Support-Seeking Communicative Patterns	Staff Responses to Students	Student Responses to Staff	Student Responses to Students
Seeking Complete Information		X	X
Seeking Alternate Information			X
Seeking Detailed Information		X	

Seeking Recommendation		X	
Seeking Daily Life Service			X
Seeking Financial Service		X	
Personal Questions			X
Support-Providing Communicative Patterns			
Providing Information	X		X
Providing Information about International Center	X		
Announcement	X		
Personal Recommendation	X		X
Link Redirection	X		X
Off-Group Contact Redirection	X		X
International Center Redirection	X		
University Redirection	X		X
Discourse Functions			
Follow-up Questions		X	X
Greeting			X
Thanks		X	X

My third finding was that staff never positioned themselves as seeking student input (e.g., asking questions). For instance, students included discourse functions such as follow-up questions in their posts, but staff did not. For example, had staff asked students a question on the Facebook group (e.g., “What activities would you like the international center to hold?” or “What what would you tell a new international student about moving to California?”), this might have opened up a dialogue in which students provided information to the staff. While international students are a complex group of individuals representing multiple cultural backgrounds, the fact that this type of interaction – a staff member asking for student input – was never observed is in itself an

endorsement of the finding that staff positioned themselves only in one way: as support-providers. This finding endorses the observation that staff interacted with students only as support-providers.

In summary, students wrote mostly about daily life topics, staff positioned themselves as providing support, while students positioned themselves as reciprocally support-seekers and support-providers, and staff members never sought student input in the group. These findings indicate a potential richness for student participation in university Facebook groups, particularly peer support-providing. In addition, these findings highlight a couple of gaps in the international center staff members' use of the group: first, that staff do not post about what students do, and second, that staff do not seek student input. These are both gaps that can be met. A further discussion follows in the next chapter.

Other Notes

In addition to exploring how these staff engaged with international students, and how students interacted with each other in the Facebook group, there are two other notes to be made before concluding this chapter. First, I address how students in the focus groups and interviews talked about using Facebook. Second, I discuss the limitations of this study.

Perceptions on Facebook in the Interviews and Focus Groups

In my conversations with international students (Chapter 5), most participants reported using Facebook frequently, although all the Chinese students were new users (China has banned Facebook). Only three participants (NR, Focus Group 2; K, Interview 1; N, Interview 2) said they had Facebook accounts but hadn't used them

much. However, many of the participants reported that they used Facebook frequently and most participants reported that a university's use of Facebook groups or pages could be advantageous. For most participants, the advantage of using Facebook was that it was convenient and easy to access, a finding repeated in Saw et al's (2013) study. One participant provided me with an example of a scenario in which classmates supported each other on Facebook before a final exam, after the university's internal website temporarily shut down:

During finals week last quarter, at night it was like 10:00 [pm] or something [and the university learning management system] crashed and went down. And everyone was on the Facebook page [of this class we were enrolled in]. They were like, “[The website] is down. How am I supposed to study for my final?” OK, you know all my notes are online and my lecture slides are online and everyone's trying to help each other. They were like, “Hey, try this.” [So] it's a good way to get people kind of connected. (C, Interview 6)

In addition to using Facebook as an alternate source of information for academic support, a few participants stated that they would use Facebook to look for information on events (Interviews 4 and 7). Another participant spoke about the social purpose of Facebook:

[If I were looking for information on this Facebook group, I would look for] the activities they are going to have, and who is in this group. Like, when I go to their activities, I won't be alone. I can have some old friends to stay with and I can also make some new friends. 'Cause if I go there myself then everybody else there is strangers to me and maybe I'll just stand there and I'm afraid to talk to other

people maybe. But I think I will meet some new people there (N, Interview 5).

In this statement, N points out that for her the Facebook group represented a potential space to meet with and make friends with others, something another participant stated in her interview:

[Facebook] is also a good place for people who don't actually go to school to find information about the school to maybe like look at the demographics to go, like, "Hey I know this person," or to look at basically how the school feels like as a community ... It doesn't really feel the same as an offline community but maybe it just gives them good feeling ... when you're [in an online community] you can kind of tell the kind of people the students are just generally nice. (C, Interview 6)

In addition to seeking information on university websites and Facebook groups, participants emphasized the social benefits of a Facebook group as a space for both academic and social support. The last participant (C, Interview 6) also claimed that Facebook groups could provide students with a sense of belonging at a university.

These findings from the interviews and focus groups endorse the concept of a Facebook group as a space in which students can support each other, an observed finding in this chapter; students already support each other in the Facebook group. Furthermore, Facebook may provide a unique space for supporting non-academic needs (i.e., daily life needs) of international students.

However, there were two caveats about Facebook use. As the interviews and focus group participants reported, reaching Chinese students through Facebook is not always possible. Furthermore, interview and focus group participants also spoke about their concerns with Facebook: namely, that there is a perceived lack of credibility among

East Asian students and there is too much information on Facebook. A recent study confirmed that most prospective Chinese international students checked onto Chinese social networking sites but only 22% regularly logged onto U.S. websites, including Facebook (Choudaha, Orosz & Chang, 2012, p. 17). Another study (Saw et al, 2013) also pointed out that Chinese students used Facebook less regularly than other students, preferring to use Renren instead. This lack of use may continue into these students' stay in the U.S. As most of the participants in this study were from Asian countries, using Facebook may be viewed by these participants as too informal. For instance, one participant from Indonesia explained at length why she believed Facebook was not a credible support space for universities:

Especially from other countries, we are under that impression [that Facebook is not a credible space because] things have to be formal to a certain extent. So if you have a university for example, like a class online, right? Sketchy place.

That's what [international students] are under the impression of. ... Like, someone from an Asian country will probably think like that. (N, Interview 2)

Additionally, one participant explained why Facebook may be a space in which too much information can overwhelm international students:

[The disadvantage of Facebook is] the information will just pop up on my phone. And I think it is very annoying sometimes so I just ignore all of [the notifications] so maybe I'll miss some very important information on Facebook. So I think if the international center wants to use Facebook, they need to also send us some emails or text messages so we won't get it only from Facebook. (N, Interview 5)

This concept – that Facebook has the potential of overwhelming users with information

and notifications – also appeared in this conversation with another participant:

[Facebook groups sometimes have] too many members in there or too many posts. They will just go all the way down, and you cannot find it anymore. You know, when you're following, or having too many friends following too many pages, it could be flooded. It could include some important announcement for me, but it [would get lost]. (NR, Focus Group 2)

Given that students' primary communicative strategy for seeking support is to seek information (this chapter), that participants spoke frequently about seeking information in their interviews and focus groups (Chapter 5), and that too much information was a barrier for these participants (Chapter 5), too much information on Facebook is a clear obstacle in providing support. In summary, Facebook usage is common even among newly-arrived Chinese students, and provides a space for online peer, academic, and social support. However, these participants also stated that Facebook could also look non-credible and could provide too much overwhelming information.

Limitations

Finally, this study focused on dialogues in which support-providing and support-seeking was observable. However, the study excludes analysis of monologues, in which no one responded to the post. I deduce that this absence complicated the coding; how was I to observe support being provided if no one responded? One of the interviewees (Z, Interview 4) indicated why this would be a concern:

S: Do you interact in these three Facebook groups a lot?

Z: I would check information.

S: Check information. So, you just read?

Z: Yeah.

S: But you are not necessarily posting?

Z: Yes.

As Z demonstrates, observing support-providing is problematic. As a result, monologues are not discussed in this paper. However, as monologues were the majority of the posts in this Facebook group, the observed sample – of dialogues – is smaller in size and may be less revealing of other support-seeking and support-providing patterns.

VI. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore university support of international undergraduate students. International students, particularly East Asian students, are an increasing presence on this campus, and at other campuses in the U.S., and universities and international centers are faced with the question of how to best support these students. In this study, I conducted focus groups and interviews with students, gave an online survey to international center staff members, and conducted an analysis of Facebook group interactions. Throughout this study, I answered research questions which asked about the types of support students needed, their sources of support, the barriers and difficulties they faced, the ways in which staff and students communicated, students' opinions about the international center, and ways in which staff defined and provided support.

One main theme emerges in this chapter, and all findings are a subset of this theme: there is a difference in *cultures* of support, which I define as the attitudes about and characteristic behaviors of support in a particular group. These cultures contribute to the campus climate, as Swail (2004) points out: "Campus climate is the development of the beliefs and practices of the administration, faculty, staff, and students belonging to that institution" (p. 31). Specifically, student participants spoke of cultures of support that emphasized relationships, reciprocity and warmth, perhaps as a result of the students' cultural backgrounds which emphasize collectivism and interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, international center staff spoke of cultures of support that resembled a business model, emphasizing institutional responsibility, managerial interactions, formal assessment, and the provision of services and programs. In other words, while students

spoke of a *caring, relational* culture of support, staff members spoke of a *bureaucratic* culture. Finally, international students may have varying expectations, not only of interpersonal relationships at the university, but also of U.S. culture in general, compounding the differences in these cultures of supports.

Overview: Caring Support and the Institution

Cultures of support differed, primarily between the staff members at the international center and the international undergraduate students who participated in the study. Students interacted with each other in a reciprocal way (Chapter 7) and spoke of the importance of peer support and others who were beacons of support (Chapter 5). They emphasized relationships in which communication was helpful and responsive, and sometimes felt like family. They responded positively to peer support in their life, which was informal but warm. This rhetorical emphasis on affective, interpersonal cultures of support among a community of students was guided, in part, by the cultural contexts of these students. As Tsai and Wong (2012) put it, “Because of their collectivistic cultural backgrounds, Asian international students may value opportunities for interpersonal connections” (p. 145). In addition, this transition from high school to university – from dependence to independence – can be a challenging time of differing cultural expectations, no matter the student's nationality.

