INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES
WITH ACADEMIC ADVISING AT A MID-WESTERN
PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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International students’ experiences with academic advising is worth studying because the number of international students is growing significantly in the United States of America (USA) even though studies show that, upon arrival, international students experience cultural, social, academic, and psychological issues including homesickness, anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Tseng & Newton, 2002). In 2016/2017, 1,078,822 international students enrolled in American colleges and universities to pursue higher education (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2017). Despite the growing number of international students in the USA, research has been limited in the areas of academic advising and international students. Thus, with the increasing number of international students coming to study in the USA, it is imperative for American colleges and universities to be aware of their issues and needs.

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to understand and describe undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising. My primary research question was: What are undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising? Thirteen students from Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Africa participated in this study, and their country of origins included India, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Bolivia, Brazil, Tanzania, and
Somalia. The data analysis for this exploratory study was guided by the constant comparative method of analysis. Although a couple of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with advising, the majority of the participants were satisfied with academic advising. Overall, most participants appreciated the service and saw a need for academic advisors for international students.

Key Words: Academic Advising, International Students, Higher Education
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I dedicate this dissertation to my mom and dad and my husband.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The following statements represent diverse international students’ experiences in various aspects of their transitions to higher education institutions in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America (USA).

Familial Influences

My parents financially support me to study abroad, so I had to talk to them where and what I plan to study. (Thai international student in Australia; Pimpa, 2003, p. 213)

My father did not attend any university, so he transferred his hope to me, to have a good education and speak English fluently. (Thai international student in Australia; Pimpa; 2003, p. 213)

Social and Psychological Challenges

When I’m talking to local students I’ve found that we just don’t have much common interest and this stops us from talking very much and because we have very different backgrounds and background references we like different things and our values and beliefs are different and in, maybe related to my personal characteristics. (undergraduate business major from Asia in New Zealand; Campbell & Li, 2008, p. 385)

Academic Challenges

I feel good in math courses because I’m on [an] equal level [with other students.] The courses that make me speak or write English are hard. My [English] is not
good. (Female undergraduate student from Korea in the USA; Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, & Baden, 2005, p. 168)

**Views on Seeking Advice**

I would speak with [a] counselor if [my] family and friends did not have the answer to [my] problem or if I was feeling bad and did not want them to see me down. I would do this if [it were the last option]. I would not feel [comfortable] talking to [a] stranger about [my problem] because I do not know what [the counselor] would think about me or [about the problem I was communicating].

(Female undergraduate student from Korea in the USA; Constantine, Kindaichi, et al., 2005, p. 170)

**Discrimination and Stereotypes**

It’s frustrating to know that people think less of you because of the color of your skin. I belong on this campus just as much as anybody else, and I get mad when people treat me like I don’t belong here. (Male undergraduate student from Kenya in the USA; Constantine, Anderson, Caldwell, Berkel, & Utsey, 2005, p. 62)

The excerpts listed above not only illustrate but also give us a glimpse of international students’ multifaceted ways of living. This sample of perspectives raises the question of how academic advisors advise and assist international students with their academic lives.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand and describe how undergraduate international students at a mid-western public university (which is addressed as Mid-Western University [MWU] moving forward) experience academic
advising. The research question was: What are international students’ experiences with their academic advisors or professional academic advisors (used interchangeably moving forward)? This study focused on degree seeking international undergraduate students of any class standing (i.e., first-year undergraduates to those in their final year) with F-1 visa status who are pursuing their undergraduate education at MWU. It is important to note that, at MWU, undergraduate students are required to see their academic advisors once per semester until graduation in order to register for classes.

**International Students**

International student populations represent diverse groups of people from across the world (Charles & Stewart, 1991; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015); they are different in “…demographics, backgrounds, learning styles and cultural mind-sets” (Glass et al., 2015, p. 19). They can be defined as students who have crossed not only geographical and cultural boundaries but for many also linguistic boundaries to pursue higher education in order to attain success for themselves and for their families (Kim, 2007; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors FAQs,

> An international student is defined as anyone studying at an institution of higher education in the United States on a temporary visa that allows for academic coursework. These include primarily holders of F (student) visas and J (exchange visitor) visas. (IIE Open Doors FAQs, 2015, p. 1)

The United States of America has been a popular destination for many international students (Glass et al., 2015; Kim, 2007). In pursuit of higher education, in
the year 2016–2017, 1,078,822 international students have cut across various
geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries and enrolled in American colleges and
universities (IIE, 2017; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). In fact, international student enrollment
rates have been rising significantly over the years due to institutional recruitment and
students’ interests in quality and foreign education (Glass et al., 2015; Hazen & Alberts,
2013; Lee, 2008; Lee & Rice, 2007; Mamiseishvili, 2012). Although various factors
“push” and “pull” international students to study abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 82),
“…knowledge, skills and intellectual growth” are of utmost importance, particularly for
students pursuing graduate programs (Kim, 2007, p. 172). Their contribution to American
institutions is quite large; they not only generate revenue for the country and institutions
but also bring diversity and generate new perspectives in the classrooms, research, and
workforce (Andrade, 2006b; Eland & Thomas, 2013; Hazen & Alberts, 2013; Lee & Rice,
2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). They expose and educate students, staff, and professors
about the world cultures, which could promote diverse set of viewpoints, open-mindedness,
cultural sensitivity, and intercultural awareness (Lee & Rice, 2007; Mamiseishvili, 2012;
Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wang, Ahn, Kim, & Lin-Siegler, 2017). Furthermore,
international students generate a large amount of revenue for individual institutions, and
based on NAFSA, the Association of International Educators, international students
contribute immensely to the United States economy (NAFSA, 2016; Smith & Khawaja,
2011). In the year 2015–2016, international student populations brought in 32.8 billion
dollars, which created 400,000 employment opportunities for the US population (NAFSA,
2016).
In general, while pursuing higher education in another country, undergraduate international students are living far away from their friends and family members. For this reason, upon arrival to a new country, international students are exposed to a new culture and a new environment that may be considerably different from their native culture and environment (Eland & Thomas, 2013; Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Tseng & Newton, 2002). As a result, students may experience culture shock, which can be “…defined as emotional reactions to the disorientation that occurs when one is immersed in an unfamiliar culture and is deprived of familiar cues” (Paige, 1993, p. 2). These experiences may lead to various cultural, social, academic, and psychological issues including homesickness, anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Eland & Thomas, 2013; Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010).

According to Paige (1993), these “intercultural” experiences are influenced by several intensity factors that “…can raise the level of psychological intensity for sojourners” (p. 4). The intensity factors are summarized below (pp. 4-13):

**Cultural differences**—international students whose cultural background are very much different from their host culture will experience more “psychological intensity” than those with the similar cultural background.

**Ethnocentrism**—ethnocentric international students will experience more “psychological intensity” than ethnorelativist international students.

**Language**—international students with inadequate language skills will experience more “psychological intensity” than international students with adequate language skills.
Cultural immersion—international students who are more involved with their host culture will experience more “psychological intensity” than those who are less involved.

Cultural isolation—international students who are less connected with their native culture will experience more “psychological intensity” than those who are more connected.

Prior intercultural experience—international students with “prior intercultural experience” will experience less “psychological intensity” than those with less or no “prior intercultural experience.”

Expectations—international students with “unrealistic” expectations will experience more “psychological intensity” than international students with no such expectations.

Visibility and invisibility—international students whose physical appearances are visibly different from people in the host country will experience more “psychological intensity” than those with less or no physical differences.

Status—international students who feel valued and respected will experience less “psychological intensity” than those who do not.

Power and control—international students who believe they are in control will experience less “psychological intensity” than those who do not.

Additionally, international students coming from collectivist societies and homogenized societies will experience more “psychological intensity” in the United States than students coming from individualistic and diverse societies (Young, 2017). That is, based on the differences in language, culture, values, educational systems and
classroom etiquette, many international students face overwhelming challenges upon arriving in their host countries (Eland & Thomas, 2013; Paige, 1993; Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Young, 2017). Making an adjustment becomes even more difficult for international students with inadequate language skills, particularly students coming from non-English speaking countries, since communication is tied to every aspect of one’s day to day life (Andrade, 2006b; Eland & Thomas, 2013; Wang et al., 2017). Additionally, “…international students may have characteristics defining them as at-risk, such as being specially admitted, first generation college students, disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, non-English speaking, learning disabled, and/or poorly prepared” (Andrade, 2006b, p. 58). To add more difficulty to this period of transition, many international students keep these challenges, particularly psychological problems, to themselves since it is not typical in many cultures to consult outsiders about one’s problems. Hence, many students may not feel comfortable to speak to licensed counselors (Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Young, 2017). For example, research shows, “some Asian students may see counseling as shameful and embarrassing because a cultural stigma is often attached to emotional expression in their societies” (Carr et al., 2003, p. 131).

Andrade (2006a) argued, “institutions cannot simply admit foreign students and expect them to adjust to life in a new country and educational system without appropriate support and programming” (p. 133). It is a common belief among researchers (i.e., Andrade, 2006a; Glass et al., 2015; Mamiseishvili, 2012) that institutions are responsible for providing adequate support to their international student populations so these students
can easily acclimate to their new environment. Unfortunately, in many institutions, support services are limited for international students (Lee, 2008), which suggests that it may not be a priority for many institutions to create appropriate programming and support services for international students. In fact, it is not uncommon for many in campus departments to send international students back to the international office because they are unable or fail to address international students’ needs (Lee, 2008).

Then, how do international students address academic issues? What about their experience with academic advising? Do international students feel comfortable speaking with academic advisors? Does an academic advisor’s gender, ethnic, and educational background complicate the advisor and advisee relationship? Does an international student’s gender, religious, cultural, educational and language background complicate the advisor and advisee relationship? Who do they turn to first if they are not seeking academic help from advisors? Do they turn to their friends, families, or professors for academic help? We know very little about any of these questions. This study was an initial attempt to begin to learn about undergraduate international students’ academic advising experience at a mid-western US university.

**Academic Advising**

For the reasons addressed above, academic advising can be of tremendous help in supporting international students as academic advising services are commonly available to students in colleges and universities in the USA. According to Strayhorn (2015),

Academic advising is arguably one of the most critical functional areas in all of higher education. It is the primary touch point where students access information,
resources, and tools to navigate successfully through college. It is where students learn the rules of this culture—what a credit hour is, how many credits each course carries, the number of credits required for a major, minor, or (ultimately) graduation. Academic advising is where students go for advice about their futures, their paths to purposeful lives, and their progress through college. (p. 61)

There are over 4,000 colleges and universities in the USA (Kuhn, 2008; Strayhorn, 2015). While academic advising has been an option for students to receive guidance with “…academic, social or personal matter [s]” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 3), some institutions may not require students to see academic advisors. Also, the mandatory advising policy along with advising practices may vary across class standing and institution types. For instance, according to the 2011 NACADA National Survey of Academic Advising, of the 795 survey partakers that included public, private, and proprietary institutions, 336 institutions reported that advising is mandatory for their students; whereas, 278 institutions did not have a mandatory advising policy and 181 institutions required advising for certain students. Of the 795 institutions, professional advisors provide advising at 175 institutions and faculty advisors provide advising at 145 institutions. In addition, 475 institutions reported that students are advised by faculty and professional advisors (NACADA National Survey of Academic Advising, 2011).

Based on my conversations with an advising administrator at MWU, advising is required for undergraduate students at many institutions (Senior Advising Administrator I, MWU, personal communication, September 15, 2015) and MWU is one of them. At MWU, the required advising policy was created to provide “high impact experiences” for
its students. The policy was implemented in summer 2012 for freshman and sophomore students, in fall 2013 for juniors, and in fall 2015 for seniors (Senior Advising Administrator II, MWU, personal communication, May 24, 2017). The discussion and implementation of this policy was further motivated by the following factors: to build better advisor-advisee relationship, to improve the university retention rate, to achieve students’ degree completion, to help students with their academic success, to guide students with academic and career goals, and to inform students about university resources that are critical to student success. Moreover, the benefit of required advising was clear from the institutional research reports (Senior Advising Administrator II, MWU, personal communication, May 24, 2017) and from the positive feedback gathered from a university-wide advising survey administered to students and advising staff in 2011. According to this survey, advising had been linked to overall student success, persistence, and retention rates. Because of this, advising became mandatory for 1st-year and 2nd-year students immediately in 2012 and for all undergraduate students in Fall 2015 (Senior Advising Administrator I, MWU, personal communication, September 15, 2015).

**Academic Advisors**

In many institutions, when newly admitted students first arrive, they meet with academic advisors to discuss their academic plans and create schedules for their first semesters. Academic advisors at MWU work very closely with first-year students, and undergraduate students are required to see their academic advisors once a semester until graduation. Thus, the student’s journey at college begins with academic advising where academic advisors are able to build rapport with their new students. For many students,
this relationship continues through their senior year as students seek advising help for numerous academic and career related reasons. Typically, academic advisors are the first professional staff members to hear a student’s accomplishments, plans, goals, and struggles in college. Hence, advisors are able to contribute significantly to students’ success and growth by encouraging and guiding students to fulfill their academic and professional goals (Senior Advising Administrator I, MWU, personal communication, September 15, 2015; Strayhorn, 2015).

Academic advisors take on several roles and responsibilities to help their students become successful; in a way, they are cultural navigators, career advisors, advocates, mentors, cheerleaders, academic counselors, and role models (Kuhn, 2008; Strayhorn, 2015). For instance, academic advisors at MWU provide guidance with course requirements and selections for majors, minors, and certificates along with registration assistance to first-year students. They assist undecided students and students who are changing their majors with major selections by introducing them to various options related to their interests and career plans. They inform students about various graduate school requirements such as entrance exam (i.e., GRE, LSAT, MCAT), recommendation letters, personal statement, GPA (Grade Point Average), and pre-requisite courses. In order to keep students engaged and motivated until they graduate, academic advisors regularly notify students about institutional policies (i.e., dismissal policies for students on probation, GPA requirement to stay on track for graduation, etc.), study abroad, academic/professional/community resources, job/internship fairs, scholarship opportunities,
and student organizations (Senior Advising Administrator II, MWU, personal communication, May 24, 2017).

It should be noted that along with academic advisors, MWU has a centralized office for career counseling, which is supported by a small number of staff members. Career counselors provide resources and feedback with resumes and cover letters, jobs and internships, interview strategies, mock interviews, and major and career selections to students who need or prefer additional guidance. MWU also has a centralized international office, which provides various types of services in regards to admission, transcripts, visa status, and programming and events to assist and support its international students. As a result, academic advisors at this institution often consult with the international office for questions and concerns about specific requirements for US and foreign government-sponsored programs such as King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship Program and Science without Borders to make certain academic advisors are providing appropriate advice while advising international students (Administrator, International Office, MWU, personal communication, September 22, 2015).

**The Role of Academic Advising in Student Success and Retention**

“Academic advising is an educational activity that depends on valid explanations of complex student behaviors and institutional conditions to assist college students in making and executing educational and life plans” (Creamer, 2000, p. 18). Academic advising influences students on various levels and is critical to student persistence and retention (Creamer, 2000; Crockett, 1978; Drake, 2011). Crockett (1978), who has written
extensively about academic advising and retention and designated academic advising to be the “cornerstone of student retention,” stated that academic advising is:

1. Helping students to clarify their values and goals and to better understand themselves.
2. Helping students understand the nature and purpose of higher education.
3. Providing accurate information about educational options, requirements, policies, and procedures.
4. Helping students plan educational programs consistent with their interests and abilities.
5. Assisting students in a continual monitoring and evaluation of their educational progress.
6. Integrating the many resources of the institution to meet students’ special educational needs and aspirations. (p. 30)

Academic advising has been around for many years in the USA (Crockett, 1978; Frost, 1991, 2000; Kuhn, 2008). With the establishment of higher education institutions in the US, the conversations between faculty members and students remained central to institutional culture in order to help students become aware of various institutional resources and benefits (Crockett, 1978; Frost, 1991, 2000; Kuhn, 2008). In the last few decades, academic advising has gained even greater momentum in the US for the following reasons: overall acknowledgment and importance of academic advising by the higher education community, focus on student success and progress, added curricula, rise of
nontraditional students, students’ need for readiness for the global world, and lastly, retaining students (Crockett, 1978).

The value of academic advising in student success and retention has been researched extensively (Frost, 1991). It is clear that quality academic advising does make a difference in the lives of students in retaining them as well as making their college experience positive and successful (Crockett, 1978; Drake, 2011; Strayhorn, 2015).

According to Drake (2011),

Four decades of research about student persistence [suggest that] . . . the value of connecting students early on to the institution through learning support systems (tutoring and supplemental instruction programs, for example), first-year programming (learning communities and first-year seminars), and solid academic advising, with advising positioned squarely as the vital link in this retention equation. (Drake, 2011, p. 9)

With the help of academic advising, students are able to think more clearly about their academic and career plans, and research shows that students who are committed to their academic and career goals are committed to schooling (Crockett, 1978). Through advising, students are also able to come up with strategies to improve their GPA, and students who are doing well in school are expected to stay in school. Overall, students with quality academic advising experiences are happy with their educational experience and persist in school (Crockett, 1978). In sum, the personalized attention established through academic advising sessions becomes the foundation for student success and retention.
Tinto (2005), who is an influential figure in the field of retention and persistence studies, also agreed with Crockett (1978) and Drake (2011). According to Tinto (2005), Advising is particularly important to the success of the many students who either begin college undecided about their major and/or change their major during college. The inability to obtain needed advice during the first year or at the point of changing majors can undermine motivation, increase the likelihood of departure and, for those who continue, result in increased time to degree completion. Though students may make credit progress, they do not make substantial degree credit progress. (p. 91)

Tinto (2005) found that “institutional commitment, institutional expectations, support, feedback and involvement” are central to retaining students (p. 90). As Tinto argued, institutional commitment is “…more than just mission statements issued in elaborate brochures; it is the willingness to invest the resources and provide the incentives and rewards needed to enhance student success” (p. 90). Having “high expectations” of students is equally important and critical to student success (p. 90). Student success further depends on “academic, social and financial” support (p. 91) and feedback, and to obtain and provide feedback, proper assessment needs to be implemented. Lastly, involvement is crucial to student success. In other words, “the more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely they are to persist and graduate” (p. 92). As stated by Tinto (2005), institutional retention efforts motivate students to continue with their schooling.

Although much has been written about academic advising and retention in relation to domestic students, a very limited amount of research has been conducted with
international students despite the rising number of international students in the USA (Andrade, 2006b; Mamiseishvili, 2012). For instance, Andrade (2006b), who has studied “international student [persistence] at a private religiously-affiliated university” (p. 57), stated that despite many challenges international students encounter at their host institutions/countries, “…graduation rates for international students are similar to those of the total student population” (p. 58). By interviewing senior students, who were mostly from Asia and the Pacific, Andrade (2006b) wanted to learn “if and how cultural integration affected persistence” (p. 64). In Andrade’s (2006b) words,

> Overall, international students felt a sense of accomplishment and growth during their time at the university. They did not give up their cultural identities to be successful although they adapted to the dominant norms of the institution. These norms were different from those of their countries and educational systems. They recognized potential future clashes between home and institutional cultures, but change was positive. (p. 72)

Andrade’s (2006b) study is not only very informative but also very critical in understanding persistence of international students. In addition to providing us with specific insights to Polynesian and Asian students’ educational journey, it highlights and recognizes the strengths along with challenges. Andrade found that these international students embraced the changes in themselves and they were able to stay committed to their cultural values while participating in US culture (Andrade, 2006b).

Although Andrade’s study (2006b) has contributed significantly to the field of retention and persistence, it is one of the very few studies along with a couple of doctoral
dissertations that have looked at international student persistence. Therefore, it was imperative to learn if academic advising played a role in international students’ academic success and persistence. And a need for an exploratory study about international students’ experiences with academic advising was warranted to understand their experiences and perceptions of academic advising. As a result, this study has not only addressed the gap in the advising and retention literature but also added another element to the field of retention and persistence as part of this study focused on how academic advising played a role in international students’ academic success and persistence at a large public research institution in the United States of America.

**Purpose Statement**

This qualitative study seeks to understand and describe undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising at a Mid-Western public research university in the USA. At this institution, academic advising is required for all undergraduate students; thus, in order for students to continue with course registration for the subsequent semesters, students must schedule appointments with academic advisors once a semester until they graduate from the institution. Although students have various routes to obtain academic advising (i.e., faculty, staff, peer advisors), this exploratory study with College of Arts and Sciences at MWU was seeking to understand undergraduate international students’ (of all class standing) advising experiences with professional academic advisors.

Neuman (2006) defined exploratory research as “research in which the primary purpose is to examine a little-understood issue or phenomenon to develop preliminary
ideas and move toward refined research questions by focusing on the ‘what question’” (p. 33). The dearth of research in academic advising in relation to international students was the motivation for this study, and a basic interpretive qualitative approach was appropriate for exploring this topic without being limited by any particular guidelines.

**Research Questions**

My primary research question and subsidiary questions include:

1. What are undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising?
   a. How do international students perceive the role of academic advising in their academic and career decision making in college?
   b. What aspects of academic advising are important to international students?
   c. How do international students perceive the role of academic advising in their academic success and persistence?

**Significance of Study**

Despite the growing international student population in the USA, research has been limited in the areas of academic advising and international students. Academic advising is an integral part of college students’ lives (Creamer, 2000; O’Banion, 1994; Strayhorn, 2015); “…[it] focuses on helping individuals achieve their own goals and interests, [but] is also a moral endeavor” (Creamer, 2000, p. 18). Through academic advising, students learn about different majors, minors, certificates, and careers within their respective fields (Strayhorn, 2015). They learn about institutional policies and procedures for transfer work, prerequisites for graduation, on campus and off campus
resources (i.e., tutoring, scholarships, organizations, etc.), requirements and application process for graduate schools, and job-related information (Strayhorn, 2015).

Additionally, through advising, students not only hear about institutional regulations and requirements for their majors but also receive advice and encouragement in support of their college education (Strayhorn, 2015).

Advising international students is different from advising domestic students since international students are not only unfamiliar with their institutional rules and regulations but also unfamiliar with their environment (Charles & Stewart, 1991). This study warranted attention because by understanding and learning about international students’ advising experience, administrators may be able to more effectively advise and support international students, create advising guidelines, and develop assessment metrics and appropriate training and workshops for professional and faculty advisors for that particular population. This study also covers the implications for international students’ experiences with academic advising in relation to institutional recruitment and retention goals.

Definitions of Terms

*Academic advising:* According to O’Banion (1994), “The process of academic advising includes the following dimensions: (1) exploration of life goals, (2) exploration of vocational goals, (3) program choice, (4) course choice, and (5) scheduling courses” (p. 10).

*Academic advisors:* Academic advisors are professionals who work with college students on a daily basis to help them successfully navigate their academic lives.
Academic advisors work with students on an individual level with coursework, selection of majors, registration, career discussions, graduation, and graduate schools (O’Banion, 1994).

*Filial piety:* “Respect for one’s parents, filial piety, is considered the most fundamental of the Confucian values, the root of all others” (Oxnam, 2015, p. 1).

*International students:* According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Education at a Glance report (2012), “students are classified as “international” if they left their country of origin and moved to another country to study” (p. 24).

*Retention and persistence:* “Whereas the former is typically used in reference to the actions and responsibilities of the institution, the latter focuses on the actions of the student” (Tinto, 2005, p. 89).

*Student success:* For this study, student success is defined in terms of international students’ academic and career goals and the steps they have taken to achieve these goals by academic involvement and engagement and overall persistence for degree completion (Yazedjian, Toews, Sevin, & Purswell, 2008).

**Organization of the Study**

This chapter provided a brief overview of academic advising and international students to introduce and discuss the significance of the study—undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising. Chapter 2 goes into more detail about academic advising and international students and reviews the influence of intercultural communication on academic advising. Chapter 3 covers the methodology
and overall research design and procedures including data collection and data analysis. Chapter 4 discusses the findings in detail, and Chapter 5 summarizes the research study including implications for practice and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand and describe international students’ experiences with academic advising at a Mid-Western public research university (MWU). In this chapter, I reintroduce international students and academic advising by discussing various topics including intercultural communication, academic advising, and international students along with the application of theories for international student populations that are pertinent to this study.

