

EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE  
AND HUMANITIES PROGRAMS WITH THEIR DISSERTATION CHAIRS AT A  
RESEARCH I UNIVERSITY

By

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To my family

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Academic advisors: Academic advisors are faculty members who assist students with course selection, oversee research and may also mentor students (Berte, King, Demars & Brownstein, 2008)
- Doctoral students: Doctoral students are individuals who are enrolled in doctoral, Ph.D. programs that emphasize research.
- Dissertation chair: The dissertation chair is a faculty member who serves as the chairperson of a doctoral student's dissertation committee and who the student considers his or her primary formal advisor (Zhao, Golde & McCormick, 2007). They should be a source of reliable information, departmental socializer, advocate, role model and occupational socializer for the student (Barnes & Austin, 2009)
- Faculty members: Faculty members are those in charge of the education of students, who act on behalf of institutions and are socializing agents for doctoral students (Bair, Haworth & Sandfort, 2004). In addition, they might provide tangible services such as pre-enrollment communication, advising, financial aid information, and participate in a variety of educational and social activities with students. A faculty member might also involve students in research and assistantships outside of students' dissertation.
- International Students: International students are individuals with non-United States educational and cultural background who enter the United States on a student visa for the purpose of getting an education (Klomegah, 2006; Tincu, 2008).

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RESEARCH I UNIVERSITY

By

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Academic advising has been identified as one of the most important predictors of graduate student success since faculty members have responsibilities for graduate student learning and development inside and outside the classroom (Bair, Haworth & Sandfort, 2004). As such, the relationship between a student and their adviser is important to graduate students' progress towards degrees and other academic goals (Acker, Hill & Black, 1994), particularly for international students (Ku, Lahman, Yeh & Cheng, 2008). With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to describe international students' experience with academic advisors and to explore the role their advisors play in their degree completion.

Eight international doctoral students from social science and humanities degree programs were interviewed and their contributions analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that advisors can positively impact international doctoral students' experience by supporting them academically and personally, providing funding opportunities, and setting clear expectations for their students. In addition, advisors should also help these students to understand the norms, expectations and values of

graduate education in American institutions. Finally, departments should consider policy changes to ensure the availability of faculty advisors who share students' research interests.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are ways in which institutions can support international doctoral students as they navigate through their degree programs.

- Provide additional scholarship, fellowship and assistantship opportunities for international doctoral students to fund their degree programs
- Implement new policies that allow international students to pay lower, in-state tuition rates if they have to remain in their programs for longer periods than expected
- Provide orientation programs for new international students that highlight departmental policies, funding options and expectations
- Allow faculty members from other departments to serve as dissertation chairpersons
- Provide professional development workshops for faculty who advise international students

The results of this study provided insights to university administrators, deans and advisors about international doctoral students' perceptions of their advising relationships. Given that there is little research conducted on this relationship, these findings inform the development of academic advising relationships between advisors and international doctoral students and help advisors to understand how they can best support these students. In addition, the findings of this study raises departments' awareness related to the needs of international doctoral students and provide policy recommendations that could improve these students' experience.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of students from countries around the world enroll in graduate programs in the United States. According to the Open Doors report published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), the number of international students currently enrolled in institutions of higher education in the United States is at a record high. Approximately 623,805 international students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States during the 2007-08 school year, which is almost 20 times the number ( $n = 34,232$ ) enrolled in the 1954-55 school year. Of the international students enrolled in U.S. institutions, 276,842 or approximately 44 percent are pursuing graduate degrees (Institute of International Education, 2008). Almost half of these graduate students are enrolled at research institutions (Institute of International Education, 2008; Walker, 2000). Typically graduate students are assigned an academic advisor to help them navigate their academic department and program and later choose a faculty member to serve as their dissertation advisor. Because success in achieving a doctoral degree is dependent on a close working relationships with one's dissertation advisor (Ph.D. Completion Project, 2009), it is important to explore the experiences of students with their dissertation advisor.

America has supported the recruitment of foreign students since the end of World War II for three reasons (Johnson, 2003). First, they add diversity to the student body and provide many American students with what may be their only opportunity to have close contact with foreigners. International students also provide support to academic departments by teaching and conducting research predominantly in the sciences and benefit the local and state economy through the out-of-state tuition and fees they pay.

Lastly, perhaps the most important reason for recruiting international students is that they constitute the population of future foreign leaders who could potentially serve as allies to the United States as foreign policy and national security becomes an issue of increasing importance (Klomegah, 2006). Thus, they are part of a prospective reservoir of good will though they are often viewed as an undervalued foreign policy asset (Johnson, 2003; Klomegah, 2006; Ku, Lahman, Yeh & Cheng, 2008).

International students are afforded special temporary residence status and have to follow special immigration rules in order to maintain their status. They must be enrolled in an “academic educational program as a full time student and must demonstrate that they have sufficient funds to support themselves during the entire proposed course of study” (USCIS, 2009). They are allowed to work at any qualifying on-campus job, which does not displace a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, for up to 20 hours per week on campus while school is in session and full time while school is not in session. However, the job must be physically located on the school’s campus or off-campus at the site of an educationally affiliated organization (IIE, 2009).

Research conducted on graduate students has typically focused on preparation for entering academia and the professoriate as well as graduate students’ perception of their graduate school experiences (Bieber & Worley, 2006). Some of this research has explored the graduate students’ experience with and the supervisory style of their faculty advisors (Acker, Hill & Black, 1994), while others have focused on the doctoral student socialization (Gardner, 2008; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). Research has also focused on doctoral attrition rates and the reasons for lack of degree completion. According to the Council of Graduate Schools (2008) only 40-60 percent of all doctoral

students will complete their degree programs. The Ph.D. Completion Project, which addresses Ph.D. completion and attrition rates among 50 research universities, indicates that the completion rate for domestic students is 54 percent while that of international students is higher at 67 percent (CGS, 2008).

Advising is one of the most important predictors of graduate student success and faculty members have responsibilities for student learning and student development inside and often outside the classroom (Bair, Haworth & Sandfort, 2004). As such, the relationship between students and their dissertation advisors is important in their progress towards degrees and other academic goals (Acker et al., 1994). At most colleges and universities, advisors serve as advocates (Bair et al., 2004), and play a particularly important role for international students (Ku, Lahman, Yeh & Cheng, 2008). Researchers have posited several different models of the advisor-advisee relationship. One such model contrasts prescriptive versus developmental academic advising (Bland, 2004). In this model, advising addresses course scheduling, academic regulations and other procedural issues while developmental academic advising takes a more holistic approach where advisees are empowered to share responsibility for their own learning (Bland, 2004).

In addition to the issues associated with advising, international students contend with the unique demands of the U.S. classroom that can be significantly different from their educational experiences in their home countries. For example, international students may not be used to the expected level of participation, oral group presentations (Zhai, 2002) and other classroom requirements that characterize American higher education (Olivas & Li , 2006). The relationships formed between

faculty members and international students, the perceived quality of instruction and the demonstration of faculty interest in international students' professional development contributes significantly to the mental wellbeing of students who are engaged in this stressful experience (Adrian-Taylor et al., 2007; Olivas & Li, 2006).

The issues facing international students go beyond academics given that these students are also coping with homesickness, acculturation and other transition related issues (Ku et al., 2008; Olivas & Li, 2006). These students tend to have fewer social supports to help them navigate their experience studying in their host country (Adrian-Taylor et al., 2007) as they typically prefer to utilize their friends and family for social support (Adrian-Taylor et al., 2007; Komiya, & Ells, 2001; Olivas & Li, 2006; Zhai, 2002; Zhao et al., 2005). This may be because international students are often unaccustomed to using counseling services available on university campuses or are not aware that they have access to these services (Olivas & Li, 2006).

Although international students comprise a large portion of the graduate student population at Research institutions, not much is known about the advising relationship between international students and their dissertation advisors (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Trice, 2003). Research on this group tends to center on acculturation, adjustment and language acquisition issues from a deficit standpoint rather than attempting to determine what it is that makes an international students experiences positive (Olivas & Li, 2006; Tseng & Newton, 2002). Consequently, there is very little published research concerning academic support mechanisms that may assist international students or help them to manage and overcome their difficulties (Ku, et al., 2008; Olivas & Li, 2006). Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore and describe international students'

experiences with their dissertation chairpersons/advisors and their perceptions of the role their advisors play in completing social science and humanities degree programs. The site where this study will be completed is classified as Research I institution in the southeast United States (Carnegie Foundation, 2009).

### **Research Question**

Given that the research establishes a clear connection between completion rates and various aspects of the relationships between students and their advisors, this research seeks to answer the following questions: how do international doctoral students at a Research I institution navigate through their degree programs and what are their perceptions of the role their dissertation advisors play in their degree completion?

### **Significance of the Study**

International student enrollment in colleges and universities in the United States continues to increase (IIE, 2008). Graduate students require faculty members to help them with admissions, financial aid, academic advising, mentoring, career development and socialization to the department and to the discipline (Bair et al., 2004). Transitions from foreign countries to the teaching and learning experiences of a culture that is unfamiliar can evoke feelings of low self esteem, stress and anxiety (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2000; Ku et al., 2008). Advisors are thus in a unique position to help international doctoral students successfully navigate the academic, social and cultural adaptations required when they enroll in US institutions (Bair and Haworth, 2004).

Choosing a dissertation advisor is one of the most important decisions that a graduate student will make during his or her career. This advisor has a heavy influence over the nature and quality of a student's experience with graduate education and can

often be the difference between completion and non-completion (Lovitts, 2001). Very often doctoral students are unaware of the requirements for successful matriculation through their graduate programs. Klaw and Taylor (2009) quote Kerlin (1998) who states that often international students perceive and experience a “hidden curriculum” in higher education. It is thus important to study the academic advising relationships between these students and their advisors because the “advisor influences how the student comes to understand the discipline and the roles and responsibilities of academic professionals” (Lovitts, 2001, p. 131).

The results of this study will provide insights to university administrators, deans and dissertation advisors about international doctoral students’ perceptions of their advising relationships. Given that there is little research conducted on this relationship, the findings will be used to inform the development of academic advising relationships between advisors and international doctoral students and help advisors to understand how they can best support these students. In addition, the findings of this study will raise departments’ awareness of the needs of international doctoral students and influence policy changes that will improve these students’ experience.

### **Limitations**

This study will employ the use of qualitative methods which have typically been criticized because of the intricate role that the researcher plays as the research instrument (Kvale, 1996). With this in mind, it is essential that I, as the researcher, take steps to critically assess my own biases, experiences and opinions in order to prevent them from having any influence on the execution of this study.

One of the major limitations for this study is the small sample of participants available at the research site. As such, my ability to recruit a sufficient number of

participants to the study will determine whether or not I can collect sufficient data to serve the purposes of the study. Generalizability is not the purpose of this study, and, as a result, by exploring the needs of international doctoral students, we gain information specific to this group which may not be applicable to other groups of doctoral students. In addition to this, participants may be hesitant to share negative experiences and information about their advisors because of the perceived power their advisor has over their academic, financial and immigration status. Since the participants for this study come from a variety of countries, language differences and accents may make comprehension and transcription difficult. In addition to this, cultural differences may create barriers for understanding between the researcher and the study participants.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The aim of this study is to explore how international doctoral students at a Research I institution navigate through their degree programs and their perceptions of the role their dissertation advisors play in their degree completion. Advising has been found to be one of the key components of doctoral education and a major predictor of degree completion. This chapter will explore research on factors affecting degree completion with specific focus on the role of dissertation advisors. Research on mentoring will also be presented because of the assertion that the most effective advisor-advisee relationships share similarities with the ideal mentor-protégé relationship (Zhao et al, 2007). Issues specifically pertaining to advising international students are also presented.

### **Doctoral Education**

In many fields of higher education, the doctoral degree is considered the terminal degree and comes in a variety of forms. These include professional degrees such as the M.D. earned by medical doctors; J.D. or juris doctor earned by lawyers; Ed.D. or doctor of education earned by students preparing for academic, administrative, clinical or research positions in education; to the Ph.D. or doctor of philosophy usually required for persons preparing for faculty or research positions (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Thurgood, Golladay & Hill, 2006). However, the vast majority of doctorates awarded are Ph.Ds (Thurgood et al., 2006) which will be the focus of this study.

Doctoral education provides the labor force for top positions in the higher education faculty and administration and for the investigation of scientific research studies (Bair & Haworth, 2004; Haworth, 1996). However, there is still much that is not

known about the doctoral education experience (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). Researchers suggest that the purpose of doctoral education leading to the Ph.D. should be to prepare graduate students to become the next generation of scholars (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). Others posit that doctoral education should include training to teach or to enter the labor market outside of academia since many Ph.D.s will work outside of academe instead of joining the professoriate (Austin, 2002; Gardner, Hayes, Neider, 2007). This preparation involves becoming intimately acquainted with the course content in the chosen field followed by demonstrating independent scholarship by completing a dissertation research project (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010).