This concept of caring support aligns with several key East Asian and Western cultural paradigms, such as the Confucian concept of self as “irreducibly interpersonal” (Herr, 2003, p. 471); *jeong*, the Korean concept of attachment and affection between people (Korea Tourism Organization, 2014); *guanxi*, the Chinese concept of relationships (Lin, 2010); and even Nel Noddling's care ethic, a moral philosophy that

emphasizes caring, reciprocal relationships (Nodding, 2013). While these philosophies and paradigms do not completely agree with each other, they converge on one essential point that student participants in this study emphasized: the importance of caring.

Supportive relationships are fundamental to students' positive university experiences. One participant framed it this way: "If I have a relationship with others, language and culture problems could be solved" (Y, Focus Group 1). Ultimately, one of the purposes of an undergraduate-serving university is to provide an infrastructure in which students can feel like they belong to the university community (e.g., Bean and Eaton, 2001). This sense of belonging can be provided within the context of caring relationships between staff and students. Multiple studies (e.g., Bista & Foster, 2011; Choudaha, Chang & Kono, 2013; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011) recommend that positive, responsive relationships between faculty, staff and students be promoted.

In contrast, this emphasis on caring was absent in the staff responses and staff interactions with students, which affirmed a bureaucratic culture. In other words, this culture emphasized the staff members' role of support-providing (Chapter 7) through information, services, and in collaboration with other offices (Chapter 6). I define this bureaucratic culture of support as one in which staff members enact positions of authority, by providing support to students in a formal way (e.g., meeting students only by appointment; requesting that paperwork be submitted by a deadline; redirecting students to other university offices that offer types of support they do not).

This culture of support likely emerged from a necessity to "comply with government regulations" as the center's mission statement claims, in a post-September 11 society. And most student participants reported that the center was efficient at their

work (e.g., “They’re knowledgeable and they do help me”). In fact, these cultures – bureaucratic and caring and relational – can exist in harmony. However, these cultures also conflict: a bureaucratic culture implies that students act as self-sufficient seekers of support, guided, in part, by the cultural contexts of the U.S., one of the most individualistic countries in the world (The Hofstede Center, 2014). Furthermore, this bureaucratic culture may be unfamiliar to some international students from different cultures, and a lack of caring, interpersonal relationships may alienate others.

For some participants, seeking support from “school probably is my last try” (NR, Focus Group 2). While many participants reported interactions with helpful staff, some noted that bureaucracy could define, and frustrate, their interactions, serving as an impediment to seeking support. For instance, N explained, “Last time I had a problem with my immigration status it’s like: ‘Do you want to see a counselor?’ ‘Yes.’ And then they, ok, you have to make an appointment. You can’t see immediately the counselor there” (Interview 2). This exchange frustrated N. In contrast, staff friendliness – and positive relationships in general – were greatly valued in all focus group and interview conversations, just as unfriendly and unhelpful support was seen as a barrier. One participant said:

For me [it’s important that the school has] staff that are willing to *be friend* with students [and] make them *feel comfortable* to share about their problem with them. Because sometimes students [are] really shy to talk to people and I need someone I feel comfortable to talk with (N, Focus Group 1, emphasis mine).

This quotation emphasizes the importance of a caring, relational cultures of support. Staff members and faculty can uniquely support students by caring for them.

Recommendation: Caring cultures of support. Universities and university offices such as the international center need to place care at the heart of support. Perhaps more importantly, the conceptualization of support as caring and relational is one that should be aligned with the institutional mission. Is caring and responsiveness an objective of support? Is there a sense of family or coziness in the center? If not, there ought to be. Although many university offices are required to comply with administrative tasks and a bureaucratic culture of support – there is a necessity for services, needs assessment, and paperwork – what this study suggests are supplementary cultures of caring and interpersonal relationships. Cultures of care should guide bureaucracy. In this regard, our findings concur with previous literature suggesting that international students' cultural and affective concerns be supported by universities.

The next section outlines the three main findings across the study, all related to these two differing cultures of support: 1) A Need for Daily Life Support; 2) Communicating Support; and 3) The Ideal International Center.

1. A Need for Daily Life Support

Throughout my research, I found that university support can be extended beyond the university walls, into the students' daily, off-campus lives, and can include more than just a few types of support¹⁷. Yet when I looked at different student support websites, including the undergraduate division's "Student Support Services" page, the types of support listed included financial, social, and academic support. Additionally, the

¹⁷ I define "types of support" as categories of support that have common characteristics and encompass common needs.

international center states in its mission statement that it provides academic and cultural support, and in the Facebook group staff members initiated more posts about student visas, work visas, and the English conversation program. Yet what students mentioned needing support with was not provided by any office: daily life support.

Daily life support, which I define as support for students' non-academic, non-social lives, is an *unmet*, maybe even unnoticed, student need. Yet this need was a clear cry in most focus groups, interviews, and Facebook posts by students. Most international students struggle to answer the questions anyone moving to a new country might ask: Where will I live? Where is the nearest supermarket? How will I commute to the supermarket? How do I open a bank account? Which cell phone company should I choose? Is it safe to travel in this country? How do I make friends with the locals? What should I talk about with them? These questions exist in addition to others, such as how to write a paper effectively, where to study, how to pay tuition fees, and which jobs or graduate programs to apply for after graduating. And when the participants needed help with their daily lives, they asked their friends, or other peers such as resident assistants or international peer mentors. However, no university office dealt specifically with these concerns.

Recommendation: Support the daily life needs of international students.

More inclusive cultures of support recognizes that international students have needs beyond what is currently offered (e.g., academic support, bureaucratic support, language support). Students spoke about their daily life needs were spoken most. University staff and international centers working with international students need to recognize that support extends into even the daily lives of these students. Supporting

these daily life needs may be as simple as creating a webpage or pamphlet, or including this type of support in peer mentoring programs, which are often focused on cultural support (Kim & Egan, 2011). Students also spoke about the support they received while living in dormitories, perhaps the most germane space in which to support students' daily lives. Finally, but no less importantly, faculty and staff members can take personal responsibility in guiding students with these needs, as demonstrated by the writing teacher of one participant: "Not only she walked me through all the grammatical stuff, but also she walked me through all the difficulties I encountered [in my] daily life about America" (NR, Focus Group 2).

2. Communicating Support

In this study, support is largely about *information*: seeking complete information, providing sufficient information, redirecting others to sources of further information. This contrasted with the staff members' perceptions in which providing services was seen as nearly synonymous with providing support (Chapter 6). While providing services was a part of providing support in the Facebook group (Chapter 7), it was only a secondary part. As students' focus group and interview responses and their Facebook group interactions indicate, providing information is often synonymous with providing support, perhaps uniquely to online spaces. Consequently, communicating information emerged as a critical component of support, a finding echoed in studies in which communication was noted as critical to students' cultural adaptation (e.g., Jones & Kim, 2013). Additionally, online information – through emails, websites, and social media – emerged as a primary way students sought support.

For the most part, student participants sought information on their own, guiding

themselves through online search tools, Facebook pages and groups, email lists, or university website visits. Others read other materials such as pamphlets, and only one participant visited the international center in person to seek information. In other words, the online world provided a wealth of information that these students could rely on.

However, students also reported experiencing communication barriers. For instance, some participants reported that there was too much information online, or that they received mixed information from staff members. Similarly, students noted ways in which staff members could communicate more clearly with students. Because most student participants relied on emails as a communication form, these students stated a preference for responsive communication (e.g., replying to an email quickly). Additionally, students noted that staff should reply with more complete information. Communication was to be clear, responsive, and to provide complete information in response to students' questions. This need for complete information was also observed in the Facebook group interactions.

From this study, it could be implied that students who visited the center to seek information had already done so online. For instance, a student may have visited the international center's website to search for information about an OPT work visa, and, upon lacking complete information, visited the international center to ask a staff member for more information in person. However, as one participant noted, being redirected by a staff member to "just go online" was incomprehensible (J, Focus Group 2). In other words, visiting a staff member in person may be a second or third stage in a student's search for information, after the student has already gone online (the first stage) or emailed a staff member (the first or second stage). Being redirected online, a frequent

communicative pattern in the Facebook group, was one thing. While redirection is another way to provide information, it can also be seen as frustrating for those students who have exhausted other ways to seek information and turn to seeking information in person.

Given the importance of online support, the Facebook group provided an opportunity to unobtrusively observe the differences in ways students and staff communicated with each other. While the purpose of communication remained the same – mostly seeking and providing information – staff and students differed in the supportive roles they adopted online. Staff members placed themselves in the position of support-providers, while implicitly placing students in the position of support-seekers. In contrast, students interacted reciprocally with each other, both providing and seeking support. While information was the objective of most of these interactions, the roles shifted when students interacted with their peers. Despite the rich potential for peer support and student responses in the Facebook group, staff members did not seek student input. In contrast, staff members emphasized a collaborative model of support in which more than one office would support international students, and often used redirection as a communicative pattern in their interactions with students. This triangle of support diffusion – not seeking student input, collaborating with other offices to provide support, and redirecting students' questions – lends to cultures of support in which staff members can step aside from the central responsibility of providing support. While staff members did provide support to students, some students spoke of the negative experiences they had when seeking support at the center. The reason for these negative experiences typically related to misinformation or redirection.