Overview of International Students

In addition to the aforementioned definitions of international students, Ryan and Carroll (2005) defined international students as “…students who have chosen to travel to another country for tertiary study” (p. 3). Additionally, Madge et al. (2009), in Coate and Rathnayake (2013) “suggest that it is more helpful to recast ‘international students’ as ‘globalized agents,’ emphasizing both individuality and agency, or free choice” (p. 42).

In 2011, the participating institution in this study had close to 1,500 international students (Administrator, International Office, MWU, personal communication, September 22, 2015). In 2015, the MWU had approximately 3,000 students and with continued recruitment efforts to address factors such as budget deficit and internationalization, this number was predicted to increase even more in the next few years (Administrator, International Office, MWU, personal communication, September 22, 2015). In 2017, according to IIE, the number of undergraduate and graduate international students increased significantly to over 3,000 (IIE, 2017). Additionally, the
MWU is located in one of the top 10 states in the country to attract international students (IIE, 2017). Overall, as of 2017, 1,078,822 international students have enrolled in the United States (IIE, 2017), and research shows that the number of international students could rise significantly worldwide (Hudzik & Briggs, 2012). For instance, Li, Chen, and Duanmu (2010) reported “…global flows of students will increase from 2.1 million in 2003 to approximately 5.8 million by 2020” (p. 389).

Thus, with the increasing enrollment numbers, the competition to recruit more international students among US institutions has been on the rise as well since international students significantly contribute to the institution’s overall revenue (Hazen & Alberts, 2013; Hudzik & Briggs, 2012). With housing, tuition, fees, health insurance, and other miscellaneous costs, international students end up paying a lot more than domestic students (Hazen & Alberts, 2013; Mamiseishvili, 2012). International students are not only boosting the institutional revenue but also contributing to the US economy, which reported to be 32.8 billion US dollars for 2016 according to NAFSA (Hazen & Alberts, 2013; NAFSA, 2016).

However, according to McHale (2011), international students are recruited not only for “revenue generation” but also for “…knowledge production and the development of a productive immigrant pool” (as cited by Hazen & Alberts, 2013, p. 13). The top 10 sending countries for 2017 were China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, Mexico and Brazil (IIE, 2017). Interestingly, all of these countries except Canada are not only linguistically and educationally different from the United States of America but also culturally different from the USA. Thus, it is very
important to understand and acknowledge why and how these differences between the United States and the sending countries affect international students academically and psychologically.

As noted earlier, international students vary considerably in terms of their cultural, religious, social, and linguistic backgrounds (Glass et al., 2015; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). These backgrounds certainly influence international students’ experiences in the United States of America. For example, Li and Kaye (1998) find that “…students from Asia and other developing countries experienced much greater difficulty than students from Western Europe in the areas of language, teaching and tutoring, finances, housing accommodation, making friends and homesickness” (cited in Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 386). International students’ decisions to study abroad are motivated by various “push” and “pull” factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 82). These include: to break away from political and economic situations, to gain excellent education due to low quality education at home, to learn about “western culture,” to take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad, and to gain prestige and value for family that comes with foreign education, and so forth (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2005). While the aforementioned lists push international students to study abroad, the following “pull” factors assist them with their decision making in selecting a study abroad destination:

Student’s knowledge and awareness of the host country, . . . personal recommendations . . . from parents, relatives, friends and others, . . . cost issues,
... environment, ... geographic proximity, and ... social links. (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 83)

**Academic Challenges**

Despite being quite selective about choosing an institution, some international students struggle to fit into their new educational and cultural environment. Although many international students considered their new-found freedom and independent living styles and struggle that comes with it to be a positive aspect toward their personal and professional growth (Glass et al., 2015), for many, it is a difficult process to transition to a new country (Alhazmi, 2010; McDermott-Levy, 2011). They experience many academic, social, cultural, and psychological issues (Alhazmi, 2010; Anderson, Carmichael, Harper, & Huang, 2009; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010). For instance, upon arrival to their new institutions, international students become familiar “…with the learning environment of an academic institution, including the education system, lecture style, assessment, relationship between students and lecturers and so on” (Li et al., 2010, p. 394). However, without adequate English language skills, navigating a new environment, interacting with staff, faculty, and classmates, writing papers, presenting in class, and participating in discussions has proven to be challenging and overwhelming for international students (Anderson et al., 2009; Lee & Rice, 2007; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Saha & Karpinski, 2016).

Among all other factors, language barriers are perhaps the most challenging of all and certainly a threat to international students’ success (Anderson et al., 2009; Sherry et al., 2010). Depending on international students’ level of English language proficiency,
these distresses can be more disruptive for some than others, which eventually influence their overall academic success (Anderson et al., 2009; Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010; Young, 2017). Whether in writing or in speaking, the language barrier is a challenge for these students, particularly for non-English speaking students (Anderson et al., 2009; Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Li et al., 2010). For instance, existing research shows that Saudi and many Asian students struggled with the English learning process in their host countries (Alhazmi, 2010; Young, 2017). Even though international students may speak more than one language (Li et al., 2010; Saha & Karpinski, 2016), learning a new language and at the same time mastering competence in that language can be a difficult task. This causes various issues for international students since they have to speak with other students, faculty, and staff members in various departments (i.e., typically admission, registration, academic advising, residence life and dining services; Young, 2017). Furthermore, international students come across other problems such as classroom etiquette, educational practice, institutional norms and regulations, plagiarism, and teaching style, which become challenging for many of these students to get adjusted to the host country (Li et al., 2010). In addition to the challenges of getting adjusted to a new country, new culture, and new educational system, international students are also responsible to keep up with their own education (i.e., homework assignments, participation, exams, quizzes, etc.) so they can be successful as students. This is a common expectation and obligation for many international students (Li et al., 2010; Pimpa, 2005; Saha & Karpinski, 2016).
However, it is important to note that they travel thousands of miles in pursuit of quality higher education (Anderson et al., 2009). Typically, many international students are the best and the brightest students in their individual home countries and many work harder to continue to hold onto that status in their host countries (Anderson et al., 2009; Dozier, 2001; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). Therefore, failure may not be an option for many of these high achieving students (Anderson et al., 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012), particularly government-sponsored students with specific guidelines. According to Dozier (2001), previous “studies have shown that international students as a group are considered academically low-risk students who have academic achievement as their highest priority. They have strong academic skills and are consistently among the best students on campus” (p. 43). Dozier (2001) found that “…although both groups [documented and undocumented international students] required remediation in reading and writing, this requirement did not preclude them, particularly the documented students, from being good and in some cases excellent students” (pp. 49-50), which coincide with the above findings (i.e., Anderson et al., 2009). It is important to note that Dozier’s (2001) study may not be applicable to international students at 4 year public and private institutions since the participants in this study were only from a community college. Additionally, a 2003 Australian study, about academic performance, with 22 educational institutions and 338,445 undergraduate international and domestic students, found that “international students performed as well as [the] Australian students” (Olsen, Burgess, & Sharma, 2006, pp. 11-12).
A large number of international students pay for their own tuition and their families take responsibilities of their educational expenses (Anderson et al., 2009; Hazen & Alberts, 2013; Li et al., 2010). According to IIE Open Doors announcements, “…more than 70 percent of all international students receive the majority of their funds from sources outside of the United States, including personal and family sources as well as assistance from their home country governments or universities” (IIE, 2012, p. 1). As a result, parents may expect their children to perform well academically, and in some ways, these children feel obligated and perhaps pressured to keep up with their parents’ expectations (Li et al., 2010; Pimpa, 2005; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). International students who receive financial support from their government are also obligated to maintain certain expectations as well. However, these students with government funding are at an advantage over other international students since a large number of international students’ tuition is paid by students’ families, which can be expensive for many international students and their families (Alhazmi, 2010; Hazen & Alberts, 2013; IIE, 2012). Most notably, having financial support is an enormous help for sponsored internationals reducing the added burden and stress to find employment to pay for one’s education (Alhazmi, 2010).

**Cultural and Societal Challenges**

For most international students, their parents, if not their significant others or families, took care of them in their home countries (Alhazmi, 2010; McDermott-Levy, 2011). For instance, many students coming from collectivist cultures live with their parents or joint families (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), and generally, children
are not responsible for the household expenses or paying for themselves. These expenses are typically paid for by the head of the families (Alhazmi, 2010; McDermott-Levy, 2011). Thus, with family support, it can be assumed that they did not have to worry about locating an apartment, paying bills, cooking or staying alone, which is the case for many international students in their host country. Moreover, as McDermott-Levy (2011) said, “traditional Arab-Muslim women are not accustomed to making independent decisions and managing their finances; they seek counsel from the men in their families, and either fathers or husbands will speak for them publicly” (p. 267). In contrast, after coming to this country, many students are mostly living independently, and for some, this can be difficult. Thus, upon arriving at their host institutions, living day-to-day can be of struggle for some international students since for many it is their first time to experience American food, American culture, American living styles, and even public displays of affection (Anderson et al., 2009; Lee & Rice, 2007).

In general, Muslim women in Arab societies are dependent on their fathers, husbands, or brothers. As noted by McDermott-Levy (2011), “the male is responsible for finances, decision making, and protection of the family’s reputation” (p. 267). One’s identity is typically determined and associated with one’s household identity; this is particularly true for women. As a result, upon arriving at their host institutions, some Arab Muslim women international students may be alone and without their families and left with individual decision making, which can be overwhelming for individuals whose decision was made or reinforced by their family members (McDermott-Levy, 2011). Maintaining “family honor” is also significant in Arab countries and societies (p. 267).
Although stipulations may vary by countries, there are strict dress codes and rules for Arab women; many wear *abayah* or *hijab* in public places. Unfortunately, McDermott-Levy (2011) found that this clothing led to discrimination for some Omani international students in their host countries.

Additionally, Saudi students, one of the largest groups of international students at MWU, are familiar with education systems where gender segregation plays a very large role (Alhazmi, 2010). Except for family members, Saudi men and women are prohibited to mix with the opposite sex. Until recently with the opening of KAUST, a co-educational institution, Saudi Arabia had only “single-sex schools,” colleges, and universities for its students (Alhazmi, 2010, p. 2). The separation between men and women also extends to eating places, parks, and entertainment venues (Alhazmi, 2010). Due to Saudi Arabia being a patriarchal society, women are heavily influenced by culture, religion, and patriarchal values. Similarly to the aforementioned patriarchal societies, men are typically the providers and the head of the households while women are to remain in the house to maintain their traditional household duties (Alhazmi, 2010; McDermott-Levy, 2011).

Although Saudi male and female international students face similar problems as they navigate their place in their host countries, culture, and institutions, for Saudi women, living in a non-gender segregated culture can be more challenging since women were greatly restricted in their home country from the outside world (Alhazmi, 2010). In fact, “it has been argued that in segregated gender societies, girls are brought up with ‘intimidation’ and ‘warning’ about boys and mixing with them” (Alhazmi, 2010, p. 7).
These childhood messages could certainly prevent both men and women to accept the co-educational culture without any hesitations. Considering the boundaries and the experiences of women in Saudi Arabia, Alhazmi (2010) further noted that “people in Saudi Arabia are rarely able to see unrelated females . . . so the important question is how an individual who lives in such an environment experiences the transition to an environment where the genders mix freely” (p. 3).

The above-mentioned research by Alhazmi (2010) and McDermott-Levy (2011) not only provided valuable information about the Arab societies but also revealed important insights about the lives of Arab, Omani female students, and Saudi Arabian male and female international students. As a result, it can be gleaned from these two articles that female students with collectivist and patriarchal values and from gender segregated countries, particularly from Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries (including Oman), may experience more problems (i.e., social, cultural, and psychological) than female international students from non-gender segregated countries and who do not wear abayah or hijab (Alhazmi, 2010; McDermott-Levy, 2011).

Psychological Challenges

Whether it is because of the differences in cultures and customs; discomfort with food, weather, and western lifestyles; poor grades in class; the absence of immediate friends and families; or the inability to communicate with others, express one’s opinion in class, and socialize with classmates, international students often experience psychological issues such as loneliness, homesickness, stress, anxiety, and depression (Anderson et al., 2009; Carr et al., 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007; Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Tochkov, Levine &
Sanaka, 2010; Tseng & Newton, 2002). For instance, while studying “cross-cultural adjustment” among freshmen students in institutions in the United States of America, Tochkov et al. (2010) found that “…international students from India experienced significantly higher levels of homesickness than American freshmen” (p. 1). Clearly, being away from their family members leads to many of these psychological distresses since most international students pursue their undergraduate and graduate degrees, which could take two to six years, and it can be costly for some international students to make frequent trips to their homeland. These psychological distresses hinder international students’ academic progress (Anderson et al., 2009; Lee & Rice, 2007) since culturally and socially, it is uncommon for many international students to seek professional help and to discuss their problems with someone outside of their families (Carr et al., 2003; Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Young, 2017).

Research also suggests that international students experience discrimination and prejudice (Anderson et al., 2009; Lee & Rice, 2007). Discrimination varies significantly among these students (since students from industrial countries or English-speaking countries will have fewer problems adjusting to American culture than students from non-industrial and non-English speaking countries; Lee & Rice, 2007). What’s more, many international students often reported being discriminated against by the university community based on their religious and cultural background (McDermott-Levy, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Speck, 1997). For instance, Speck’s (1997) study with Muslim international students illustrated the subsequent issues.
Professors’ misunderstanding of Muslim practices may result in misrepresenting them in the classroom; professors may use media that introduces misunderstandings about Islam; professors may fail to maintain attitudes of respect for certain religions in the classroom; and professors may not make an effort to accommodate students’ religious practices. (p. 40)

McDermott-Levy’s (2011) findings with Omani Muslim female students also showed that absence of designated prayer rooms and not having options for halal food made it difficult for these students to retain their day-to-day religious practices. Whether these students were discriminated against by their fellow classmates, faculty, or staff members, it can certainly affect their already distressed state of mind.

Undoubtedly, international students have quite a few challenges to deal with in addition to the usual challenges of being college/university students; it cannot be easy to confront these many issues, and at the same time, continue with their lives as international students. In addition, as discussed above, due to cultural views, many international students do not seek counseling in spite of their experiences with anxiety, depression, loneliness, sadness, and homesickness. Typically, in many cultures, counseling is not an accepted method to deal with one’s problem; family members and relatives are there to console each other in tough times (Carr et al., 2003).

These experiences affect students’ physical and mental health, which impedes their academic progress (Anderson et al., 2009; Lee & Rice, 2007; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). Therefore, academic advising becomes a necessity for many international students since for many, among other factors, the primary purpose to go abroad is to
attain education (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2005). Most importantly, culturally competent advisors would be able to work positively with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. As a result, a positive relationship would allow international students to openly discuss their academic and social problems without feeling embarrassed or ashamed, as many would be speaking to a licensed counselor or a psychologist.

**Persistence of International Students**

Despite many of the aforementioned challenges, international students continue to choose US institutions for higher education, and as noted earlier, enrollment numbers have been higher than ever (Glass et al., 2015; IIE, 2017; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). An important note to make is that a vast majority of research found on international students focused on the deficit model, mostly addressing challenges and difficulties faced by international students rather than highlighting their strengths and resiliency. In fact, only a small number of researchers addressed resiliency as part of their studies (e.g., Glass et al., 2015). A review of international students’ narratives demonstrates that they are strong-minded, motivated, and resilient (e.g., Andrade, 2006b; Glass et al., 2015). Despite many challenges, they are focused on achieving their goals (Anderson et al., 2009), and for many, these challenges made them stronger as individuals (Andrade, 2006b; Glass et al., 2015). They have strong connections to their immediate and extended family and friends through social media and other networks and they utilize these support systems to confront their transitions as international students (Saha & Karpinski, 2016; Glass et al., 2015).
Based on interviews with 40 international students from various types of institutions from across the US, Glass et al. (2015) remarked, “these international students are flourishing” (p. 4). However, the researcher pointed out that “the process of negotiating their [international students] identity, while difficult at times—even leading to tears—forges a sense of self that is more resilient and adaptable” (p. 23). Their findings do not only illustrate the important initiatives and approaches some institutions have taken to support and integrate their international students but also give us a glimpse of diverse viewpoints shared by students. The researchers found that as international students navigated and experienced the various aspects of their educational journey they became resilient, open-minded and independent. For instance, “as students reflected on their classroom experiences, they expressed a strong sense that they had become more open from these different encounters” (p. 23). Furthermore, Glass et al. (2015) wrote, Many of the international students we interviewed specifically stated that they came to the United States to face challenges that they anticipated would help forge an independent self—to develop a sense of perseverance and confidence that only emerges after a long and difficult journey. The movement away from friends, family, cultural traditions, language, and social networks, reflects international students’ self-understanding within the framework of resilience and agency, despite the inevitable frustration, loneliness, isolation, and marginalization that they may encounter and need to overcome. (p. 42) Although international students continued to negotiate their “in-between” identities, while “…develop[ing] greater resilience and self-reliance as a result” (p. 60),
they appreciated the opportunity to learn about different cultures and to meet diverse people. In fact, one of the factors that encouraged many international students to study at US colleges and universities is their interests in “...local people and community...[and] culture” (Glass et al., 2015, p. 65).

Glass et al. (2015) also found that strong familial networks fundamentally contributed to international students’ resiliency. Typically, international students’ decisions to study abroad are supported by his or her entire family; thus, family members (immediate and extended) are involved in the process of immigration, selecting a university, paying for school, and providing additional support needed to help their international students (Glass et al., 2015). Today, many international students talk to their family members every day; Social Media, Skype, and many other online technologies made it possible for international students to stay connected with their family members (Glass et al., 2015; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). Based on the narratives, international students’ primary support systems are their families—parents and siblings. Lastly, Glass et al. (2015) addressed the impact belonging has on international students’ persistence and success in terms of resilience, social capital, and civic agency. Thus, institutions have to remember that “…belonging becomes a key, if not the, resource individuals turn to when they are in places that are unfamiliar to them and they feel marginalized” (Glass et al., 2015, p. 83). The aforementioned remarks based on Strayhorn’s research, who has written extensively on belonging, is a critical reminder for administrators working to support international students.
Intercultural Communication

As can be seen, international students are diverse in their race, ethnicity, cultural, geographical, religious, and linguistic background (Glass et al., 2015; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). A review of the top 25 sending countries reveals that the majority of the international students coming to the USA are from collectivist cultures and countries that are culturally, socially, academically, and linguistically different than the United States (Glass et al., 2015; Hofstede et al., 2010; IIE, 2017; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). For instance, two of the largest groups of international students in the USA are coming from two Asian countries China and India (IIE, 2017) that place a strong emphasis on filial piety (Hofstede et al., 2010). That is,

As a core Confucian value, the concept of filial piety sets a foundation of sociocultural beliefs and behaviors in many Asian societies. The concept is not simply a set of guidelines for hierarchical displays of respectful behaviors. Filial piety is intertwined with Asian conceptions of “face,” “harmony,” “personal relationship,” and “relational determinism,” which address the social and moral implications of behavior. (Lieber, Nihira, & Mink, 2004, pp. 325-326)

Lieber et al. (2004) discussed filial piety in terms of “…caring, achievement and excellence, obedience, respect, work ethic, and responsibility” and how these values are understood among Chinese immigrants in the USA (p. 327). Although these parents wondered about their children’s “sense of responsibility” toward them, parents talked about the obligations they felt for their parents and families and hoped that their children would carry on with their “values of filial piety” as well (pp. 324-328). The narratives
expressed by the Chinese immigrants showed that “modernization, immigration, and change” had an impact on some of the usual principles of filial piety (Lieber et al., 2004, p. 327). Generally speaking, people belonging to collectivist cultures such as Asian cultures have a “sense of responsibility” to care for their parents, to listen to their parents, to obey their parents, and to support their parents (Hofstede et al., 2010; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2001, 2002; Lieber et al., 2004).

Although it is important to recognize the common values of collectivist cultures, college administrators including academic advisors must acknowledge the diversity that exists within collectivist cultures and societies (Glass et al., 2015). Certainly, these differences have an impact on international students’ lives including their interaction with others from diverse cultures. Thus, in order for the advisors to effectively address the diversity in their students, intercultural communication is an appropriate topic for discussion. According to Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012), intercultural communication “…is about acquiring the necessary knowledge and dynamic skills to manage such differences appropriately and effectively” (p. 5). Intercultural communication is not only important because of the increased global workplace heterogeneity and increased domestic workforce diversity, [but also for] . . . engaging in creative problem solving, comprehending the role of technology in global communication, facilitating better multicultural health care communication, enhancing intercultural relationship satisfaction, fostering global and intrapersonal peace, and deepening cultural self-awareness and other-awareness. (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 5)
Hence, by becoming mindful of intercultural communication through awareness, knowledge, and skills (Hofstede et al., 2010), and by educating themselves about communication styles (low versus high context communication; Hall, 1977), and various cultural dimensions, advisors will be able to successfully address international students’ questions and concerns. A brief discussion of cultural value dimensions follows, which consists of individualism versus collectivism, small versus large power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and feminine versus masculine (Hofstede et al., 2010; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 44). Cultural values according to Ting-Toomey and Chung,

Form the implicit standards by which we judge appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in a communication episode. They are the contents of self that drive our thoughts, emotions, and everyday decision-making processes. They serve to shape the motivation to explain human behavior . . . Thus, the first and most important dimension that shapes our sense of self is the individualistic-collectivistic value pattern. (pp. 43-44)

**Individualism Versus Collectivism**

Individualism can be understood in terms of “…self-efficiency, individual responsibility, and personal autonomy,” whereas, collectivism is about “…relational interdependence, in group harmony, and in group collaborative spirit” (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, pp. 44-45). In individualist societies, relationships between people are loose, whereas, relationships in collectivist societies are strong (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 92). Hofstede et al. (see Table 1) listed some of the significant distinctions between
individualist and collectivist traditions in relation to “language, personality, and behavior” (pp.113-117). Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) also summarize Hofstede et al.’s (2010) explanations of these two societies (See Table 2).

Table 1

*Differences between Collectivist and Individualist Societies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Collectivist</th>
<th>Individualist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We oriented</td>
<td>People rely on others</td>
<td>I oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People rely on others</td>
<td>People generally live with an extended family</td>
<td>People rely on self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing culture</td>
<td>Young adults are not only obligated to stay with their family or parents but also take care of them.</td>
<td>Young adults are neither obligated to stay with their family or parents nor take care of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactful</td>
<td>More emphasis is placed on sharing sadness over happiness</td>
<td>More emphasis is placed on sharing happiness over sadness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People rely on friends and family for news.</td>
<td>People rely on media for news.</td>
<td>Disabled people live integrated lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled people live segregated lives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010, p. 117)

Table 2

*Value Characteristics in Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Individualistic cultures</th>
<th>Collectivistic cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>“I” identity</td>
<td>“We” identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>Extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Privacy regulation</td>
<td>Relational harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Individual competition</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Personal competence</td>
<td>Ingroup emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Direct communication</td>
<td>Indirect communication patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality equivalence</td>
<td>Independent self</td>
<td>Interdependent self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 47)
The primary reason to highlight these differences is to particularly draw advisors’ attention to the “we” and “family” aspects of collectivist cultures. For instance, research suggests that Asian Americans often select majors that will make them and their parents happy and bring their family prestige. Asian parents are heavily involved in their children’s success (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). Asian American parents encourage and expect their children to not only pursue higher education but also to pursue certain careers (i.e., physicians, computer engineers, dentists, medical scientist) that would be financially beneficial (Fouad et al., 2008; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). For instance, Tang et al. (1999) stated that “since the most frequent occupations selected by the participants are engineer, physician, and computer scientist, it may well be that Asian American college students are following their parents’ wishes” (p. 152). Although the above articles are about Asian Americans, they discussed values that are important to Asian cultures along with various factors that may influence participants of some Asian ancestry on their career/major choices. Another study by Arthur and Popadiuk (2010) who interviewed an Iranian female international student in Canada also depicts parental expectations and family involvement when it comes to selecting a career or a major. In Azzi’s case,

As the youngest and only female in the family, Azzi is bound by certain gender scripts related to her career. Her family has primed her to become a scientist throughout her life—she was required to take sciences in school, she witnessed her brothers become doctors and professors, and her parents have been dreaming for the day she becomes a doctor. (p. 427)
Arthur and Popadiuk (2010) illustrated Azzi’s ongoing negotiation with herself as “…she felt obligated to fulfill her parents’ wishes, even though she was becoming less certain that she could achieve their goals” (p. 430). This suggests that for some international students, career/major selection is a family decision and not an individual decision, and students from collectivist cultures may feel a sense of responsibility to uphold their parents’ decisions.