### **Factors Affecting Degree Completion**

Research has identified several factors that may affect doctoral degree completion. These include funding, a student's fit with the department, advisor selection strategies, academic advising, mentoring and socialization (Bair et al., 2004; Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Golde, 2005; Kraska, 2008).

#### **Funding**

According to the PhD completion project from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), 80 percent of doctoral students identified financial support as one of the main factors that contributed to their ability to complete their doctoral programs. This included 80 percent of social science students and 73 percent of humanities students who were less likely than engineering students to report that they had been offered guaranteed multi-year funding upon their admission to their degree programs (CGS, 2008). Financial support also has a significant influence on the time taken to complete a degree program (Ferrer de Valero, 2001). As such, several organizations such as the Ford, Danforth and Mellon Foundations as well as the National Defense Act Fellowships

have attempted to improve doctoral completion rates by providing fellowships and grants in aid to doctoral students. However fellowship holders were not found to have appreciably higher completion rates or shorter time to degree than their counterparts which indicates that the role that financial support actually plays in degree completion remains unclear (Ehrenberg et al., 2007).

### **Students Fit with Department**

Admissions decisions made by the department can affect the academic and social integration of doctoral students. This is especially true where the student is not a good fit in the department and has dissimilar research interests to department faculty. A lack of congruence between faculty and student research interests may make it difficult for students to find an advisor and other departmental support for their dissertation projects. A student's fit with their department also affects their level of involvement and contributes to their satisfaction, retention and completion (Bair & Haworth, 2004a; Ferrer de Valero, 2001). If students are dissatisfied with their programs, they are less likely to complete their doctoral programs (Bair & Haworth, 2004a; Lovitts, 1996).

### **Advisor Selection Strategies**

Research clearly indicates that advisors have a significant impact a student's ability to complete their degree program (Acker, et al., 1994; Golde, 2005; Ku et al., 2008). The means by which students are paired with their advisors is one issue that impacts student satisfaction and degree completion (Zhao, et al., 2007). New students can be paired with advisors in different ways. Some departments, such as in the humanities, assign students to an academic advisor at the beginning of their degree programs with the expectation that the student will form a relationship with another faculty member who they will ask to serve as their primary dissertation advisor (Zhao, et

al., 2007). In these departments, research is typically a solitary endeavor since students usually do not work on faculty members' research projects (Golde, 2005). In other departments, such as in science, advisors and students are paired as a part of the admissions process where advisors can choose the specific students they wish to work with. In these departments, it is not uncommon for faculty members to "sit at the center of a small solar system – graduate students at various stages and post doctoral research fellows orbit around the faculty advisor" and graduate students' dissertation research stems from their advisors own research (Golde, 2005, pp. 677). This structured interaction between faculty and students in such degree programs results in more consistent one-on-one interaction with advisors. Yet other departments assign students to a committee for their first year while searching for a primary advisor in a process called "research rotations" which is prevalent in life science degree programs (Gardner, 2010; Walker, Golde, Jones, Conklin, Bueschel & Hutchings, 2008).

## **Advising**

Researchers have continuously emphasized the importance of the advising relationship in graduate education (Acker et al., 1994; Golde, 2005; Ku et al., 2008). Factors contributing to the development of successful advising relationships include personal characteristics and advising style of the dissertation advisor.

Advisors' responsibilities include helping students get integrated into graduate education and socialized into the department and their chosen profession (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Lovitts, 2001). Golde (2005) argues that inadequate academic integration can contribute to attrition particularly in the humanities where she describes scholarship as a solitary endeavor. She suggests that a lack of social integration may be detrimental because students feel isolated from peers and faculty and must therefore operate in the

absence of a collegial and supportive relationship with other members of their department. Student integration and participation in departmental academic and social activities, therefore, are factors which contribute to persistence and time to degree completion (Ferrer de Valero, 2001).

### **Personal characteristics of the academic advisor.**

Good advisors are supportive. They interact with their students both formally and informally on a frequent basis. They are accessible, provide regular progress reports, and are intentional about helping their student progress through their degree program in a timely manner (Zhao et al. 2007). Students who were very satisfied with their advisors described them as brilliant and inspiring teachers, researchers, scholars, advisors and mentors who were competent and knowledgeable and served as good role models (Lovitts, 2001). Good academic advising relationships ( Ferrer del Valero, 2001; Nerad & Cerny, 1993) where there are clear expectations and a high level and quality of interaction and collaboration (Bair & Haworth, 2004a; Barnes & Austin, 2009) contribute to doctoral program completion. By contrast, students who were not satisfied with their advisors criticized them for being too controlling or not giving the student enough independence (Lovitts, 2001). When there were positive relationships between students and their advisors or other faculty members, students were significantly more likely to complete their doctoral degrees (Bair and Haworth, 2004a). In the same vein, Golde (2005) found that incompatible relationships between advisors and their students, characterized by a lack of interaction, trust and intellectual support, were the primary cause of non-completion among doctoral students.

### **Technical rationality model.**

Individual advising style has also emerged in the research as a factor that can contribute to the development of a healthy advising relationship. In general, academic advising falls into one of two models. The first is the technical rationality model of academic advising where students are led through a series of coherent and consistent set of practices that mainly addresses course selection and academic regulations (Acker et al., 1994). A similar model is labeled by Light (2001) as prescriptive advising which dictates that the production of the dissertation can be completed by following a series of predictable steps that the student undertakes under the supervision of their advisor. Prescriptive advising addresses only the basics of doctoral education such as course selection and academic regulations (Bland, 2004) and the student is seen as a passive participant who follows the rules in order to obtain a satisfactory result while advisors hold all the power and control (Acker et al., 1994; Bland, 2004).

### **Negotiated order model.**

The second model identified by Acker et al. (1994) is the negotiated order model wherein the advisor fosters the student's creativity while providing necessary guidance throughout the doctoral program and dissertation process. In this model, akin to the developmental model suggested by Bland (2004), the advisor empowers the student to participate fully in the decision making process. The aim is for the student to feel at home in the institution and to develop a meaningful educational plan which is compatible with their long and short term goals (Bland, 2004). Light (2001) supports this particular model, stating that there should be a partnership between the student and his or her advisor that goes beyond rules and regulations to foster the students' personal growth and development.

Ferrer de Valero (2001) quotes Bowen and Rudenstein (1992) who point out that the most common advising style tends to be one where advisors allow students to work at their own pace without setting a work schedule or deadlines. The authors are adamant about the danger inherent in this style of advising. They believe that periodical monitoring of research work is essential especially given the isolated nature of research in the social sciences and humanities. Lovitts' (2001) study of doctoral program completers and non-completers found that completers were three times as likely as non-completers to cite their advisors advising style as a reason for their degree of satisfaction with their programs. Positive remarks about academic advisors style included their flexibility and giving their students appropriate amounts of freedom, advice, support and guidance which are also characteristics of a good mentor.

### **Mentoring model.**

Some advisors serve in a dual capacity as both advisors and mentors to their students while others do not. Within academia, researchers often make the connection between advising and mentoring, some arguing that a combination of the two provides a positive academic advising experience for students. In fact, very often, the terms advisor and mentor are used interchangeably (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Valadez, 1998). Jacobi (1991) states that some academic advisors take on a mentoring role by providing support, encouragement and guidance, facilitating access to resources and opportunities, providing information, protection and sponsorship and serving as a role model. Paglis, Green & Bauer (2006) label this advising style advisor-mentoring. On the other hand, there are those who propose that the roles of advisor and mentor are significantly different and not necessarily related. Nettles and Millet (2006) think that advisors should act in an official capacity by discussing and approving coursework,

consistent with Acker's et al. (1994) technical rationality model. Mentoring on the other hand, implies a more involved relationship, shepherding their students through the process which is more consistent with Acker's et al. (1994) negotiated order model of advising.

Finding a supportive mentor is one of the first and most important steps to ensuring success in academia, particularly for students from nontraditional backgrounds (Klaw & Tailor, 2009). Because of the perceived and demonstrated impact of mentoring relationships on mentees or protégés (Paglis, et al., 2006), incorporating some aspects of mentoring into the advising relationship may positively affect doctoral student completion.

Several related but distinct definitions of mentoring have been identified in the literature. Paglis, et al. (2006) quote Anderson and Shannon (1988, p. 40) who defined mentoring as "a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, engages counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and/or personal development" Other researchers have defined mentoring as a socially constructed concept (Koro-Ljungberg & Hayes, 2006) which is a means to provide career and psychological assistance to the person being mentored known as a mentee or protégé (Cunningham, 1999; Kram, 1983) and to contribute to the development of strong and effective leaders through the transference of organizational knowledge (Gates, 2003). Kathy Kram, (1983, 1985) outlines two functions that characterize mentoring relationships. These are psychosocial and career related functions. Through the psychosocial functions of mentoring, mentors serve as role models. They provide

acceptance, confirmation, counseling and friendship so that mentees are supported in developing their sense of competence, confidence and effectiveness (Kram, 1983). Career related functions include sponsorship, coaching, protection, exposure, visibility and providing challenging work assignments aimed at helping mentees or protégés learn about organizational life and prepare for upcoming advancement opportunities (Kram, 1983). This is similar to the role of advisors play in the socialization of doctoral students.

Regardless of the demonstrated benefits of mentoring, often there are many barriers such as large student teacher ratios, different research interests and lack of incentives that preclude effective mentoring relationships in graduate education (Koro-Ljungberg & Hayes, 2006). Although research universities have acknowledged the many benefits associated with mentoring graduate students (Koro-Ljungberg & Hayes, 2006), the development of such relationships are hindered because teaching and its associated activities are rarely rewarded as compared to research specific activities (Barnes & Austin, 2009). This faculty reward system, typical of research institutions, may actually be a hindrance to advisors and advisees spending quality time in advising, mentoring and socializing activities (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Some faculty members, academics and professionals believe that mentoring relationships should only be created with students who are similar to them in terms of research interest, philosophical outlook, background and “polisocioecoracial” kinship because they see mentoring as a means of reproducing themselves (Brown et al., 1999).

### **Peer mentoring relationships.**

Peer relationships have also been shown to offer an important alternative to typical mentoring relationships. While there are similarities in the benefits reaped from peer

mentoring relationships and conventional mentoring relationships, there are significant differences. For example, in a typical mentoring relationship there are significant differences in age, hierarchical levels and the quality and content of the exchange between mentor and mentee, all of which are not necessarily true in a peer-mentoring relationship. Also, mentoring relationships typically involve a one-way helping dynamic while peer mentoring involves a two-way exchange (Kram & Isabela, 1985).

With regard to doctoral students, peer-mentoring relationships also provide a variety of psychosocial and career development benefits (Kram & Isabella, 1985). These kinds of relationships allow students to build social and emotional support structures that helped them get socialized to professional and academic settings, participate in academic discourse and to obtain skills necessary to successfully navigate their doctoral programs (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Kram and Isabella's (1995) study suggests that there are specific and unique developmental opportunities that arise from peer relationships that should not be overlooked or underestimated, particularly for students who do not have or want mentors. Peer mentoring can help students to "achieve a sense of expertise, equality and empathy that is frequently absent from traditional mentoring relationships" (p. 129). In addition, these relationships are important because they can provide continuous support over the course of a person's career as they tend to last longer than typical mentoring relationships which are most important in the early stages of one's career.

#### **Advisor-mentoring or Academic mentoring model.**

Many times advisors provide critical mentoring to students in a variety of ways (Paglis et al., 2006). For example, graduate advisors may demonstrate an interest in student welfare by helping them to address the anxiety that comes along with

undertaking graduate education (Bargar & Mayo-Chamberlain, 1983; Paglis et al., 2006). Role modeling, guidance, support, enhanced self-confidence and career advice were some of the benefits that graduate students received through participation in a mentoring relationship. In addition, graduate students who have been mentored tend to rate their graduate experience as positive (Paglis, et al., 2006; Luna & Cullen, 1998; Lyons & Scroggins, 1990) which supports Zhao et al's assertion that the best advisor-advisee relationships approach the ideal of mentor and protégé (Zhao, et al., 2007).

Paglis et al., (2006) expanded Kram's framework to include research collaboration thus creating the advisor-mentoring model of academic advising. The purpose of research collaborations is to enhance students' commitment to research and improve students' sense of self-efficacy, which is defined as the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977, p.193; Paglis, et al., 2006). Within this setting, advisors invite their students to collaborate on research projects, which is a context specific activity that complements the career-related function identified by Kram (1983, 1985). With regard to graduate study, mentoring assumes respect for students as sources of ideas and insights (Koro-Ljungberg & Hayes, 2006). The end result of this collaboration is typically a journal publication which is often viewed as the key to job placement for those interested in a career in research (Nerad & Cerny, 1993; Paglis et al., 2006).