Recommendation: A responsive model of communication. Because information is such a critical component of support, providing complete information is fundamental for university support. In particular, university staff members should ensure that complete information is provided online on their website, as this is where most international students will first seek information. However, if international students do not find all the information they need, and the information is not readily available through their peers, they may send an email or speak with a faculty or staff member in person. Emails from international students should be responded to, even if the information being sought is outside the realm of one's job; a couple of student participants spoke highly of people who provided information, even when it was “not a part of [their jobs]” (N, Interview 5). Additionally, faculty and staff members who respond kindly, as if they know the students “very well,” are perceived warmly (NR, Focus Group 2), a finding that affirms caring, relational cultures of support. In fact, even if staff members did not have the information the students were seeking, a caring response (e.g., “I'm sorry I don't know this, but here's a website / person who can help”) would be seen as responsive and helpful. For instance, the beacon of support that N identified admitted he did not always have an answer to her questions: “And he told me he doesn't know about this kind of information,” she said, adding, “and then he gave me some information” (Interview 5). Establishing one or two staff contact people – something Moores and Popadiuk (2011) also recommend – will help students seek support from and feel more comfortable adjusting to the university.

Websites and emails are not the only way to communicate responsively with students, however. Providing an offline space for student input is important; though

international center staff members never included student input, this is exactly what some student participants wished for. This is characteristic in this quotation by Z:

I think the international center can offer more chances to communicate with us, and to share our trouble or experience or something with them ... I think they can have communication with international students [to] understand their trouble ... [The staff can] set a specific period of time in a week and let international students come in and talk with them, share their problems. (Z, Interview 4)

Implementing an intentionally responsive model of communication, which includes sending informative responses and perhaps providing international students a space in which to “talk with [staff], share their problems,” is a poignant recommendation emerging from this study.

3. The Ideal International Center

Students mostly reported using the international center as a “visa stop” for all their immigration needs. And while immigration support is unquestionably necessary – for the most part, students found this support helpful – when students reported interacting with staff, they did not report feeling warmth in the interactions; in fact, a few reported negative experiences. Students also stated that the center was not a place they would like to “hang out” in. However, when asked about what an “ideal” international center would look like, student participants expressed a distinct vision of what support might look like: cozy and peer-focused. The ideal international center was not only a physical atmosphere, but more importantly a social and emotional one. The terms “family” and “home” imply a type of coziness that extends beyond academic life, to personal life. The distinction between the university world and the personal one is

blurred in these participants' ideal international center. Additionally, one participant described an international center where students could communicate with each other – “gather, and share their experience, and talk about their life here” – a student-to-student, not a student-staff, relationship. In other words, she contrasted the traditional, bureaucratic relationship between student and staff with the “coziness” and more intimate social relationships possible between students. This participant also imagined that this type of inter-peer relationship would also benefit the center (N, Interview 2). While peer support occurred on the Facebook group, there was a discrepancy between the Facebook group and what happened when students walk into the center. The center has not been designed as a place for students to experience caring, relational support, which indicates an under-utilized opportunity. While students did feel that they were effectively supported in some ways by the center, particularly in immigration support, this was an overlooked chance to provide both cultures of support.

In conjunction with this chapter's earlier suggestion that universities provide daily life support, I also found that students also wanted the international center to provide daily life support. For instance, when asked what she thought the international center could do, one participant replied, “Maybe they could give help with, like, advising ... [like] pros and cons about telephones, daily necessities. Sometimes we also need that kind of thing. For example, like telephone company, credit card company, that kind of thing” (N, Interview 2). Another participant, Z, suggested that the international center help with these needs, because “I don't think they have any support [for] daily life”:

I think, [in addition to academic support, the international center] can provide us with more help in our life. Because ... if you don't have your parents here you

want to go shopping or something like that. I mean, the daily life assistance can provide us more help (Z, Interview 4).

Conversely, other forms of support seemed more important to staff. For instance, staff initiated more posts on immigration and language topics, focused primarily on announcing an upcoming English conversation program or workshop, or a travel signature session. In other words, while students sought daily life support, staff focused more on providing other types of support. The two groups – students and staff – were simply looking at student needs from different lenses.

Recommendation: A social, student-focused international center. While international centers have had to spend more time on federal responsibilities (i.e., maintaining the required visa database, SEVIS) as a result of increased security laws, there is still room for comfort and social support in an international center. Improving a space to make it more student-friendly could be as simple as creating a central study lounge, including student input in design, and focusing on making the center a social student space first and an immigration space second. In our conversations, students idealized a space in which they could meet other international students; in other words, they envisioned a social space. As it stands, this university's international center positions itself as a space in which students only visit to meet staff members, not other students. Yet institutionalizing that social support at the international center is a way to provide a campus space for this peer support to occur.

An Additional Note about Facebook

Throughout this research, both in monitoring the Facebook group but also in talking with student participants, I saw that the Facebook group had the potential for

being a caring, relational support space. For instance, students spoke with each more informally, both seeking and providing information from and with each other.

Additionally, student participants stated that using Facebook was positive for both convenience and ease of access. Universities may use Facebook groups and pages as an alternate online space in which to both provide information and offer a place for naturally-occurring peer support. However, few participants had seen the Facebook group or were even aware of its existence, and the group had little online activity compared to other international student Facebook groups at the same university (e.g., a social activity student group called “International Club”¹⁸), and staff-student interactions were not reciprocal in the way that student-student interactions. The staff members replicated a position of authority in that they provided support, but never sought it. It is my opinion that this imbalance in power in an online space corresponds with the bureaucratic culture of support represented in the physical space of the international center.

In summary, Facebook has the potential for rich, relational support and communication, even if this specific group did not demonstrate such potential. In addition, there are a couple of other caveats about Facebook use, such as its potential lack of credibility among East Asian students, and a lack of access by Chinese students. Consequently, future research on the institutional Facebook groups, with an eye to the potential limitations among East Asian students, may reveal more results than this study produced.

A Final Note on the Strength of Students

¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/iclubuci/>

Much of the literature on international students is rhetorically focused on these students' *struggles*, and I am cautious of such rhetoric. For instance, many studies discuss the difficulties international students experience when they move to the U.S. (e.g., depression, alienation, culture shock). While these acculturative struggles did appear in this study, there was also a presence of *strength*. Despite their struggles, it is my objective to state a counter-narrative of a group of international travelers who struggle, yet are brave. These are people who, for the most part, have left their family and friends in another country at a young age to move to a new country and become immersed in a new language and new ways of thinking and being. As Bista and Foster (2011) state, "fortunately for North American universities, many [international students] are dedicated to receiving a degree in higher education and carry out their studies *in spite of* the additional difficulties" (p. 1, emphasis mine). Additionally, one study found "no evidence to corroborate the generalization that international students experience more serious alienation than do American students" (Klomegah, 2006). These students' strength cannot be underestimated. However, there is a growing interest in focusing on the "positive aspect of crossing cultures" (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011, p. 292): one study in the early 1990s found that international students described themselves in positive terms such as "determined, thankful, happy, confident, cheerful, and cautious" and that they "seemed to cope well [and] overcome obstacles" (Parr, Bradley & Bingi, 1992, as paraphrased in Moores & Popadiuk, 2011, p. 292). Yet there remains a need to care for these students, to support their struggles and applaud their ability to adjust.

Future Research

As my literature review indicated earlier, there is an increasing number of studies

on international students. However, few studies in higher education have addressed the intersection between student and staff cultures of support. Consequently, the recommendations I have made are not only pragmatic suggestions, but also points from which to take future research. Specifically, future studies can address topics such as: international center staff members' perspectives on support; the environmental psychology of international center spaces; evaluative studies of institutional ways of providing daily life support; the sources and types of support provided in dormitories; and the role of Facebook groups in providing an informal, online space for peer support. Additionally, financial needs and financial support are under-explored arenas in international student research; it is possible that this study's participants – most of whom did not report needing financial aid – were more representative of the increasingly wealthy middle class of East Asians studying in the U.S. than they were of international students from other regions and socio-economic positions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, support students is about caring. While there is need for a bureaucratic culture of support, there is also need for caring, relational cultures of support. Additionally, the daily life needs of international students should not be overlooked by universities seeking to support this growing population, and daily life support should be implemented at international centers as well as by anyone working with international students. Additionally, communication with international students should be responsive, and online communication (i.e., websites, email, social media) in particular should be accurately informative, and provide spaces for communication between staff and students, and between students and their peers. Finally, international

centers ought to consider placing student comfort and peer support as a primary objective of their spaces, thereby allowing international students to thrive in a student-centered space of care.

IX. References

- Abdullah, D., Aziz, M. I. A., & Ibrahim, A. L. M. (2013). A “research” into international student-related research: (Re)Visualising our stand? *Higher Education*, 1-19. doi: 10.1007/s10734-013-9647-3
- Altach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11, 290-305. doi: 10.1177/1028315307303542
- Andrade, M. S. (2006). International student persistence: Integration or cultural integrity? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(1), 57-81.
- Barkhuus, L., & Tashiro, J. (2010, April). *Student socialization in the age of Facebook*. Paper session presented at the Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), Atlanta, GA.
- Bartlett, T., & Fischer, K. (2011, November 3). The China Conundrum: American colleges find the Chinese-student boom a tricky fit. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Chinese-Students-Prove-a/129628>
- Bean, J., & Eaton, S. B. (2001). The psychology underlying successful retention practices. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 3(1), 73-89.
- Beykont, Z.F., & Daiute, C. (2002). Inclusiveness in higher education courses: International student perspectives. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(1), 35-42. doi: 10.1080/713845250
- Bista, K., & Foster, C. (2011). Issues of international student retention in American higher education. *The International Journal of Research and Review*, 7(2), 1-10.