**Small Versus Large Power Distance (PD)**

The differences between small versus large power distance are also important to address to increase advisors’ understanding of various cultural value dimensions. For instance, based on the findings of Hofstede et al. (2010), Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) provided the information as shown in Table 3 of these two cultures.

Table 3

*Value Characteristics in Small and Large Power Distance (PD) Cultures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>Small PD Cultures</th>
<th>Large PD Cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Emphasize interpersonal equality</td>
<td>Emphasize status-based difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Children may contradict parents</td>
<td>Children should obey parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Younger people are smart</td>
<td>Older people are wise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Teachers ask for feedback</td>
<td>Teachers lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Subordinates expect consultation</td>
<td>Subordinates expect guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Informal communication Patterns</td>
<td>Formal communication patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Equivalence</td>
<td>Horizontal Self</td>
<td>Vertical self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 49)

Table 3 illustrates that students from the large power distance cultures who have the utmost respect for their parents (Hofstede et al., 2010; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012)
will have the most difficulty in navigating careers if students’ career goals do not coincide with their parents’ expectations. In this situation, having cultural knowledge would be valuable because advisors must be cognizant of students’ mental states and guide them accordingly to assist them in making the best decisions that will be most rewarding for the student.

**Low and High Context Communication**

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), “lots of things that in collectivist cultures are self-evident must be said explicitly in individualistic cultures” (p. 109). In other words, the differences between low and high context communication are noticeable that cannot be ignored and must be known by administrators who are working with international students (Hall, 1977). This suggests that students with high context communication styles who may be unaccustomed to speak openly will be hesitant in expressing their concerns directly. As a result, advisors who are familiar with “Low and High Context Communication” will be able to understand their students’ requests and will feel more comfortable while communicating and corresponding with international students (See Table 4).

In sum, being knowledgeable about various cultural dimensions and communication styles will assist advisors to properly interact with their advisees. While searching for what entails “successful intercultural interactions,” Deardorff developed the intercultural competence model (Deardorff, 2012, p. 45). According to Deardorff, having an understanding of the following elements is critical in understanding and learning about intercultural competence: attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery),
Table 4

Low-Context Communication and High-Context Communication: Verbal Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Context Communication</th>
<th>High Context Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualistic values</td>
<td>Collectivistic values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear logic</td>
<td>Spiral logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct verbal style</td>
<td>Indirect verbal style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matter-of-fact tone</td>
<td>Understated or animated tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal verbal style</td>
<td>Formal verbal style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal assertiveness or talkativeness</td>
<td>Verbal reticence or silence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 124)

knowledge (cultural self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge, etc.), skills (observation, listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating), internal outcomes, and external outcomes (Deardorff, 2012, pp. 45-47). Based on Deardorff’s intercultural competence model, Gregersen-Hermans and Pusch (2012) stated that “…intercultural competence refers to behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately in cross-cultural situations to achieve one’s goals to some degree” (p. 23). In fact, mastering intercultural competence is not a quick and an easy process, it is a “lifelong” process (Deardorff, 2012, p. 47); it takes “…knowledge, skills, motivation to learn, and time” (Gregersen-Hermans & Pusch, 2012, p. 23). However, “intercultural communication can be taught” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 420) and by becoming familiar with intercultural communication and intercultural competence model, academic advisors will become culturally sensitive and aware.
Academic Advising

With the various challenges noted above, I now turn to academic advising. Academic advising is a crucial part of undergraduate students’ development and academic success in higher education institutions in the USA (Davis & Cooper, 2001; Tuttle, 2000). Academic advisors inform and educate students about majors, minors, certificates, careers, institutional policies and procedures, graduation requirements, tutoring, scholarships, student organizations, and graduate school requirements (Strayhorn, 2015). Academic advisors connect students with other services on campus, and most importantly, academic advising contributes to retaining students (Davis & Cooper, 2001).

Overview of Academic Advising

The importance of academic advising was acknowledged as early as 1889 when John Hopkins University tried to “…connect students and faculty more closely” (Frost, 2000, p. 8). However, according to Tuttle (2000), “in 1870 [Harvard President Charles W. Eliot] appointed the first administrator in charge of student discipline and development and initiated the elective system that created the need for advisement about course choices” (p. 15). Although there is a discrepancy in the information noted above, research suggests that ever since 1889, various approaches toward academic advising were spearheaded and implemented by several institutions such as Wesleyan University, Alfred University, and Syracuse University. From 1949 to 1999, the need for academic advising became apparent due to the increase in the number of institutions and enrollment numbers, establishment of GI Bill, and the growing numbers of diverse students (Frost,
2000). During this period, faculty members were becoming involved in research, which created the demand for professional academic advisors to advise students (Frost, 2000; Tuttle, 2000). As a result, academic advising became an establishment in the late 1970s. According to Kuhn (2008), during this time, “academic advising became an examined activity when those doing advising began to compare how they conducted advising to how it was being conducted at other institutions” (p. 7). In fact, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was originated in 1979 to inform and promote the value of academic advising (Frost, 2000).

Existing research suggests that to be a good academic advisor, one needs to be aware and familiar with institutional/program/major/graduation/career/employment information (Wade & Yoder, 1995). However, academic advising will vary based on students’ needs, class standing, major and types of institutions and advisor’s knowledge and experience will influence the quality of advising. Additionally, “…advisors need to take enough time to evaluate problems, be good listeners, show interests in students, be able to assess student capabilities, and get along with people” (Wade & Yoder, 1995, p. 99). Musser’s (1993) research, which included interviews with various stakeholders (i.e., advisors, faculty, students) and review of extant literature, also echoes with Wade and Yoder (cited in Wade & Yoder, 1995). Musser stated that the following skills are imperative to be a good academic advisor: “…communication, counseling, evaluation/assessment, interpersonal skills, knowledge base, management, philosophy/ethics of advising, positive attitude, and being a teacher” (cited in Wade & Yoder, 1995, p. 99). Furthermore, the students mentioned the following information:
Need for advisers to be available, make an effort to know students as individuals, be knowledgeable about programs and requirements, be informed about graduation requirements, be caring people, be available to listen, know where students can go for additional information, and be capable of communicating to students that they enjoy and are committed to advising students. (Wade & Yoder, 1995, p. 99)

**The Role of Academic Advising**

According to Creamer (2000), for the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), “the focus of academic advising is the whole person” (p. 20). As a result, the goals of academic advising can be fulfilled by

1. Assisting students in self-understanding and self-acceptance (values clarification; understanding abilities, interests, and limitations)
2. Assisting students in considering their life goals by relating their interests, skills, abilities, and values to careers, the world of work, and the nature and purpose of higher education
3. Assisting students in developing an educational plan consistent with their life goals and objectives
4. Assisting students in developing decision-making skills
5. Providing accurate information about institutional policies, procedures, resources, and programs
6. Referring students to other institutional or community support services
7. Assisting students in evaluating or reevaluating progress toward established goals and educational plans

8. Providing information about students to the institution, college, academic departments, or some combination thereof. (Habley, 2000, pp. 40-41)

Although these goals provide an overview of academic advising, it cannot be overlooked that some of these goals are culturally specific. For instance, students from collectivist societies may have different values than students from individualistic societies. Also, as discussed earlier, in many collectivist societies parents are not only heavily involved in their children’s academic decision making but also their personal and professional lives. As a result, career decision making and life goals for some students may not be solely dependent on students but their families as well (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010; Fouad et al., 2008; Tang et al., 1999). Thus, advisors may not be able to fully assist students with their decision-making, career and life goals.

Types of Academic Advising

Although several types of academic advising have been mentioned throughout the literature (i.e., intrusive advising, learning-centered advising, integrated advising, strengths-based advising), developmental advising, prescriptive advising, and more recently, appreciative advising are commonly known among advising professionals.

Developmental Advising

Developmental advising has been considered the most influential type of advising among researchers and academic advisors due to its impact on students (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Developmental advising takes into account one’s developmental stage
Prescriptive Advising

While responsibilities are shared between students and advisors in developmental advising, advisors are mostly doing the advising within the prescriptive advising style (Crookston, 1994; King, 2005). “In this relationship, the student is passive. The flow of information is strictly in one direction” (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 66). According to Crookston (1994), prescriptive advising “focus[es] on limitations, [whereas, developmental advising] focus[es] on potentialities” (p. 7).

Appreciative Advising

By working closely with students, appreciative advising highlights students’ strengths while utilizing “Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don’t Settle,” the segments of appreciative advising model (Palmer, 2009, p. 1). According to Bloom, Hutson, and He (2013), “Advisors do not necessarily go through all six phases in each advising session nor necessarily employ them sequentially” (p. 85). However, each of these phases takes on different aspects of a situation and can be equally responsible and necessary to effectively advise students (Palmer, 2009). Disarm is a meet and greet phase. During this phase, advisors work toward developing rapport with students, so students feel comfortable and welcomed by the advisors (Bloom et al., 2013). Discover phase suggests that advisors learn about their advisees’ lives and their “…hobbies, strengths, and passions by asking open-ended questions” (p. 1). During Dream phase,
advisors learn about their advisees’ “hopes and dreams” and guide them accordingly to achieve their goals (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 86). At this time, Dream phase turns to Design phase since advisors are working with their advisees to create strategies and providing them with appropriate resources to assist them with their plans (Bloom et al., 2013; Palmer, 2009). In Deliver and Don’t Settle, the final two phases of the appreciative advising model, advisors continue to inspire their students to achieve their goals with continuous “positive feedback” and encouragement (Palmer, 2009, p. 1).

**Academic Advising Models**

Academic advising models vary across institutions and institutional types and are not always delivered by staff members in student support services (NACADA, 2011). Historically, faculty members primarily advise students in liberal arts and private colleges (Kuhn, 2008). In most four-year public institutions, students have access to faculty and professional academic advisors, as it is the case for MWU. For-profit institutions utilize professional academic advisors to stay connected to their students via online and phone advising (Kuhn, 2008), and for community colleges, “the three most common organizational structures for academic advising . . . are the self-contained, split, and faculty only models” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 10).

According to Kuhn (2008), W. R. Habley (1983, 2004) discussed seven different models for academic advising. They are faculty-only model, supplementary model, split model, dual model, total intake model, satellite model, and self-contained model.

**Faculty-Only Model:** All students are assigned to an instructional faculty member for advising. There is no advising office.
Supplementary Model: All students are assigned to an instructional faculty member for advising. There is an advising office that provides general academic information and referrals for students, but all advising transactions must be approved by the student’s faculty advisor.

Split Model: A specific group(s) of students (e.g., undecided, underprepared, etc.) are advised in an advising office. All other students are assigned to academic units or faculty advisors.

Dual Model: Each student has two advisors. A member of the instructional faculty advises the students on matters related to the major. An advisor in an advising office advises the student on general requirements, procedures, and policies.

Total Intake Model: Staff members of an administrative unit are responsible for advising all students for a specific period of time or until some specific requirements have been met. After meeting these requirements, students are assigned to an academic subunit or member of the instructional faculty for advising.

Satellite Model: Each school, college, or division within the institution has established its own approach to advising.

Self-contained Model: Advising for all students from the point of enrollment to the point of departure is done by staff in a centralized unit. (Kuhn, 2008, pp. 7-8)
Academic Advising and International Students

How do academic advisors advise international students? What are some of the implications of academic advising? Charles and Stewart (1991) wrote, “probably the two most fundamental objectives in advising international students are to help them (a) adjust to the demands of their respective academic programs and (b) achieve academic success” (p. 174). Academic advisors play a vital role in assisting international students in accomplishing these objectives (Charles & Stewart, 1991). Although these objectives can also be applicable for domestic students, for international students, “…the advising process must take into consideration their cultural diversity and unique needs . . . [and] it is the cultural diversity among international students that may prove to be the greatest challenge for academic advisors” (p. 174). It is indeed an important remark and remains relevant in advising international students today.

Additionally, how international students view their advisors may vary based on their cultural experiences and practices in their native countries, and Charles and Stewart (1991) raised some important points to be considered by academic advisors that could become problematic while advising. For instance, male students from gender segregation countries may not be comfortable with advisors of the opposite sex and similar situation could occur between female students and male advisors (Charles & Stewart, 1991).

Charles and Stewart (1991) addressed several points to help and inform academic advisors. Charles and Stewart suggested that academic advisors need to be open-minded and culturally sensitive, so they can understand international students. In order to advise students with appropriate classes, class load, resources, and institutional requirements,
academic advisors need to become aware that international students come from different educational systems and cultural backgrounds as well as the challenges (i.e., inefficient language skills, transitional issues, etc.) they face for being international students. International students may also be bounded by several restrictions such as visa and immigration policies, government or sponsor requirements for financial aid, and parental expectations. By gaining knowledge about these restrictions and by learning about the expectations international students have toward academic advising, academic advisors will be able to guide them adequately. Finally, Charles and Stewart reminded us that, “the cultural dimension of working with international students may create ambiguity that may not exist in the advising relationship with American students” (p. 179), and with acceptance, understanding, and open-mindedness, academic advisors can make a huge difference in the lives of international students.

The findings from Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino’s (2004) study that took place at a large institution resonate with Charles and Stewart’s (1991) recommendations for academic advisors to be understanding, caring, and culturally sensitive. For instance, to establish “what undergraduate students want in academic advising” (p. 48), Mottarella et al. (2004) required their participants to rate “hypothetical advising scenarios” (p. 49). Four hundred sixty eight participants of whom 71.8% were White took part in the study. Although Mottarella et al. did not study international students’ satisfaction with advising, their study provided insights from 468 students about their advising needs. The researchers found that “…students value warmth and depth in advising relationships” and advisors should aim for building “…warm and supportive advising relationships” (pp.
58-59). Building rapport is particularly helpful for introverted students since many may be hesitant to reach out to their advisors (Mottarella et al., 2004).

On the topic of providing effective advising to international students, Priest and McPhee (2000) coincided with Mottarella et al. (2004) and Charles and Stewart (1991). Priest and McPhee (2000) suggested that advisors need to recognize the academic and transitional difficulties international students experience and advisors need to stay in regular contact with their international students in order to assist them effectively (Priest & McPhee, 2000).

**Application of Theories in Academic Advising**

According to Don G. Creamer (2000), “academic advising is a form of teaching that is both complex and puzzling and its effectiveness depends on the sound use of multiple theories about students and the educational institutions in which they study” (p. 18). Student development theories are a critical tool for higher education professionals because they can be applied to understand diverse students’—non-traditional students, multi-racial students, commuter students, LGBTQ students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities—psychosocial, cognitive, intellectual, emotional, ethical, and spiritual development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Hubbard, 2012; Vasti, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Although many student development theories were developed by White males for White upper-middle class traditional age students and have been criticized for their applicability to diverse students (Kodama et al., 2001), theories on ethnic identity development and other student development theories can be utilized in
student affairs practice to learn about students’ “...abilities, aptitude, and objectives” (Vasti et al., 2009, p. 577).

In other words, student affairs practitioners can use appropriate theories to navigate, understand, and learn about a particular problem and find ways to resolve that problem (Evans et al., 2010; Hubbard, 2012). Indeed, theories serve multiple purposes for higher education professionals. Whereas theories have multiple benefits, student affairs professionals must not assume that theories are equally beneficial for all students and all problems. They must assess each situation separately. In other words, limitations to theories must be acknowledged. Educators must acknowledge that some theories may not be appropriate for certain populations. For this reason, student affairs practitioners must be cautious when utilizing theories; they must remember that students come first, not the theory (Evans et al., 2010). Thus, student affairs professionals must consider students’ experiences and their stories. Overall, student affairs professionals must become knowledgeable about student development theories in order to properly assist with student’s growth and development in college (Jones & Abes, 2011).

A review of articles suggests that international student population faces various academic, social, cultural, and psychological barriers (Carr et al., 2003; Charles & Stewart, 1991; Lee & Rice, 2007; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). To understand and address these issues, in addition to using intercultural communication theories, academic advisors can utilize student development theories such as Schlossberg’s transition theory and James Marcia’s ego identity statuses.
Schlossberg’s transition theory focused on transitions in adult’s lives and it provided ways to deal with these transitions. For instance, her theory “includes an examination of what constitutes a transition, different forms of transitions, the transition process and factors that influence transitions” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 214; Schlossberg, 2011). Schlossberg’s theory stresses the significance of the transitions to the individuals. For instance, a transition will not be considered a transition if it is not important to the individual experiencing it. The anticipated event, unanticipated event, and nonevents are three types of transitions described by Schlossberg (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg, 2011). International students are going through a transition as they moved from their home country to their host country. Although these students are not aware of every specific change they will experience, they come to this country with the expectation of starting a new school and making new friends. Unanticipated events, on the other hand, are unexpected events. For instance, an international student running into a financial problem and unable to pay tuition due to parent’s loss of income would be considered an unanticipated event. Nonevents, “…which are expected to occur but do not,” according to Schlossberg and Robinson, “…are more associated with probability than possibility” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 215); for example, an international student unable to graduate within the expected timeline. By keeping these types of transitions in mind, academic advisors can use Schlossberg’s four S’s (situation, self, support, and strategies) that can assist them to understand where international students are situated in terms of their personal and psychological state of mind, support system they have, and strategies they use to tackle their challenges (Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg, 2011).
Academic advisors can also apply James Marcia’s ego identity statuses to assist with and understand international students’ psychological adjustments as they go through many psychological distresses. For instance, Marcia, whose research is based on Erikson’s stage theory, “…introduced identity statuses as a way to explain how young adults experience and resolve crisis, [and find that] there are two critical variables in individual identity formation, exploration (crisis) and commitment” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 52). Marcia’s identity statuses included foreclosure, moratorium, identity achievement, and diffusion. For instance, many students may be expected to become a doctor or engineer or pursue a health-related career (as reported in Chapter 4 for Rasha, an international student from Somalia/Saudi Arabia), and in foreclosure status, students respect their parents’ decision. However, upon arriving in a foreign country as they struggle with challenges or find opportunities to explore their interests, international students may question their parents’ decision (moratorium status) and commit themselves to their own choices of studies or professions (identity achievement; as reported in Chapter 4 for Rasha; Evans et al., 2010). It is important to note that the applicability of student development theories for international students is questionable since student development theories were developed in a different social context than international students. For instance, sponsored students may not have the options to change their majors regardless of their interests and many international students may not defy their parents’ decisions.
Application of Student Development Theories for International Students

According to Evans et al. (2010), “student development theory provides the basis for the practice of student development” (p. 7). Student development theories inform and educate higher education professionals about how development occurs in students and what influences their development and growth including family, peers, faculty, staff, and environment. Institutions, particularly student affairs professionals and faculty members, play a significant role in the student development process. For instance, in order to address a specific population and to create effective programs and services, student affairs professionals can implement programs and policies that are grounded in appropriate student development theory (Evans et al., 2010).

The research on international students’ identity development, cognitive development, and psychosocial development is very limited (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995; Vasti et al., 2009). According to Sheehan and Pearson (1995), “one of the difficulties in the study of international students is the lack of theoretical approaches to describe their development” (p. 524). For many students, they are not only grappling with typical college related issues but also facing several new challenges as international students including language barriers along with numerous cultural, social, psychological, and academic adjustment issues (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). Thus, international students’ identity formation is influenced by their experiences as international students as well as their individual religious, “social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds” (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995, p. 524). Additionally, theories rooted in western cultures do not consider “non-westerner’s worldviews or mind-body assumptions, cultural values, different living
conditions, patterns of child rearing, parental roles, and various communication patterns” (p. 524). For instance, typically, in collectivist and non-western societies, many individuals are more interested in pursuing what their family wants for them instead of pursuing their respective wishes. For these reasons, many theories created from and with a western outlook may not be entirely suited to understand international students’ development process (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995).

Sheehan and Pearson (1995) conducted a study in order to understand to what extent Chickering’s vectors—developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose and developing integrity—are applicable to Asian international and American freshman students. Their findings illustrate that although both groups were autonomous in their decision-making in college, Asian international students were found to be less active educationally, have unclear “educational and career goals,” and experiencing trouble navigating their way around academia (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995, p. 527). It is also challenging for Asian international students (in the group studied by Sheehan and Pearson) to develop interpersonal relationships and intimacy. Poor communication skills, coupled with academic work, cultural differences, and collectivist values could prevent Asian international students to interact freely and make friends with domestic students (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). Heggins and Jackson’s (2003) findings coincide with Sheehan and Pearson. For instance, they reported that Asian international students rely on their family, relatives, community members, friends, and religious facilities/leaders while
experiencing emotional problems instead of consulting with licensed counselors. Unlike Sheehan and Pearson (1995), they suggested that student development theories including Perry’s intellectual and ethical development, Phinney’s ethnic identity development, and Chickering’s theory of identity development along with Schlossberg’ transition theory would be appropriate to understand Asian international students’ experiences in college (Heggins & Jackson, 2003).

Kodama et al. (2001) studied Asian Pacific American students’ Psychosocial development as well. Although this study did not address international students, it is a fundamental study in understanding Asian students’ development issues in college. Kodama et al. (2001) argued that although Chickering’s seven vectors may be applicable to Asian Pacific American student to some extent, these vectors do not fully grasp the various factors involving Asian students such as diversity, generational status, acculturation levels, geographical context, cultural values, history, and racism (p. 428).

Although student development theories have been addressed as frameworks or roadmaps for student affairs professionals to use while working with students, administrators must remember that “theories are socially constructed in that they reflect both the historical, societal, political, and cultural contexts which they evolved and the perspectives of whom generated them” (Jones & Abes, 2011, p. 151). As Kodama et al. (2001) asserted that “we can do harm to students in applying theories that were not designed for them” (p. 430). In other words, while deciding on a theory to solve a particular situation or a problem, student affairs professionals must not assume anything and apply any theories to any student. We must ask ourselves: would this theory be a
good fit for this person to resolve this matter (Kodama et al., 2001). Thus, in order to appropriately address the diverse needs of undergraduate international students to assist them with their psychosocial and cognitive development, higher education professionals must be conscious of the existing student development theories. Most importantly, higher education administrators must recognize the diversity within the students of Asian, Latino, African, and Caucasian background because they are not only developmentally and cognitively different but also represent multiple heritages, cultures, languages, and religions (Kodama et al., 2001; Sheehan & Pearson, 1995).

**Conclusion**

Whether educational institutions are targeting international students to diversify their campuses, introduce different perspectives, bring in the best and brightest in certain field, teach students, staff, and faculty about other cultures, prepare students to work with diverse populations, compete with other institutions, brand their names or primarily for economic gain, institutions around the world are implementing and utilizing several strategies to aggressively recruit international students (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009). Active recruitment amongst higher education institutions coupled with international students’ drive and desire to pursue higher education in western and English-speaking countries increased the overall number of international students worldwide particularly in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America (Andrade, 2006a; Douglass & Edelstein, 2009).

With the increasing number of international students coming to study in the USA, it is imperative for institutions to be aware of international students’ experiences with
academic advising. Thus, through this qualitative study, I attempted to explore and learn about international students’ experiences with academic advising in order to develop appropriate advising guidelines for academic advisors and other university professionals working with international students.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study about international students’ experiences with academic advising at a mid-western public research university in the USA. For this study, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate and took precedence over quantitative method because “qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 15). For instance, according to Hatch (2002), “the strength of interviews is that they allow insight into participant perspectives” (p. 97). I wanted to hear international students’ viewpoints and stories about academic advising. Thus, through this exploratory study, I attempted to understand and describe international students’ experiences with academic advising at a mid-western institution in the USA.

My primary research question and subsidiary questions include:

1. What are undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising?
   a. How do international students perceive the role of academic advising in their academic and career decision making in college?
   b. What aspects of academic advising are important to international students?
   c. How do international students perceive the role of academic advising in their academic success and persistence?
Situating Self

What piqued my interest to study international students’ experiences with academic advising was my involvement in undergraduate advising as an academic advisor for over four years. I consider myself an advocate for student success. My advising philosophy is to empower and motivate students to recognize their strengths and potentials as they embark on their educational journey because I believe one’s determination to succeed is far more important than one’s ability.

Having the opportunity to help students navigate their academic lives so they can achieve their goals has been rewarding for me. As an advisor, I had the opportunity to work with undergraduate students from freshmen to seniors pursuing various majors. A few of my advisees were international students and I was curious to know if advisors are equipped to work with international students. Thus, I wanted to explore the following questions: What expectations do international students have from their academic advisors and are we living up to those expectations?