### **Advising International Students**

There are specific challenges associated with advising international doctoral students such as cultural differences, perceptions and expectations of their dissertation advisors and a limited understanding of faculty culture.

International graduate students oftentimes find themselves challenged by classroom pedagogy and language acquisition issues directly arising from having a different educational background. Their academic success thus depends on the support they receive from their advisors in helping them navigate through these difficulties. Further, international students also experience homesickness, academic restrictions and financial difficulties directly associated with their F-1 student status. Thus, the quality of their advising relationship is critical to their academic success (Adrian-Taylor, et al., 2007; Ku, et al., 2008). For example, it is essential that advisors have an understanding of cultural sensitivity, discard ethnocentric ways of thinking and are aware of English proficiency difficulties their students may have. Advisors should also be prepared to help their students to effectively deal with these issues by suggesting helpful campus resources (Charles & Stewart, 1991).

International students' perceptions of their advisor may also be a hindrance to their success in doctoral programs. Cultural issues may affect the interaction between advisors and advisees, particularly when students are from cultures where, for example, females are not allowed to look their male advisors in the eye (Charles & Stewart, 1991). In addition, there is often a significant difference in the expectations that advisors and international students have of the advising relationship. From the students' perspective, these expectations often go unmet. For example, international students typically perceive that their advisor is supposed to tell them what to do and may be intimidated by the power and authority of the advisor or frustrated when these expectations are not met (Khabiri, 1985).

Additionally, international students often misinterpret their professors' intentions because they do not understand the faculty culture on U.S. campuses. Students may perceive their faculty members as uncaring if they are unable to meet with them outside of office hours because of other research, teaching and service responsibilities (Burrell & Kim, n.d.). In addition, international students often feel unsure about the level of dependence they should display towards their advisors and question whether or not showing initiative would be seen as showing too assertive or aggressive (Lewthwaite, 1996). Other international students reported that they often perceived that their faculty members were very busy and often unavailable when needed. In this case, these students may be reluctant to approach their advisors for assistance (Burrell & Kim, n.d.; Lewthwaite, 1996).

### **Socialization**

Socialization is defined as the process by which graduate students learn and adopt the skills, values, attitudes, norms and knowledge necessary to become members of the department, discipline and simultaneously to the professional role (Gardner, 2008; Gardner, 2010; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). Socialization can occur in both formal and informal ways. Formal socialization occurs through structures they establish, conference presentations, participation on job search panels and courses taught by faculty members. Informal socialization occurs through individual advising, research supervision and social interaction (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010). Socialization occurs as graduate students become familiar with the culture of higher education and learn how to behave, what to hope for, and what it means to succeed or fail (Tierney, 1997). This is important because every discipline has its own qualities, codes of conduct, and values that ultimately affect the experiences of the faculty, staff and students therein (Gardner

& Barnes, 2007; Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2005). Socializing doctoral students to the academic department and to the research profession is an essential function of the advisor (Barnes & Austin, 2009) but can also be achieved through orientation programs and graduate assistantships (Poock, 2004). Socialization can also be achieved through interaction with peers within the department or college although this is generally an undervalued method. This may be because faculty members spend more time addressing program requirements and structure than dealing with interpersonal relationships between students (Gardner, 2010).

Lovitts (2001) offered a model of graduate student socialization which occurs in four developmental stages. The first stage, labeled stage zero, is the anticipatory stage which typically occurs when the student first begins their degree program and must learn the roles, procedures and agendas associated with their new position. Stage 1 is the entry and adjustment stage which coincides with the first year during which students begins to feel like a part of their department. Stage 2 begins the development of competence which starts in the second year of the students program and carries on until the student has completed all coursework and has achieved candidacy. Finally, in stage 3- the research stage – the student develops a dissertation topic, establishes their doctoral committee and writes and defends the dissertation (Lovitts, 2001; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010).

Similarly, Tinto (1993) proposed that socialization occurs in three stages: transition, candidacy and doctoral completion. During the transition stage, students decide that they want to be a member of the group or department and engage in social and academic interactions particularly with the department. The candidacy stage is

characterized by the acquisition of knowledge typically through coursework. Importantly, success at this stage depends heavily on the students skills and abilities and their interaction with faculty members. At the doctoral completion stage, the student moves from gaining candidacy to completing their research proposal, research project and dissertation defense. In this stage, the student goes from regularly interacting with several faculty members to interacting with a few, most notably, the dissertation advisor (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). At this final stage of doctoral study, the provision of support may be one way to increase completion rates (Burnett, 1999) particularly when it comes to the quality and appropriateness of supervision (Wilcoxson, 1994). Thus, the advisors role is most crucial during the research or completion stage of the doctoral education process.

### **Dissertation advisors.**

According to Lovitts (2001), collaboration with faculty is the most effective means of socialization. As such, advisors who work closely and have frequent interactions with their students will facilitate their students' intellectual and professional development to a greater degree than those who do not (p. 146). Through socialization activities with their advisors, students also learn about and adapt to the institutional culture which affects both their academic and social experience in their degree programs (Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). When interacting with international students, faculty members may tend to focus more on honing research skills rather than spend time working on the teaching skills. This may be because faculty members often feel a sense of discomfort when dealing with cultural differences and prefer to focus on academic pursuits rather than professional socialization (Weidman et al., 2001).

### **Orientation programs.**

Orientation programs are another source of socialization for doctoral students that assists them in getting acclimated to their new environment and tends to increase persistence and retention (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Poock, 2004). Orientation programs are any effort undertaken by the university to help entering students to transition from their previous environment to the collegiate environment with the goal of enhancing their academic success (Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984). While some researchers praise orientation programs as a means of helping doctoral students transition to their departments and the institution in general, others suggest that such programs tend to deal more with students' social concerns while leaving academic concerns unaddressed (Cusworth, 2001).

### **Graduate assistantships.**

Research and teaching assistantships also serve as a means of socializing doctoral students to the respective professions and helping students to develop relevant knowledge, skills and abilities. Assistantships, at their best, organize teaching and research experiences in such a way as to allow doctoral students the opportunity to engage in developmentally challenging experiences. However, this is not necessarily the case as many universities create teaching assistantships to address department needs for faculty substitutes and where research assistantships are based upon faculty grants and research needs (Austin, 2002). As such, research assistantships do not necessarily address the needs of students in helping them develop the knowledge, skills and abilities required for them to be successful in their chosen professions.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, doctoral program completion can be affected by factors such as fit, financial support (Ferrer de Valero, 2001), socialization (Gardener et al., 2008; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Golde, 2005), academic advising (Acker et al, 1994; Bland, 2004; Light 2001; Lovitts, 2001), and mentoring (Koro-Ljungberg & Hayes, 2006). For international students, cultural differences, perceptions and expectations (Golde, 1998, 2000, Charles & Stewart, 1991) of their advisors can compound the situation. As such, these are the issues that will be addressed in the design of this study.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand how international social science and humanities doctoral students navigate through their degree programs with specific attention being paid to the role of their dissertation advisors. This information will assist in the improvement of the advising experiences through specific recommendations to departments, faculty and staff members related to their interaction with their international student advisees. This research answers the questions: how do international doctoral students at a Research I institution navigate their way through their degree programs and what are their perceptions of the role their dissertation advisors play in their degree completion?

This chapter describes the methodology of the study. It begins with a discussion about qualitative research, followed by an introduction to the theoretical perspective and methodology, data collection and analysis methods, and a description of study participants. The chapter concludes with a statement of the researcher's subjectivity.

### **Methodological Perspective**

Since the purpose of the study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of international doctoral students, the use of qualitative methodologies is the most appropriate means of accessing the participants' own 'truths'. The design of this study is based on previous research that indicates the importance of advising, mentoring, socialization, and student expectations in the completion of doctoral programs in order to explore the experiences of the participants.

Qualitative research can be defined as a broad approach to the study of social phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and has traditionally been used to illuminate the details of a newly explored issue or problem (Creswell, 2005), in this case, the academic advising experiences and perceptions of international doctoral students. Qualitative methods are used to understand social phenomena from the point of view of those experiencing them (Glesne, 2006). Traditional qualitative research assumes that knowledge is not objective “Truth”, but instead, is produced differently by different people. It also assumes that society is reasonably structured and orderly and also that researchers remain neutral in trying to understand the meaning participants make of their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This mode of research has become increasingly important especially in fields such as education, nursing and management which have traditionally been dominated by positivism and quantitative research methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) qualitative research has five main characteristics. It (a) is naturalistic and is aimed at representing what is real (b) uses multiple methods that respect the participants in the study (c) focuses on context (d) is emergent and evolving and (e) is fundamentally interpretive.

The study employed a constructivist approach which embraces the premise that meaning is neither subjective nor objective and is not created but constructed by humans as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). The researcher must therefore form a relationship with study participants in which they are comfortable sharing their stories and experiences in their own words (Charmaz, 2000). As such, participants had the opportunity to ask any questions they had about the study in order to create a trusting relationship and help the participants to be confident that the

researcher's priority was to tell their stories accurately. Participants' questions included wanting to know about my own personal background, my reasons for choosing to study this particular topic, and about my experience as an international doctoral student. I was very careful in answering these questions to not say anything that I thought would influence the participants' responses. In the second interview, many participants asked questions about my preliminary findings. I responded by saying that the results appeared to be similar across many different degree programs and countries of origin but tried not to give a more detailed response. Many participants had apparently thought seriously about the questions asked in the first interview and one participant asked clarifying questions about confidentiality of their responses because of concerns about the information getting back to their department. I assured this participant that there would be no identifying information revealed in the report and this alleviated their anxiety. Many participants expanded on or repeated things they said in interview number 1 and for the most part seemed much more open in interview number 2. Perhaps this came as a result of developing a certain level of trust in me as a researcher.

Constructivism also acknowledges that each person's experience and perspective is different but just as valid and worthy of respect as any other (Crotty, 1998). As such, meaning, or truth cannot be described as wholly objective or wholly subjective but a composite of both objectivity and subjectivity. This is part of an interpretivist stance which recognizes that it is possible to understand the subjective meaning of actions in an objective manner which leads to an understanding of the narrator's beliefs and desires (Schwandt, 2000). Meaning derived by the analyst is considered to be the

original meaning of the original narrative. As such, it is imperative that researchers employing this framework take action to “step outside their historical frame of reference” by keeping a reflective journal and noting personal biases, similar experiences and the thought process throughout the duration of the study (Schwandt, 2000).

### **Research Design**

This research project employs qualitative research methodologies. Participants were chosen from among the population of international doctoral students in social science and humanities degree programs at a research I institution in the south eastern United States. Participants were interviewed using a common interview guide and the information obtained was analyzed using one version of Richard Boyatzis’ (1998) thematic analysis. This is finally presented in the context and language of the study (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

### **Institutional Context**

The institution at which this study was conducted is a public land grant, research I university (Carnegie Foundation, 2009) considered among the top 20 public institutions in the nation. There are currently over 50,000 students enrolled in all 16 colleges and over 4,000 faculty members including 52 Eminent Scholars. In a speech presented to the International Exhibition for Higher Education in 2010, the provost and senior Vice President of the institution expressed the University’s commitment to internationalizing its campus and globalizing its operations (Glover, 2010). In light of this, the University’s International Student Center has developed a strategic plan for the internationalization of the university. Within this context, the Center’s aim is to enhance the University’s ability to pursue and develop international activities and partnerships. Through these efforts, students have the opportunity to learn about and begin to appreciate other

cultures through a range of study abroad programs and from international students and faculty who come from over 100 different countries (UFIC, 2010).

Research is also an important part of the culture and the university received research awards totaling \$678 million in the 2009-10 academic year. The University's position is that collaborations between faculty and graduate students, particularly doctoral students, are a necessity, contribute to the research in their disciplines in countless ways and play an important role in the emergence of the state of Florida as a technological and economic leader in the 21st century (UF research, 2011).

Since 2008, the institution has experienced a decrease of over \$158 million dollars in state funding due to the nationwide economic recession and has resulted in the university being ranked 50th, last, in state government per capita funding for higher education (Crabbe, 2010c). In 2008, the board of trustees approved \$47 million in cuts, announced several faculty and staff layoffs and a reduction in enrollment by 1,000 students per year for four years. In January 2009, the president requested that each academic and administrative unit prepare reduced budget proposals that were 10% less than their current budget which resulted in further faculty and staff reductions (Associated Press, 2008; UF News, 2009). These budget cuts may also limit the availability of funding to graduate students, and international students.