- Bochner, S., Buker, E.A., & McLeod, B.M. (1976). Communication patterns in an international student dormitory: A modification of the small world method. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 6*(3), 275-290.
- Bochner, S., McLeod, B.M., & Lin, A. (1977). Friendship patterns of overseas students: A functional model. *International Journal of Psychology, 12*(4), 277-294.
- boyd, d. m., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13*(1). Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>
- Choudaha, R., Chang, L., & Kono, Y. (2013). International student mobility trends 2013: Towards responsive recruitment strategies. *World Education Services*. Retrieved December 1, 2013, from <http://www.wes.org/RAS>
- Choudaha, R., Orosz, K., & Chang, L. (2012). Not all international students are the same: Understanding segments, mapping behavior. *World Education Services*. Retrieved December 1, 2013, from <http://www.wes.org/RAS>
- Connell, R. S. (2009). Academic libraries, Facebook and MySpace, and student outreach: A survey of student opinion. *Libraries and the Academy, 9*(1), 25-36.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Eland, A., & Thomas, K. (2013). Succeeding abroad: International students in the United States. In H. C. Alberts & H. D. Hazen (Eds.), *International students and scholars in the United States: Coming from abroad* (145-162). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook "friends":

- Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, 1143-1168. doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x
- Friedlander, L. J., Reid, G. J., Shupak, N., & Cribbie, R. (2007). Social support, self-esteem, and stress as predictors of adjustment to university among first-year undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(3), 259-274. doi: 10.1353/csd.2007.0024
- Fugate, D. L., & Jefferson, R. W. (2001). Preparing for globalization: Do we need structural change for our academic programs? *Journal of Education for Business*, 1, pp. 160-166.
- Gill, S. (2007). Overseas students' intercultural adaptation as intercultural learning: A transformative framework. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 37(2), 167-183. doi: 10.1080/03057920601165512
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research observations*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Glass, C. R. (2011). Educational experiences associated with international students' learning, development, and positive perceptions of campus climate. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 16(3), 228-251. doi: 10.1177/1028315311426783
- Gordon, L. (2012, January 13). More out-of-state, foreign students apply to UC schools. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://latimes.com/la-me-uc-apply-20120113,0,6397867.story>
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1984). Language as code and language as behaviour: A systemic

- functional interpretation of the nature and ontogenesis of language. In R. Fawcett, M. A. K. Halliday, S. M. Lamb, & A. Makkai (Eds.), *The semiotics of culture and language*. London: Frances Pinter.
- Hampton, K. N., Goulet, L. S., Rainie, L., & Purcell, K. (2011). *Social networking sites and our lives*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet Research Center. Retrieved from <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Technology-and-social-networks.aspx>
- Hanna, D. E. (1998). Higher education in an era of digital competition: Emerging organizational models. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 2(1), pp. 66-95.
- Institute of International Education (2013A). *Open Doors 2013: "Fast Facts."* Retrieved November 11, 2013, from <http://www.iie.org/~media/Files/Corporate/Open-Doors/Fast-Facts/Fast-Facts-2013>
- Institute of International Education (2013B). *Open Doors 2013: International students in the United States and study abroad by American students are at all-time high*. Retrieved November 11, 2013, from <http://www.iie.org/Who-We-Are/News-and-Events/Press-Center/Press-Releases/2013/2013-11-11-Open-Doors-Data>
- Jones, R., & Kim, Y. S. (2013). Communication experiences of international students in the U.S.: A comparison study of cross-cultural adaptation between European and Asian students. *Scientia et Humanitas*, 3, 83-104. Retrieved from <http://capone.mtsu.edu/scientia/ojs/index.php/seth/article/view/86>
- Junco, R., & Cole-Avent, G. A. (2008). An introduction to technologies commonly used by college students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 124, 3-17. doi: 10.1002/ss.292

- Junco, R. (2011). The relationship between frequency of Facebook use, participation in Facebook activities, and student engagement. *Computers & Education, 58*, 162-171. doi: 10.1016/j.compedu.2011.08.004
- Kim, K. H., Yun, H., & Yoon, Y. (2009). The Internet as a facilitator of cultural hybridization and interpersonal relationship management for Asian international students in South Korea. *Asian Journal of Communication, 19*(2), 152-169. doi: 10.1080/01292980902826880
- Klomegah, R. Y. (2006). Social factors relating to alienation experienced by international students in the United States. *College Student Journal, 40*(2).
- Korea Tourism Organization. (2014). *Gi, heung, jeong culture*. Retrieved March 28, 2014, from http://visitkorea.or.kr/enu/CU/CU_EN_8_8_1_1.jsp
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., & Whitt, E. J. (2010). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kim, S., & Egan, T. (2011). Establishing a formal cross-cultural mentoring organization and program: A case study of International Student Mentor Association in a higher education context. *Journal of European Industrial Training, 35*(1), 89-105. doi: 10.1108/030905911111095754
- Lacina, J. A. (2002). Preparing international students for a successful social experience in higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education, 117*, 21-27.
- Lee, J. J. (2007). Neo-racism toward international students. *About Campus, 11*(6), 28-30. doi: 10.1002/abc.194

- Lin, L. H. (2010). Cultural and organizational antecedents of *guanxi*: The Chinese cases. *Journal of Business Ethics, 99*, 441-451. doi: 10.1007/s10551-010-0662-3
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). "Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 16*(2), 82-90. doi: 10.1108/09513540210418403
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Montgomery, C., & McDowell, L. (2009). Social networks and the international student experience: An international community of practice? *Journal of Studies in International Education, 13*(4), 455-466. doi: 10.1177/1028315308321994
- Moore, L., & Popadiuk, N. (2011). Positive aspects of international student transitions: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of College Student Development, 52*(3), 291-306. doi: 10.1353/csd.2011.0040
- Mori, S. C. (2000). Addressing the mental health concerns of international students. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 78*(2), 137-144. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6676.2000.tb02571.x
- NAFSA. (2013). The economic benefits of international students to the U.S. economy. Retrieved December 1, 2013, from http://www.nafsa.org/_/File/_/eis2013/Pennsylvania.pdf

- Nathan, R. (2005). *My freshman year: What a professor learned by becoming a student*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Nodding, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed.). Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Oseguera, L., & Rhee, B. S. (2009). The influence of institutional retention climates on student persistence to degree completion: A multilevel approach. *Research in Higher Education, 50*, 546-569. doi: 10.1007/s11162-009-9134-y
- Pandit, K. (2013). International students and diversity: Challenges and opportunities for campus internationalization. In H. C. Alberts & H. D. Hazen (Eds.), *International students and scholars in the United States: Coming from abroad* (131-144). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research* (Vol. 1). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Poyrazli, S., & Grahame, K. M. (2007). Barriers to adjustment: Needs of international students within a semi-urban campus community. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 34*(1). Retrieved September 25, 2011, from http://www.redorbit.com/news/education/907480/barriers_to_adjustment_needs_of_international_students_within_a_semiurban
- Ramsay, S., Jones, E., & Barker, M. (2007). Relationship between adjustment and support types: Young and mature-aged local and international first year university students. *Higher Education, 54*, 247-265. doi: 10.1007/s10734-006-9001-0
- Reuben, R. (2008). The use of social media in higher education for marketing and communications: A guide for professionals in higher education.

Riddle, M. D., & Souter, K. (2012). Designing informal learning spaces using student perspectives. *Journal of Learning Spaces, 1*(2).

Romero, V. C. (2002). Noncitizen students and immigration policy post-9/11. *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal, 17*, 357-366.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Saw, G., Abbott, W., Donaghey, J., & McDonald, C. (2013). Social media for international students – it's not all about Facebook. *Library Management, 34*(3), 156-174. doi: 10.1108/01435121311310860

Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2007). Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 12*, 148-180. doi: 10.1177/1028315307299699

Schmitt, M. T., Spears, R., & Branscombe, N. R. (2003). Constructing a minority group identity out of shared rejection: The case of international students. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 33*, 1-12. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.131

Sherry, M., Thomas, P., & Chui, W. H. (2010). International students: A vulnerable student population. *Higher Education, 60*(1), 33-46. doi: 10.1007/s10734-009-9284-z

Smyth, J. (2006). When students have "relational power": The school as a site for identity formation around engagement and school retention. *Australian Association for Research in Education: Proceedings of the 2006 Conference*, Adelaide, Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.aare.edu.au/06pap/smy06167.pdf>

Stebbleton, M. J., Soria, K. M., Aleixo, M. B., & Huesman, R. L. (2012). Student-faculty

and peer interactions among immigrant college students in the United States.

Multicultural Learning and Teaching, 7(2), 1-21. doi: 10.1515/2161-2412.1122

Student visas. (n.d.). In *U.S. Department of State*. Retrieved from

http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1268.html

Sümer, S., Poyrazli, S., & Grahame, K. (2008). Predictors of depression and anxiety among international students. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 86, 429-437.

Swail, W. S. (2004). The art of student retention. *Educational Policy Institute*. Retrieved Jan 30, 2012 from

http://studentretention.org/pdf/ART_OF_STUDENT_RETENTION.pdf

The Hofstede Center. (2014). *Countries*. Retrieved January 21, 2014, from <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>

Thomas, L. (2002). Student retention in higher education: The role of institutional habitus. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(4), 423-442.