Additionally, as an undergraduate student, my experience with academic advising was very positive. I was not very familiar with the institutional rules and the requirements for obtaining an undergraduate degree since I had not lived in the USA for very long. As a result, I was dependent on my academic advisor’s assistance to navigate my new academic environment. It was very helpful to have someone who could introduce me to various majors based on my interests; guide me with my course requirements; inform me about institutional resources, policies, and procedures; and at the same time encourage me to prepare and plan for my future endeavors. My academic
advisor’s guidance, assistance, and encouragement made my educational and college experience very positive. On this basis, I believe academic advisors play a strong role in college students’ academic success and retention.

My past and current experiences with academic advising will certainly have some bearing on my position as a researcher. For instance, as an academic advisor and based on my positive experiences with my academic advisor, I hope that all students’ experiences are positive and that all academic advisors care about their students’ academic success. However, students’ experiences may not always support my assumptions. I must recognize that academic advising practices will vary based on individual advisor’s work experiences, academic and cultural background, and overall interests in advising. Thus, students’ experiences will not only depend on various academic advising practices but also students’ majors since some majors may require more guidance than others. However, by being cognizant of these assumptions, I would be able to avoid imposing my biases on my research participants. Merriam (2002) wrote,

The human instrument has shortcomings and biases that might have an impact on the study. Rather than trying to eliminate these biases or “subjectivities,” it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data. (p. 5)

Thus, it is important to document these biases or “subjectivities,” because of their overall significance to the research outcomes (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Merriam, 2002).
Additionally, my research is grounded in constructivism, and within “the constructivist worldview, researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation [. . . and] the researcher’s intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). My ontological belief is that there is more than one reality (Hatch, 2002). These realities are influenced by individual’s cultural and societal background and worldviews with the notion that everyone’s reality will be different from the others’ (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In other words, “knowledge is symbolically constructed and not objective; that understandings of the world are based on conventions; that truth is, in fact, what we agree it is” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15).

The constructivist paradigm emphasizes the importance of “co-construction”—working together with participants to collect data (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). From this perspective, my study was dependent on my participants and their understanding of academic advising. Through this research, I wanted to understand international students’ construction and interpretation of academic advising. I wanted to learn and discover how their understanding of academic advising is different based on their academic, cultural, and linguistic background.

**Approach**

“Qualitative research is a powerful tool for learning more about our lives and the sociohistorical context in which we live” (Merriam, 2002, p. xv). Interacting with participants is significant to qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Hatch 2002; Merriam, 2002). What’s more “natural settings, multiple sources of data, participants’ meanings,
rich description, researcher as a key instrument, extended firsthand engagement, centrality of meaning, wholeness and complexity, subjectivity, emergent design, inductive and deductive data analysis, holistic account, and reflexivity” are equally critical to qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186; Hatch, 2002, pp. 6-11; Merriam, 2002).

The framework for this study is interpretive qualitative research. The interpretive qualitative research is guided by phenomenology and symbolic interactionism and it seeks to understand “…how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam 2002, p. 38). This study is informed by the constructivist principle. It suggests that “…multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In other words, participant perspectives are essential for a quality project; it is impossible to attach meaning to one’s life without hearing what one has to say.

By using this research approach, I was able to understand “how [international students] interpret their experiences [with academic advising], how they construct their worlds, and [the] meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2002, p. 38). Most importantly, by utilizing an interpretive study to interview students, I was able to discover how my participants understand academic advising as international students (Merriam, 2002).
Research Site

Due to the exploratory nature of my research questions, I chose a large public institution that requires mandatory advising, that has a great number of international students from numerous parts of the world, and that offers various majors. Mid-Western University (MWU) is a public research institution located in the mid-western region of the USA with over 250 undergraduate degree programs. Although this happens to be a research institution, I wanted to select a public institution where professional advisors are not only the primary contacts for students but also where students have the opportunity to work with both professional advisors and faculty advisors. It was critical to choose a large public institution because these types of institutions often employ professional advisors for their advising offices, whereas, in many private institutions, faculty members serve as the advisors for their students.

Academic advising is required for all undergraduate students at MWU; thus, students are assigned to a professional and a faculty advisor. Professional advisors mostly provide academic and some career advising to students; however, students are encouraged and directed to see faculty advisors for specific questions related to careers, graduate schools, and internships. Undergraduate students of all class standing are required to see their professional advisors once a semester except for the semester they are graduating (Senior Advising Administrator, MWU, personal communication, September 15, 2015).

This institution is committed to student success. One of the strategic goals of this institution is to “ensure student success,” and to achieve that goal, many initiatives have
been taken on by the institution. Required advising is one of the many initiatives that has been perceived to be beneficial to students who have participated in the institutional survey about advising. For this reason, as of 2015, required advising became mandatory for students at this institution so they can take advantage of the various advising resources and tools available for students to become successful (Senior Advising Administrator, MWU, personal communication, September 15, 2015).

In addition to the required advising model, MWU was chosen for this study because it is one of the top 10 institutions in the U.S. with a large number of international students (IIE, 2017). What’s more, it has remained one of the leading institutions to host international students as of 2017 (IIE, 2017). Furthermore, global connection is important to this institution and this particular institution has been actively recruiting international students. In fact, the number of international students at this institution increased significantly to over 3,000, a noticeable difference from 2011 (IIE, 2017; Senior Advising Administrator, MWU, personal communication, September 15, 2015). As a result, MWU was selected for this study because of its large international student population with approximately 3,000 undergraduate and graduate international students from over 100 countries in the world (Administrator, International Office, MWU, personal communication, September 22, 2015).

Lastly, due to its large number of undergraduate degree programs, this institution is home to various colleges. The College of Arts and Sciences was purposefully selected for this study because it offers various majors and it houses more international students than any other college at this institution. This college also offers various science related
majors that are of particular interest to international student populations (Fouad et al., 2008; Tang et al., 1999). Thus, I believed a large group of students with diverse backgrounds could yield more recruitment opportunities.

**The College of Arts and Sciences at Mid-Western University (MWU)**

The College of Arts and Sciences (A&S) advisors at MWU mainly advise undergraduate students from the college but also advise undergraduate students from other colleges at MWU who are considering majors and minors within the college. The College of Arts and Sciences at MWU has approximately 6,000 students; however, approximately 4,400 students are required to see professional academic advisors every semester since the mandatory advising policy was implemented in 2012. A&S offers over 40 undergraduate degrees and consists of numerous majors such as Anthropology, Computer Science, English, Physics, and Political Science.

In the central advising office, A&S employs 11 advisors; however, three additional advisors are assigned to three specific A&S departments. These advisors work with undergraduate students within those departments. In addition to these 14 professional advisors, starting fall 2015, faculty advisors began conducting required advising appointments for juniors and seniors, although it should be noted that the implementation of faculty advising is still in progress. It is not clear how many professors from each department will take on this responsibility and how many students they will be responsible for advising each semester. Academic departments at this college are currently working out the details since additional training may be required for faculty advisors so they can effectively assist students with course requirements.
Retaining students is important to MWU; thus, colleges at this institution have taken multiple steps to assist their students. For instance, A&S communicates early with its students to inform them about required academic advising, and for the last three years, A&S has been providing evening hours to help students. Each advising appointment is 45 minutes in length. Along with having 32 appointments per week, every advisor holds office hours and has additional responsibilities. Conversations between advisors and advisees differ based on the students’ majors, academic and personal backgrounds, as well as the advisor’s knowledge, experience, and background. In other words, various factors influence the conversations between an advisor and advisee. However, a typical conversation may include degree audits, classes for the following semesters, graduate school, career exploration, academic resources, and academic progress (Assistant Dean of Advising, College of Arts and Sciences, MWU, personal communication, December 18, 2015).

**Research Participants**

Initially, to obtain diverse perspectives, I decided to interview a large group of students because I believed interviewing more students would allow me to speak with more students from multiple countries, ethnic and language backgrounds, and majors. However, it is important to address that there are disagreements among qualitative researchers about the number of interviews that would be appropriate for a quality study. As a result, the number of interviews is contingent on the scope, research questions, and purpose of the research; thus, the interviews with a small group of people might be more sufficient for some research projects than others (Charmaz, 2014). Additionally,
according to Morse (2011), “it is necessary to locate ‘excellent’ participants to obtain excellent data” (p. 231) and having rich data is important because it brings quality to a study (Charmaz, 2014). In line with this argument, I focused on obtaining rich data for a strong and a quality study rather than fulfilling the quantity of interviews.

Thus, to find suitable information and to abide by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules, I established several criteria to recruit participants and I believed that these criteria would be beneficial in eliciting valuable information from the participants (Merriam, 2002). Due to the difficulties in obtaining consent for minors, whose parents and guardians may not be residing with the students, participants were required to be 18 years of age or older so they could provide consent to participate in the study. Classifications of undergraduate students were determined to select participants. For instance, at this institution, students with 0 to 29 earned credit hours are considered first-year, 30 to 59 credit hours are considered sophomore, 60 to 89 credit hours are considered junior, and 90 to 121 credit hours or higher are considered senior undergraduate students. Thus, I decided to interview students from all class standing (i.e., first-year students, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) to understand if their experiences changed with academic advising as they progressed through different levels of undergraduate education. To fully capture and understand students’ advising experiences at the participating institution, I wanted to exclude ESL, exchange, and transfer students because they may not be required to see academic advisors or may not have adequate advising experiences.
Initial Criteria for Recruitment

What follows are the initial criteria for recruitment for this study:

- Undergraduate international students of any class standing from the College of Arts and Sciences at MWU
- F1 Visa status
- 18 years of age or older
- At least one semester of advising with the College of Arts and Sciences

Exclusion Criteria

What follows are the exclusion criteria for this study:

- Exchange and transfer students (internal and external) needed to be excluded because exchange students may not be required to see academic advisors and transfer students may not have completed adequate advising with the College of Arts and Sciences at MWU
- ESL students were also excluded from this study because due to the qualitative nature of the research, participants would be required to communicate in English.

Recruitment of Participants

Purposeful sampling was applied to select participants for this study because Merriam (2002) suggested that “since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned. This is called a purposive or purposeful sample” (p. 12). Thus, upon obtaining contact information for all undergraduate
international students in the College of Arts and Sciences from the Research Office, I sent email invitations to students (see Appendix A) to participate in this voluntary study in the beginning of Spring 2016 with several follow up emails (see Appendix B) as reminders. These emails contained a consent form that provided information about the study, and the overall interview process such as location, length, recording, and transcription (see Appendix C for consent form).

For instance, every student who responded to the researcher’s emails and agreed to participate in the study received a questionnaire (see Appendix D) via email that included demographic questions (i.e., name, major, class standing), selection criteria (i.e., age, visa status, ESL/exchange/transfer status), and general questions about academic advising. The answers to these questions were used for contextual purposes as well as recruitment criteria. For instance, the questions on Advising Tools and Academic Advising were used to determine students’ familiarity with these resources. Lastly, questions regarding career/major and extracurricular activities were used to inquire if international students visited their advisors for these purposes in addition to course schedules and registration.

**Additional Recruitment Attempts**

Students who completed the questionnaire and met the requirement criteria for participation and agreed to be interviewed were contacted for face-to-face interviews. These students received an additional three or more email reminders for face-to-face interviews (See Appendix F for Timeline for IRB request along with approval and Recruitment Attempts).
Despite several email attempts, I had difficulty in obtaining participants for the study. For instance, several students who had completed the questionnaire did not want to participate in the face-to-face interviews. One student who had completed the questionnaire informed the researcher that he had received his green card and was no longer classified as an international student; therefore, could no longer participate in the study. Several students who had completed the questionnaire and agreed to be interviewed did not show up for interviews. Students who did not show also received various emails but none responded to these further email requests.

To increase participation rate, on February 9, 2016, I submitted an IRB amendment to request additional changes to the research criteria. Although I wanted to request students’ phone numbers so I could recruit students by phone, I learned from the Research Office that many international students have not updated their international numbers with their current numbers. For this reason, the following changes were requested:

1. Invitation to participate in the research will be extended to internal and external transfer students and ESL students who have been released from the ESL program.

2. Snowball sampling will be utilized to recruit more participants.

To recruit more participants, all participants who had participated in the study were requested via texts or emails to share the information about the study with their friends/classmates/colleagues. I also communicated with colleagues/friends/classmates working at MWU and emailed the presidents of various international student organizations about the study. Through these various attempts, 13 undergraduate male and female
international students took part in the face-to-face interviews. They represented diverse age groups, education levels or classifications (i.e., first-year, sophomore), nationalities, and majors. Additionally, participants selected for this study were cooperative and eager to share their views about academic advising, which generated rich data, an important attribute of qualitative study (Charmaz, 2014; Morse, 2011).

Data Collection

Interviews and a questionnaire were utilized to collect data. Prior to preparing questions for the interviews and questionnaire, I completed several informational interviews with international students from England and Kenya, along with administrators, and professional academic advisors with international and international travel background, who have worked with international students at MWU. As a result, their feedback was critical to the study and their suggestions were taken into consideration to formulate culturally sensitive interview questions for the participants.

In qualitative study, the researcher is the main instrument, who collects and analyzes data. As a result, researchers have the ability to make inquiries while interviewing and collecting information (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, through interviews, I had the opportunity for member checking, so when needed, participants were asked to clarify something in order to avoid miscommunication. I utilized Berg’s suggestions and divided my interview questions into the following sections: essential, extra, throw-away, and probing (cited in Hatch, 2002, p. 102). The questions (see Appendix E) were open-ended so the participants shared as much as they preferred about their views for advising (Hatch, 2002).
For instance, by beginning with throw-away questions, I had the opportunity to build a rapport with the participants and create a comfortable environment for them to speak freely (Hatch, 2002, p. 102). Building trust was important because according to Charmaz (2014), “how your research participants identify you influences what they will tell you” (p. 29), which suggests that participants who feel respected by the researchers will be more open to share and discuss than those who do not (Charmaz, 2014). As a result, in addition to utilizing the above interview approaches, I explored Charmaz’s intensive interviewing techniques due to the emphasis on open-ended and in-depth interview process (p. 85). I was not only interested in hearing about my participants’ experiences but also observing how they express themselves through “…language, meanings and actions, emotions and body language” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 58).

By keeping in mind Charmaz’s (2014) and Hatch’s (2002) guidelines for qualitative interview questions, I created the open-ended questions (Appendix E) to guide me with my overall interviews. A couple of the interview questions were adapted from Schroeder and Terras’ (2015) study with graduate students and their experiences with academic advising. The questions are as follows: recall your last advising appointment and tell me what are some of the topics you discussed during your advising appointments; in your opinion, good academic advisors are . . . and in your opinion, bad academic advisors are . . . . My goal was to elicit stories in a respectful manner that illustrated my sincere interest in the participants’ lives, stories, and worldviews (Charmaz, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As Charmaz (2014) said, “by creating open-ended, non-judgmental questions, you encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge” (p. 65). Although with each individual
participant, I asked follow-up and probing questions based on their responses, the list of
guiding questions kept me focused on my research question and topics (Charmaz, 2014). I
kept in mind that with one question I may obtain more information than with multiple
questions and it was equally important for me to allow participants to be reflective by
keeping questions open-ended (Charmaz, 2014).

Interviews lasted for an hour to 90 minutes and more for 1–2 participants. In order
to avoid noisy areas, interviews took place in a quiet setting such as the study rooms or
sitting area (based on participant’s preference) at the institution’s library. The participants
received a consent form to sign before the interviews, and they were also verbally informed
about the study and the interview process prior to signing the consent form. Participants
were also informed that with their approval, the interviews would be audio recorded,
transcribed, and coded for future publications and presentations. All participants received a
$15 Starbucks gift card.

Data Analysis

Data analysis according to Hatch (2002),
Is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that
what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing
and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify
themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount
critiques or generate ideas. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation,
categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding. It always
involves what Wolcott calls “mind work.” (p. 148)
The constant comparative method of analysis, which is often connected to grounded theory, was used for data analysis. In fact, it is common for the qualitative researchers to borrow methods from different approaches to analyze data. Qualitative research approaches are not limited to a single data analysis method (Merriam, 2002).

For this study, I utilized initial and focused coding to analyze my data because according to Charmaz (2014) “initial and focused coding will suffice for many projects” (p. 147), “[and . . .] coding consists of . . . initial, shorthand defining and labeling” (p. 115).

Whether it is word-by-word coding, line-by-line coding, or incident with incident coding, initial coding is about thoroughly reading and reviewing the data (Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz, “initial codes are provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data” (p. 117). Initial coding is about being attentive, so I can not only understand both implicit and explicit meaning associated with participants’ statements but also look for missing data (Charmaz, 2014). As a result, after each interview, I listened to the recording and read the participants’ responses several times and looked for “…words that reflect action” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 116). In fact, I reviewed my transcripts in their entirety and read them multiple times prior to making any conclusion about the findings. Having an open mind is important during coding so my biases do not influence the process entirely (Charmaz, 2014). As a result, during the data analysis process, instead of “coding people,” I looked for words or phrases that embodied “meanings and actions,” which were significant to the participants’ advising experiences (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 112-116).
According to Charmaz (2014), “through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means” (p. 113). I repeated this process with focused coding as well. As stated earlier, I answered the question, “what is happening in the data”—a pertinent question in initial coding process (Charmaz, 2014, p. 116). In other words, while coding I deliberately kept my focus on the following questions:

1. What is this data a study of?
2. What do the data suggest? Pronounce? Leave unsaid?
3. From whose point of view?
4. What theoretical category does this specific datum indicate? (p. 116)

For effective initial coding, I followed Charmaz’s (2014) suggestions to “…remain open, stay close to the data, keep your codes simple and precise, construct short codes, preserve actions, compare data with data, and move quickly through the data” (p. 120). My initial codes were discussion with family about career and schooling, questions about policies, GPA, registration, and core classes, resources at the university including advising, expectations for international students, to name a few.

Upon completing initial coding, I moved onto focused coding, which is primarily an in-depth analysis of the initial codes (Charmaz, 2014). I reviewed all my initial codes and looked for connections between them. According to Charmaz (2014), “it means concentrating on what your initial codes say and the comparisons you make with and between them” (p. 140).

As a result, comparisons between “data with data . . . codes and codes and . . . codes and data” were conducted to look for “emerging” and “theoretical” codes along
with patterns and categories (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 141–146). My focus codes were encouragement and involvement from family, advisor’s help with curricula, associating advising to a support system, opportunities at the university, registration requirements, expectations from advisors, cultural differences, differences in educational system, to name a few.

While coding, I kept reflective memos to capture my initial thoughts, which helped me to keep track of my questions, concerns, and thoughts that evolved while collecting and analyzing my data (See Appendix G for memos #7, 8, and 9). For instance, while writing memos, I was not only capturing my participants’ conversations but also questioning the hidden meaning associated with their accounts. Memos can be a self-reflective note (Hatch, 2002), ideas, concepts, themes, and notable quote (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 205). Upon completing these steps, I closely reviewed my memos, codes, revisited my transcripts, and “compare[d] data and codes” for categories. My categories were

1. Academic Advising = A Valued Resource + A Trusted Service
2. Academic Advisors = A Trusted Guide + A Support
   System/Motivator/Navigator + Primary/Emergency Contact
3. Academic Success and Persistence = External Versus Internal
   Influence/Motivations

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Multiple sources were used to maintain credibility for my research findings. To achieve credibility, trustworthiness, and reliability, my research incorporated the
following processes: negative information, member checking, and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014, pp. 201–202). Additionally, to maintain the integrity of the research, all findings were reported including negative findings (i.e., students’ dissatisfaction with advising) even though it was not demonstrative of the overall product (Creswell, 2014). In fact, “Patton (2002) argues that credibility hinges partially on the integrity of the researcher, and one approach to dealing with this issue is for the researcher to ‘look for data that support alternative explanations’” (cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 219).

Furthermore, member checking throughout the interviews was an important step for my research because member checks confirm credibility for qualitative research studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks allowed participants to clarify, confirm, and correct their initial responses and provided them an opportunity to add new information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba, “unless one has reason to doubt the integrity of informants, however, the member check is probably a reasonably valid way to establish the meaningfulness of the finding and interpretations” (p. 315). I conducted member checks during interviews because I wanted to inquire about participants’ “intentionality” and reactions toward certain responses and to clarify and question ambiguous responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314).

Throughout the interviews, I followed up on responses that needed clarification and additional information. I also tried to briefly summarize their points before moving on to subsequent questions, so they can change their statements if needed. Thus, by incorporating member checking strategies, I was able to make sure my findings resonated with my participants’ conversations with me (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, upon
completing the analysis, for member-checking, I emailed the participants a summary of the findings. I briefly recapped the findings to make certain I had not misinterpreted their views and I represented their voices accurately. I highlighted some of the main points to allow my participants to confirm, to correct, and to provide additional information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unfortunately, only one participant responded to my email to say “thank you” but did not provide any feedback about the study.

In addition to member checking, I consulted with peer debriefers with diverse backgrounds for additional feedback (Creswell, 2014). For instance, one of the peer debriefers was a recent Ph.D. graduate and an international student from Kenya. Additionally, two other peer debriefers were US citizens but worked with international students as academic advisors. In addition to proofreading the paper, they provided valuable feedback to clarify sentences and some sections of the study (i.e., consistency in charts, APA citations).

Peer debriefing is as critical as member checking to confirm credibility for qualitative research studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Having a peer reviewer, preferably someone who is not very familiar with the research and who can be the “devil’s advocate” according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), would be particularly important to maintain the quality of the research (p. 308). Through peer debriefing “the inquirer’s biases are probed, meanings explored, the basis for interpretations clarified;” [most importantly,] “all questions are in order during a debriefing, whether they pertain to substantive, methodological, legal, ethical or any relevant matters” (Lincoln & Guba,
1985, p. 308). Having honest feedback was particularly important in improving the overall quality of my research.

Furthermore, to develop credibility and trustworthiness I considered the concept of reflexivity (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002). I believe reflecting on my own subjectivity was a crucial step in this development (Hatch, 2002) because reflexivity is about the influence researchers have in their research due to their “personal background, culture and experiences” (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). In other words, based on one’s backgrounds, values, and cultures, every researcher brings his or her own biases to the studies. Since researchers are merely interpreters of their participants’ lives and stories, these interpretations are not possible to be precise accounts of participants’ lives (Charmaz, 2014). For this reason, I included a self-reflection section in the beginning of the chapter to explain how my background (i.e., gender, experience, culture, etc.) may have influenced this research, including my analysis and findings (Creswell, 2014).

**Ethical Considerations**

In preparation for this research project, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) at the beginning of summer 2015 to receive training on research ethics. I also completed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application, which was submitted to IRB prior to this study. Upon IRB approval, I continued with this project and recruited interested participants for the study. Face-to-face interviews took place only upon receiving their consent because participation for this study was voluntary. Participants were informed about the study prior to the interview process and they had the chance to read the consent form prior to signing and beginning the
interviews. Participants were aware that they could withdraw from the study at any given time during interviews and the study. Moreover, participants selected pseudonyms for themselves, and to protect their identities, no identifiable information was reported about the participants. Interview recordings were kept confidential and safeguarded.

**Delimitations**

Although participants of this study were diverse in terms of age, gender, nationality, majors, and educational levels, these participants represent only the College of Arts and Sciences at this institution. Upon arrival to this country, many international students may have encountered academic advising for the first time. Based on my conversations with the participants and other international colleagues, in many countries, academic advising is not a commonly used support service for undergraduate students. Thus, depending on international students’ knowledge of academic advising, their expectations determined their experiences with academic advising.

**Limitations of Research**

Although students who were released from the ESL program were part of the study, language barriers may have hindered them, particularly new international students, to speak easily and entirely about their advising experience (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Thus, students with inadequate language skills may have felt uncomfortable or uneasy sharing their advising experience in detail and in length.

Additionally, Charmaz (2014) stated that “…race, class, gender, age and ideologies” may also influence the interview process (p. 77). From this perspective, my gender and my South Asian immigrant and academic advisor/Ph.D. student background,
as well as the title of an academic advisor, may have positively or negatively influenced this research (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2014) as some participants may have felt more comfortable discussing their experiences with me than others.