In the fall of 2009, the University's president announced an additional \$16.6 million in budget cuts for the University which would result in the elimination of many faculty perks and the implementation of a voluntary retirement program. He also announced that tuition increases would fund the hiring of additional faculty members after money from the federal stimulus was exhausted (Crabbe, 2009). However, additional cuts are

expected moving forward into the 2011-12 academic year (Crabbe, 2010b). As of March 2010, 127 faculty members had chosen to voluntarily retire (Crabbe, 2010a) which will undoubtedly have an effect on faculty availability to students, including international doctoral students.

Funding cuts have also resulted in increased tuition, and additional accountability on the part of all academic and non-academic departments as demonstrated by the implementation of the new Responsibility Center Management (RCM) budget model. This new model allows the university to focus more on increasing the quality of education they provide for their student by encouraging financial autonomy which will mitigate the effects of the continuing decrease in state funding for the institution (UF Intro to RCM, n.d.).

## **Participants**

Data supplied annually by the institution to the Institute of International Education (IIE), indicates that there are currently 4,557 international students enrolled in full time and part time degree programs at the institution under study. Of these, 3,287 are enrolled in graduate programs. Of these graduate students, 36 percent (n = 1,180) are female and 64 percent (n = 2,107) are male. The majority of these international graduate students, 45 percent (n = 1,479), use personal and family funds to pay for their enrollment. Forty two percent (n = 1408) receive funding from the university or their degree program. The remainder relies on employment, private organizations, the US government or their home government for financial assistance.

The vast majority of graduate international students on this campus, 77 percent (n = 2545), are of Asian origin. Six percent (n = 203) are from Europe, 4 percent (n = 112) from Africa, 1 percent (n = 43) from the Caribbean and 11 percent (n = 363) from South

America, Central America and Canada. Sixty eight percent (n = 2335) are enrolled in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields while 32 percent (n = 1052) are enrolled in social sciences and humanities degree programs. Participants were chosen from among the 268 doctoral students enrolled in social sciences and humanities programs on this campus.

Purposeful sampling techniques, which are intended to help achieve an in depth understanding of the experiences of particular people, was used to recruit 6-8 participants for this study. From the population of international doctoral students on the campus of this Research I institution, criterion based selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 69) was used to identify study participants. Based on the models of doctoral student socialization, it appears that the academic advising relationship is significantly more important in the doctoral completion or research stage of a student's doctoral programs (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Gardner & Mendoza., 2010; Lovitts, 2001).

Participants selected met all of the following criteria: (a) be enrolled in a humanities or social science degree program, (b) have completed all coursework requirements for their degrees (i.e., be in the research or doctoral completion stage of their program) (c) have a formal dissertation chairperson which they have chosen or been assigned (d) be available for interviews and other contact in the fall semester (e) be willing to participate in the study (f) be an international student (g) be comfortable participating in an interview conducted in English.

Access to the study population was obtained through the university's International Center listserv. An email was sent to all international graduate students on two separate occasions soliciting participants who meet the predetermined criteria. The first

recruitment email was sent out to doctoral students in non-STEM degree programs in mid-September after IRB approval had been obtained. This initial invitation yielded two students who were willing to participate. In mid October, a revised IRB application, offering \$5 gift cards for each interview completed, was submitted. After receiving approval and sending a revised version of the invitation email to the listserv, 15 students responded of whom 5 were eligible based on the criteria for the study. One additional participant was recruited through personal connections of the researcher. Study participants were subsequently interviewed in November and December 2010. One participant, who was conducting research in her home country, responded to the first round of interview questions via email but chose to withdraw from the second round.

### **Data Collection**

The main source of data for this study was the participants' experiences which were obtained through semi-structured life world interviews. Before engaging in data collection, permission was sought, and granted, from the University's Internal Review Board (IRB). Interview questions were developed based on research on academic advising, mentoring, international students and doctoral socialization which suggests that these factors are essential to the success of doctoral students.

An interview guide containing a list of questions was used to steer the individual interviews. The use of an interview guide ensures that generally the same information is obtained from each participant in the same order (Patton, 1980). While the narrator is the primary participant in the interview, the interviewer was not passive, asking probing, encouraging questions in order to gain further explanations based on participant's responses. (Riessman, 1987). The interview guide also allowed the researcher to make good use of the limited time available for the interview and helped to delimit the topics

that were explored by establishing a conversation that focused on the subject under study (Patton, 1980).

Qualitative interviews constitute a special kind of conversation that allows researchers to obtain empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). However, Holstein & Gubrium (2003) state that ideally the interviewer should actively try to engage the interviewee in the sharing their experience but not in the related processes of co-constructing the attitudes, sentiments and information in question.

One form of research interviews, a semi structured life world interview, is defined as an interview which is used to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale, 1996, p. 5-6). Through such interviews, a description of each participants experience was obtained. Semi-structured interviews consist of a sequence of themes and suggested questions to be addressed. However, there is also freedom to ask probing questions to follow up on answers given and stories told by study participants (Kvale, 1996). An interview guide was used to guide the conversation and contained a sequence of carefully worded suggested questions and themes that were covered in the interviews.

Data were obtained by conducting face-to-face semi-structured life world interviews with 7 out of 8 participants. The eighth participant responded to the interview questions via email because she was in her home country conducting her own dissertation research. There were a total of 5 introductory questions and 9 interview questions (See Appendix A) which explored the participants' experiences with academic advising. The open nature of the interview allowed the interviewer to ask questions that

followed up on unexpected leads that arose, while leaving control of the conversation in the hands of the participant (Riessman, 1993). Probing questions were asked to encourage participants to provide further explanation of particular points of interest (Glesne, 2006).

### **Conceptual Framework**

While the focus of the study is the academic advising experiences of international graduate students, research indicates that there are several factors that can affect attrition and completion rates. As such, issues such as financial aid opportunities (Ferrer de Valero, 2001), doctoral student socialization (Gardener et al., 2008), integration and involvement (Golde, 2005), academic advising and the relationship with their advisors (Acker et al, 1994; Bland, 2004; Light 2001, Lovitts, 2001) cultural differences, perceptions, and expectations (Golde, 2000; Charles & Stewart 1991) should be briefly addressed during the interview in order to explore comparative perceived impact of these factors on degree completion. With specific regard to the academic advising experiences, unrealistic or inaccurate expectations also play a role in the success or failure of the advising relationship, and further, degree completion (Khabiri, 1985). Participants were asked about the expectations they had of their advisor prior to the beginning of their degree programs. In this vein, participants were also asked about what they perceive to be their responsibility in the success of their advising experiences and degree programs (Greisberger, 1984). Finally, participants were asked questions aimed at eliciting the nature of the interactions between participants and their advisors. The mentoring framework was applied to participants' responses in an attempt to determine whether each advising relationship shares any characteristics of a typical mentoring relationship.

The results of Lovitt's (2001) study indicates that whether a student chooses or is assigned an advisor can be a critical factor in the program completion as students who selected or were selected by an advisor were more likely to complete than those who were assigned. In fact, her study found that being assigned an advisor was associated with short durations in their program as students who had been assigned an advisor reported feeling no connection with them. As a result, I asked participants how they came to be advised by their current advisors. In addition, the nature and quality of the interactions between student and advisor is critical to how well a student is socialized to the discipline. Lovitts (2001) attempted to explore this factor by asking students to "tell me about your advisor" and further probed for information about the frequency and duration of interactions and quality of the relationship as necessary. For this study, a similar question was asked in order to elicit such responses from this study's participants.

Lovitts' (2001) study also explored the interactions between doctoral students and their advisors. Her study found that a typical meeting was "brief and to the point" and lasted approximately 20 – 30 minutes (p. 138). Her survey data also showed that program completers had more interaction with their advisors than non-completers at all stages of graduate education. In addition to this, research in the social sciences and humanities has been described as a solitary endeavor (Golde, 2005). Therefore, participants were asked to describe a typical meeting with their advisors. Probes were also used to find out approximately how often these meetings take place.

Student perceptions of their advisors personal characteristics were also found to be important to program completion in Lovitts' (2001) study. As such, participants in this

were asked what characteristics their ideal advisor should have. In addition, participants were asked about factors that they believe affect the success of their relationships with their current advisors. Finally, students were asked to talk about some of the issues specifically related to advising international students. For example, Greisberger (1984) suggests that advisors should allocate additional time to advising international students.

### **Data Analysis**

There were a total of 13 interviews conducted. 10 were transcribed by this researcher and the other 3 were transcribed by a graduate of the M.Ed. program in the College of Education. All interviews were then re-read and compared to the audio recordings in order to ensure that the transcripts were accurate. All interviews were then read line by line and analyzed using Boyatzis' hybrid approach to thematic analysis.

Given the nature of the interview data for this study, it would not be possible to compare sub-samples as required for the traditional thematic analysis methods described by Boyatzis. More specifically, there was not a desirable set of criteria by which to divide the data into sub-samples (e.g. English speakers vs. non-English speakers etc). As such, it was not possible to compare and contrast across subsamples. In this case, Boyatzis suggests that researchers use a method of thematic analysis wherein comparison across subsamples is not required.

Following this approach, the first step was to develop themes and codes arising directly from the raw information. Each interview was read line by line from beginning to end to identify any patterns that emerge in experiences of the study participants (Aronson, 1994). Information that appeared relevant to the research questions was highlighted and summarized. Next, each interview was read again and summaries were compared for similarities across interviews and grouped accordingly into themes.

Themes were created by “bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences which are often meaningless when viewed alone” (Leininger, 1985, p. 60). Themes that did not appear in at least 6 of the 13 interviews were eliminated from consideration so as to minimize exclusions from the resulting codes. The final step was to group themes into codes then to conduct a review to ensure that the codes were applicable to all members of the sample (Boyatzis, 1998) and provided a comprehensive view of the experience of these international doctoral students.

For the purposes of this study, themes were obtained through an inductive process using raw data from the interviews. Working with raw data enhances appreciation of the information and illuminate silenced voices or perspectives inherent in the information. Good thematic codes capture the richness of the phenomenon under study and have five elements (a) a label or name (b) a definition of what the theme concerns (c) a description of how to know when the theme occurs, (d) a description of any qualifications or exclusions to the identification of the theme and (e) examples from the data (Boyatzis, 1998). An additional step taken in this analysis was to compare this comprehensive view to the existing research framework so as to illuminate any differences or similarities between the experiences of international students and domestic students.

### **Validity and Reliability**

There has been some debate regarding the applicability of reliability and validity measures in qualitative research (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). Some authors argue that the priority of qualitative research should be to ensure trustworthiness as a part of the constructivist paradigm (Lincoln, 1995). With this in mind, strategies such as prolonged engagement (Creswell, 2005), member checks during coding, and peer reviews were

employed in order to confirm results with participants (Morse et al., 2002). Limitations of the study were also considered and clearly stated.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1981) member checks should be a continuous process during data analysis. One way to do this is to ask participants to review their interview transcripts or the results of data analysis. However, some researchers warn that member checks may actually be a means of invalidating research since there is no guarantee that participants will judge the analysis to be correct (Morse et al., 2002). Morrow (2005) suggests that validity can be assessed by determining to what extent the participants meaning was understood by the researcher. For the purpose of this study, member checks allowed for the clarification and as a strategy for the validation of the trustworthiness of the interview transcripts (Poland, 2003). Participants were given the opportunity to check interview data to make sure that their voices were accurately represented.

Prolonged engagement in the field was accomplished by conducting multiple interviews with the study participants. Member checks were conducted after interviews have been carefully transcribed and rechecked for accuracy. Complete interview transcripts were sent to each respective study participant thus allowing participants to confirm the accuracy of the transcribed interview protocol. Only one participant had a concern about confidentiality which we discussed in the second interview. Peer review was conducted by inviting one masters-level graduate students with qualitative research experience to read 3 out of 13 interview transcripts to determine whether or not the codes made sense. Since themes and codes were derived directly from the raw interviews, there was a great deal of consistency between the researcher and peer

reviewers themes and codes. It was expected that unfamiliarity with cultural themes that may emerge can cause barriers to understanding when the interviewer and narrator are from different cultural backgrounds (Riessman, 1987) but this was not the case.

For this study, I employed the following strategies to ensure validity and reliability of the data collected, analyzed and presented:

- Multiple interviews allowed for prolonged engagement with participants so as to obtain as complete a story as possible.
- Complete interview transcripts were sent to study participants to allow them the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the information to be used for analysis
- I maintained a self-reflective journal throughout the research process to keep track of my experiences and emerging self-understanding and awareness over time. This was helpful in addressing my reflexivity and making me aware of previously obscured assumptions or biases and emotional responses that may come to light during the research process. The journal also served as a location for me to keep memos of my evolving understanding of the data and the analysis process.
- Purposeful sampling methods were used to ensure that appropriate perspectives are represented
- Data was collected and analyzed concurrently so that follow up questions for the second round of interviews could be created.
- One masters level, graduate student with qualitative research experience served as a peer reviewer of the interview protocols.
- Final codes were applied to the entire sample of interview protocols to ensure consistency.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument since typically it is the researcher who collects and analyzes data (Kvale, 1996). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) qualitative researchers view social worlds as holistic and all encompassing and should engage in systematic reflection on the research process. They should also be cognizant of their own social identities and how these identities can

affect and shape the study. In qualitative research, phenomenologists coined the term 'bracketing' to describe the process of building an awareness of one's own assumptions and predispositions and setting them aside. This is meant to allow the researcher to engage in fair collection and interpretation of data (Husserl, 1931; Morrow, 2005).