Thomas, S. L. (2000). Ties that bind: A social network approach to understanding student integration and persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(5), 591-615.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *The Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1998). Colleges as communities: Taking research on student persistence seriously. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21(2), 167-177. Retrieved from http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/review_of_higher_education/v021/21.2tinto.html

Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. Chicago, IL: The

University of Chicago Press.

- Toyokawa, T., & Toyokawa, N. (2002). Extracurricular activities and the adjustment of Asian international students: A study of Japanese students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 26, 363-379.
- Trice, A. G. (2004). Mixing it up: International graduate students' social interactions with American students. *Journal of College Development*, 45(6), 671-687. doi: 10.1353/csd.2004.0074
- Tsai, P. C., & Wong, Y. J. (2012). Chinese and Taiwanese international college students' participation in social organizations: Implications for college counseling professionals. *Journal of College Counseling*, 15, 144-156.
- Tucciarone, K. M. (2009). Speaking the same language: Information college seekers look for on a college web site. *College & University*, 84(4), 22-31.
- UC Irvine Office of Institutional Research. (2013). *Total undergraduate enrollment by state or country: Fall quarter 2004 through fall quarter 2013* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.oir.uci.edu/files/enr/IIA09-fall-ugrad-enr-by-home-location-2013.pdf>
- UC Irvine University Registrar. (2014). *Undergraduate student fees 2013-14*. Retrieved from <http://www.reg.uci.edu/fees/2013-2014/undergrad.html>
- Wandel, T. (2008). Colleges and universities want to be your friend: Communicating via online social networking. *Planning for Higher Education*, 37(1), 35-48.
- Ward, C. (2001). The impact of international students on domestic students and host institutions. New Zealand Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/international/14684>

- Ye, J. (2005). Acculturative stress and use of the Internet among East Asian international students in the United States. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior, 8*(2), 154-161. doi:10.1089/cpb.2005.8.154
- Ye, J. (2006). Traditional and online support networks in the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in the United States. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 11*, 863-876. doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00039.x
- Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly, 16*(1), 15-28. doi: 10.1080/0951507031000114058
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ying, Y. W. (2002). Formation of cross-cultural relationships of Taiwanese international students in the United States. *Journal of Community Psychology, 30*(1), 45-55. doi: 10.1002/jcop.1049
- Zhao, C. M., Kuh, G. D., & Carini, R. M. (2005). A comparison of international student and American student engagement in effective educational practices. *The Journal of Higher Education, 76*(2), 209-231.

Appendix A. Top 25 countries of origin for international students in 2012/13

Country	Number of Students Enrolled	% of All International Students
China	235,597	28.7
India	96,754	11.8
South Korea	70,627	8.6
Saudi Arabia	44,566	5.4
Canada	27,357	3.3
Taiwan	21,867	2.7
Japan	19,568	2.4
Vietnam	16,098	2.0
Mexico	14,199	1.7
Turkey	11,278	1.4
Brazil	10,868	1.3
Germany	9,819	1.2
United Kingdom	9,467	1.2
Nepal	8,920	1.1
Iran	8,744	1.1
France	8,297	1.0
Hong Kong	8,026	1.0
Indonesia	7,670	0.9
Nigeria	7,316	0.9
Thailand	7,314	0.9
Malaysia	6,791	0.8
Colombia	6,543	0.8
Venezuela	6,158	0.8
Kuwait	5,115	0.6
Spain	5,033	0.6

Note. Adapted from *Open Doors 2013: "Fast Facts,"* by Institute of International Education, 2013A.

Appendix B. Admissions selectivity of freshmen, UC Irvine, Fall 2009 to Fall 2013

		Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013
California residents: freshmen	Applied	41,647	43,106	44,070	48,468	51,547
	Admitted	18,590	19,447	19,607	18,591	20,188
	Selectivity rate	44.6%	45.1%	44.5%	38.4%	39.2%
California residents: transfers	Applied	10,251	13,476	15,596	14,913	14,962
	Admitted	6,326	6,677	6,481	6,494	7,121
	Selectivity rate	61.7%	49.5%	41.6%	43.5%	47.6%
International students: freshmen	Applied	827	1,108	1,540	3,618	6,062
	Admitted	256	509	879	2,032	3,041
	Selectivity rate	31.0%	45.9%	57.1%	56.2%	50.2%
International students: transfers	Applied	151	222	209	303	386
	Admitted	52	45	42	59	36
	Selectivity rate	34.4%	20.3%	20.1%	19.5%	9.3%

Note. Selectivity rates for Fall 2013 (freshmen) made bold font. Adapted from “Admissions selectivity and yield by applicant’s California residency status, freshman applicants: Fall 2004 through fall 2013” and “Admissions selectivity and yield by applicant’s California residency status, transfer applicants: Fall 2004 through Fall 2013” by UC Irvine Office of Institutional Research, 2013.

Appendix C. Staff survey

This survey asks you about support and your experiences with support. When the word "**support**" is used, it refers to the services typically offered by an international student center. The survey contains 10 questions and should take **5 to 10 minutes**.

Your participation in this survey is **voluntary**. You may refuse to participate or discontinue your involvement at any time, without penalty. If you decide later that you want to remove your survey responses entirely, email me and I will delete the response.

I am collecting data anonymously and will not ask for your name. However, I will ask you if you are interested in a 30-minute interview.

Please check here if you are willing to participate and you agree to let me, the researcher, use your data for research purposes:

- I consent.

1. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

2. What is your passport country or countries?

- U.S.
- Other (please specify):
- Prefer not to say

3. In total, how long have you lived in the United States?

- 2 to 5 years
- 6 to 9 years
- 10 or more years

4. Think about the international students at your center. How important is each type of support for them?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Somewhat unimportant	Unimportant
Academic support: Support for students' school experience (classes, English language practice, studying, tutoring)				
Financial support: Support for students' payment of tuition and other related expenses (loans, grants, scholarships).				
Social support: Support for students' having fun and meeting with other students (on-campus activities, student clubs, holiday events).				
Cultural support: Support for students' understanding the U.S. culture (cultural				

training, idiom and slang classes, American peer mentors).				
--	--	--	--	--

5. How much do you agree with these statements?

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
The International Center staff support international students.				
The International Center staff care about international students.				
If international students needed support, they would talk to an International Center staff member.				
If international students needed support, they would talk with other international students.				
If international students needed support, they would talk to someone else other than International Center staff or other international students.				

This page refers to the International Center Facebook group found at <https://www.facebook.com/UCInternationalCenter/>

6. Thank you for your patience. You are more than halfway through this survey. How much do you agree with these statements?

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
Only a few international students have Facebook accounts .				
Only a few international students have Internet access .				
The Facebook group is difficult to use .				
There is too little relevant information on the International Center Facebook group.				
There is too much irrelevant information on the International Center Facebook group.				

7. How much do you agree with these statements?

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree

Using online social networking (like Facebook and blogs) is a good way for universities to communicate with their students.				
Using online social networking (like Facebook and blogs) is a good way for universities to support their students.				

8. Thank you for your patience. These are the last two questions. How would you define “school support”?

9. How can universities best support international students?

10. May I contact you to participate in a 30-minute follow-up interview?

- No
- Yes
 - Please provide your email address (optional): _____

Confirmation:

Thank you.

Your response has been stored. If you have further questions, or you wish to remove your data, please email slind@uci.edu and provide the date and time (hour/minute) you completed this survey.

Thank you for your time.

Appendix D. Student focus group questioning route

Type of Question or Activity	Question	Time Allotted
N/A (waiting for participants, registering)		13 minutes
Opening	1. Tell us your name, your major and your country.	5 minutes
	2. [Most of] you have been in the U.S. for a few months. How has it been so far?	5 minutes
Lead-in Question (Students' Needs)	3. What do you remember needing help for when you first arrived to study in the U.S.? [take notes about the types of support listed. Possible types: Financial Support, Academic Support, Social Support, Cultural Support, Logistics Support]	5 minutes
Categorizing and Rating Items (Different Types of Support)	4. To repeat what I've heard, we're talking about these types of support. [show papers, which are on the wall, and write on them] Am I right? [wait for confirmation or clarification; give examples of what I heard] Now I'll ask you to rate these types of support [give names] as "Very important," (1) "Somewhat important," (2) "Somewhat unimportant" (3) and "Unimportant" (4). Check-mark your rating on the pieces of paper on the wall. [give students markers]	10 minutes
Follow-up Question	5. [wait until students return to sit, or remain standing with them if they prefer that]	10 minutes

	What patterns do you see in these rankings?	
	[If no response, ask “Which types of support have the highest/lowest ranking, and why do you think this is?”]	
List Making (Perceptions of Support)	6. Think back to a time when you've felt supported by a school. What makes school support excellent? Write your answers on a piece of paper. In a moment we'll share these with each other.	5 minutes
	[2 minutes writing time, then discussion for 3 minutes]	
	7. Think back to a time when you <u>did not</u> feel supported by a school. What is <u>bad</u> school support? Write your answers on a piece of paper. In a moment we'll share these with each other again.	5 minutes
	[2 minutes writing time, then discussion for 3 minutes]	
Sources of Support	8. Where do you get these types of support? [referring to papers]	10 minutes
	On UCI's campus, where do you get these types of support?	
	[If they don't mention International Center, I'll bring it up to transition to next question]	
International Center Support	9. Have you visited the International Center?	5 minutes
	What are the top (three) things you do when you visit the International Center? Make a list.	
	10. How has the International Center helped you?	5 minutes

International Center Facebook Group	11. How could the International Center help you more?	5 minutes
	12. How many of you have a Facebook account? How long have you had it?	5 minutes
	Take a look at this website. [shows Facebook group]	
	Do any of you recognize it?	
	[wait for response, or if there is none, explain that it is a Facebook group].	
	How many of you have used this site before? [if a couple, go into next 2 questions; if not, skip next 2 questions]	
Universities and Social Media	13. What are the pros and cons of universities using Facebook and other social media to support their students? International students?	5 minutes
Optional Questions	<i>14. When did you first start using this site? How much time did you spend on the site when you visited? What did you do there? What information were you looking for?</i>	2 minutes
	<i>15. Do you receive notifications from the Facebook group? If so, how often do you read their updates?</i>	2 minutes
Ending Questions and Summarizing	16. I want you to help me understand how universities like UCI can support international students. In addition, I want to see how or if universities can support students through social media like Facebook. Is there anything I missed? Is there anything you want to say that you haven't had a chance to say yet?	2-10 minutes
	[Thank people, shake hands,	

collect note papers]

Total: 115 minutes (2 hours)

Note. Format and activities adapted from “Developing a questioning route” in *Focus groups* by R. A. Krueger and M. A. Casey (2009), pp. 35-61.