These factors limited my study because they may have kept participants from sharing valuable information that could have significantly contributed to my research. Whether it was the language barriers or the hesitancy to share advising related information to an advisor, these limitations certainly influenced my overall study.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 3 outlined and discussed research methodology, research site, recruitment process, research participants, and the method of data analysis. In fact, the diversity of the participants, the quality of the interviews, and the methodological rigor has produced trustworthy results. Chapter 4 reviews findings and demonstrates that academic advisors would be particularly beneficial for international students since international students, mainly upon arrival, are not familiar with institutional rules and regulations. For these reasons, in order to assist international students to become successful in a college setting, this study was critical in illustrating how international students are utilizing advising services.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to understand and describe undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising. The data analysis for this exploratory study was guided by the constant comparative method of data analysis. At Mid-Western University (MWU) where the study was conducted, advising is mandatory for all undergraduate students. Students are required to meet with their academic advisors every semester. They also have the opportunity to reach out to their faculty advisors for guidance and support. In addition to their professional academic advisors and faculty advisors, some students have assigned athletic, honors, and international student advisors. In fact, a few of my research participants reported having multiple advisors. However, all students must meet with their professional academic advisors to fulfill required advising. In some cases, specific colleges may elect faculty advisors to complete required advising.

The central research question for this study was: What are undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising? However, my research was further divided into three secondary questions:

1. How do international students perceive the role of academic advising in their academic and career decision-making in college?
2. What aspects of academic advising are important to international students?
3. How do international students perceive the role of academic advising in their academic success and persistence?
This chapter introduces my research findings, which begin with a brief introduction of the research participants. This foundational information will be helpful in understanding the participants as well as their remarks and experiences with academic advising. A summary of findings from the questionnaire as well as the interviews will follow the introduction of the research participants. Lastly, the secondary questions are discussed in detail followed by an overview of the primary research question.

**Research Participants**

The participants for this study were diverse not only in regards to ethnicity and cultural background, but also class standing, major, and GPA. Thirteen students from Asia, the Middle East, South America and Africa participated in this study, and their countries of origin include India, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Bolivia, Brazil, Tanzania, and Somalia. Although some participants represented one nationality, some lived and studied in more than one country across the world including Charlie and Rasha. In fact, a few of the participants’ country of birth were different from the country of his or her nationality such as Warada, Salwa, and Rasha. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participants’ identities (See Table 5).

According to Geert Hofstede, who has extensively researched cultural dimensions, the country of origins suggest that these participants are from collectivist and patriarchal societies and grew up with collectivist values (Hofstede et al., 2010; Young, 2017). This may shed some light on participants’ reactions and remarks to interview questions for this study. Some participants discussed their difficult transitions in adjusting to a new country; but they spoke of their friends and families as their reliable
support networks. Almost all participants took part in extra-curricular activities. They appeared intellectually driven, goal-oriented, humble, appreciative, and wise beyond their
years. Most importantly, they voiced determination and grit to complete their education and pursue further education.

**Findings**

Through this study, I wanted to understand and learn about international students’ advising experiences so advising administrators can effectively advise these students. Based on the questionnaire and interviews, the findings show that participants appreciated advising as a service. Overall, there were more positive experiences and satisfaction with academic advising than dissatisfaction. Although participants acknowledged advisors’ roles in their academic and career decision-making process, academic and career decision-making for international students were intricate and multifaceted. While academic advisors’ guidance and assistance with academic and career decision-making were recognized with gratitude, many of the participants did not consult with academic advisors for career decision-making and initial major selection. These participants knew of their majors and had career plans prior to coming to the United States. Nevertheless, they equated academic advising to a valued resource and a trusted service. They designated academic advisors as a primary and emergency contact and a support system at the institution. They indicated several external and internal influences and motivations that helped with their academic success and persistence including an appreciation and need for academic advising/academic advisors. Along with professional and faculty advisors’ guidance, and university and sponsor’s requirements, international students’ own motivations, obligations and responsibilities, and family
support and expectations influenced international students’ academic success and persistence.

A total of 191 participants who met the research criteria (i.e., F-1 status, undergraduate international students, etc.) were invited to complete a questionnaire via Qualtrics™. Fifty-four students visited the questionnaire page and 40 completed the questions. Based on the responses from the 40 students, around 52% expressed satisfaction with advising, 22% were neutral and 25% expressed dissatisfaction with advising (see Figure 1).

![How satisfied are you with your academic advising experience?](image)

Figure 1. Satisfaction with Advising

The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect preliminary information about the participants and their knowledge of advising. It included questions about demographics, satisfaction with advising, and the knowledge of the three most commonly used advising tools (i.e., semester-by-semester course guides, an online portal for degree planning and
requirement, and MWU university catalog for academic policies) at the MWU during advising sessions. Examples of questions from the questionnaire include: How familiar are you with the following advising tools (name of the tools were listed for the participants)? How satisfied are you with your academic advising experience? Who do you go to when you need academic help with registration, class schedule, resources, change of major, careers, and so forth? Do you take part in any extra-curricular activities?

While answering the question about satisfaction with academic advising, of the 40 students who completed the questionnaire, 11 students selected satisfied, seven students selected very satisfied, and three students selected somewhat satisfied with their advising experience. Additionally, nine students selected neutral, three selected somewhat dissatisfaction and seven students stated dissatisfaction with their advising experience.

To hear more about the students’ reaction to the questionnaire, all students who completed the questionnaire were invited for interviews. Although 17 participants agreed to be interviewed and expressed interest in the study, a couple of students withdrew from the study. Additionally, a few students agreed to be interviewed but did not show up when scheduled. Students who did not show up to their interviews were contacted again but did not respond. The study continued with 13 undergraduate male and female international students.

The satisfaction with advising and familiarity of advising tools varied for the participants. Some participants utilized the advising services more than others. What follows are participants’ responses to the questionnaire that provide insights to their
involvement and satisfaction with advising and advisors. For instance, six of the 13 participants who participated in the face-to-face interviews expressed satisfaction and two expressed somewhat satisfied with academic advising. Salwa was very satisfied with advising. For academic help with registration, class schedule, resources, change of major, careers and so forth, she goes to her academic advisor and visits her advisor twice per semester. She was familiar with the advising tools at MWU but she uses only one of them on a regular basis. Warada expressed satisfaction with her academic advising experience. She reported being well-informed about two of the three advising tools used at the university. For academic help, she goes to her academic advisor and she sees her advisor 1–2 times per semester. Diya who is a transfer student also expressed satisfaction with academic advising and sees her advisor when help is needed. She meets with her advisor 1–2 times per semester and she is knowledgeable about the advising tools. Penny was very satisfied with her academic advising experience. For academic help, she goes to her academic advisor approximately twice per semester and she uses two of the university advising tools. Sara expressed being somewhat satisfied with her academic advising experience. However, she was knowledgeable about all the advising tools used at this university; and for academic help, she sees her academic, honors, and faculty advisors once per semester. Charlie was also somewhat satisfied with his advising experience. He knew how to use the advising tools; and for academic help, he visits his academic advisor 2–3 times per semester. Rasha was satisfied with academic advising. She used some advising tools more than others. She goes to her academic advisor for academic help and visits her advisor once or twice per semester.
Three of the 13 participants chose neutral for their advising experience and two participants expressed dissatisfaction with academic advising. Although the reasons are unknown for all students who selected dissatisfaction and neutral on the questionnaire, interview participants provided greater insights for their contentment and discontentment with academic advising, which is discussed in a later part of the chapter. Hebe checked off neutral for her advising experience. She is a transfer student and did not know about all advising tools but she takes advantage of the ones she knows. She goes to her friends for academic help. Aman selected somewhat dissatisfied for his advising experience. He was accepted to the university prior to the required advising policy implementation; thus, he is not required to see an advisor. However, he does go to the advising office if academic help is needed but not every semester. He shared he was familiar with only one of the advising tools. Adam expressed dissatisfaction with his advising experience. However, due to required advising policy, for academic help, he goes to his academic advisor once per semester. He felt he could use most of the advising tools.

What’s more, first-year students had a more varied advising experience than upperclassmen. These students were less knowledgeable and familiar with advising tools than other students. For instance, Aalia was satisfied with academic advising, and when she needed help, visited her advisor 2–3 times per semester. She was aware of the advising tools but did not know how to utilize one of them by herself. Faban chose neutral for the question regarding satisfaction with advising. He was recently released from the ESL program and only heard about one of the advising tools used at the university but did not know how to use it. He speaks with his advisor and friends for
academic help and sees an advisor 2–3 times per semester. John selected neutral for his advising experience and visits his academic advisor once per semester. He is an athlete; thus, for academic help, he mostly goes to his athletic advisor. He did not know about any advising tools.

Largely, based on the questionnaire and interviews with these 13 students, academic advising appeared to be a strong support system for most international students. A few participants, although acknowledging the help of academic advisors, had various opinions about the required advising policy and stated that they could have navigated their way around the institutional/major requirements without the guidance from their advisors. Nevertheless, the participants provided several suggestions that could not only improve advising for international students but also are worth considering for the advising administrators.

The Role of Academic Advising in International Students’ Academic and Career Decision-Making in College

For the purpose of this study, academic decision-making included day-to-day questions and concerns about academic major, planning, requirements, and graduate schools. Career decision-making included conversations, guidance, and assistance with selecting majors and careers. Research suggests that in addition to providing academic guidance, advisors are instrumental in helping undecided students in the process of major/career exploration and selection (Wade & Yoder, 1995). Although international students acknowledged advisors’ roles in their academic and career decision-making in college, for 12 participants, no direct involvement was reported between their initial
major and career decision-making and their academic advising at the university. Career/major decision-making was influenced by multiple factors, and academic advising appeared to play more of a role in the international students’ day-to-day academic decision-making process. All participants recognized advisors’ roles in enriching their academic journeys through guidance, support, and encouragement. Whether it is to help students understand institutional/program/major/course/academic requirements and policies, assist with course selections/registration/change of major, connect students to campus resources, provide information about graduate school/career, or offer moral support and encouragement during tough times (i.e., academic adjustments, bad grades, homesickness, etc.), academic advisors played an instrumental role for these international students, particularly, during their transitional phase to the United States.

The presence of parental and family involvement was significantly strong for most international students’ major and career decision-making in college. Upon arrival to the institution, some participants including Diya, Sara, Aman, and Rasha sought out career/major/graduate school advice from faculty members/advisors. Along with family, parents, friends, and faculty members, academic advisors were one of the many individuals who provided guidance, support, and directions with academic/career planning and personal matters. Academic advisors helped students who continued with their initial majors, changed their majors, or added courses/minors/concentrations to enhance their academic/career/professional goals. These participants had clear career goals and their career/major selections were completed early.
In fact, many of the participants exhibited strong aspirations to pursue their career goals and many were working proactively to achieve them. For instance, Adam, a transfer student from China, very passionately shared that even though he initially selected Biological Engineering as his major, he decided to pursue Biochemistry. Adam asserted, “Chemistry is my favorite . . . [and] I want to learn more about . . . Chemistry.” Due to his interests in Chemistry, after college, he plans to attend graduate school. Diya, another transfer student from India, confidently said,

I always wanted to go into a medical field and we explored the options out here. I’m really interested in just Biology field, so I selected that as my major and then I wanted to go to med school and so that is my concentration . . . premed. There were other options like psychology and biochemistry but I thought biology would be better for me.

Although Diya had clear career/major goals about becoming a medical doctor, her family, friends, a counselor back home, and a few faculty members at MWU aided and guided her overall decision-making process.

Family involvement was clearly prominent in some of my participants’ career decision-making processes including Aalia, Hebe, Warada, and Rasha. For instance, while discussing major/career decisions, Aalia, who is currently majoring in Biotechnology, stated, “I had a course in my high school about Biotechnology so it kind of interested me a lot.” However, Aalia was not entirely certain about her decision since she had a few other majors in mind, and she was interested in becoming a doctor to follow her father’s footsteps. Nevertheless, with guidance from her parents and a family
friend, who she referred to as a counselor, Aalia was able to clarify some of her confusion and questions and decided to go with Biotechnology instead of Medicine. She plans to attend graduate school to further her education in Biotechnology.

Hebe, a Chinese transfer student, indicated that when she was in China, her father did not like her initial majors (i.e., design and hospitality management) because they had lower prestige in the community. Also, her father along with her instructor did not think she was good at design, a major of her choice. Instead, he suggested that she select traditional Chinese medicine because it was not only a lucrative but also a popular field in China. Hebe did not want to disappoint her father so she decided to go with traditional Chinese Medicine. She shared with me that even though she found science majors to be difficult, she respected her father’s wishes because at some point in his life, he wanted to be a doctor. Although his dream was not accomplished, he wanted his daughters to fulfill his dreams. However, while transferring to the United States, an agent who helped Hebe with paperwork suggested that she select pre-med or pre-pharmacy since Hebe wanted to be in a medically related field. Upon coming to the United States, she also discussed her interests with a professor about becoming a Pharmacist, and with his suggestions, she selected Biochemistry as her new major. In fact, Hebe very proudly voiced that her parents are happy with her major and her decision to pursue graduate school in that field. It was clear that making her parents happy was important for this participant.

Additionally, Warada, a Tanzanian by birth and Omani by ancestry, stated that even though she studied the science route in her homeland to become a teacher, due to a scholarship opportunity from the government, she chose Mathematics as her major. She
enjoys learning and staying abreast of current research, and teaching as a profession would allow her to continue with her interests. Although her career/major decisions were made early, it was clear that several factors influenced Warada’s decisions, including her parents, whose encouragement was crucial in her decision-making. For instance, Warada talked about suitable careers for Muslim women due to cultural and religious values and practices. Based on this, she considered teaching to be a good profession within these conditions. She talked about her parents’ enthusiasm toward the idea of her being a teacher because she had demonstrated her teaching skills while educating other family members. She also seemed passionate about teaching due to its religious purposes and stated that passing on knowledge to others is considered to be an important part of being Muslim. She also enjoyed working with students so she decided to choose happiness over money.

Clearly, for Aalia, Adam, Diya, and Warada, no conversation took place between their academic advisors about deciding on a major or career. As Warada stated, “I really didn’t talk to them because I was sure what I wanted.” As seen with Aalia, Diya, and Warada, each participant had a major/career in mind prior to coming to the United States and each had various factors influencing his or her major/career decisions. It is also worth noting that some of these participants including Aalia, Diya, Warada, and Hebe are from India, Tanzania, and China, respectively, countries that are collectivist in nature that value family perspectives. In some collectivist societies, parents are often given utmost respect and authority over big decisions including marriage, career, and education (Young, 2017). Thus, family involvement with academic and career decision-making can
be expected from students belonging to collectivist societies where parents are influential in the overall decision-making process.

Participants, all except John, stated that they did not consult with their academic advisors or receive any help from their academic advisors with their initial major/career plans. John initially selected exploratory (for undecided students) as his major and shared that he was able to solidify his interests to pursue international relations with help and guidance from his family, from athletic and exploratory advisors, and through his first-year experience course. When asked about the major decision, John also shared the following with me: “Since I am an athlete, I have been traveling to a lot of places, a lot of different countries and I met so many people that I don’t know, I don’t see myself doing anything else.” Even though John would have selected law as his major in Brazil, he felt that international relations would be a better choice for him here. Additionally, being an athlete certainly influenced John’s decision-making.

Of the 13 participants, three participants—Sara, Rasha, and Charlie—changed their majors. Their initial majors were Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS), Speech Pathology and Audiology (SPA), and Computer Science, respectively. Initially, Sara did not have a set major in mind when she was applying to the institution. After reviewing all the majors at the university, she decided to go with HDFS. However, she learned about Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from a friend and decided to change her major to TESL from HDFS because she felt that TESL would be more useful in her country (Malaysia) than HDFS.
Rasha and Charlie found their classes to be very difficult, so they did not continue with their initial majors, and they changed their majors to TESL and Psychology, respectively. Charlie stated that his parents were involved in the decision-making process when he selected his first major; however, with his new major, he sought guidance from his academic advisor. Charlie’s parents supported his decision, and it was not a difficult process for him to change majors.

Conversely, the change of major process was certainly more complex for Rasha than it was for Charlie. She shared that her father wanted his daughters to become medical doctors. He was heavily interested in health-related fields and wished his daughters to respect his decisions. As Rasha explained:

- It was my dad’s decision all the time. My dad wanted me and my sister to be a doctor. He was the one who always used to put into our heads “health” . . . it will be health. You go to health. It wasn’t what I chose or what I wanted to do, but when you are young and that’s what you always hear, you just think that’s what you want until you face the problem and you feel like, no this is not for me, I want to change. Until now he [my father] doesn’t know that I’ve changed my major.

When Rasha was not doing well in her classes, she consulted with her family members and academic advisors about her concerns with the major. However, she could not tell her father that she changed her major because she did not want him to be disappointed. In fact, students in similar situations as Rasha may feel guilty to change majors even though they may be forced to do so due to poor grades. In Rasha’s words,
He [father] will be disappointed that I’ve changed, but I am sure he’ll be okay as long as I got a qualification and then I am sure he will be fine. It’s better than having lots of F’s and not succeeding, right? I am sure he will be okay.

It was a very stressful semester for Rasha so she changed her major as she said, “the level of the stress that I was having at that moment which was last semester was higher than what my dad or anyone wanted me to do. I couldn’t take it.”

For Rasha, change of major was not as simple as completing a form; it required much more negotiation and navigation on her end to reach a conclusion. Although bad grades prompted Rasha to change her major, she had no major in mind; she was undecided. “I was confused, I didn’t know what I want. I knew for sure that I don’t want to continue doing speech. I didn’t know what I want to do in order for me to change.”

She not only had to search for a major that she would enjoy but also find a major that could be completed within the sponsor’s timeframe. During this process, she spoke with academic advisors, family members, and friends before coming to the decision to select Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) as her undergraduate major.

Rasha’s description of her experience exposed several critical areas such as parental involvement, parental choice, and lack of agency on the student’s part with the career decision-making process that could be experienced by many domestic and international students. Parental involvement is clearly a pattern in major and career choice.

Of the 13 participants, foreign governments sponsored five participants and they had to maintain compliance with certain guidelines to keep their sponsorship. Although
Aman and Rasha said they were able to change their majors without any issues with their sponsors, they had followed specific rules with credit hours and online classes and maintained approved grade/GPA requirements so they would not lose their funding from their government.

Although 12 participants did not seek help for their initial career decision-making, a few students including Rasha, Sara, Warada, Diya, Hebe, and Aalia consulted with their faculty members, and faculty and professional advisors for suggestions to augment their career plans. For instance, while discussing academic and career goals, Sara stated multiple people helped with her career goals. She shared that,

I think my professors help[ed] me a lot. My professors really . . . expose[d] me to different fields in education, in TESL. I think different talks [at the university] . . . like different programs, just so many programs. Just expose[d] me to a lot of things. . . . I think my faculty advisor . . . was very helpful . . . I have a TESL advisor so he is very helpful in . . . encouraging me to think about . . . grad school and apply to grad school. (Sara, an international student from Malaysia)

Sara did not speak with her professional academic advisor about career related inquiries because based on the job title, she did not think academic advisors provided career advising. This is an interesting finding since, for many students, career exploration often begins with academic advising (O’Banion, 1994; Wade & Yoder, 1995). However, Sara voiced that “I think . . . [academic advising is] definitely useful, especially for people . . . who don’t have a very effective faculty advising system.”
Aspects of Academic Advising that are Important to International Students

Advising matters for international students; it has been viewed as a support system for many of the participants. Academic advisors do not only offer academic advice but also support students with personal and professional upheavals (O’Banion, 1994). Academic advising made a lasting impression on nine of the 13 participants. As we discussed the aspects of academic advising that are important to international students, all participants except four shared in detail about the importance of academic advising for them. Whether it was through input, guidance, or encouragement, academic advisors helped students with their academic planning and requirements. The relationship with advising can be described as appreciative and dependent, and the appreciation toward advising was apparent throughout the conversations with nine participants. Clearly, for these participants, academic advising is a valued resource and a trusted service.
Figure 2. Academic Advising = A Valued Resource + A Trusted Service

If somebody will ask me what is academic advising, I would say it’s the most important thing [at this university]. Maybe because I’m coming from a third world country and I know nothing about doing registrations online and picking what class you want to choose and stuff like that, but for me, I think it’s a very important thing . . . An advisor is the person who is going to help you like giving you the roadmap of your studies, what you should do in your first semester, second semester, third semester, although it is online. But because we’re coming from a country like that . . . I didn’t even know that I can find what I’m going to study online. But going through the advisor, he would tell you, this is your roadmap, you should do this on this semester, these are [university core courses] . . . Because again, I don’t know what are [university core courses], I don’t even know what are major classes. But once you go to your academic advisor, he will tell you this is what this is . . . And you would ask any question and he would be able to answer you. Like about taking foreign languages, am I supposed to take or not? How can I calculate my GPA? These kinds of questions. When I graduate, what am I going to be? . . . I think for us international students, it is very important for us to go to an advisor. (Warada, an international student from Tanzania/Oman)

In the above-mentioned excerpt, Warada positively expressed her experience with many aspects of academic advising that she deemed important for her as she navigated her way around the unfamiliar higher education system in the United States when she was
a new international student. For Warada, academic advising/academic advisors were particularly significant in explaining the major and university courses, course selections, registration process, and locating resources online. Warada’s account highlights many unknown factors for international students and is a clear indication of what new international students may experience as they begin their studies at their host institutions. However, some of her experiences in regards to technology may not resonate with technologically savvy students or students coming from technologically advanced countries and who are equipped to use various online tools.

In fact, other participants including Rasha, John, Diya, Sara, Charlie, and Aalia echoed Warada’s thoughts about the helpful nature of advising. For instance, when asked about academic advising and academic advisors, Rasha said, “the best place or the best people you can go to is those people. They will give you the accurate answers you’re looking for.” John’s explanations further illustrate the role of academic advising/academic advisors for international students. For instance, per John,

I would say that they help you when you’re lost so you should meet them more often or as many times as possible, because when you get here everything’s different and you don’t know what to do, where to go, so they have an important role here [at this university]. (John, an international student from Brazil)

Diya considered academic advising to be a “really nice service.” She shared that services like academic advising are not available in India. Academic advisors help students with,
What courses to take, how to get settled in a foreign country, how to go about your major decisions and stuff, because I know some people change their majors . . . That is what academic advisors did for me. Just a source to tell and talk about what you want to do and ask them how can you do it. (Diya, an international student from India)

Indeed, advising helps students with navigating the new system while they transition to a new academic environment, particularly for students who are coming from a country with different institutional expectations, guidelines, and practices than the United States.

Academic advising proved valuable for most participants including Warada, John, Diya, Sara, Charlie, and Aalia and the importance associated with advising for these participants is noteworthy. Warada considered academic advising to be an important resource. Charlie disclosed appreciation for advising and pointed out that seeing an advisor is a good idea. As a transfer student from Malaysia, Sara had to go to a couple of advisors for help with transfer credit evaluation. She stated that credit transfer for international students can be a difficult and frustrating process. A syllabus is required for evaluation and many students are unable to provide them to their new institutions. Even though she had a syllabus, she was upset that her first advisor was not able to help her. However, she was very happy to receive help from another academic advisor with transferring some of her credits from Malaysia. It saved her time and money as well.

Sara connected academic advising to encouragement and accountability because these aspects of academic advising helped her to stay “on track” for graduation. She perceived academic advising to be:
Just encouraging... whenever I see my academic advisor it would be very encouraging... he said oh look... you’re doing great in your classes... you’re on track!... it doesn’t hurt to have an extra someone to encourage me to do well academically. So... I think that encouragement is good and keeping me on track and just expectation-the possible expectation of you-we will help you... when you have an assigned academic advisor the university is telling you that we want you to be successful. We... are providing someone to help you to get there. So you are expected to graduate on time. You are expected to do well in your classes... So you know you feel like you have an extra person watching you, supporting you in that sense to do well in school. (Sara, an international student from Malaysia)

Sara’s statements also suggest that academic advising can create favorable impressions on a student’s mind about institutional commitment. This is certainly good news for the institution, particularly, for recruitment and retention management teams. Sara’s statements reinforce the importance of academic advising in student success and retention.