With this in mind, it is important to disclose certain characteristics about myself as a researcher in order to address my reflexivity (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). I believe that truth exists on an individual basis, meaning that there can be a different truth for each individual on the planet. For example, in terms of the advising relationship with advisors, I believe that there may be similarities between my relationship with my advisor and another person's but I also believe that we will not experience this relationship the same way even if we had the same degree program, courses and advisor.

I selected this topic because of my own experience, as an international student on three very different college campuses in the United States. I have experienced most if not all of the hardships that international graduate students contend with, including but not limited to negative experiences with advisors, financial difficulties arising from my F-1 (international student) status and a feeling of helplessness when it comes to the bureaucracy involved in graduate education. I have also had the experience of feeling that I am not in a position to complain about any of the academic issues I was facing with my advisors since I was under the impression that my F-1 status could easily be jeopardized. As an international student, I have also had the feeling that I had to do exactly what my advisor said regardless of what my opinion was simply because of the

power I perceived they had over me and their ability to affect my academic, financial and immigration status.

As international students we are told that we have to be extremely careful to meet the requirements to maintain our status because something as small as working one too many hours per week or filling out a form inaccurately could easily put us out of status and leave us at risk for deportation at a moment's notice. It is stressful just being an international student, particularly on a large campus where it is so easy to perceive that you are just number and that there are limited resources available and accessible to us.

With regard to the research methods to be employed for this study, I have had experience conducting ethnographic interviews and coding protocols for three prior research studies. This knowledge was gleaned from completing coursework in Foundations of Qualitative Research, Qualitative Data Collection and Qualitative Data Analysis. I consider myself to be more of a 'doer' than a researcher. I am much more comfortable with the practice of student affairs than I am with the study of it. While I do feel a sense of disorientation with regards to completing this study, I am excited by the prospects of carrying out the steps involved and developing a new set of skills and building an experience that I have not had.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Being an international student, will be both a benefit and a challenge for me with regard to completing this research study. Thus, it will be important for me to set my own experience and expectations aside (bracketing) while conducting the interviews and analyzing data. At the same time, I believe this experience will also be able to assist me in asking probing questions during the data collection phase as well as interpreting the data and presenting it in a meaningful form after data analysis.



## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The goal of this study was to explore the experiences of the international doctoral students who participated in this study as they navigate through their degree programs. It is important to note that while there were some similarities between these results and information contained in current literature, there were also significant differences that make international doctoral students experiences distinct from that of graduate students in general. Some of the themes were expected in light of the literature reviewed for this study. Other themes were new and represent the most significant findings of the study. These new themes uncovered nuances related to the development of the advisor-advisee relationship, the level of fit the student has within their department, and aspects of socialization unique to international doctoral students. In addition, while the issue of funding was expected to emerge, its impact on participants' immigration status was the most salient factor related to international students' experiences.

Participants represented countries including Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Taiwan, Korea, Canada, Nicaragua and Italy. Seven out of the eight participants spoke English as a second language. Three participants chose to attend university in the U.S. in order to learn English. Although each participant represented a different doctoral degree program, seven out of eight had completed a master's degree in the United States prior to enrolling in their doctoral programs. Only one completed that master's degree at the institution where this study was undertaken. All participants intend to pursue careers in either research or the professoriate upon completion of their degrees. Demographics of study participants are presented in Appendix B.

## **Findings**

As stated in the previous chapter, interviews were analyzed and common themes were grouped into codes which give a comprehensive picture of participants' experience. In the following sections, each code is presented starting with a label and followed by a definition, a description of how the code occurs and, where necessary, a description of any exclusions. Examples of each code are also provided directly from the interview data.

### **Relationship with Dissertation Advisor**

The study was designed with a particular focus on the role of the dissertation advisor given that research consistently points to the advisor as the main source of socialization for doctoral students (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010; Lovitts, 2001). However, this study illustrates that for these students, the role of the advisor is not as important. All eight participants described both positive and negative experiences. The following themes describe factors that affected the creation of relationships with their advisors.

#### **Character of meetings.**

Participants were asked to talk about a typical meeting with their dissertation advisor. Only two participants indicated that they had regular meetings with their advisor. One met with her advisor every two weeks, and the second had weekly lab meetings with her advisor and other graduate student research assistants. Antoinette had regular meetings with her advisors, however, her experience is vastly different from the remaining participants because her degree program, while listed as a social science degree program, is more similar in nature to a data driven, hard science degree program (Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2005). She says the following:

I think people are a little different but it's more just that you're involved in this ongoing research that's happening and how that's going. Because I guess it's so day to day that you have these lab meetings every week where you just share seven days more of data.

Both of these participants indicated that they talked with their advisors about the content of their research, and obtained comments, critiques and suggestions from their advisors during regular meetings. The remaining participants arranged meetings with their advisors as they went along through the semester. Typically, these participants reported sending emails or simply dropping by their advisors' office to schedule these meetings.

Participants also reported that they expected faculty members to show genuine concern about them and their progress through their programs. This was demonstrated by advisors inquiring about both academic and non-academic aspects of the student's life. Although Georgia did not have regular meetings with her advisor, she talked about the contents of the meetings she did arrange with her two advisors. She reports:

For our meetings I usually email him the material in advance. I sit down, we talk, he gives me some advice and I leave... In our meetings we discuss pending issues that can be varied as in corrections for papers, new analysis, re doing some work

Regarding meetings with her second advisor, she says the following:

Sometimes we talk about personal issues and sometimes we work in her place, office or coffee places

On the other hand, Antoinette did not think that a faculty member showing interest in her personal life was necessary to the advising relationship. She says the following:

I guess some people have this advisor as best friend model that I'm not that keen on where they go out drinking and stuff. So I'm not really into that. That seems a bit weird to me.

These differences in perspective between Georgia and Antoinette may be as a result of personal preferences combined with differences in the culture and norms of their respective degree programs. Antoinette reported having regular meetings with her advisor as part of the weekly lab meetings and most of her time was spent in a lab where there were other graduate research assistants. This environment of continuous interaction might foster a climate for informal and personal interactions to flourish thus accounting for the differences between her experience and Georgia's.

### **Advisor support.**

Support on the part of the advisor was another theme that emerged from the data. This support was demonstrated in a variety of forms including writing recommendations for scholarships and fellowships, working together to create concrete steps for participants to carry out throughout the research process and providing personal support during stressful times. Students also talked about the importance of feeling that advisors care for them. However, this caring did not necessarily relate to mentoring as explained below. The following quotes illustrate these points.

Thomas shared his expectations of caring from his advisor:

I think generally caring. I mean I have to feel it. I have to feel I mean that oh ok this person really cares. Even challenge me. I mean, you can challenge me but if you just try to you know bully me I can tell you know the difference between you trying to bully me or you try to just care, help.

Hannah spoke highly of her advisor when she talked about his support of her scholarship and fellowship applications:

He is also always pushing me to obtain like scholarships or fellowships. Last semester I applied for one to interview my writer and he was very supportive of this. He is always willing to write letters saying about what I am doing and things like that

Thomas also talked about ways in which his advisor could support him as an international student:

But Dr. C. is kind of nicely pushing me you know, she gives me concrete steps that I can follow. So that's going to really help me a lot.

Veronica also spoke highly of one of her two advisors:

[he] always has open door so I can always stop by and talk with him If I'm too stressed and think I'm never going to be done or finished or that it's not good enough. He definitely believes in what I'm doing and what I can achieve, writing letters of recommendation. But because it's not directly in his field it's more difficult to discuss or comment on what I'm doing and why I'm doing it.

Participants indicated that having a supportive caring advisor who challenged them was a positive aspect of their relationships with their advisors. Further, providing support in the form of recommendations for scholarships and fellowships was important as well. This finding is consistent with the literature which indicates that good advisors actively demonstrate their support for their advisees (Zhao, et al., 2007)

### **Academic mentoring.**

For the most part, participants did not identify their advisors as mentors. In fact, only two students identified other persons they thought of as mentors. For example, Thomas talked about a faculty member from a previous institution and Christine was adamant that her current advisor was not a mentor to her:

he is more like an advisor not a mentor. Because I work with other professors and other professors make me feel more like [they are] a mentor; for me a mentor also focuses on your professional development. Also focuses on you as a human being. I think the missing part of this between [me and] my current advisor... I think I get that kind of support from other advisors.

Antoinette was also adamant that she did not particularly need her advisor to serve as a mentor to her:

What I want is for us to have a good working relationship where we are good at talking about the things that we need to do for the study and stuff. I'm not really concerned if I can tell you like, I'm sad about some fight I had with somebody else or whatever it would be. So, I think it's doing the right things for the research.

Yasmine, while she did not use the term 'mentor' to describe her advisor, spoke of her in a way that elicited positive feelings for her:

she really tried to help and support me. And it is not just for me, I mean she always tried to support all students and even though I am international students, I am not good at speaking English, I'm not really good at writing English. But if I turn in my paper, instead of saying, "oh you are not good writer", she just try to figure out what I am talking [about] or she helps me to clarify my writing and her comments are great so and then she always try to see my advantages instead of my disadvantages. So before seeing my problems and my... cultural issues, she always talk to me about what I am doing good job or what is my good experience. Kind of really positive thoughts

In sum, the findings related to the relationship with advisors are consistent with the literature on academic advising which suggests that good advisors trust their advisees and provide intellectual and personal support for them (Lovitts, 2001). The theme of mentorship also emerged although not in the way expected. The literature is clear that the best advisor-advisee relationships approach the ideal mentor-protégé relationship (Zhao, et al., 2007). However, the findings from this study suggest that although participants recognized the value of mentorship in general, their current advisors do not necessarily serve as mentors to them. In this way, the findings of this study support the assertions of prior studies where researchers suggested that mentors choose their protégés based primarily on similarities they share (Brown et al., 1999) and thus, may not see international students as appropriate candidates for mentorship.

## **Culture.**

Some participants spoke specifically about the impact of culture or their advisors experiences with other cultures as one aspect that affected their relationships with them. Christine is from a similar cultural background as her advisor; a culture where males and females have very different interactions than they do in American culture. For example, in some Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, females are not allowed to look their male advisors in the eye or be in a closed room alone with a male non-relative (Charles & Stewart, 1991). She spoke about how this impacted her ability to build a strong relationship with her advisor:

[his] personality I think he is more distant. I think because he is a male and I'm a female. And then he [is] kind of distant I feel. And as an international student we see teachers as your parents here.

Hannah, who is also from a similar cultural background as her advisor, also indicated that this similarity does not always have a positive impact on the development of her relationship with her advisor. When asked how the similarity in culture impacts her relationship she said the following:

sometimes [it] hurts because sometimes as we are Latins or Latinos, I think that sometimes we are like brothers and sisters but at the end we also have our differences so I don't know if it's just like the way I see this

Yasmine and Charles also mentioned that their advisors prior experience with different cultures, through advising other international students or through traveling to various countries, affected their perception of their advisors ability to interact with them.

Yasmine said the following:

Actually, at first time I said why [did] she believe me? Because she didn't have really much experience with me so I'm really curious about why, how come she can believe me? But I heard she has Korean students 5 or 6 years ago and she really did a good job so basically my advisor has really

good experience with Korean students before so that's why maybe it has a good impact on my job

Charles had similar expectations of his advisor because she had travelled extensively in his country of origin and was intimately familiar with his cultural background:

she's American, but see, here is the interesting thing. Yeah. You should consider this. Because she studies the music history of Italy so she speaks my language and she studied the history of my country in the 18th century. So she's been visiting there, we met over there. So yeah that's something that certainly plays into your thing here. I think to some degree, she probably understands my diversity.

The literature on advising international student also talks about international students often being hesitant to take initiative or approach their advisors for assistance (Burrell & Kim, n.d.; Lewthwaite, 1996). Yasmine illustrates this well by sharing her hesitation to show initiative and ask to participate in the writing of a research paper:

I don't know how I can participate in writing research paper. I really want to be in one of the authors in research papers but I think American students they are really positive they are really active in participating in writing research or book chapters with academic advisors but I don't know how I can participate in, how I can say like can I join that? But I'm really afraid of [them saying] no because you are not good writer yet and I do not think you have the quality to write a paper now, so I don't ask anything about participating in writing research paper.