Appendix E. Student interview questions

Type of Question or Activity	Question	Time Allotted
N/A (waiting for participant, registering)		
Opening	1. Tell me a bit about yourself: your name, your major and your country.	5 minutes
Ranking Items on scale of importance (Different Types of Support)	2. Now I'll ask you to rank these seven types of support – Daily Life support, Language support, Cultural support, Career support, Social support, Immigration support, and Financial support – from “Most important” (1) to “Least important” (7). What is your ranking of each type of support?	5 minutes
Follow-up Question	3. I noticed you ranked “_____ Support” as the most important form(s) of support. Why did you rank it so highly?	2 minutes
List Making (Perceptions of Support)	4. Can you give me an example of how the International Center is successful at supporting international students? in Daily Life Support? in Language Support? in Cultural Support? in Career Support? in Social Support? in Immigration Support? in Financial Support?	10 minutes
Source of Support	5. If you needed support, who would you speak with?	5 minutes
	6. How is the International Center <i>unsuccessful</i> at supporting international students? Do you have any university center you could compare the International Center to? If so, what are the differences in the way they supported you?	5 minutes

International Center Facebook Group	7. Take a look at this website [show Facebook group]. Have you used this site before?	5 minutes
	8. [IF USED BEFORE] When did you first start using this site? How much time did you spend on the site in the past? What did you do there? What information were you looking for? Do you receive notifications from the Facebook group? If so, how often do you read their updates?	(3 minutes, if asked)
	8. [IF NEVER USED] If you knew the International Center had a Facebook group, what information would you look for?	5 minutes
	9. What are the pros and cons of universities using Facebook to support their students? International students?	5 minutes
Using Your Imagination (International Center Support)	10. Imagine that you could wave a magic wand, and in one year you could have exactly what you wanted. What is the International Center like in this ideal world?	5 minutes
Ending Questions and Summarizing	11. If you could make your college choice over, would you still choose to enroll at UC Irvine? Why or why not?	5 minutes
	12. We want you to understand how universities like UCI can support international students. Is there anything I missed? Is there anything you want to say that you haven't had a chance to say yet?	5 minutes
Total:		62 minutes (1 hour)

Appendix F. Results in Focus Groups and Interviews

Theme Category	Representative	<i>N</i>
1. Types of Support		
1A. Daily Life Support	Common	13
a. Needs public transportation advice		
b. Needs cell phone advice		
c. Needs post-arrival guidelines on daily life in U.S.		
d. Needs to know where supermarkets are		
e. Needs car advice		
f. Needs medical care and health insurance advice		
g. Wants workshops on daily life needs		
h. Received daily life advice from co-national students		
i. Received daily life advice from family member currently living in the U.S.		
j. Received daily life advice from international peer mentor		
k. Received daily life advice from roommate(s)		
l. Received daily life advice from RA		
m. Received daily life advice from TA		
n. Received daily life advice from professor		
1B. Academic Support	General	11
a. Academic advisor was helpful		
b. International peer mentor provides academic advice		
c. Professor provides academic advice		
d. Help from tutor at community housing academic center		
1C. Financial Support	General	10
a. Funded by family		
b. Received scholarship from university		
1D. Spoken and Written English Support	General	9
a. Enrolled in writing course at university		
b. Enrolled in pronunciation course at university		

c. Attended English conversation club at international center		
d. Visiting campus writing center		
e. Emailed tutor at campus writing center		
f. Help from peer mentor, correcting writing mistakes		
g. Help from peer mentor, practicing speaking English		
h. TA guided student's writing task		
i. Practice speaking with U.S. students		
j. Roommate(s) correct English pronunciation mistakes		
1E. Cultural Support	General	9
a. Attended summer cultural transition class for both U.S. and international students (a positive experience)		
b. Attended cultural class at international center		
c. Attended cultural workshops at multicultural center		
d. Summer orientation program offered tips on adjusting to American culture		
e. International peer mentor offers cultural support		
f. Learned about U.S. culture online		
1F. Career Support	Variant	6
a. Attended career center workshops		
b. Visits career center staff for support		
c. Is aware of international center's career workshops, but haven't attended them yet		

2. Barriers and Difficulties

2A. Cultural Difficulties	General	12
a. Feels left out in conversations with U.S. students (e.g., cultural references, jokes, speed of speech)		
b. Asian students (e.g., Chinese) isolate themselves		
c. Differences in Asian and U.S. student communication		
d. Experienced racism		
e. Difficult to meet U.S. students		
f. Culture shock in the U.S.		
g. Cannot understand professor's lectures		

h. Difference in teaching styles in U.S.		
2B. University Barriers	General	10
a. Inconvenience		
b. Bureaucracy		
c. Too much information, or too many resources		
d. Mixed information		
e. Inflexible policy		
2C. Career Difficulties	Variant	5
a. Difficult to find jobs off-campus		
b. Difficult to find jobs on-campus		
c. Wants more on-campus job opportunities		
2D. Financial Difficulties	Variant	4
a. Limited financial support available to international students at university		
b. Wants university to offer more financial aid for international students		
c. Feels pressure from family because of their funding		

3. Sources of Support

3A. Support in the Dorms	General	8
a. Speaking to others in the dorms		
b. Attending events in dorms		
c. Advice for daily life needs from roommate(s)		
d. Emotional support from roommate(s)		
e. Career advice from roommate(s)		
f. Roommate(s) correct English pronunciation mistakes		
g. Advice from RA about daily life needs		
3B. Peer Mentorship	Variant	6
a. Mentor helps with U.S. cultural support		
b. Mentor helps with daily life needs		
c. Help from peer mentor, correcting writing mistakes		
d. Help from peer mentor, practicing speaking English		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. International peer mentor provides academic advice f. Mentor is also a friend 		
3C. Staff and Faculty Support	Variant	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Individual staff members as “beacons” of support b. Individual faculty members as “beacons” of support c. Professors are friends d. Received daily life advice from professor e. Library staff were helpful f. Would prefer staff to become friends with students 		
4. Communication and Support		
4A. Seeking Information	General	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Self-guided, online (e.g., Google, websites) b. Reading emails from university office(s) c. Sending inquiry emails to professor(s) d. Stopping by office to talk to staff e. Self-guided, through informative books and pamphlets f. Visiting Facebook pages for information g. Visiting “Rate My Professor” website h. Reading campus posters i. Prefers to choose where to get information 		
4B. Staff-Student Communicative Forms and Patterns	General	11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Communicating through emails (preference) b. Being able to “ask anything” (preference) c. Immediate email responses (preference) d. Late or no email responses (dislike) c. Re-directive response (dislike) f. Communicating through text messages (preference) 		
5A. The International Center and Support		
5A-1. International Center as Visa Stop	General	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Knows international center provides immigration support, but doesn't know what else it does 		

b. Says the international center should just focus on immigration support, nothing else		
c. Is familiar with language workshops, but did not attend		
d. Is aware of international center's career support, but hasn't used it		
e. Is familiar with cultural workshops, but did not attend		
5A-3. Participants' Lack of Knowledge about International Center	Variant	7
a. Doesn't visit international center much, or at all		
b. Is confused about international center services or mistakes a different program or center for the international center		
5A-4. Negative Experiences at the International Center	Variant	6
a. Staff perceived as unhelpful		
b. Visa information is unclear		
c. "Scared" to see international center staff		
5A-5. Need for More Publicity	Variant	4
a. The international center should advertise its services more.		
*5B. The Ideal International Center		
5B-1. Ideal International Center as a Student Community	Common	7
a. An international student community		
b. A space for international students to talk to other students		
c. A space for U.S. and international students to meet		
d. A space for more senior international students to share information with newer international students		
e. A space to display international cultures (e.g., a photo gallery)		
5B-2. Ideal International Center as a Cozy Place	General	5
a. Family-like / home-like / cozy		
b. Lounge-like / coffee shop environment (physical comfort)		
c. A space for staff to listen to international students		
d. Center encourages closer relationships between staff and students		

Note. A theme is described as common if it applied to 13 to 15 participants, general if it applied to eight to 12 participants, and variant if it applied to four to seven participants.

*For the last two themes – "Ideal International Center" – a theme is described as common if it

applied to all seven participants, general if it applied to four to six participants, and variant if it applied to one to three participants; this question - "What is the International Center like in [an] ideal world?" was only asked in interviews ($N=7$), not focus groups.