Academic advising was not only seen as a valued resource but also a trusted service. Academic advising as a service was trusted because nine of the 13 participants regarded his or her academic advisor either as a trusted guide, a support system, a motivator, a navigator, and a primary or an emergency contact.
Salwa, a non-traditional student, spoke highly of her academic advisor. Although an adult student, she relied on her family and she trusted her advisor’s guidance as well. For instance, she said,

I couldn’t have done this without their help [academic advisor] and without my family help because it’s like there [are] 2 important side for me and if I make my schedule with my family first, I have to go to the advisor and if I go to the advisor first, I have to discuss it with my family. (Salwa, an international student from Saudi Arabia)

Salwa’s children also attend the same university so she always checks in with her family about classes.
Aalia, who is a first-year student, also trusted her advisors’ guidance and believed advisors to be knowledgeable. Being able to connect with advisors as needed helped Aalia to feel at ease, making her transition to Mid-Western University less chaotic and enjoyable. According to Aalia:

Academic advisors . . . for me . . . are like my emergency contacts . . . if I have any problems, just go and talk to them. They will . . . help you. Even if they can’t help you they will provide you with people who can help you. So if someone would ask me where should I go? I would . . . [say] go to your academic advisor and just ask them how. [Be] cause they have more knowledge about what’s going on around here than you have [be]cause they have been advising many people and they know what’s right for you. (Aalia, an international student from India)

In fact, the need for guidance for first-year students or students in the beginning of their undergraduate journey was an important area of discussion for Warada and Sara. For instance, Warada mentioned that she would have attended academic advising even if the institution did not require it. Although she feels that as a junior, she knows a lot about the institution and the college and major requirements so she may not go to her academic advisor as much as she did as a freshman and sophomore but she would still visit an academic advisor. She strongly believed that it is very important for new students to see academic advisors. According to Warada:

At the beginning, it’s very . . . important for us. And if I’ll have anything on the way . . . I just email my advisor. . . . I find them as fathers for us here. Because nobody can help you. And we don’t really have American friends who can tell
you the system and stuff. And it depends on your major, it depends on . . . your classes. So it’s very different to depend on a friend or somebody else who is out of the academic advisor because they won’t really know in what situation you are in. But . . . for me, . . . I have the same advisors since I started . . . and they both know what’s going with me. (Warada, an international student from Tanzania/Oman)

Warada’s statement depicts that for newly admitted international students, academic advising is essential and academic advisors serve various purposes. In fact, there may be a fear that the lack of pertinent information may prevent international students to register for incorrect classes, miss necessary deadlines, and graduate on time. For instance, for Warada, she relies on her academic advisors and respects their suggestions. Her reference, “I find them as fathers for us here,” suggests her trust in academic advising. Although this association can be interpreted in many ways, it is clear that academic advising had helped this student significantly. She also shares that due to lack of American friends she cannot really ask them for help. She also questions if she does ask others for help, would they be able to provide accurate advice, which also reinforces her trust and confidence in academic advising and academic advisors.

Although Sara believes that seeing an advisor every semester should not be mandatory for students with faculty advisor, she believes that academic advising plays a critical role for freshman students. Sara recalls,

My freshman year it was definitely helpful to have someone, especially [as] an international student to have someone to guide me, show me [what MWU is],
explain to me what I need to do . . . how to pick classes and all those very basic things. (Sara, an international student from Malaysia)

Even though a few participants like Sara did not want advising to be required, they wanted the options to email or speak with advisors with questions. For instance, Penny, Aalia, and Charlie shared that due to lack of appointment times, sometimes they are not able to schedule appointments with their advisors. Although this could be an issue for institutions with large number of students that require students to see academic advisors, international students need to be informed about office hours, walk-ins and email/phone advising. Penny suggested that:

Either add more people or . . . separate different sections of the student body to have schedules at different times so that it’s easier. . . . I was lucky enough that I had enough confidence with my advisor to be like “hey I’m in trouble I need you to help me right now.” But if you don’t have that confidence, if you’re shy or something then you will just have to wait three weeks. (Penny, an international student from Bolivia)

Penny’s suggestions are worth looking into for institutions with a large number of international students since due to lack of institutional knowledge and unfamiliarity with the educational system, many students may not know about the ways to reach out to their advisors.
The Role of Academic Advising in International Students’ Academic Success and Persistence

For the purpose of this study, academic success and persistence were loosely defined based on students’ willingness to do well in classes, and if not doing well, the steps they have taken to continue with their education by utilizing campus resources and support from faculty, staff, friends, and family members. Their current GPA, involvement with organizations, and plans for future were also taken into consideration in determining academic success and persistence. Several external and internal influences and motivations (see Figure 4) played a role in international students’ academic success and persistence. Their individual motivations/obligations and responsibilities motivated them with school work. The support and expectations from their families encouraged them to stay focused on academic and professional goals. The requirements set by the university and sponsors reminded these participants to stay on task and on track for graduation. Lastly, the guidance from professional and faculty advisors helped students with successfully navigating their undergraduate programs.
**External versus Internal Influences/Motivations**

*Figure 4. Academic Success and Persistence = External versus Internal Influence/Motivations = Self-Motivations/Obligations/Responsibility + Family Expectations/Support + Requirements by University/Sponsors + Guidance from Professional/Faculty Advisors*

**Self-Motivations/Obligations/Responsibility**

This semester I’m trying to take a 3.5 GPA and I was talking with a few international students about it and I feel that international students way more worry about GPA and do well than American students. I feel that the sense of you [re]presenting your country, your family, and even this opportunity . . . It’s a big opportunity to study in the United States, so what motivates me is basically make my people proud and try to take the most of this college experience here. That’s why I’m always trying to improve, even on my sport and on the academic part. I think that all that we are representing here is what makes us motivated.

(John, an international student from Brazil)
Whether it is the desire or obligation to finish college, attend graduate school, or do well academically, many of the participants shared numerous reasons to continue with higher education. For instance, John listed several reasons that motivated him to stay in college and that contributed to his academic and professional plans. His remarks not only showcase his desire to represent his country but also highlight his obligations and responsibility for his country. His family was a motivational factor for him to do well academically as well.

Hebe shared that along with her study habits and desire to earn good grades, what helped her to do well academically and contributed to her success and persistence is her prior knowledge in some of the subject matter. She went to faculty office hours, completed her homework early, and studied lectures and notes thoroughly so she could do well in her classes. She also talked about the obligations and responsibilities she had felt toward her family because they are paying for her tuition. For instance, she stated,

First, . . . [as] you know international student’s tuition is expensive. More expensive than [domestic students] . . . may be twice. Double, double I think . . . , my father . . . [works] hard to pay the tuition for me. . . . I cannot just play—I need to [be] responsible for my parents. I [am] already twenty-three years old. After eighteen years old, I’m not a teenager. But I still spend a lot of money from my parents. Although, they are my parents, . . . I need to [be] responsible for my parents’ money. Also, I need to [be] responsible for myself. . . . In my country we have a proverb. A sentence says [that] in your childhood, if you no study hard, you will cry . . . when you become older. . . . In my Chinese University, my
classmates took sales jobs . . . the money they earned every month, is similar [to] my father for one day. My family is not very rich, but, it’s good, I think. My father still earns . . . a lot of money a month. And living [in] this environment. . . . I don’t want . . . my life [to be] worse than before. (Hebe, an international student from China)

In this excerpt, Hebe points out that education is a valued commodity in China and obtaining an education is encouraged, which along with other factors can be influential in her decision to pursue graduate school. It also shows that she wants to pursue a career and education that will allow her to live a financially comfortable life.

**Family Support/Expectations**

Whether it was by supporting their children financially and emotionally during undergraduate years or through family expectations for their children to do well in school and classes, obtain a degree with a major, or prepare for a career of their liking, family support and expectations were not only paramount but also influential for participants like Charlie, Penny, and Rasha. As shared earlier, many participants including Warada, Aalia, and Hebe to name a few spoke of the family support and involvement, particularly from their parents, in their academic and career planning. Penny shared that her parents are very supportive of her major/career choice. Even though her parents are doctors, she selected International Relations as her major. “They are very happy with whatever I choose to do as long as it’s not medicine.” Charlie’s parents were supportive of his decision to change majors from Computer Science to Psychology. When asked about factors that helped and motivated him to come this far in college, he said,
It’s definitely my parents who helped me out. They have been supporting me all the time. Staying away from them is terrible because I miss them a lot, but they guide me all the time. Definitely, the friends that you make over here as well. They will help you and motivate you. They will make you stick to your task . . . Definitely people around you over here [academic advisors, professors], they will help you and motivate you. (Charlie, an international student from the Philippines)

Charlie’s statement shows that in addition to his parents, his friends, and the academic community including advisors, professors helped him and motivated him to continue his education. Like Charlie, Salwa, a participant in her 50s whose children also attend the university, mentioned her family several times. Her family motivated her to pursue an undergraduate degree and they are her biggest supporter for graduate education as well. Salwa said,

My children and husband are insisting on this [graduate education] but I told them [that] just let me finish [undergraduate education] now and then I will decide because it’s not that I don’t want it . . . As a person, I always love to live in my moment.

Clearly, Salwa has a very supportive family; her family members are not only encouraging her to pursue undergraduate education but graduate education as well. However, unlike Salwa, Charlie, and Penny, Rasha’s father may not support her decision to choose TESL over SPA (Speech Pathology and Audiology). Her father expected his
daughters to go into medical fields so he was okay with SPA. Thus, she has not notified her father that she changed her major to TESL.

**Requirements by University/Sponsors**

Requirements by university and sponsors also influenced international students’ academic success and persistence. To begin with, in addition to standardized testing scores, Mid-Western University requires newly admitted students to complete Math, English, and Foreign Language placement tests so students can be placed into appropriate courses. Students with low scores are placed in remedial courses and students with higher scores are placed in intermediate courses. For many students, not being able to take college-level courses can be a motivating factor to continue to push themselves to do well academically.

This institution also has fixed GPA requirements for graduation, majors, and minors. For instance, to be in good standing, 2.0 overall GPA is required of students. Additionally, to be able to graduate with a degree, students are required to maintain a major-specific GPA. Through conversations with academic and faculty advisors, friends, families and graduate schools, participants who plan to attend graduate schools including Diya, Aalia, Warada, and Hebe, to name a few, are aware that they need to obtain high GPAs to apply to graduate schools. In addition to meeting these requirements, sponsored students (Warada, Rasha, Salwa, Aman, and Faban) may be required to earn specific grades, GPA, and credit hours to keep their scholarships. Many times, these scholarships pay for their tuition. Thus, these requirements certainly add to students’ motivation to do well in classes and help them to continue with their academic and career goals.
Guidance From Professional/Faculty Advisors

Guidance from faculty and professional academic advisors were pivotal for some of the participants including John, Sara, Diya, and Hebe. While discussing additional factors that helped John academically, he narrated the following account:

This is my first time starting as a freshman here. In Brazil, I have just three years of high school, so actually, I graduated in 2013 from high school and I just came here [in] 2015. All of my major questions was about the GPA. When I get here everyone started talking about GPA, but you don’t actually know what is this or why is this so important, so the first semester I was kind of lost and I didn’t understand actually how that works . . . I could have [done] way better if I understood this importance. Now in the second semester after living that . . . experience, I can improve [my GPA] and I’m doing good. (John, an international student from Brazil)

He also shared his confusion with course selections because he did not understand the rationale for taking certain courses over others. John’s comments further reiterate new students’ unfamiliarity with institutional requirements. Academic guidance can certainly help students with understanding the college requirements. In addition to not being familiar with GPA, he also expressed unfamiliarity and lack of understanding with advising tools. However, his exploratory advisor, first-year experience course, and athletic advisors helped him to decide on a major. Although initially, John had a major in mind, he decided to enter the university as an exploratory (undecided) student. Advisors, along with his family, were part of his decision-making process. From this perspective, it
can be surmised that academic advisors’ guidance with selecting majors, courses, as well as interpreting the policies and procedures help students with their academic success and persistence. In John’s words,

Having a good staff behind me makes me feel secure and confident to keep going . . . the fact of you being far from home makes you be more responsible too, so yes, they help me a lot. I feel secure being protected by a great staff behind me.

(John, an international student from Brazil)

For career-related advice, Sara found her faculty advisor’s counsel to be valuable and was grateful for his advice. In her own words,

I have a TESL advisor so he is very helpful in . . . encouraging me to think about . . . grad school and things like that. So . . . I think besides friends and professors… my faculty advisor was very helpful. (Sara, an international student from Malaysia)

Whether the contribution is from academic advisors, faculty advisors, or athletics advisors, academic support and guidance have clearly made a difference for these students.

**Undergraduate International Students’ Experiences With Academic Advising**

Overall, nine participants shared that they had benefitted from academic advising. They were appreciative of the advice and help that they received from their faculty and academic advisors. They were particularly grateful for the academic advising services because many said that services like advising are not available in their home countries/institutions. Academic advising had helped them enormously to get acquainted
with the institutional, program, major, minor, course requirements, and campus resources. However, their unfamiliarity with advising tools and some of the participants’ comments about academic advising and institutional requirements reinforced the need for academic advising for international students. For instance, according to Charlie,

Not all students know about academic advising and advisors should get the information [to students] or get the students involved . . . because many international students don’t know about academic advising. When I first came here I had no idea about it until they told me that I required advising. Just giving the information… that they are available and they are there [to help] would really help. (Charlie, an international student from the Philippines)

Charlie’s statements inform us that advising may not be a familiar concept to some international students and it may not be a commonly used service in some parts of the world. Thus, international students need an academic advising tutorial, which can be given during orientation events for new international students. Charlie provides an excellent solution below that suggests that international student advisors or international offices can also introduce and inform international students about academic advising since students have already established a connection with the institution’s international office.

I feel like the [international office] should be the ones to tell the students about it because when international students first come, that’s the only office you first go to since that’s where you actually start. That’s the home base. They should be the ones telling about academic advising and that you should be going to it every
time, whenever you have a problem. Even if you don’t have a problem, still go to it. To get international students to go there more often, definitely emailing them personally as well, that would really help. I know that students have to be responsible for their own being, but a lot of international students have troubles communicating. (Charlie, an international student from the Philippines)

A few students also discussed their unfamiliarity with GPA, course requirements, placement testing, and course/university requirements. In fact, to help students become accustomed to institutional requirements, Warada suggested that international students should at least receive a copy of the roadmap prior to their enrollment at the institution so they will be aware of their classes. She shared that when she first learned about it, she had no idea what roadmap was. She also suggested that international students should be informed of placement testing and the importance of it. Because she did not know that she would be placed in a math course based on her score, she could not prepare for the test literally or mentally. She could not start with the required math courses right away because she was placed in lower level math courses, which delayed her for a semester. Thus, it would be helpful for students to know about placement testing prior to attending the university. These findings suggest that institutions need to reach out to their prospective students and inform them about some of the common university and major requirements so international students can be prepared well for their academic journey.

For instance, John shared his difficulties in understanding the course requirements. He explained,
In this semester, I went to pick my classes but . . . it’s kind of confusing, all this . . . core [classes] and you have to take classes that are not related to your major so that is still confusing. They just make you pick without explain[ing] you why, so I feel like those are the problems for international students that it probably doesn’t happen in other countries. I think that should be improved. (John, an international student from Brazil)

Rasha also pointed out several issues with academic advising. Although Rasha considered advising services to be important for international students, she shared that she was more satisfied with some advisors than others because she felt that some advisors helped her more to understand and retain advising-related information. In fact, she talked about a few of her international classmates who could not understand some of the common university requirements even after meeting with advisors, although she is not sure if it is due to language barriers.

At the beginning, it wasn’t useful. . . . Obviously, I listened to what the advisor says, but when I come back I’m clueless. I don’t know what I’ve heard. I completely forgot. It was not meaningful to me somehow. Then there . . . [were] students who were about to graduate who came before me. They told me, “Do your research. Go and see other advisors! Read!” After that, I’ve seen different advisors.

I’ve met a number of girls who are students here . . . They do go and see their advisors, but at the end . . . I feel like they’ve never seen an advisor. They don’t understand what is upper division, they don’t understand what is . . . core
[classes], elective etcetera. I don’t know what is the problem, but I feel this should be solved. I don’t know . . . is it our problem as international students who are lacking of language? I don’t know what it is, but there is something that is not useful and needs to be looked at somehow. (Rasha, an international student from Somalia/Saudi Arabia)

These scenarios portray new students’ concerns and difficulties as they begin their studies as college students. Thus, academic advisors or faculty advisors working with international students need to explain the course and institutional requirements to them so students have a better understanding of their major and institutional regulations. For instance, when academic advisors are helping students, according to Adam, instead of telling them to “check online . . . show them—how to use this online, and click where, and what is what.”

John and Sara both suggested that upon completion of advising appointments, academic advisors should check with students to see if they understood the information discussed during the meeting. The following excerpts by John and Sara can be critical for administrators:

They can have, for example, a fact [sheet] online . . . like most common questions online. That would be very helpful. . . . Ask . . . international students, if they know what are this, what is this for, why are you taking this. I say they [academic advisors] explain a little bit better. (John, an international student from Brazil)

Sara agrees with John and suggests that academic advisors need to ask questions to see if their advisees understood the conversation because many international students
will not ask for an explanation from their advisors. For instance, she makes the following remarks:

Just ask them more questions. So I don’t know about all international students, but if you’re talking about Asian international students, [they] don’t really know how to ask questions. [They] don’t really know how to take initiative. So if you can identify a few common things that international students struggle, it could be language, it could be looking for food, it could be busses. Just to reinforce . . . ask them . . . if there’s anything that an academic advisor could connect them with.

What they are struggling? I think it would be very helpful. Not every international student know how to get around such a huge university in a foreign culture. So just to have an additional person there for them who is willing to connect them to resources. It depends on them what resources they need but I think that would be nice. And not just give them a flyer, you know do this, because they’re like oh it’s all in English. Especially the ESL student, it’s all in English . . . I don’t get it. You know . . . to be more aware of what international students need. . . . If you [are referring to] the writing [center], tell them . . . what it is. Oh this [is] writing [center], they’re going to help you. You know tell them more. Like . . . they won’t grade your essay but they can teach you how to proofread your essay. To be more aware of what international students don’t know. . . . Because a lot of time academic advisors [are] so used to American students, they just assume that they know, just give them a bunch of flyers and like go. . . . like I say, don’t put international students into box. Some are very
independent. But some do need a little bit more scaffolding . . . Ask them, do you know what they do? You know like do you think this would be helpful or do you need me to explain a little bit more, give you more instruction? I think that would be nice. (Sara, an international student from Malaysia)

Sara’s remarks are not only crucial in understanding the unique nature of many international students, but also significant for academic advisors to understand and acknowledge the diverse needs of the international student populations. Echoing Sara’s points, academic advisors or anyone working with international students should not “put international students into [a] box.” Advice should be given based on students’ needs, not their title.

Like Sara, Faban, Aman, Hebe, Rasha, and Warada also suggested that concerns involving language skills could be an issue for international students whether it is due to poor English language skills or heavy accent or hesitation to speak with others due to poor language skills. Warada shared that many of her friends express concerns to meet with advisors because they are hesitant about their language skills. For instance, the following excerpts illustrate the concerns students may feel prior to their advising appointments:

What am I going to do with him? I don’t know . . . how to speak? Making them feel comfortable with the language—oh don’t worry, you used she instead of he, it’s okay. You are good. You will learn, you just need time. This kind of sweet words, you find them very little. But they really help the students [to] be happy
. . . because I believe the mood of a student affect his grade a lot. (Warada, an international student from Tanzania/Oman)

Rasha also suggests that advisors need to be “more understanding” for students who are unable to clearly explain their questions and having difficulty communicating with the advisors.

The advisors . . . could be more understanding that we’re not as the native American student here. We have some problems with language, culture . . . and knowing your student is very good. If this student is a shy student who . . . needs time to express and tell what he needs for his . . . [major] . . . trying to break it down using a less of . . . hard English or language for them to understand, allowing them to bring a translator if they want, explaining to them from the start the rules because a lot of them don’t understand the rules. (Rasha, an international student from Somalia/ Saudi Arabia)

By treating each student individually, academic advisors will be able to assess the situation effectively and take the proper measures to help students. Permitting students with language barriers to bring a friend or a relative may be helpful for both parties to convey the necessary information.

Furthermore, Warada suggested “it’s very important to make the students comfortable enough,” particularly for students who are not used to speaking with a man outside of family members.
Having a first experience talking to a man, and just in a room just the two of you, might make you feel not comfortable enough. So I think it’s very important for them [academic advisors] to be kind and use nice words.

Faban shared similar concerns as Warada for female students coming from Saudi Arabia. Faban recalled,

"Because in our country . . . female should speak to female but if there’s no female they have to speak to male . . . For me is okay but for female, . . . [if] male [advisor] . . . tried to shake her hand that would be a big problem."

Hence, being aware of students’ cultural background, particularly, of students coming from religiously conservative countries, is very important for academic advisors and administrators.

In fact, a few participants including Faban, John, Charlie, Adam, and Warada referred to the languages spoken by the advisors. They believed advisors who can speak the same language or have similar experience or “of international background” or are aware of the difficulties experienced by international students would be more understanding of international students. This would help students to speak with them with ease and more comfortably without worrying about anything. According to Charlie:

"Let’s say you’re an international student and from a [different] culture . . . you say something to them and they take it a different way. That’s why having an advisor from the international background is better for international students and not just Americans, because I feel like there are only Americans in the advising office. I mean, they could have traveling experience, but they don’t exactly know. It’s
hard to explain, but it’s just having an international advisor would be also nice just so that he’s out of the country and he knows how things work there . . . [and] here. I would be able to rely on him or her better, because we both can share similar experiences more. I could talk to him or her easier. (Charlie, an international student from the Philippines)

John had similar thoughts:

Sometimes, even [if] I have someone that is speaking English would be . . . useful or someone that speak your language and you can talk to . . . They’d be more aware of how to help international students in a way that, like supposing that [students] don’t know what to do here and why they have to do certain things here, what would be more useful for them to do here besides just classes, or even talk about the international programs that [MWU] has or things like that. (John, an international student from Brazil)

In addition to providing an explanation of why international students would feel more comfortable with someone of similar background, which was echoed by other participants in the study including John and Faban, Charlie sheds light on another important issue, the need for representation. As institutions continue to recruit students who are ethnically, religiously, linguistically, and culturally diverse, it is necessary to hear students’ feedback to improve institutional services that could create a welcoming environment for the students. Whether it is by recruiting diverse staff or faculty members or by providing professional development/cultural competency workshops or both, institutions need to find ways to support their international student populations. As a
result, by learning about international students’ fears and concerns, academic advisors or others working with international students can be considerate and respectful of their situation instead of making assumptions based on their language skills or cultural background.

Although nine of the 13 participants were satisfied with academic advising/advisors, a few participants including Hebe, Adam, Aman, and Faban were not entirely happy with their advising experiences. Aman and Adam were particularly critical of their academic/faculty advisor, and Adam stated that he could have managed everything if he did not have help from his academic advisors. Hebe and Faban expected their academic advisors to know more about graduate schools and career and training opportunities. They had expected their academic advisors to be more knowledgeable about their majors and programs. They were not entirely satisfied with their academic advisors.

Hebe shared that, even though she wants to become a Pharmacist, she does not feel prepared to take the PCAT test, a required standardized test for pharmacy school. She is not confident in her ability to do well on this test. She stated,

I discuss my confusion [with my academic advisor] for . . . taking the PCAT test. I said I am not confident to take the test. He encouraged me to try. Don’t . . . feel scared. If I don’t try I never know what the test is. (Hebe, an international student from China)

When people are in doubt, the words of encouragement are certainly powerful in boosting their confidence. While teaching students to take responsibility for their own
actions, academic advisors continue to encourage and empower students to stay focused on their academic and professional goals.

Although Hebe was appreciative of her advisor’s help with course selection for the major and pre-requisite courses for graduate schools, Hebe expected more from her academic advisor. She was quick to point out that her advisor did not know enough about the courses and graduate school and did not inform her about research requirements for graduate school. For instance, she said, it would be helpful,

If the advisor . . . had told me if you’re planning on applying for Graduate [schools], you need to have research experience, and you can go to professor office to ask for them, whether they need assistance, or just to be a volunteer, to get experience or something else. (Hebe, an international student from China)

She also shared that her advisor did not know about the costs of graduate school. Based on Hebe’s questions, her academic advisor referred her to the appropriate department and faculty members/advisor. Hebe felt that faculty members/advisors were much more knowledgeable about graduate schools and majors than academic advisors. Diya’s accounts coincided with Hebe’s statements. For example, she shared,

I never got any help with my premedical concentration . . . Now I have to shadow doctors, I have to volunteer at hospitals, and stuff like that. I got to know everything from my faculty advisor and my academic advisor never told me I had to do that. If I had, I would have started earlier. Probably because I’m really sure about my major, I know some people are not, but if you’re really sure about your major, they should guide you towards extracurricular activities they have. Even
about the fraternity I got to know about from my department. In a general way, if you [need] to know something they can just guide you. (Diya, an international student from India)

Similar to Hebe, Faban also selected neutral for his satisfaction with advising. Faban shared the following about his academic advisor.