The findings from this study are generally consistent with the literature on advising international students in that culture does indeed have an impact on building a relationship with advisors in a variety of ways (Charles & Stewart, 1991; Khabiri, 1985). Results show that advisors and international students having similar cultural backgrounds will not necessarily guarantee the creation of a positive relationship. Similarly, experience with or understanding of an international students' culture does not necessarily result in the ability to build a good relationship. However, prior experience

advising international students may impact the advisors ability to interact in a positive way with other international students from the same culture.

### **Fit with Department**

Another code that emerged from the data regards the participants' fit with their departments. Fit refers to how suitable a student is for placement within or acceptance to a particular department or degree program. Issues related to fit with the department that emerge at the time of admission to that department can be different from issues that arise upon matriculation to the program.

Charles shared this experience about his first interaction with faculty in his department:

I got here in [my degree program] and as soon as I got here I wanted to introduce myself to the head of [my] department and he eventually said that I would have not fit and he suggested [for] me to try with [a different degree program]. That is why I ended up in [my current degree program]. And I did not leave the school because they suggested [for] me to keep [my concentration], which was the reason I initially came to the US.

Hannah identified a fit-related issue that she perceived was of particular concern to international students:

sometimes when you are an international student you don't know exactly that you need to apply to a school that really has a program that has a lot of professors that are interested in your area and not just to apply because it is a good university.

While this would be an issue for international students, domestic students are not necessarily immune. However, domestic students may have an advantage in that they may have greater access to information in a way that international students, applying from their home countries, may not have. On the other hand, Hannah did complete a master's degree in the United States and would arguably have had the same access to

information about her degree program as domestic applicants would have. As such, this finding is not necessarily conclusive.

The issue that most participants highlighted with regard to fit was faculty availability. All participants indicated that they expected that departmental faculty would be available to guide them through their dissertation writing process. However, all participants described having negative experiences in finding faculty to serve as dissertation chairpersons. Participants reported that upon beginning their degree programs, the faculty member they had intended on working with were not available. Two of these faculty members had left the university to take positions at other universities:

ok so now Dr. A left, first advisor. And Dr. C. left, second advisor. Right? I had to find an advisor. And within my department we have [only] four faculty [members] that are qualified to be my advisor

Similarly, Christine says that:

[there are] three professors in that department all assistant professors and I think they are working very hard to get tenure. So a lot of times they don't have much time to guide the students

Seven out of eight participants reported that upon settling on a research topic for their dissertations, there was no faculty member in their department willing or able to supervise their project. At this particular institution, the general rule is that each doctoral committee must contain at least 4 eligible faculty members, three of which have to be from the department where the student is enrolled. Further, the committee chair-person must be from the same department. This was problematic for participants because their research topics were unrelated to the areas of research for the faculty members in their department. Participants described the time consuming nature of their search for a faculty member who could supervise their dissertation.

Thomas gives a detailed report of his search for a dissertation advisor:

So I approached first person and she can't she has too many people so ok. And then next person probably similar deal but she, you know, I had [another] advisor and I just don't click with him. I can't really explain him. I chose him because I thought he was interested in international students so I thought he was going to be really helpful but no no no. And then the last one [I said] If you don't advise me then no one is going to advise me. So he said ok. But that's not the right reason. You know and he told me that he's not going to look at my paper because he's not familiar with my research. Ok. So what should I do? So he said you have to find another chair who will oversee your research.

The faculty member that Hannah initially chose died very shortly before she arrived for her first semester. Hannah had to change her dissertation topic because there was not a faculty member in her department who was willing to supervise her project. She also described the tedious process of finding another advisor:

so then I started having problems with my topic because nobody in the department deals with that topic. So I was just thinking about coming back to my country and just quit the program. So I started sending so many mails to different people in [my] department. All of them answered that they couldn't direct that kind of dissertation. So at the end I decided to change my topic

Similarly, Victoria went door to door in other departments trying to find a faculty member willing to assist her with her dissertation project.

So I wanted to work on something and no one in my department worked on that topic. Ok so I look outside and I went to [another department] and talked with a professor. She's a lecturer there with a Ph.D. so I talked with her and I'm working with her so in practice she is my main advisor but in theory she cannot be because she is not from my department.

She also expressed concern that this faculty member would not get the recognition she deserved for working so closely with her because she was outside her official department:

I'm trying that the outside [advisor gets all the] recognition that I can get that I'm going to thank her first. Because everything I am doing would not have been possible without her.

Thomas also had to find a faculty member in another college to advise his dissertation research:

Dr. A. left, they're colleagues, and the department didn't hire a person who can [do the] research. And Dr. C. left now and then they didn't give me any like support at all. You know. It's up to you. It's up to you. It's up to you. You know. That's really, really hard, challenging for me. So I finally found Dr. E. from college of Nursing. She's done [similar] research

Yasmine's primary dissertation advisor actually said she was unable to supervise her dissertation research and encouraged her to find another faculty member to do so:

I got admissions with research grant assistant and I am working with my advisor, my first advisor really well and she figured out my interest, my research interest is more focusing on [my research] area and she is more expert in [another]practice not really in [my] area. So she just realized my specific interest and she recommend me to have one more advisor and she think if I have two advisors I can combine two of their interests for my dissertation. That's why she now ask me to have one more advisor and, my second advisor, I already took her class, maybe three of her classes and I have got to know [her], she is really good at my research area. That's why I have two advisors

Even though Charles was able to find an advisor within his department, he reported that his advisor insisted he change his dissertation topic because it was too similar to her current research projects:

The problem is when we started discussing the topic of my dissertation my advisor said to the first topic I suggested, "no, because that is my research topic and it doesn't have to look like I pushed you". Right so, that's the situation. But that's not because I'm an international student right, that's about the teaching philosophy of the professor that thinks that teaching is more about her or his research rather than about the student. I mean I would expect the advisor to help me to [become] the best I can not the one they want me to be

One element that emerged had to do with international students' awareness in choosing an appropriate graduate program when applying. It is important that students apply to doctoral programs where there are faculty members who can support their research interests. However, international students, and graduate students in general,

may not be aware of this criterion and as such, choose to attend institutions which may or may not have the faculty resources to support their dissertation projects. This is an issue that does not appear in the current literature but should be addressed at the time students are seeking admissions to degree programs.

In general, departments seem to be unable to support participants' research interests. This could be because of the severe financial crisis the institution has been experiencing for the past three years. During this time, many faculty members have left the institution or been asked to take on additional responsibilities which impacts the time they are able to devote to advising students. This resulted in participants having to spend considerable time and effort to find a dissertation advisor even outside of their departments. However, as previously stated, some of these issues, such as the effects of limited faculty availability and fit with the department, may not be exclusive to international doctoral students but could conceivably affect domestic students as well.

### **Socialization**

The third code that emerged from the data regarded doctoral student socialization. Socialization occurs whenever the participant learns, formally and informally, the norms, expectations, values and processes of the department or institution or culture (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010). The literature on doctoral student socialization is quite clear that this is one of the most important roles an advisor plays (Bair & Haworth, 2004a; Barnes & Austin, 2009; Ferrer del Valero, 2001; Nerad & Cerny, 1993) However, participants' responses indicate that while advisors were involved in some aspects of students' socialization, they were completely uninvolved in others. For example, in terms of professional socialization, faculty were somewhat involved in the socialization of students to research but less so in helping participants to understand their roles as

teachers. Additionally, participants identified socialization to the academic culture of an American research university as an important deficit they experienced in navigating through their degree programs.

### **Formal and informal socialization.**

Formal socialization takes place through classes, conference presentations, job-search panels and structures established by advisors. Informal socialization occurs over time in social interactions and conversations with peers, faculty and departmental staff and in meetings with advisors (Bragg, 1976). In this study, informal socialization was a lot more commonly noted by participants. However, building familiarity with department rules and policies and course requirements was facilitated by the distribution of department handbooks:

We have a graduate handbook that says what things you have, what courses you need to take, that are required... also how many years, in what semester you need to take the qualifiers, and in which semester you need to start doing certain things, [you can find it on the department] webpage.

Antoinette shared her experience trying to figure out how to deal with her new teaching responsibilities. She reported that she found the information she needed by talking to her peers and other more advanced students in her degree program who had taught the class in the past. This is an example of informal socialization:

it's really the other students that are more the people that you would ask. So what I did was I found people who had taught it before and said like 'what text book did you use' and also people usually give you a set of slides. In fact I think there's one set of slides for intro that were made up about 10 years ago that everybody uses . . . but after that the problem with teaching, which is one thing I still don't really know how to deal with is [that] there's no independent assessment that you can make of whether you're doing a good job or not. Like you have your own sense of it sort of but then you have the teaching evaluation which everybody agrees are uninformative and that if you give everybody an A they all say they love you but if you give everybody a . . . yeah . . . so I don't know

Similarly, Christine shared the following perspective:

I think I get that kind of support from other advisors because I think being a doctoral student and professor you want to be a professional and not only focus on your professional but also interpersonal skills as well, personal growth.

In her second interview, Christine continued to talk about her peers as a resource in helping her figure out how to navigate through the degree program:

one of my friends she finished her degree in 2008 I think. So I kind of see how she completed all the process. She spent 7 years here; only PhD degree she got her masters somewhere else. So she kind of shared her experiences how she finish her degree, how she find a job you know. So I think [she was a] role model.

Hannah identified her programs graduate coordinator as the person she would go to if she had a problem:

my coordinator from the Spanish program. He was my coordinator from 1131 and we always have a [good relationship] because we work together and I have to say to him that things are working well or not.

Participants made little mention of socialization activities that are defined as formal, except for the reference to the student handbook. However, as mentioned earlier, all students had regular or irregular meetings with their advisors, which is a main form of socialization. Several instances of informal socialization were noted such as conversations with peers and obtaining assistance from other departmental staff such as graduate coordinators who provided information for students where necessary. This seems to be consistent across all the academic areas represented among study participants.

### **Professional socialization.**

Professional socialization was another area that participants spoke about. Professional socialization occurs as students learn to carry out the functions of their

chosen profession. All participants intended on entering academe upon completion of their degree programs and, as such, each participated in research, teaching or both at some point during their graduate career in order to learn the requirements of their field. Georgia expressed a wish that her advisor would be more helpful in providing career advice:

Sometimes I think I would expect my main chair to be more concerned about my doubts and some advice about research and career . . . My second chair is sometimes too tough and I wish she would be more understanding with certain issues like language and personal interests in terms of research

On the other hand, Victoria and Thomas report that their advisors typically did assist with their research projects thus helping them to develop research related skills and abilities.

Victoria shared the following:

so what I wanted to work on, nobody was doing that in the department and so I went there and talked with her and she was starting a project in west Africa that really interested me and they speak also French as I do so I thought it was like the perfect connection so I just started to work with her as a research assistant and I'm working I'm helping her on her project but I'm also connecting my dissertation to her project.

Thomas also shared this experience:

I've worked with her before and I mean I was very very productive because you know she pushed me and we did the presentation. You know we published articles, we did research together, we went to schools and did data collection, data analysis, [and] we're on a schedule and everything.

Unlike Thomas, Antoinette, who works as a teaching assistant in her department, reported that she was not given guidelines as to what was expected of her as a teaching assistant or how to go about teaching a class successfully:

the way that the teaching seems to work which is they just say here you have a class, it has 60 students in it bring us some grades at the end of the semester. And that was kind of like ok. They didn't seem to be like have

anything about making sure you have any idea what to say in front of a class or whatever that still seems weird to me.

Findings from this study confirm assertions made by Weidman et al (2001) who suggest that faculty members may feel more comfortable with academic socialization efforts compared with professional socialization efforts. Because of this, participants were forced to use other resources, mostly peers and more advanced students in their department, in order to obtain the information they needed. However faculty members appeared much more likely to participate in socialization efforts related to research activities. This may be because the institution is classified as a research I institution and faculty are well aware of the value placed on research responsibilities.

### **Peer mentoring.**

Peer relationships also played a significant role in the participants' experience. As indicated in the research, these kinds of relationships allow students to build social and emotional support structures which help them become socialized to professional academic roles (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). This was certainly the case among the participants in this study. For example, Antoinette shared this perspective:

I guess it's really the other students that are more the people that you would ask. So what I did was I found people who had taught it before and said like 'what text book did you use' and also people usually give you a set of slides. In fact I think there's one set of slides for intro that were made up about 10 years ago that everybody uses...

She also added that her peers typically work together to determine which classes to register for:

we sort of take all our classes together so it's like "oh these are the classes that we're taking" this semester.