Appendix G. Open-Ended Staff Survey Responses

Theme and Text	Representative
<p>Support through Services and Programs</p> <p>(1) [Universities can support students by providing] programs and services...</p> <p>(2) I would interpret [support] as services and programs that are offered to students...</p> <p>(3) Advocating for student's needs be it financial, social/programming.</p> <p>(4) [Different services are] critical to provide options and supports...</p>	General
<p>Support through Needs Assessment</p> <p>(1) Assess needs and provide programs and services to address needs...</p> <p>(2) The university should assess common trends among these students ... If additional support is needed based on needs of international students, programs should be created ...</p> <p>(3) ... student's needs be it financial ... advocating for their needs and concerns.</p> <p>(5) ... support that the student needs and then followed up with needs assessments and other data ...</p>	General
<p>Support the Responsibility of the Institution</p> <p>(3) [School support is about] advocating for student's needs ...</p> <p>(4) School support is an institutional endeavor.</p> <p>(5) As support for an international student is an institutional charge ...</p>	General
<p>Collaborative University Support</p> <p>(4) A combination of various offices (academic and student affairs) services is critical to provide options and support that ultimately will aid students ...</p>	Variant

(5) I believe that more than one office needs to share the responsibility and collaborate towards this common goal [of school support].

Types of Support

Variant

(3) ... social [needs] ... make students feel welcomed ...

(3) ... financial [needs] ...

(3) ... programs on how to improve their English skills [based on their needs].

(4) ... their academic ... goals.

Note. (1) to (5) represent the corresponding staff members (e.g., (1) is the first staff member). A theme is described as common if it applied to all five participants (not observed), general if it applied to three or four participants, and variant if it applied to one to two participants.

Appendix H. Staff Initiations and Responses in the Facebook Group

	Topic / Type	Support-Providing Communicative Pattern	<i>N</i>
Staff member (<i>N</i> =9) initiates dialogue by:			
Posting photo only.	Unique	N/A (Documentation)	5
Announcing English conversation program.	Language	Announcement	3
Announcing job at international center.	Career	Announcement	1
Staff member (<i>N</i> =2) answers a student's response by:			
Making a follow-up comment on the post, or a response to the question, with more information.	Language	Information	2
*Staff (<i>N</i> =26) responds to student's question by:			
Providing an informative response to the student's question. Questions were about the English conversation program (e.g., "What is it?" or "When does it start?").	Language	Information	3
Providing an informative response to the student's question, including information about where the center is located. Questions were about the English conversation program (e.g., "What is it?" or "When does it start?").	Language	Information, Information about International Center	2
Providing an informative answer with a disclaimer ("as I know...") followed by a link to the university financial aid office. Question was about summer school classes, required enrollment.	Academic	Information, Link Redirection	1
Responding that if the student is international, he or she should see an international advisor. Alternately, the person should see his or her academic advisor. Question was about summer school classes, required enrollment.	Immigration, Academic	International Center Redirection	1
Responding with information about visa renewal. Question was about clarifying details of a student visa (e.g., how to renew the visa).	Immigration	Information, Information about International Center	1
Responding that the staff emailed the student's international advisor, who will contact him	Immigration	Off-Group Contact Redirection	1

separately. Question was about clarifying details of a student visa (e.g., expiry dates).

Redirecting the student to a university website about housing, adding "let us know if you need additional information." Question was about recommended housing.

Redirecting the student to an external website (Yelp) and provides specific names of local hair salons to student. Question was about good local hair salons.

Redirecting the student to university registrar website about international tuition fees. Question was about international student fees.

Redirecting the student to the parking office, adding "let me know if you need any assistance with this." Question was about parking during an academic break.

Responding that the student will be called by a staff member soon, and what the student should expect for training. Question was about job application for an international center job.

Responding that the student will need to bring a photocopy of her student visa to the center for checking in, and where the center is located. Question was about international center hours and location, and checking in at the center as a new international student.

Responding with information about what the center does, and adding a link to the center's website. In a follow-up response to a second inquiry, the same staff member posts two links, one to the university admissions website and another to the university graduate studies website. Question was about the purpose of the international center, and how to apply to the university.

Recommending that the student visit the international center for more information. Question was about the post-graduation work visa (OPT).

Daily Life Link Redirection, Follow Up Request 1

Daily Life Link Redirection, Information 1

Financial Link Redirection 1

Daily Life University Redirection, Follow Up Request 1

Career Off-Group Contact Redirection, Information 1

Immigration Information, Information about International Center 1

Immigration, Academic Information about International Center, Link Redirection 1

Career International Center Redirection 1

Providing two links for airport shuttle options (one through the university, one through a company). Question was about public transportation to the airport.	Daily Life	Link Redirection	1
Responding that the student can come to the center and leave a post on the bulletin board there. Question was about buying, selling car.	Daily Life	International Center Redirection	1
Redirecting the student to the university cashier website. Question was about an international bank transfer to pay tuition.	Financial	Link Redirection	1
Responding by telling the student about a tax workshop at the international center, including the time, location, and RSVP email of the workshop. Question was about taxes for international students.	Financial	Information about International Center	1
Redirecting student to a website by the parking office, on "surviving with a car." Question was about carpooling and public transportation.	Daily Life	Link Redirection	1
Responding with information about full-time enrollment requirements. Question was about required full time enrollment as an international student.	Immigration	Information	1
Responding with information about travel signatures and opening hours of the center, recommending student visits the center. Question was about travel signatures.	Immigration	Information about International Center, International Center Redirection	1
Providing specific names of cell phone companies to student. Question was about recommended cell phone companies.	Daily Life	Information, Personal Recommendation	1
Redirecting student first to a university website about admissions health requirements for international students, then followed up a few more times to say that she was clarifying by contacting the university health center directly, then telling the student she had emailed him separately about the topic. Question was about pre-arrival vaccinations.	Daily Life	Link Redirection, Off-Group Contact Redirection	1

* Observed in student-staff dialogues (i.e., when a staff member responds to a student's post) and in student-staff-student(s) dialogues (i.e., when one or more staff members and one or more students respond to a student's post).

Appendix I1. Student-Initiated Dialogues in the Facebook Group

	Topic / Type	Support-Seeking Communicative Pattern	<i>N</i>
Student (<i>N</i> =48) initiates dialogue by:			
Asking for roommates to live with, or advice on housing. Are incoming students (3) or current student (1).	Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	4
Asking for someone to sublease his apartment. Current students (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	2
Asking if the English conversation program was being held that day. Are current students (implied).	Language	Seeking Complete Information	2
Greeting others as a new student. First student had just arrived in the U.S. that week, and the second student was going to transfer to the university during the next month.	Social-Emotional	Greeting	2
Asking what kind of housing is recommended. Will be an incoming student next year; accepted.	Daily Life	Seeking Recommendation	1
Asking which local hair salons are best. Is a current student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking Recommendation	1
Asking how much international tuition fees are. Will be an incoming student in 1.5 years; planning to transfer.	Financial	Seeking New Information	1
Asking if she can park her car in a parking lot over the academic break. Is a current student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking New Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
Asking about status of job application. Is a current student (implied).	Career	Seeking Complete Information	1
Asking about location of international center, and when to check in. A follow-up question is about which immigration documents to bring. Is a current student returning from abroad.	Immigration	Seeking Complete Information	1
Asking how to renew a student visa. Is a current student (implied).	Immigration	Seeking New Information	1
Asking about alternative times for the English	Language	Seeking Alternate	1

conversation program. Is a current student (implied).		Information	
Asking about what the international center does. A follow-up question is about enrolling at a university in the U.S. Is not a student, and may not even have applied to this university, but expresses interest.	Unique	Seeking New Information	1
Asking a detailed question about a student visa, as a new student, and how to proceed.	Immigration	Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
Is graduating early and asks about when to receive a post-graduation work visa (OPT). Is a current student, soon to graduate in three months.	Immigration	Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
Asking about what the English conversation program is, and in a follow-up question, how to join it. Is a current, but new, student (implied).	Language	Seeking New information	1
Asking about alternate, cheaper ways to take a shuttle to the airport. Is a current student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking Alternate Information, Seeking Recommendation, Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Is moving to the U.S. two months later, and wants to buy a used car for the six months she'll work at the university. An incoming student.	Daily Life	Seeking New Information, Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Asking which location the English conversation program – which the student knows about already – will be held the next day. Is a current student (implied).	Language	Seeking Complete Information	1
Asking when the open house is held that day. Is a current student (implied).	Unique	Seeking Complete Information	1
Asking if international students can pay through a bank transfer from another country, and details of this payment. Is an incoming student.	Financial	Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
Asking a detailed question about filing taxes in the U.S., or would like to book a one-on-one session with an IRS agent. Is a current student	Financial	Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Financial	1