She wasn’t good actually. . . . I [asked] them about . . . training . . . Do you have to buy a book, can you train . . . in Saudi Arabia? We do not have a social security number, so all the hospital ask for social for . . . training . . . and we do not have it. She said, I don’t know if we can train in Saudi Arabia or not . . . She did not know a lot actually. For training, my advisor should give me advice. If we can train in Saudi Arabia it’s going to be easier for us because we do not need social. Here, we need to have a social security number. When I ask her, she said she didn’t know at all. (Faban, an international student from Saudi Arabia)

Faban expected his academic advisor to know about training opportunities for students majoring in Medical Technology. When I asked him if he had spoken to anyone else about his concerns, he said, “because she is my advisor. I didn’t know if I was supposed to talk to somebody else.” Faban believed that academic advisor should be able to answer these types of questions regarding one’s major.

Hebe’s, Diya’s, and Faban’s expectations and experiences suggest that they did not know about the partnership that exists between academic advisors and faculty advisors at Mid-Western University or the advising office has failed to educate students about the shared responsibilities between students, advisors, and faculty advisor at this
university. This also questions how much students know about the roles and responsibilities of an academic advisor.

Fabian also pointed out that his advisor doubted his ability to continue with his major. According to Fabian, “the first time I met her she said, listen it’s too hard major.” He did not like what his advisor told him and how she told him. Sara also had a similar experience with one of her academic advisor who assumed that she would not be able to handle a difficult course. For instance, she said,

When I first came here I wanted to take classes that would have a good balance . . . to learn things. And I think my academic advisor kind of told me here are some easy classes and . . . I told her that I want to take history and she’s like . . . are you sure? Because not many . . . international students take that. (Sara, an international student from Malaysia)

Unfortunately, the comments made by academic advisors have negatively influenced Faban and Sara. Aman and Adam also had some negative experiences with their academic/ faculty advisors.

Aman stated that he applied to Mid-Western University through an agency because he “couldn’t communicate with universities and to look for opportunities to get admission.” He said he was young and did not know about the application process and was not aware of the classes that he will be taking at the university. When he shared his professional interests with the agency to become a Medical Technician, he was looking forward to “fixing machines at the hospital. Like fixing the devices they use. I was planning for this kind of engineer.” Although the agency suggested Medical Technology
for him as his major, Aman realized that this is not what he had anticipated upon admission to Mid-Western University. This suggests that some international students may not have a good understanding of their selected majors, especially if agents recommend the majors. Language barriers could also make the major selection process difficult. Majors with similar labels in the home and host countries may not create any difficulties for international students; however, majors that are uncommon and different to students could certainly make the selection process complicated. Thus, without any introductory information, students may not be fully aware of their majors.

Aman started at the Mid-Western University prior to the implementation of required advising. For this reason, he was not required to see an academic advisor every semester to register for courses. However, he did see academic advisors and faculty members/advisors as needed. During the interview, when I asked him what guidance he received while changing majors, he said, “I talked to some of the faculties.” However, it was unclear at times if he was speaking of his experiences with his faculty advisor for Medical Technology, professors for Molecular and Cellular Biology, or professional academic advisors. He had spoken with a few people to explore additional options to choose a major. He recounted,

I talked to . . . the faculty advisor. For the medical technology . . . she was one of the people that . . . I talked to. . . . When I talked to some of the faculties—when I came I . . . [was] depressed . . . what should I do? Easy answer. Change your major. It’s not good for you. It kills me, no! no! I am not going to change my major. I would do my best . . . I am pretty sure there was a . . . weakness for me,
my friends, like international student friends. . . We all deserve . . . better education, good education. (Aman, an international student from Saudi Arabia)

Aman was visibly upset when he was talking about the advice he received regarding his major. He was determined and adamant in his decision to continue with his major. However, he was deeply hurt by the conversations, which suggested that he look for a new major since he was finding his current major to be challenging. It was a very difficult transition for Aman. The language barrier made the situation even more difficult academically as well as socially. His major turned out to be a different major than he had expected and his classes were difficult. He was homesick. He also felt isolated in the classrooms because he was a few years older than the traditional-aged students in the freshman class. Navigating through the university website and advising tools was not easy for him. He spoke with professors for help with his classes but they suggested that he seek tutoring and review notes, but he felt that he needed additional help from professors. When he received a “D” in his biology course, he was very disheartened.

I have never ever . . . in high school got that grade. . . I was one of the smart students, I get really good grades. So . . . it was a big shock. That’s why I was telling you . . . is that really [my] academic life. Is that gonna be struggling? . . . I was studying and I was doing what I can do just to get a good grade. I kept getting D’s and C’s but now I reach to B’s and A’s. But wow a lot of struggle to get to . . . [this] point. (Aman, an international student from Saudi Arabia)

Aman voiced that international students’ needs are not being taken into consideration when academic advisors are selecting classes with the students. He also
stated that the semester-by-semester course planning guides do not reflect the needs of international students. During one advising appointment, he was advised to take a few science courses together. Although it is possible that his courses were suggested based on the roadmap for the major, Aman felt otherwise. He said, “one time I went to her and she made me a tough schedule. Chemistry, biology, labs. But I was like, if I follow this I am gonna get F in all classes.” Aman consulted with some of his friends and adjusted his schedule with some general electives.

A few participants like Aman had spoken about reaching out to their friends for questions, clarification, and advice. Although it is required for students to take certain courses to earn a degree, it is crucial for academic advisors to work together with their students to select courses. It is particularly important to recognize students’ readiness to take multiple difficult courses at one time and suggest alternative ways to help students to stay on track for graduation.

Adam shared that even though his first advisor was very helpful, he had a negative experience with his second advisor. He told me that he looked for his first advisor but he was not listed on the scheduling website. Adam was unable to log in to his student account and had several other technological problems with his account. Although he reached out to the technology support department, he was directed to see his academic advisor. He told me that he will not see his advisor unless he needs to “because she is kind of bad.” “She is not kind hearted so I don’t want to see her.” He also said, “she looks not friendly and my advisor is white people. I find that it’s a little bit hard to get along with white people.” Adam did not think his advisor was helpful at all because she
had always directed him to review the advising tools and websites for assistance. It seemed that the conversations that took place between Adam and his advisor were quite limited. He expected his advisor to spend more time reviewing the course requirements. For instance, Adam said, “I think we need more help with about introduction of some classes. Why I have to choose these classes.” Therefore, providing a brief overview of the courses or sharing the catalog entry that describes the courses would be beneficial for international students in choosing classes.

**Conclusion**

Whether it is leaving home for the first time to go to college, sitting in a large classroom with 200 new classmates, taking a class with a foreign instructor with an accent, or writing a 10-page research paper, the transition can be overwhelming for students—domestic or international. It is not easy to leave behind what is familiar for a number of years and embark on a new journey. For international students, however, the transition can be even more challenging, particularly, for students with poor English speaking and writing abilities. Unlike domestic students, international students are not only leaving home but also leaving their families and countries behind. International students coming from non-western countries and cultures are being exposed to new cultures, educational systems, teaching styles, food, language, etiquette, manners, and ways of life. For some international students, expectations from family, sponsors, and university to maintain good grades and excel academically become an added pressure.

Thus, navigating one’s way around a university and becoming familiar with the various university and major requirements can be confusing and difficult for some
students. During this time, student services play a crucial role by supporting and helping students in their academic transition. Although a few participants expected more from their academic advisors and were not entirely satisfied with their advising experience, the findings show that the nine of the 13 students participated in the study were satisfied with academic advising and they appreciated and acknowledged the role of academic advisors. Academic advising/academic advisors positively influenced these participants through empowerment and encouragement. In fact, through academic advising, students connected with university officials and felt supported. Through academic advising, they learned about a variety of resources that were available to support students. As a result, academic advising played a significant role in international students’ academic success and transition.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

Although academic advising has been researched extensively, very little is known about international students’ experiences with academic advising. As institutions are recruiting more and more international students, it would be important for the university administrators to know what support services are helpful for these students. This information will not only help the institution to support its international students but retain them as well. This study was conducted to learn about international students’ experiences with academic advising so students can be advised effectively and adequately throughout their undergraduate journey.

The most important finding is that international students considered academic advising/academic advisor to be a valuable resource. The college experience for an international student is different from a domestic student. International students, particularly from non-western countries, are not only unfamiliar with the western culture but also unfamiliar with the western educational system. As a result, getting acclimated to a new culture and a new university system may be difficult for some international students. This difficulty can become even more overwhelming for those with limited English language skills. As a result, during this transitional period, proper guidance is critical for international students. My study reveals that academic advising/academic advisor at MWU played an important role in helping international students successfully transition to college. Academic advisors’ guidance helped students navigate and understand the complex major/university requirements. Through academic advising,
international students learned about various resources that supported their academic/career goals. Academic advising not only connected students to other campus resources but also became a strong support system for the international student population. Because of this finding, it is recommended that institutions provide academic advising services for their international students particularly in the beginning of their college education.

This qualitative study was an attempt to address the gap in the literature and to understand and describe undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising. My primary research question and subsidiary questions include:

1. What are undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising?
   a. How do international students perceive the role of academic advising in their academic and career decision making in college?
   b. What aspects of academic advising are important to international students?
   c. How do international students perceive the role of academic advising in their academic success and persistence?

**Discussion of Findings**

This study suggests that, in general, undergraduate international students were satisfied with their academic advising experience. Although there were a few negative experiences, the positive experiences were prevalent throughout the conversations. Of the 13 participants, nine participants appreciated the service and the support they received from their academic advisors. Of those, many pointed out the need for academic advisors
for international students and the importance of academic advising, particularly, in the beginning of undergraduate years when students are unfamiliar with everything at the institution.

In regard to academic/career decision-making, 12 of the 13 participants did not consult with academic advisors for their initial major/career selection process; among other factors, parental/family involvement was common for numerous participants. In regard to the aspects of academic advising that are important to international students, nine of 13 participants considered academic advising to be a valued resource and a trusted service. They identified the academic advisor as a trusted guide and a support system who provides motivation and navigation. They also considered the academic advisor a primary and an emergency contact. In regard to the role of academic advising in their academic success and persistence, participants had several external and internal influences and motivations that helped them with their academic success and persistence. For instance, individual motivations, obligations, and responsibilities along with family support and expectations helped students to carry on and continue with schoolwork. They also considered guidance from professional and faculty advisors and the requirements set by university and sponsors as contributing factors to their academic success and persistence.

**Academic and Career Decision-Making**

In addition to career advising, academic advising helps students graduate on time, connects students to resources, and through academic advising, new students (i.e., first year and transfer) learn about various majors/minors/certificates available at the
institution (Berdahl, 1995). Research suggests that academic advising provides multiple benefits for students including new students. For instance, selecting a major/career can be overwhelming and daunting for many students, and academic advising “…help[s] students avoid academic pitfalls and instills more certainty and confidence in them as they engage in the process by which they choose, and stay with, a major” (Berdahl, 1995, p. 8). This study shows the obligation to continue with one’s major to respect familial or parental hopes and dreams or wishes or to bring reputation to one’s family often became critical for students, as was the case for Rasha and Hebe. From these perspectives, selecting a new major can be overwhelming and stressful time for international students.

Although most of these participants did not utilize their academic advisors for their initial major and career decision-making, the importance of academic advising was clear amongst most of the participants even though they had selected their majors and had career goals and aspirations before advising. The majority of the participants made their career decisions early on in their lives prior to coming to the United States. Their goals were well defined, they were aware of the necessary steps to achieve their goals, and they were determined to carry out their plans. However, it can be gathered that for many students like Hebe, Warada, and Aman, major and career decision-making can be a complex process for some international students and many are influenced by various factors and individuals. Among many factors, their family played a huge role in the overall decision-making process. Therefore, while speaking to an international student from Asia or other collectivist cultures who may be struggling with maintaining good grades and with deciding a major/career, advisors must acknowledge the strong
influences many collectivist families may have on their children to earn A’s and B’s and to pursue certain majors/careers (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010; Fouad et al., 2008; Tang et al., 1999). For this reason, prior to making any assumptions about international students and their families, advisors must think through students’ culture, religion, and ethnic traditions (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010). Thus, while working with international students, advisors need to be mindful of their students’ individual stories, so they can help these students with their academic and career decisions.

**Important Aspects of Academic Advising**

Academic advising encompasses much more than academics; it also consists of the professional and personal development of students. For instance, Hanson and Huston (1995) wrote,

> The role of an adviser, however, is more interactive and personal that of a classroom teacher. A good adviser helps students assess their academic goals, helps them plan their program of study, and keeps track of their academic progress. Most students will confront serious difficulties sometime during college years, and it is at these turning points that the rapport a faculty member has established by taking the time to know the students pays off. (p. 95)

Whether it is a faculty advisor or a professional advisor, an opportunity to connect with someone is helpful for domestic and international students (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). While discussing survey results for an advising program, Hanson and Huston (1995), said, “academic advising had influenced the choices students made and ultimately their academic success” (p. 95). In fact, nine of the 13 participants of this study
appreciated advising as a service because it allowed them an opportunity to speak with faculty and professional advisors for assistance and guidance for their academic and professional lives.

Although academic advising supports all students, advising support is particularly important for new college students as many live independently on campus and away from their parents and adjusting to academic life (Wade & Yoder, 1995). During this time, academic advisors are very significant in helping new students successfully transition to their new institutions (Berdahl, 1995). Academic advisors assist students and their guardians with understanding institutional policies and orient them to various academic and institutional requirements. Academic advisors’ primary roles and responsibilities to support students not only help students with enriching their academic journeys but also reduce stress for students and their family members during their undergraduate years (Berdahl, 1995). This suggests that first-generation college students and international students may benefit from academic advising since they may not have available support systems to help with academic decisions due to being the first one to attend college or being away from home and studying in a different educational environment (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). My findings were consistent with the above literature and support that advising can be critical during the transitional phase for international students. A few participants from the study have spoken highly of the need to have academic advisors for first-year international students when students are new at the institution.
**Academic Success and Persistence**

The findings from this study suggest that international students’ academic success and persistence were influenced by several factors including professional and faculty advisors’ guidance, university and sponsor requirements, the international students’ own motivations, their obligations and responsibilities, and their family support and expectations. This important finding supports the current persistence literature. For instance, Li et al. (2010) stated that, “Many international students, on one hand, were under great stress of intensive study and on the other hand, were faced with high expectations from their families for successful completion of their study” (p. 400).

However, family expectations along with English speaking ability and social interaction played a significant role for Chinese and other international students in enabling them to finish their education (Li et al., 2010; Saha & Karpinski, 2016). Family involvement was common for Thai international students as well. As Pimpa stated,

Many students reported that they were pressured by the family expectation prior to their final decision to study abroad. Most students mentioned that expectation from parents and siblings had a great impact on their decision to study abroad, choice of country, academic course and university. (Pimpa, 2004, p. 355)

These findings clearly demonstrate the cultural complexities international students face in terms of study abroad, selection of major/career, and academic success and persistence (Pimpa, 2005).

According to Mamiseishvili (2012), among many factors, Andrade (2006b), whose participants were predominantly from Asia and the Pacific and from a single
institution, found that “…support from peers, family, faculty, and staff was crucial for
them to succeed academically” (p. 3). Mamiseishvili (2012), who studied 200 freshmen
international students from a large data set of “Beginning Postsecondary Students
Longitudinal Study” that included 23,090 students from multiple institutions found that
“…GPA, degree goals and academic integration had significant positive effects on
persistence of undergraduate international students” in the United States (p. 12). For
instance, students with strong English language mastery were found to persist more than
students with poor English language mastery. Students’ willpower and ambition to
accomplish academic goals and finish school were important for international students.
Also, students who felt connected to the institution were more integrated; hence, had
more reasons for them to stay at the institution (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Lastly,
Mamiseishvili found that academic advising played an important role in retaining
international students. According to Mamiseishvili, “Andrade (2008) also suggests that
support and validation from faculty members, peers, and staff is critical for international
students’ adjustment in college” (p. 13).

The findings of this current study are very similar to the findings of Andrade
(2006b) and Mamiseishvili (2012). The majority of the participants in this study were
not only focused on their current degree attainment but also preparing themselves for
future education. They wanted to do well in school so they could pursue their goals and
aspirations. Also, the overwhelming majority of the participants believed that advising
helped them get acclimated to the university and major requirements. They considered
the service to be important for international students.
Similar to international students, domestic students in higher education institutions in the USA also benefit from academic advising. Through their quantitative study with 363 first generation college students at a public university, Swecker et al. (2013) discovered that there was 

A significant relationship between the number of meetings [with academic advisors] and the retention of first-generation college students. . . . [In fact, they found] that for every meeting with an advisor the odds that a student is retained increases by 13%. (p. 49)

Moreover, Museus and Ravello’s (2010) qualitative study with 31 racial and ethnic minority students, and 14 advisors at three predominantly White institutions (i.e., public, private, and community college) also confirmed that through “…humanized, holistic and proactive advising practices” academic advisors influenced student success (p. 55). For instance, the researchers learned that students connected with advisors who were “caring,” and demonstrated “commitment to their students’ success” (p. 53).

Undergraduate International Students’ Experiences With Academic Advising

In addition to approving academic advising as a valued and a needed service, participants of this study highlighted several important points that are worth citing and may prove valuable for the administrators working with international students. Although all 13 participants have in some ways utilized academic advising and benefitted from academic advising, Warada, Sara, John, and Aalia reaffirmed the need for academic advisor’s guidance during freshmen year. In fact, due to the help of academic advising/advisors, transitioning to new country and institution was less stressful for
participants like Aalia, John, Warada, and Salwa. Although there were a variety of opinions about the required advising policy for students of all class standings, some students preferred the overall policy whereas others preferred it for freshmen and sophomores only. Nevertheless, it was clear that these participants saw a value in academic advising and appreciated the service.

It was also brought to my attention that international students should be informed about academic advising, placement testing, and course/university requirements prior to matriculation. A few participants provided useful advice for advising departments and international affairs so they can reach out to their students prior to matriculation. For instance, the advising and international affairs departments can send welcome letters that address some of the basic information about academic advising, placement, and major/university requirements so students can become familiar with some of the institutional requirements. Charlie suggested that students should be informed about academic advising, preferably by the international office since students connect with that office first before connecting with other offices on campus, and international students may not be familiar with academic advising. Warada suggested that academic advisors can help international students by “communicating with them before coming.”

Generally speaking, prior to matriculating to a college or university, domestic students have the opportunity to visit several institutions and meet with advising and admission staff. These visits provide students with various information about their majors and the university on top of what they already know about the university/college system in the United States. However, this is not the case for many international students
unless they are already residing in their host countries or taking ESL classes at their host institutions. Thus, students may not be familiar with some of the common requirements such as GPA or academic advising because they are not familiar with higher education regulations of this country. For many, they simply do not have the opportunity to visit prospective institutions like their domestic counterparts. Some may not be aware of the ways to learn more about their major and institution requirements prior to matriculation. As a result, informing international students about academic advising, placement testing, and course/university requirements prior to matriculation could reduce their academic shock and enhance their understanding of institutional rules and regulations, which can contribute to international students’ persistence, success, and retention.

Furthermore, participants expressed that advisors and administrators need to be aware of students’ concerns about language skills. It cannot be underestimated that to learn how to speak a new language is a challenging task, but to learn how to communicate with others and to learn how to write in that language is even more challenging (Wang et al., 2017). Many international students, particularly from non-English speaking countries, are not only learning a new language; they are learning to live in a new environment with a new set of cultural and institutional norms and regulations (Li et al., 2010). Because of these complexities, many students, upon their arrival, may not feel comfortable or confident to socialize with English speakers. They speak to students who speak their same language and mostly mingle with other international students. Especially in the beginning, they spend more time speaking in their native language than speaking in English. Many international students feel
embarrassed to mix with native English speakers due to their poor English language skills (Young, 2017; Similar sentiments also expressed by Hebe, an international student from China). Thus, they may be hesitant to take advantage of the opportunities available at their institutions because of their language difficulties. Regrettably, by not speaking with native speakers and not participating in extracurricular and social activities, some international students not only are impeding their language skills but also are missing several professional and personal development opportunities (i.e., leadership roles, conference presentations).

Nonetheless, lack of communication skills influence students’ day to day to actions; thus, advisors and administrators need to understand students’ anxieties for their language skills and utilize multiple options to communicate valuable information. Advisors can also connect students to resources that can help them improve their language skills. However, advisors and administrators must remember to create a welcoming environment for their students so they feel comfortable sharing their concerns.

In fact, several participants shared their concerns and fears that resulted from the unfamiliarity of the educational environment as well as their cultural or linguistic background. John stated,

I don’t feel… too much comfortable with my academic advisor … I was even afraid of asking some questions because they might be dumb questions, like something very simple about . . . like what is a good GPA, for example, that I didn’t ask . . . my academic advisor.
Although based on our conversation, John had a good grasp of the English language, as a freshman student from Brazil, he was unfamiliar with many of the institutional requirements. Lack of institutional or educational knowledge could have contributed to John’s uneasiness with the advisor; hence, lucid explanation of institutional and major requirements is critical for new international students. Thus, to address students’ unfamiliarity with the institutional/educational requirement, advisors can provide an explanation of course/major/institutional requirements during initial advising appointments. Academic advisors can also explain about the resources around the university and connect students to resources that would enrich their academic, linguistic and cultural experience. For instance, by being aware that language barriers can be burdensome for some international students and by staying connected with other campus partners, academic advisors will be able to connect students to resources that could not only improve their language skills but also make them feel connected to the campus community.

A few participants also discussed their difficulties with transferring credits from their former institutions to MWU. Sara was one of the fortunate ones to have credits counted toward her degree requirements; whereas, a few others including Hebe and Rasha could not continue with the process for several reasons (i.e., no syllabus, difficult process). To avoid difficulties with transferring credits, institutions need to simplify the process so transfer students are able to transfer credits that are applicable to their majors and degree. By creating articulation agreements with institutions from top sending countries, institutions can assist international students with transferring credits.
Participants also suggested that advisors need to become knowledgeable about opportunities and requirements for graduate school that could help international students’ academic and career plans. In fact, participants expected more information from their academic advisors about their majors, courses for their majors, requirements for graduate school, training opportunities, and professional programs in their respective fields. A few participants shared that their advisors either did not know adequate information or did not direct them to the appropriate resources when asked about courses, graduate school, and training opportunities. Diya who plans to become a medical doctor shared that she learned about the need for internships, volunteering, and shadowing from her faculty advisor but she did not hear any of this information from her academic advisors. Faban had concerns about his advisor’s knowledge regarding his major. He was not satisfied with his advisor’s answers and expected his advisor to know more about the program since she was advising the major. Adam wanted to know more about the courses required for his major.

Above inquiries can also be applicable to domestic students because anyone in pursuit of graduate school may need to know about requirements for graduate school and career opportunities early on, so one can plan accordingly. Although advising models and advising practices vary across the country and typically career-related advising falls under the guidance of faculty advisors, professional development or co-curricular opportunities could provide additional knowledge for academic advisors. For instance, advisors can attend some introductory classes, visit graduate school programs, and meet regularly with faculty advisors to stay updated with the necessary information. Thus,
appropriate training may be required for academic advisors working with international students with majors that require graduate school.

Additionally, the importance of getting to know students was emphasized by participants since no two students are alike so international students should not be placed in one category. To borrow Sara’s words, international students should not be placed in one box. Depending on one’s country of origin or educational or cultural experience, some students may be less independent than others, may need more help than others, and may require more time with advisors than others. At the same time, advisors may come across international students who are independent, knowledgeable about host culture, and require no or little assistance from academic advisors or administrators. For this reason, making assumptions based on students’ backgrounds can be deadly since traditionally the primary role of an advisor is to help students become academically successful. Thus, categorizing international students collectively should be avoided by administrators working with international students and by learning about students’ background, academic advisors will be able to appropriately provide assistance to their international student advisees.