Christine also depended on the input of friends and classmates in determining who she should ask to be a member of her doctoral committee. She says:

I wish I had just known what professor works well with my advisor and just start taking courses with them [my friends] would say they approached my advisor and my advisor just reject to sit on their committee and so I kind of know through the conversation

Thus, through building relationships with their peers and classmates, participants were able to obtain valuable information about how to successfully navigate through their degree programs.

### **Cultural clashes.**

Participants also expressed the need for socialization to the academic culture of U.S. institutions due to a number of cultural clashes that they frequently encounter. This is an issue that is unique to international students and would not affect domestic students. As indicated in the research, international students typically have difficulties transitioning from the academic environment in their home countries to that of U.S. institutions. Researchers also indicate that because of this, the nature and quality of academic advising provided for these students is critical (Adrian-Taylor, et al., 2007; Ku, et al., 2008). Charles expressed that his status as an international student put him at a disadvantage in terms of his advisor not setting clear expectations for him:

And so sometimes they expect us, me, to be able to read their mind so for my dissertation she let me wonder for two years and eventually I had to have a meeting also with the director to talk it out. You know. I understand I am working to my advisors' satisfaction but her expectations must be clear. And she cannot simply tell me "you have to argue more convincingly about something" you have to tell me what is not convincing about what I am arguing. What is not convincing to you. Right? When I turn in something that is my best effort and if that is not good enough for you well we have to discuss on the merit of what I did or did not. . . . as an international student. Right? All of us. And I'm not saying that we need to be spoon fed but often times expectations are not clear and to some degree we have to rely on someone here. Because you know at least to gather information. And so I would expect the academic advisor would help me staying on track and keep me out of troubles. So I'm not, I do not think that we deserve a

discount, that's not the point, but it just, we don't know better. I mean we know something that is different

Georgia also mentioned her advisor not being particularly supportive of different research perspectives:

sometimes, people think that the way they see the world is the best way to be as a professional and in terms of a career. I have different ideas about my career path and my political approaches for research and I think it is a little problematic for some chairs to understand a different standpoint . . . I love the fact they give me advice and care about me but sometimes I think that it would work better if they acknowledged that maybe there are different ways to do things and that they can be valid too

Additionally, Hannah felt that her department limited her freedom to conduct research in the way she wanted to:

I think that the [my] department works different as other departments and sometimes I think that they continue having like old ideas ... even the way they see literature it is different from the way people from here see that.

Christine expressed transition related issues saying "I think to accommodate the language and the culture it took me a long time" Antoinette talked about issues related to language and communication as a result of her status as an international student:

So everybody thinks I'm foreign. But that's something and I feel like, kind of frustrated that to me, if you don't understand the thing that I said just say, can you say that again and I'll say it again. Or like, I was with you until this, or like what was that word, repeat this up until the part you didn't get. But here people are so hesitant to do that.

Charles mentions cultural clashes due to the teaching philosophy of the professors and differences in his culture and educational background:

So I think that this is again something about the teaching philosophy of the professor. That those people are applying also with their American students. Certainly their American students grew up in this culture and might be a little but more accustomed to that way of doing things. I would have not expected her to tell me exactly what to do but I would expect to have expectations a little more clear. I think that one of the problems again, back to the research 1 institution where professors are more focused on their research, possibly.

The literature is clear on the role that advisors play in socializing doctoral students to their institutions, departments, and professions (Weidman et al., 2001). One area that the literature does not address is socialization to the academic culture of U.S. institutions. International students come from vastly different educational and cultural backgrounds than their advisors and their American counterparts. Not only are they challenged with adjusting to living in a new culture, but there are elements of doctoral education, including academic expectations, written and oral communication and educational philosophy that are often taken for granted by advisors. These elements, if left unaddressed, can be detrimental to the success of international doctoral students and should be considered when creating support services for this population of students. Weidman et al. (2001) suggests that this very interaction is integral to students learning and becoming accustomed to the academic culture. As such, limited interaction with advisors may be the reason why participants were not adequately oriented to the academic culture of the institution and the expectations and teaching approaches of faculty.

### **Campus Resources**

Participants also highlighted several campus resources that proved invaluable in helping them navigate through their degree program. These resources included the career resource center, the university's international center, the writing lab, the counseling center, libraries and librarians, and the department of housing and residence life. Participants essentially were on their own to find resources to supplement their experience based on their immediate needs. For example, Victoria used the career resource center for assistance with applying for faculty positions upon her much anticipated graduation:

I just went once to the employment center to look at my CV. But I think that for student going into academia, it would be nicer to have meeting with them before the application time so you can start working on your cover letter because it takes forever. So maybe I don't know if that is the job of the advisor or the department but ... maybe better prepare the student to start thinking about jobs because it takes so long to send your applications out, to hear from them, and to get an interview and maybe get the job.

Christine identified departmental resources and librarians who helped her with her research projects:

In our department we have a research [course] in methodology...people help you to write a methodology. And also librarians because know that they help you with literature review, how you access the database, be more efficient

Christine also used resources offered by the Department of Housing, the writing center and the International Center who helped her to address cultural and language and communication issues:

I think the housing. Family housing, they do have like a regularly a cultural dinner thing that people from different country. I think that helped me to make friends. Like now they start to offer some kind of academic help like a writing center . . . to help us write better to accommodate the language and the culture better. I think to accommodate the language and the culture it took me a long time. So I think . . . support from the international student center; they have a language workshop and [a workshop on] how to build a good relationship with your advisor.

Regardless of the challenges international students report facing; they are still able to navigate their degree programs. While the majority of participants' socialization did not come from their advisors, participants were able to glean the information they needed from a variety of different sources. These sources include their peers, department staff, and other departments on campus. This socialization occurred in both formal and informal ways. Also, students learned about how to address differences in culture through programs provided by the international center and the Department of Housing and Residence Education.

## Funding

Funding for their degree programs was an issue mentioned by participants, although not as often as expected. Nevertheless, participants seemed to experience significant challenges with financial issues in their doctoral experience. As stated in the literature, financial support for graduate education is one of the main factors impacting student's ability to complete their degree programs (CGS, 2008; Ferrer de Valero, 2001). This is particularly important considering the fact that the university has experienced over \$150 million in state funding over the last three years and that departments have to be much more stringent in their budgeting because of the implementation of the Responsibility Center Management budget model (Crabbe, 2010c, UF Intro to RCM, 2010). In particular, Antoinette stated that funding was necessary for her to continue in her program but also would become even more important if she had to postpone her graduation and enroll for an additional semester since she would have to extend her student visa:

If I didn't have funding, I wouldn't have money to live, so yes. Yes, I don't have other money . . . I [would have] to decide if I wanted to apply to extend my visa and to do that you have to have funding.

Victoria also mentioned funding and immigration issues with regard to her international student status:

[my second advisor] is more focusing on the quality of the work and maybe I should stay longer. But me I am thinking I am international student, my funding it's over in august and I cannot afford one more semester on my own so . . . I'm not going to pay international tuition.

Christine expressed concern about her eligibility for funding opportunities through her advisors research grants because of her international student status and apparent lack of knowledge about the advisors' research area:

my current advisor he had lots of grant money but I think he probably look for Americans, native English speakers, because education is very highly related to the school culture and we not grew up here so I don't have working experiences in the United States so I probably didn't know a lot of school culture so when he has funding he won't take international students. But he did offer me, because I expressed that I had financial needs and then he said okay after a year of courses I can offer you the teaching assistant job.

Antoinette was similarly dependent on her advisor for funding to continue her program:

I spoke to my advisor about it and he was like ... if for some reason the department doesn't have funding, he has funding off his grant

While the literature is unclear on the impact of funding on doctoral student's ability to complete their degree programs (Ehrenberg et al., 2007), this issue significantly affects international students who must prove, beforehand, that they have the finances to support themselves while enrolled in order to maintain legal student status or to extend their visas if necessary (USCIS, 2009). In general, participants were dependent on their advisors to provide them with funding opportunities such as teaching or research assistantships. Undoubtedly, the availability of funding also affects domestic students' ability to complete their degree programs. However, given the potential impact on international students' immigration status, this issue appears to be particularly detrimental to international students.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The findings of this study generated four main themes with regard to how international doctoral students navigate successfully through their degree programs. The literature indicates that the academic advisor should be central to helping their students learn the norms of their departments through a variety of socialization efforts

(Weidman et al., 2001). However, results of this study indicate that the advisors may not play as significant a part in international student socialization as anticipated.

Notably, participants' advisors were mainly involved in socialization to research procedures, perhaps because of the institutional focus on and value of research activity. More importantly, international students required assistance in becoming acclimated to the culture, values, norms and expectations of doctoral study in U.S. institutions. This was an area in which they received no guidance from their advisors. Participants thus used other resources available to them such as their peers, other department staff and campus resources to fill this gap.

Surprisingly, cultural similarity with their advisors also played a role in how these participants were able to build relationships with their advisor and navigate through their degree programs. According to the results of this study, cultural similarity did not necessarily make it easier to build a positive relationship with their advisor. However, findings indicate that advisors' prior experience working with international students has the potential to positively affect the relationship that advisor was able to build with other international students, particularly when the old and new students were from the same culture.

Based on the findings presented in this chapter, the following chapter will offer suggestions for future research and implications for policy and practice.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter a brief review of the study is presented and interpretation of the findings offered in light of the research presented in the literature review. Finally, implications for future research, practice and policy are explored.

### **Review of the Study**

This study was approached from a constructivist point of view and employed qualitative techniques to explore the experiences of international doctoral students in Social Science and Humanities degree programs as they navigate their degree programs. There was specific focus placed on the role of the participants' dissertation advisors because there is a consistent assertion in the literature that these advisors play a critical role in the success of doctoral students in the final stages of their doctoral programs (Burnett, 1999). The main purpose of the study is to highlight these students' experiences with the hope of helping doctoral dissertation advisors and department personnel better understand the needs and experiences of international doctoral students and the factors that contribute to the successful completion of their doctoral programs.

### **Interpretation of Results**

The themes that emerged from the data were generally consistent with the literature explored for this project although there were specific issues related to international students which had not previously been addressed. Themes included building a relationship with their advisors, fit with the academic department, socialization, and funding which are all areas highlighted in prior research. One new theme relating to cultural clashes also emerged.

## **Advisor Support**

The literature is clear that good advising includes faculty helping their students to be successful not only in their academics but also in providing research, presentation and funding opportunities for them (Acker et al., 1994, Golde, 2005, Ku et al., 2008). The participants in this study had very high expectations of their advisors. One such expectation is that their advisor would be invested in their success as students. This could be demonstrated by genuinely caring while challenging them to do their best work. Another way advisors could demonstrate investment in their students is by helping them to find and obtain funding and other research related opportunities that would supplement their academic experiences. Providing funding opportunities emerged as a particularly important part of the role of an international student's advisor. While limited funding certainly affects all doctoral students (CGS, 2008), international students are particularly vulnerable because of the potential impact of lack of funding on their immigration status and subsequently their ability to remain in the United States (USCIS, 2009).

Most advisors appear to advise their students according to the technical rationality model of academic advising. For example, students reported mostly discussing their projects with advisors in meetings. They obtained feedback from their advisors, made the requested changes and started the process over again. While some participants reported that their advisors did take time to address personal issues, it was not a common occurrence for advisors to inquire about the non-research related aspects of these students' lives.

Participants certainly felt that they did not have any control of their research timetable and further, their progress towards completion. Part of this problem stemmed from

the difficulty involved in finding a faculty member to advise their dissertation projects. This will be discussed in the next section. One participant, Antoinette, felt that her progress towards completing her dissertation was completely out of her control because of the nature of the research she was conducting. It is important to note however, that Antoinette's degree program is vastly different in structure than the other seven participants in that it was more akin to a science degree program in terms of structure and level of interaction with her advisor (Gardner, 2010).

Finally, there is a segment of the literature which identifies academic mentoring as another model of advising doctoral students. This model involves the advisor also carrying out the function of a mentor in terms of helping students with career, research and personal issues (Paglis, et al., 2006). Role modeling, guidance, career advice and research collaboration are among the benefits students can obtain from academic mentoring relationships and can help propel students towards degree completion (Luna & Cullen, 1998; Lyons & Scroggins, 1990; Paglis, et al., 2006). However, none of the participants indicated that their advisors served as mentors to them. At the same time two participants revealed that they did have current and former faculty members who served in this role and supported them as a mentor should. While this is a salient issue for international students, it is not necessarily an issue that is specific to this particular group of students. As such, future research could explore the extent to which international or domestic students have mentoring relationships with their advisors or other faculty members and the implications of having or not having these kinds of relationships for their degree completion.