(implied).		Service	
Asking about carpooling options as he lives off campus. Is a current student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Asking about enrolling in summer classes, and prices. Is a current student (implied).	Academic	Seeking Detailed Information	1
Asking about number of units enrolled in, and whether it will affect her visa status. Is a current student (implied).	Immigration, Academic	Seeking Complete Information	1
Asking about getting her travel signature before leaving the next day. A second student posts a comment on this post, saying she is in the same situation. Both are current students (implied).	Immigration	Seeking Complete Information, Seeking Immigration Service	1
Asking about which cell phone service providers are best. Is a new, current student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking New Information	1
Asking about admissions health requirements (i.e., required vaccinations). Is an incoming student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking New Information	1
Asking about tax treaty between U.S. and home country. Is a current student (implied).	Financial	Seeking Detailed Information	1
Greets other students, and says he'd like to meet them at the gym to play soccer. Is a new student.	Daily Life	Greeting	1
Asking about finding a room to live in. Is an incoming student.	Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Asking whether or not he will be interviewed for a long time upon arrival in Los Angeles airport, as he has a common name in China. Is an incoming student.	Unique	Seeking New Information	1
Asking for more details about medical plans and costs. An incoming or new student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking Detailed Information	1
Asking whether anyone else has applied for and received word about living in a housing complex. An incoming student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking Complete Information	1
Asking if anyone would like to buy her furniture, as she's moving out. A current student.	Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Asking whether anyone has paid for housing, and stating that she does not have a U.S. bank account. A current, new student.	Financial	Seeking New Information	1
Asking if anyone else is studying in his degree. Is an incoming or new student (implied).	Unique	Greeting	1

Announces that she's graduating, and will sell her car.	Daily Life	Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Asking how long it takes to open a bank account and get a new phone. Is a new student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking New Information	1
Asking whether or not he can drive in California with a driver's license from his home country. Is an incoming or new student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking New Information	1
Asking whether anyone can confirm if there is a beach activity that weekend. Is a new student (implied).	Social-Emotional	Seeking Complete Information	1
Asking multiple questions, including whether or not to live off campus, how much cars cost, if there is public transportation, and so on. Is an incoming student (implied).	Daily Life	Seeking Detailed Information	1

Appendix I2. Student Responses to Staff in the Facebook Group

	Topic / Type	Support-Providing Communicative Pattern (N=0)	Support-Seeking Communicative Pattern (N=13)	N
Student (N=18) responds to staff by:				
Making a comment (e.g., stating how nice a photo looks).	Unique	N/A (Complimenting)		3
Commenting on an announcement about the English conversation program, stating that they have schedule conflicts.	Language	N/A (Explaining)		2
Thanking the staff member but asking an additional question of clarification. Posts were about visas.	Immigration		Thanks, Seeking Complete Information	2
Stating that she cannot find job applications for a center job. Post was a link to the center's photo album; not about the job. Implied need for job application.	Career		Seeking Complete Information	1
Asking if a photo can be sent to the student's family in Japan. Post was group photo.	Unique		Question of Permission	1
Asking whether or not the post – a photo of baked brie – is a photo of pie, and when it is clarified, he states he would like to try it.	Unique		Seeking Complete Information	1
Commenting on an announcement about the English conversation program, asking if they can help him with his “accent problem.”	Language		Follow-up Question	1
Asking a follow-up question of clarification (“How can I join?”) after the staff answered.	Language		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1
Asking a follow-up question to	Financial		Follow-up	1

clarify a detail. The student was asking for a link to more details about the original question, about international bank transfers.		Question, Seeking Complete Information	
Asking a follow-up question to staff about whether the center can host a one-on-one tax session with IRS agents and international students.	Financial	Follow-up Question, Seeking Financial Service	1
Thanking, then asking a follow-up question to the staff who responded, about comparative details on cell phone companies. When the staff gives a personal recommendation, the student thanks and closes the dialogue, though two more students and the staff continue discussing cell phone companies.	Daily Life	Thanks, Seeking Detailed Information, Seeking Recommendation	1
Adding a follow-up question ("What about coverage?"), which I assume is to the staff. When the staff member responds to him, he asks a second follow-up question to clarify if what he read somewhere is correct.	Daily Life	Follow-up Question, Seeking Recommendation, Seeking Complete Information	1
Thanking the staff, then asking a follow-up question about required vaccines.	Daily Life	Seeking Complete Information	1
After reading a dialogue between staff and a student about required vaccines, adding a follow-up question about what the updates on the topic were.	Daily Life	Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1

Appendix I3. Student Responses to Students in the Facebook Group

	Topic / Type	Support-Providing Communicative Pattern (N=17)	Support-Seeking Communicative Pattern (N=23)	N
Student (N=40) responds to student(s) in dialogue by:				
Two students respond to a post by a student moving out and selling her furniture. The first student posts many links to websites (the Craigslist ad she's put up, a link to the type of coffee table she has	Daily Life		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	2
			Information, Link Redirection	1
Two students respond to a post by someone subleasing her apartment. The second student responds that he has a contact who is looking to sublet but the first student says she's only looking for female roommates. Then a new twist occurs: a third student responds to the second student, stating that he is looking for a male roommate, and that he should email him on Facebook.	Daily Life	Off-Group Contact Redirection		2
Two students responding that they have the same question as the original student – details about a beach activity through the center. The original student said she wants to go with them to the beach another day.	Social-Emotional		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	2
			Personal Recommendation	1
Exchanging back and forth (two students) about if they should go together in the morning to the international center to get their travel signatures as one is leaving on the weekend and the other is leaving the next day. Starts with a question, then a "me too" by the second student. The exchange includes questions about when the center is open, and where and when they will meet the next day.	Immigration	Information, Information about International Center		1
				Follow-Up Question, Seeking Complete Information

In response to a post asking about carpooling, recommending the student bike to campus.	Daily Life	Personal Recommendation		1
In response to a post asking about enrolling in units before check in, answering (“Yes that is fine”).	Academic	Information		1
In response to a student's answer, adding a follow-up question (to the student) about the deadline for enrolling in full-time.	Academic		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1
In response to a student's question about cell phone companies, providing a recommendation and information based on his own experience.	Daily Life	Information, Personal Recommendation		1
After reading a dialogue between a staff and student about required vaccines, a second student tells the first student that an email from the staff is probably in his Facebook inbox (he had been checking his email).	Daily Life	Off-Group Contact Redirection		1
Providing two responses, first a detailed response about a tax treaty difference between the U.S. and New Zealand, quoting the tax article. Second, a shorter response telling the first student what to do (“that means your income is not taxable”).	Financial	Information		1
Responding directly to the student (“whats your phone num?”) in order to create a soccer team. A third student joins in this dialogue, stating he wants to play soccer too, and where do they meet?	Daily Life	Information, University Redirection, Off-Group Contact Redirection		1
			Seeking Daily Life Service, Seeking Complete Information	1
Responding by posting a link to an apartment-finding website, and recommending that the student – who was looking for a	Daily Life	Link Redirection		1

room – “try to find something in” one of the graduate housing areas.

Responding to assure that the student need not worry about being held in the Los Angeles airport as she was questioned there and had no difficulties.	Unique	Personal Recommendation		1
Responding that he and his roommates have a bedroom for sublease for a few months – the student was looking for a roommate. The first student thanks but responds that she's looking for an apartment for at least a year, so he redirects her to a link on the university housing rates.	Daily Life	Information, Link Redirection		1
			Thanks, Seeking Alternate Information	1
Responding that she is interested in moving in to an apartment, but for only one quarter – post was about finding a roommate.	Daily Life		Question of Permission, Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Asking in a follow-up question how much it costs per night to rent a bedroom – the post was about subleasing a bedroom (but did not include price).	Daily Life		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1
Two students respond to a post about health insurance in the U.S. - they both respond to the student in Portuguese. From what I can tell, the second student asks questions about when the student will study at the university, and when she will return to Brazil. The third student posts a link to the university's health insurance website, in response to the original question.	Daily Life		Greeting, Personal Questions	1
		Link Redirection		1
Responding to a student who asks about responses to a housing application. The first student asks follow-up questions such as whether or not the second student is a graduate student, and when	Daily Life	Information, Personal Recommendation, University Redirection	Seeking Complete Information	1

she received her offer. The second student recommends that the first student call the housing office, and gave a couple of names of people to ask for.			Follow-up Question, Greeting, Personal Questions	1
Responding that the first student can pay in cash to the housing because and "that's what I did"	Financial	Information, Personal Recommendation		1
Responding that he has a room to offer to rent, and that the first student should send him a Facebook personal message. When the first student asks for more details and provides a personal email address, he tells that student to check the Facebook inbox.	Daily Life	Information, Off-Group Contact Redirection		1
			Seeking Complete Information	1
Responding that she is interested in the offer – a room rental – and that if it's available, she's very interested.	Daily Life		Question of Permission, Seeking Daily Life Service	1
Responding to a request to meet other students doing the same degree, by posting a link to a Facebook profile of someone in the same program as the first student.	Unique	Link Redirection		1
Responding that the student should also "try craigslist and laundry rooms" to advertise selling her car.	Daily Life	Personal Recommendation		1
Responding to student about how to open a bank account – telling her to visit one of the two campus banks – and how to get a phone number – get a friend to help, or buy a prepaid phone. Both answers were informative and detailed.	Daily Life	Information, University Redirection, Detailed Information		1
Following up on a response to her about getting a bank account and phone number, she asked a follow-up question about buying a phone.	Daily Life		Follow-up Question, Seeking Complete Information	1

Two students respond to a post asking about driving in California on an international driver's license. The second student provides detailed information about driving, then in a follow-up comment pastes text and a link from the DMV website about driving. He recommends buying a bike or renting a car. The third student then points out that she's looked up information on other university international center websites about being a resident, and is not sure if international students are considered residents (and thereby cannot get driver's licenses). The first student asks a lot of questions of both students.

Daily Life Detailed Information, Personal Recommendation, Link Redirection 1

Seeking Complete Information 1

Information 1

Responding in great detail with multiple suggestions for housing choices and car choices. Includes a link to a rental car company, and a few recommendations.

Daily Life Detailed Information, Personal Recommendation, Link Redirection 1