## **Fit with Department**

All participants indicated that they had negative experiences related to their fit with their academic department. In most cases, this had to do with the availability of faculty members who share their research interests and thus choose to serve as a dissertation committee chair person or advisor. Issues of fit emerged both before and after initial enrollment in the department. For example one participant suggested that it is possible that international students apply to schools without knowing whether or not they will have faculty to support them in their research. They do not know what questions to ask or even that faculty availability is something they should attempt to ascertain prior to application or enrollment. This, however, is not necessarily an issue limited to international students as domestic students may not receive this information either. This is an issue that departments can address by providing current and accurate information about faculty research interests, and identifying potential faculty-student matches prior to admission.

The issue of fit also impacted the way in which participants were paired with their advisors. However, advisor selection strategies did not play as significant a role as expected. The literature indicated that the means by which students are paired with their advisors impact on their satisfaction and thus their overall experience (Zhao, et al., 2007). Participants' reflections on their experience indicate that while they did choose their advisors, they perceived that there were not necessarily any alternate options. Most participants indicated that this was mainly due to the limited availability of departmental faculty members who share their research interests. Departments should therefore consider research interests and allow some opportunities for students to interact with their potential advisors prior to selection and admission to the program

similar to the way advisor assignment is often addressed in science and engineering programs (Golde, 2005).

In some respects, the availability of faculty is out of the department's control in that department administrators cannot know if or when faculty members will leave the department to take other jobs or retire. It is important to mention that at the time of this study, the institution was experiencing a severe financial crisis, which resulted in many faculty members leaving their positions or being assigned additional duties and teaching assignments. In addition, as of the fall of 2010, over 120 faculty members had selected to take advantage of the option for voluntary early retirement that was offered by the university (Crabbe, 2010a). Even so, the nature of doctoral study requires the presence and availability of faculty members with common research interest to the students admitted to and enrolled in the department since, in general at the institution where the study was executed, department policy requires that the primary advisor be a faculty member in that department (Bair & Haworth, 2004a; Ferrer de Valero, 2001).

Participants in this study addressed this issue in a very creative way by obtaining a secondary advisor often referred to as a co-advisor or second advisor who was a faculty member in another department. This person effectively served in the role of a primary advisor by helping them develop and execute their research projects. At the same time, a faculty member from their department served as their official primary advisor on paper.

Given these findings, departments and institutions as a whole must consider the impact of the issues facing international students on their ability to recruit and retain international students in the future. The literature indicates that these students are

recruited heavily partly because they form a pool of potential future foreign leaders which could be beneficial to the U.S. in the future. International students provide academic support for departments by teaching classes and conducting research and they stimulate the economy by paying out-of-state tuition costs (Johnson, 2003; Klomegah, 2006; Ku, et al., 2008). Their academic experiences will undoubtedly inform their attitudes towards the institution and the country as a whole. As such, it would behoove departments to reconsider and adjust current policies in such a way as to ensure the retention of these students. One such policy review could include exploring additional resources for funding international students once their primary source of funding is exhausted.

In recent years, greater focus has been placed on developing interdisciplinarity in institutions of higher education in the United States (Sá, 2006). Interdisciplinarity refers to collaborative research activity “across traditional department and disciplinary boundaries” (Sá, 2008, p. 538). In light of this increasing value being placed on interdisciplinarity by government and funding sources (Sá, 2008) departments might consider adapting this concept as a means to address the issue of faculty availability. Strategies typically used to infuse this concept into academic departments include the creation and adaptation of university practices, policies and structures. These structures include interdisciplinary centers, also known as organized research units (ORUs), of which there are several already on the institution’s campus.

Challenges associated with the interdisciplinary research must also be acknowledged. For example, current organizational structure and specialization of fields do not support the implementation of interdisciplinarity. In addition, this

implementation often incurs certain 'transaction' costs (Sá, 2008) which cannot be supported in light of current decreases in some state appropriations (Feller, 2007). Additionally, faculty pursuing interdisciplinary research may experience difficulty in securing funding, publication and peer recognition opportunities for their research because such research projects are difficult to evaluate. Other challenges associated with interdisciplinary research include communication and management issues and the need for researchers to become familiar with the knowledge and methods used in other fields (Sá, 2008).

Regardless of the challenges associated with implementing interdisciplinary strategies, they do encourage collaboration across institutional units and may provide students with more flexibility in finding a dissertation chairperson or advisor with whom they have common research interests. Perhaps a new policy could allow students to petition to have faculty members from outside their department serve as their primary advisors in the absence of faculty with similar research interests in their 'home' departments. This could have a positive impact by facilitating students' successful and timely completion. Departments should also stress the importance of faculty availability and common research interests to international students at point of application by making conversations about research interests a consistent part of the admissions process. Students who do not have common research interests with faculty should not be admitted if current department policies remain in place.

### **Socialization**

Socialization is one of the major and most important roles that an advisor plays in the academic experience of doctoral students (Barnes & Austin, 2009). As stated in the literature, the advisor is most impactful in the final stage of socialization, the doctoral

completion/research stage (Lovitts, 2001). This is because at this point in the doctoral degree program the student goes from having contact with many faculty members who teach their classes to having primary contact with one person, the advisor (Gardner et al., 2007). The literature also indicates that advisors help their students become socialized to their institutions, departments and professions (Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Tierney, 1997). However, the issue of socialization to research, teaching and the academic culture of U.S. institutions and the institution in particular, emerged as a salient issue related to the experiences of international doctoral students.

Participants clearly identified their advisors as being instrumental in helping them to obtain teaching or research assistantships, mostly as a means of providing funding for their degree program. In light of the literature on advising, socialization and mentoring, the role that advisors played in the experiences of the study participants was woefully inadequate. Given the limited availability of departmental faculty to supervise students' research projects, participants reached out faculty in other departments for guidance in their research projects. Those students who were research assistants reported that their advisors did provide them with direction on how to carry out the research process. On the other hand, those participants who taught or were teaching assistants were not advised on how to successfully manage a classroom. In fact, these participants consistently reported being left to figure these processes out on their own. To do this, participants reached out to their peers for information and guidance.

This, however, is not necessarily an issue reserved for international students, as some participants were quick to point out. Limited faculty availability and, consequently, inadequate faculty-initiated socialization opportunities is an issue that could conceivably

affect both international and domestic students in the department. Future research should explore any changes in the role that advisors play, in a very practical sense, in the socialization experiences of international students specifically and doctoral students in general. Additional research should also be conducted to explore the role that students' peers play in graduate student socialization.

In this study, peer relationships also played a big role in helping participants to become socialized to their department. More specifically, participants were able to obtain information ranging from which classes to take, to what faculty members would work most efficiently and effectively together as members of their dissertation committee. As such, academic departments should consider implementing department run peer mentoring programs where incoming students are assigned to more advanced doctoral students who can guide them in learning the rules, norms and values of the department and help them understand their roles and responsibilities as a member of the department. Mentoring programs can also help students to develop social and emotional support structures within the department that will help them to successfully navigate their academic programs (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Socialization to the academic culture of American institutions is one international student- specific theme that emerged from the interviews. Participants expressed repeatedly a series of cultural clashes including a lack of clarity on their advisors expectations of them. The academic traditions in U.S. institutions are very different from those in participants' home countries. Many of the behaviors that students have to practice to be successful in American classrooms are vastly different from those that help students succeed in their home countries (Adrian-Taylor, et al., 2007; Charles &

Stewart, 1991). In addition, based on some participants' experience, faculty members tend to think that their way is the best, most valid way to carry out a research project or that their perspective and interpretation of the literature was to be emulated by their students. Participants expressed a need for their advisors to guide them in overcoming difficulties while at the same time making it very clear that they did not expect their advisors to spoon feed them. However, it is important for faculty to understand that these students come from different academic traditions and that certain perspectives are not necessarily second nature to them.

### **Campus Resources**

Again, where participants found that they were lacking in support from their advisors, they were able to locate and utilize services across campus that would fill those gaps. Campus resources such as the career resource center, international student center, and the department of housing and residence life all provided helpful resources for participants in the form of workshops, information sessions and social gatherings. Future research should address how these and other departments can work together in an intentional way to continue to provide services that meet the specific needs of international doctoral students. For example, academic departments should collaborate with the International Student Center to provide information to faculty about the advising needs of international students. These departments can also collaborate to provide workshops for international students highlighting some of the academic traditions of U.S. institutions and providing a framework for what will be expected of them as doctoral scholars. Finally, international student orientation programs should be consistently provided and proactively advertised by the department. Such programs should include information about departmental policies, coursework and other

requirements and about the educational culture and expectations specific to the U.S., the institution and the department. While these suggestions are made based on the experiences of international doctoral students, domestic doctoral students will also undoubtedly benefit from any adjustments or changes made.

### **Final Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are ways in which institutions can support international doctoral students as they navigate through their degree programs.

- Provide additional scholarship, fellowship and assistantship opportunities for international doctoral students to fund their degree programs
- Implement new policies that allow international students to pay lower, in-state tuition rates if they have to remain in their programs for longer periods than expected
- Provide orientation programs for new international students that highlight departmental policies, funding options and expectations
- Allow faculty members from other departments to serve as dissertation chairpersons
- Provide professional development workshops for faculty who advise international students

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, international students depend on a variety of resources in order to navigate their way through their degree programs. While the literature highlights the role of the advisor as one of the most important contributors to doctoral degree completion, findings from this study suggest that their role might not be as important as previously thought, particularly as it relates to the experiences of international doctoral students. Instead, international students' peers, other department faculty and administrators and a variety of campus resources served as important avenues for these students to obtain

the information and services they need in order to navigate through their degree programs. The results of this research will hopefully encourage departments and advisors to examine their current modes of operation and consider changes that will improve the experiences of international doctoral students.

## APPENDIX A INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Introduction:

- a) Express appreciation for the participant's willingness to assist with the study
- b) Reassure the participant of the confidentiality of their identity and information provided in the interview

### Introductory Questions:

- a) Name/Alias:
- b) Country of Origin:
- c) Years as a student at institution:
- d) Program of study (degree program):
- e) Why did you decide to pursue a graduate degree outside your home country?

### Interview questions

- 1) How did you come to be advised by your current dissertation advisor?/ How did you meet your current advisor? (assigned or chosen)
- 2) Tell me about a typical meeting between you and your dissertation advisor.
- 3) Think back to the time when you first began your graduate program.
  - a. What were your expectations of your dissertation advisor?
  - b. What did you perceive to be your responsibilities in the advising relationships?
  - c. To what extent were your expectations met? Please explain.
- 4) What were the limitations of the relationship/things you wish were different/you could have changed about the relationship with your dissertation advisor?

- 5) Think about your idea of the perfect/best advisor. What characteristics would this person have?
- 6) Thinking about your advising experience, what do you see as some of the issues specifically associated with advising international students?
- 7) How has your advisor affected your progress towards completing your degree?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to share on the topic or any question you think I should have asked?

Follow up questions for the second round of interviews were created from themes, issues and data derived from the initial interview. These questions were:

- 1) What do you see as the role of your advisor as you progress through your degree program?
- 2) To what extent does your advisor serve as a mentor to you?
- 3) Thinking about your program from start to finish, what helped you move forward or make progress towards completion? What hindered you?
- 4) Are there any support services on campus that have helped you? What are they?
- 5) Can you tell me about a time you found yourself in a difficult situation here in the US and how you dealt with it? Who served as your support system as you worked through the issue?

Probing questions were asked to further explore participants' responses.

APPENDIX B  
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Name/Alias	Country of Origin	Years enrolled	English as Second Language	U.S. Masters Degree
Antoinette	New Zealand	5	No	No
Christine	Taiwan	4	Yes	Yes
Charles	Italy	5	Yes	Yes
Hannah	Mexico	3.5	Yes	Yes
Victoria	Canada	4	Yes	Yes
Georgia	Nicaragua	4	Yes	n/a
Yasmine	Korea	3	Yes	No
Thomas	Japan	6	Yes	Yes

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Krystal Lee was born and raised in Kingston, Jamaica and is the first of three children. She enrolled at Morgan State University (MSU) in the fall of 2000 and received a B.S. in information science and systems in 2004. She worked for one year in the Office of Residence Life and Housing at MSU before enrolling in the Masters of Public Administration (M.P.A) degree program at the University of Delaware (UD) in 2005. Krystal earned her M.P.A. in 2007 and subsequently enrolled in the Doctor of Education (Ed.D) program in Higher Education Administration at the University of Florida (UF). During her time at UF, Krystal worked as a graduate assistant in the department of Multicultural and Diversity Affairs where she oversaw the planning and execution of a variety of educational and cultural programs. In addition, she has completed several internships, including serving as an Association of College and University Housing Officers - International (ACUHO-I) intern in the department of Housing and Conference Services at the University of South Carolina. Other internship placements include the Office of Academic Advising, the Office of Academic Support and the Career Resource Center at the University of Florida and the Office of Residence Life and Housing at Morgan State University.