Lastly, opportunities for students to connect with their advisors are crucial not only in strengthening advisor-advisee relationship but also in helping students feel a sense of belonging to the institution, through building rapport with the advisor (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). In Penny’s words, “[b]ecause sometimes as an international student you feel like an outsider. So seeing that people actually care about [you] makes you feel part of the University to say it that way.” The tenor of Penny’s statement suggests that
academic advising has created a sense of belonging to the institution. It is important to note that in addition to fulfilling the typical requirements and responsibilities of being a college student, international undergraduate students are also maintaining family and personal expectations along with several adjustment issues. These experiences, unfortunately, influence students’ mental health, which can make staying focused and continuing with their educational goals both overwhelming and challenging.

Additionally, international students, particularly transfer students, may initially lack a sense of belonging to the institution and its employees, and some students may not feel comfortable in seeking help and discussing school/life adjustment issues. In fact, the seminal research on retention and persistence suggested that students’ connection to the institution is pivotal to retention (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). Hence, academic advisors can be a constant contact for international students and a strong support system in creating a sense of belonging and connecting students to the campus community.

**Implications for Academic and Faculty Advisors, Advising Administrators, and International Affairs**

This research indicates that there is a need for faculty and professional advisors for international students. Academic advising is imperative for international students, particularly in the beginning of their undergraduate years. Whether it was a faculty advisor or a professional academic advisor, participants in this study expressed their need for academic advising and had trust and confidence in academic advising to guide them throughout their undergraduate journey. This suggests that whether advising is required by the institution or not, institutions should provide services that can help guide
international students particularly freshmen and sophomore students. This also indicates that required advising has been shown to assist international students, and thus, it is worth exploring for advising administrators and policy makers.

Also, professional advisors need adequate academic training so they can provide accurate and timely advice to international students about training opportunities relating to one’s major and graduate school. International students expected their academic advisors to be knowledgeable about graduate schools so to keep up with students’ demands advising administrators must train their academic advisors with up to date information for most commonly selected career paths for international students.

In order to properly assist students, academic advisors and administrators must recognize the student’s cultural background and diversity across one’s background. Every student with an F-1 visa may share the title of international student but every one of them represents a different culture, ethnicity, and set of experiences. Most notably, underscoring the importance that although transparency is an important part of advising so students are aware of the degree and major requirements, it is equally important to be cognizant of how the messages are being conveyed so they are not discouraging for students. For instance, students from certain cultural backgrounds may not be accustomed to direct conversation; thus, they may interpret the messages differently from others. By taking part in cultural competency workshops and by learning about intercultural communication and international students, academic advisors and administrators will be able to effectively advise international students. Most importantly, professional development workshops particularly on intercultural communication and/or
cultural competency will improve the advisee and advisor relationship. These workshops would also inform and change some of the advisors’ perceptions of international students, which would allow advisors to assess students’ needs and recognize diversity within and between their students.

Lastly, this study brought up the lack of diversity and representation in the advising staff. In fact, the preference for shared background/shared culture/shared language was evident in the participants’ statements. International students believed they would be able to build a better rapport with advisors who have international experience or who were of international background or who spoke the same language as them because that would help advisors in understanding the lives of international students. As a result, based on the shared cultural identity, advisors can relate to their students and the reciprocity will be mutually respectful. Hence, the need for diversifying advising staff is critical and worth considering for advising administrators and hiring managers.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Although this study has contributed to the literature of advising international students, it is limited to 13 participants from a Mid-Western University (MWU), a public university that requires academic advising. Thus, it may not be applicable to private institutions or institutions that do not require academic advising. Participants from this study were also primarily representing non-English speaking countries. Thus, a larger study with more participants from English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries will showcase different views among these groups. At MWU, advising requirements are mostly completed by professional academic advisors; thus, future research that focuses
on international students’ experiences with faculty advisors may provide additional insights. Moreover, a study that focuses on both academic and faculty advisors, as well as students, may provide greater insights in understanding international students’ experiences with academic advising.

**Conclusion**

The findings from this study not only added to the limited existing research about undergraduate international students’ experiences with academic advising but also presented a foundation for future research. Nine of the 13 participants were satisfied with academic advising and these undergraduate international students’ experiences with advising were mostly positive. They appreciated the service and saw a need for academic advisors for international students. However, participants who were not satisfied with advising offered explanations for their experiences with academic advising. Participants’ messages to the college and university advisors and administrators are as follows: inform students of essential information (i.e., placement testing, roadmaps, etc.) prior to enrollment, acknowledge students’ language skills and cultural background while advising, implement transfer credit articulation systems between transfer institutions, provide additional training for advisors to stay current of major/career specific information, and offer professional development and intercultural communication workshops for advisors to learn about their international student populations. Thus, this study not only provided an outlet for advisors, administrators, and researchers to learn about international students’ experiences with academic advising but also demonstrated numerous suggestions to improve academic advising that could be significant for
academic and faculty advisors, advising administrators, and international affairs. This study also showed that the role of academic advising is important in international students’ academic success and persistence. As a result, academic advising can be instrumental in retaining international students, particularly now, in light of the current political climate.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INITIAL RECRUITMENT EMAIL
Appendix A

Initial Recruitment Email

Dear international students,

My name is Neete Saha and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Administration program at Kent State University. For my dissertation, I am conducting a study about international students’ experiences with academic advising. I would like to hear from you about your advising experience with College of Arts and Sciences and I invite you to participate in my study if you are on F-1 visa and working toward your undergraduate degree. This is a voluntary study and your participation will remain anonymous and confidential.

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Kent State University (Protocol #15-638). The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand and describe how undergraduate international students in the College of Arts and Sciences at Mid-Western University experience academic advising.

This is a very short questionnaire; it will take less than 5 minutes of your time. Upon completing the questionnaire, if you agree to speak with me about your experiences with academic advising, you will be invited for follow-up interviews that could last for 60 to 90 minutes.

Please click on the link below to complete the questionnaire: (a link was provided to students).

I thank you for your time and your participation in this questionnaire is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate in my research or have any questions about my study, I can be reached via email at nsaha@kent.edu.

Sincerely,
Neete Saha
APPENDIX B

SECOND RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR THE INTERESTED PARTICIPANTS
Appendix B

Second Recruitment Email for the Interested Participants

Dear international students,

Thank you for completing the questionnaire and agreeing to participate in my dissertation study. As you know, the purpose of this qualitative study is to understand and describe how undergraduate international students in the College of Arts and Sciences at Mid-Western University (MWU) experience academic advising. As a result, I would like to interview you for 60 to 90 minutes and hear your experiences with academic advising at MWU. These interviews will take place at the 2nd floor of the library and it will be audio taped. Your involvement in this study will remain anonymous. Participants will receive a $15 Starbucks gift cards. Please let me know if you are still interested in participating in the study. If so, please select a time and date from below that fits your schedule (a list of time and date was provided to students).

If you would like to participate in my research or have any questions about my study, I can be reached via email at nsaha@kent.edu.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Neete Saha
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FOR THE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS
Appendix C

Informed Consent for the Interview Participants

Title of Study: International students’ experiences with academic advising at a mid-western public research university.

Principal Investigator: Mark Kretovics and Neete Saha

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand and describe how undergraduate international students in the College of Arts and Sciences at Mid-Western University experience academic advising. Through interviews, which will be audio recorded and transcribed, the goal is to hear international students’ perspectives and their views on academic advising in order to assist administrators and advisors to be more effective in their advice and support to international students. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Kent State University (Protocol #15-638).

Benefits: With the exceptions of self-reflection during interviews, there are no anticipated benefits for the participants in this study. However, this research will generate new perspectives about the effectiveness of academic advising with international students. It will help us understand how international students view academic advising, which can be educational for academic advisors.

Risks: With the exception of students’ time, there are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

Privacy and Confidentiality: This will be a voluntary study; participants can withdraw at any times. Although excerpts will be used in publications, pseudonyms will be used for participants and audio data will be kept secure and confidential.

Compensation: Participants will receive a $15 Starbucks gift cards.

Consent Statement and Signature:

Please sign and date below if you have fully understood the consent form and want to participate in the study.
Name ____________________________ Signature ____________________________
Email ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Audio Recording:

Please sign and date below if you have fully understood the consent form and want to participate in the audio recording.
Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Contact Information:

Mark Kretovics  mkreto1@kent.edu  330-672-0642
Neete Saha  nsaha@kent.edu  330-672-2862
APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE
Appendix D

Questionnaire

General Questions for the Questionnaire (Demographic and Academic information)
Note: Addressing questions about context and recruitment criteria.

1. What is your name?

2. What is your email address?

3. Please check your class status: (Note: would like to target different class level to understand if their experiences with advising changed over time).
   - Freshman (1st year)
   - Sophomore (2nd year)
   - Junior (3rd year)
   - Senior (4th year or more)

4. What is your GPA?

5. What is your gender? Male/Female

6. How old are you? (Note: Check box -18 years or older)

7. Are you on F-1 visa? (Note: only F-1 students are eligible to participate in this study)
   Yes/No

8. Where were you born (i.e. country)?

9. What is your nationality?

10. What is your primary/native language?

11. How long in total have you been residing in the USA?

12. Are you a transfer student? (For your undergraduate degree, have you attended any other US or foreign institutions prior to this university?) Yes/No

13. Are you an exchange student (are you participating in a study abroad program)? Yes/No

14. Are you currently enrolled in ESL classes?

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Major/Career Choice

15. What is/are your declared major/s?

16. Have you changed your major recently? If selected yes, students will be asked the following: please list your former major?

17. Has anyone helped you with your major/career decision (i.e. family, parents, academic advisors, friends, professors)?

Advising Tools

18. How familiar are you with the electronic version of the semester by semester course guide (It helps you to keep track of your courses)?

19. How familiar are you with semester by semester course guide (this tool provides a list of courses required for graduation)?

20. Are you familiar with MWU Catalog (MWU Catalog provide information about institutional policies and procedures for students)?

Yes/No, if selected yes, students will be asked to answer the following question: Have you used Catalog to learn about institutional policies and procedures for students?

21. How do you decide which courses you need to take for each semester?

   Using semester by semester course guide
   Using electronic version of the semester by semester course guide
   With advisors’ Help
   Help from friends
   All of the above

Extracurricular Activities

22. Do you take part in any extra-curricular activities (i.e. student organizations, sports)? Yes or No

   No
Academic Advising

23. Who do you go to when you need academic help (i.e., registration, class schedule, resources, change of major, careers etc.)?
Academic Advisor, Professors/Instructors, International Office, Friends, Others

24. Have you completed at least one semester of advising with the College of Arts and Sciences?
Yes or no, If not why not?

25. How many times do you meet with your academic advisor in a semester?

26. Have you seen the same advisor during each of your advising meeting?

27. How long are your advising appointments (i.e., 15 min, 20 min, 45 min, 30 min, 60 min)?

28. On a scale from 1 to 5 (5=very satisfied, 1=very dissatisfied), how satisfied are you with your academic advising experience?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you are interested in participating in a face to face interview, please indicate your name, email address, and phone number. I will contact you for an interview if you meet the selection criteria.

Name

Email address

Phone number
Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: Prompts for Interview Questions

Name of Participant:                                             Pseudonym:

Date:                          Interview time:                                     Interview location:

Introduction

Overview of study

Review of Consent Form

Career/Majors/ Academic Semester/ Extracurricular activities (Note: addressing questions about academic and career decision making)

1. What classes are you taking this semester?

2. What do you like about this University?

3. How is your semester going?
   
   **Prompts:** How are you doing in your classes this semester?

4. You listed your major as ______. Why did you major in ___?
   
   **Prompts:** How did you decide on your major?

5. You stated that your _____ helped you with selecting your major. Can you tell me more about that (or Has anyone influenced you with choosing a major [i.e., family, parents, academic advisors, friends, professors])?
   
   **Prompts:** Did your academic advisor help you? What are some of the ways your academic advisor/s helped you to select a major? Provide examples (i.e., via discussions, information, resources, referrals etc.)

6. Can you tell me about your academic and career goals?
Prompts: If you were helped by your advisor, what are some of the ways your academic advisor/s helped you with your academic and career goals?

7. Have you received any help from your academic advisor about your career? What type of advice and information have you received from your advisors about your career?

8. You stated that you are part of ________organizations/sports. Tell me how did you make the decision to get involved with extra-curricular activities?

Prompts: Did anyone help you such as your family, academic advisors, classmates, professors, and friends? If so, explain?

Knowledge and Experience of Academic Advising/ Academic Advisors (Note: addressing questions about the aspects of academic advising that are beneficial to students and their overall experiences with advising)

1. How would you describe what academic advising is and what academic advisors do if you are talking to your friend who just came from your country?

Prompts: What is academic advising? What is your understanding of academic advising?

2. Tell me about your experience with academic advising.

Prompts: How would you describe your experience with academic advising?

Were you familiar with academic advising services prior to attending this institution? How did you learn about academic advising?

Did you use or have academic advising in your home country?

3. Can you tell me more about your reasons to visit your academic advisor (Provide some examples i.e., it’s required, questions regarding schedule, registration, career related questions, etc.)?

Prompts: Why do you visit your academic advisor?
Tell me why and when you first met with your advisor.

4. You stated that for academic help you go to ________

   **Prompts:** Who do you go to when you need academic help (i.e., questions regarding schedule, registration, career related questions, etc.)?

   How many times do you visit your academic advisor in a semester?

5. Recall your last advising appointment and tell me what are some of the topics you discussed during your advising appointments (i.e. electronic version of roadmap, resources, road maps, class schedule and registration, careers, jobs, internships, graduate school, etc.) (adapted from Schroeder & Terras (2015) interview questions)?

   **Prompts:** Did you feel your advisor helped you with your questions?

   Do you think academic advising is useful?

6. You stated that you ____. How comfortable do you feel discussing academic issues with your academic advisor?

   **Prompts:** Tell me how you feel when you talk to your advisor/s?

   Do you feel comfortable meeting with your advisors?

   Was your advisor approachable and easy to talk to? (If not, what can they do to become more approachable?)

7. As international students, in what ways, if any, have cultural differences made it uneasy for you to communicate with your advisor. What about the differences in language (if relevant)?

   **Prompts:** Can you provide any examples or describe a situation when cultural and/or language differences made it difficult for you to communicate with your advisor?
Benefits of Academic Advising (Note: addressing questions about the success and persistence)

1. What are some of the benefits of academic advising?

   **Prompts:** What aspects of academic advising have you found to be useful?
   Did you find your advising appointments to be effective and helpful?

2. Give two examples when and how you were helped by your academic advisor?

3. Give two examples when and how you were not helped by your academic advisor?

4. What contributed to your academic success? What are some of the ways academic advising helped you to become successful academically?

5. What are some of the criticisms and disadvantages of academic advising?

   **Prompts:** What are some of the ways academic advising can be improved for international students?

Closing Questions

1. As an international student, what were your expectations of academic advising?

2. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your overall academic advising experience at this university?

   **Prompts:** In your opinion, good academic advising is _______________

   In your opinion, bad academic advising is ______________________ (adapted from Schroeder & Terras [2015] interview questions).

3. How would you describe your overall experience with your academic advisor/s at this university?

   **Prompts:** In your opinion, good academic advisors are _______________

   In your opinion, bad academic advisors are ______________________ (adapted from Schroeder & Terras [2015] interview questions).
4. What can academic advisors do to help international students?

**Prompts:** How can academic advisors assist international students with their academic lives?

5. What suggestions do you have for academic advisors working with international students?

6. What would be your advice to new international students in regards to academic advising?

7. Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX F

TIMELINE FOR IRB REQUEST/APPROVAL

AND RECRUITMENT ATTEMPTS
Appendix F

Timeline for IRB Request/Approval and Recruitment Attempts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/9/2015</td>
<td>Submitted IRB application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/10/2015</td>
<td>Received IRB approval (IRB #15-638)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/14/2015</td>
<td>Communicated with Institutional Research for contact information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/19/2016</td>
<td>Received contact information from Institutional Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/22/2016</td>
<td>Recruitment email: Template 1 (subject line: Call for Participants: International Students’ Experiences with Academic Advising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/26/2016</td>
<td>Recruitment email: Template 1 (subject line: Call for Participants: International Students’ Experiences with Academic Advising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2/2016</td>
<td>Recruitment email: Template 1 (subject line: Call for Participants: International Students’ Experiences with Academic Advising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/9/2016</td>
<td>Recruitment email: Template 2 (subject line: HELP US IMPROVE ADVISING 😊)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2/9/2016</td>
<td>Submitted amendment/change request to IRB to increase participation rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/16/2016</td>
<td>Recruitment email: Template 2 (subject line: HELP US IMPROVE ADVISING 😊)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/22/2016</td>
<td>Received IRB approval for the amendment/change request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9/2016</td>
<td>Communicated with Institutional Research and received an updated list of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/10/2016</td>
<td>Recruitment email: Template 2 (subject line: HELP US IMPROVE ADVISING 😊)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/15/2016</td>
<td>Recruitment email: Template 3 (subject line: Get a $15 Starbucks Gift Card and Help Us Improve Advising! 😊)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/22/2016</td>
<td>Recruitment email: Template 3 (subject line: Get a $15 Starbucks Gift Card and Help Us Improve Advising! 😊)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/18/2016</td>
<td>Emailed the Director of the ESL Center to reach out former and current students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/29/2016</td>
<td>Director of ESL Center sent email to 82 former ESL students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Reflective Memos

Reflective Memo #1: IRB process

Although I had expected the IRB process to be quite simple and straightforward, it turned out to be a lengthy process. In fact, it took a few email exchanges and phone calls with the IRB office to obtain the IRB approval for my study. A few weeks after my IRB application submission, I received an email from the IRB office with questions that needed to be addressed right away. Frankly, it did not make sense to me why IRB office needed clarification on questions that were clearly explained on the initial application. It seemed almost silly and unnecessary. Although annoyed at first, I checked with the IRB office for clarification along with International Office and Legal services. I also checked with my dissertation committee for suggestions and feedback. I made the suggested changes, and finally, the IRB office approved my study and I was on my way to collect data. Considering that my IRB application was for an interview study for academic advising, I was surprised that my study was not approved right away. However, it was a learning process for me and I will be able to use these guidelines for future studies.

Reflective Memo #2: Recruitment phase for face-to-face interviews

Although I received my IRB approval toward the end of December 2015, I decided to wait until the end of January 2016 to send out my first recruitment email since classes did not begin until mid-January. For several reasons, I was very optimistic with securing participants for my study. First and foremost, a few years back, I had a very positive response for my first study with international student populations. Thus, I had hoped for
a similar outcome for this study. Second, upon completion of interviews, I planned to provide students with $15 Starbucks gift card and who can reject Starbucks? Third, it was an interview study, so I thought international students would like to share their advising experience with me. Fourth, I thought having an international sounding name might appeal to students and make them feel comfortable speaking with me. With these assumptions in mind, in the spring of 2016, I sent eight recruitment emails to 191 participants who met the criteria. Every month, from January to April, I sent two to three emails to the selected list of students. At first, it was very exciting because 54 students completed the questionnaire, so I had hoped that all of these students would agree to speak with me face to face. However, that was not the case—some students viewed the questionnaire but did not complete it, some students did not want to participate in the interviews, some agreed to participate but did not show up during interviews, some did not meet the criteria (perhaps received questionnaire link from friends), and others did not respond to any emails. In order to appeal to students, I used diverse and catchy subject lines, I addressed students by their first names, I used graphics and I reduced interview times to one hour from 1.5 to 2 hours. I continued my attempts to recruit students until June of 2016. I reached out to various international student organizations, colleagues with international background; colleagues who work with international students, and the Director of the ESL Center. I also completed an amendment form for IRB, so I could request my participants to recommend their friends or colleagues to take part in my study. In fact, I emailed and texted my participants in hopes to recruit more participants. Despite taking the entire spring semester to recruit, with all my attempts,
only 13 participants agreed to participate in my study. Although I was worried at first with having only 13 participants, I believed in my data, which was not only rich but significant for the purpose of the study.

**Reflective Memo #3: First face-to-face interview**

When I sent out my recruitment email, Warada, a mathematics major, and a female Muslim student was the first to respond to my email. An ambitious and a very positive student, who identified herself as Tanzanian and Omani due to her roots in both countries, she spoke in great length about her satisfaction with Academic Advising and her experience at the institution under study. The interview lasted for 2 hours and it was a very productive interview. She was in a leadership role for two different organizations and spoke very powerfully and eloquently about her career goals of being a teacher/professor. She sincerely described her advisor as a “father figure” because of his support and encouragement during advising sessions. This was very interesting for me to hear but I understood what she meant. It was obvious that she not only respected her advisor but also valued advising and was grateful for this service.

**Reflective Memo #4: Meeting with my participants**

I absolutely enjoyed speaking with my interview participants. Although I had completed an interview for a class project, this was the first time I interviewed participants for an empirical study. I decided to meet with my participants at the institution’s library, so it could be convenient and comfortable for students. However, it was a learning process for me because it involved not only building rapports and trust with my participants but also figuring out some logistical issues. Reserving a quiet study room in the library was
difficult because the study rooms were occupied most of the times and it was very
difficult to reserve ahead unless participants confirmed their appointments with me.
Sometimes it was difficult to block two hours in advance because there was no
availability for a two-hour block. In fact, there were times when I was only able to
reserve a room for an hour. As a result, even though when I was not done with
interviews, I had to clear the room and sit outside with my participant, which was noisy at
times. In addition to having difficulty with finding a quiet space for my interviews, I also
ran into an issue with a participant who did not have a phone and since we did not know
each other, it took a few minutes to find each other at the library. Although I had
designated an area in the library for us to meet, I relied on cell phones to locate my
participants since we did not know each other. Thus, with the student without a phone
number, I had to rely on email responses and it took a few minutes to locate each other.
It was definitely an interesting experience.

Reflective Memo #5: Chaotic nature of data analysis
My over-excitement to conduct my interviews and analyze my data at the same time
came to an end very suddenly when I was unable to see common threads in my data right
away. Data analysis was chaotic, time-consuming, and overwhelming. I could not
understand what was happening even though I spent numerous hours on my data analysis.
I was questioning if I had enough data and wondering what more I could have done
considering my trouble with recruiting participants. I meticulously read the transcripts
several times. I listened to the audio recording several times. I followed the steps for
initial and focused coding per constant comparative method of analysis. I then stepped
away from my data and reread my transcripts. While panicking in my disbelief that I may not have enough data to finish my data analysis, I spoke with my committee members for their suggestions. They all confirmed for me that, with an exploratory study like mine, my data should be sufficient, and it is okay to report out everyone’s comments if I am unable to find commonalities within my data. I had to quickly realize that my study was an exploratory qualitative study so it’s all right to have different answers. I also had to acknowledge that my participants were very diverse and it only makes sense to hear diverse opinions from them. While lamenting in my worries to produce a quality project, I completed all my interviews and reviewed all of my transcripts again as a whole. Luckily, I started noticing similarities as well as differences in my participants’ remarks. Then it was time to finish my data analysis and begin writing.

**Reflective Memo #6: Writing up my analysis**

I spent so much time analyzing my data that I neglected the importance of writing. I do not particularly enjoy writing so that also influenced my reluctance with the writing process. However, I kept myself updated with the current literature in academic advising and wrote occasionally to summarize some of the findings. Once I had completed my analysis and started writing, it seemed that there was so much for me to include in my findings. Every excerpt told a story and selecting one over another has certainly been tough. I believe it was Charmaz who said importance is determined by researchers. So, if I think of something is important, then it’s important. Some of the students had beautifully articulated their feelings and opinions about academic advising. My goal was now to find ways to disseminate all the matters reported by the participants.
Reflective Memo #7: Career/major decisions made early

An overwhelming majority of the participants stated that they did not receive any help from their academic advisors about their career/major. Many were aware of their career interests and selected their majors prior to attending the institution under study. Several factors influenced these participants’ career/major decisions. Penny shared that a journalist in Bolivia influenced her decisions to choose international relations as her major. Faban was influenced by her brother who also chose medical terminology for his undergraduate major. From the age of 14 and 15, Diya knew that she would like to pursue medicine after college. Although Adam’s initial major was Biological Engineering, he remained interested in Chemistry and decided to change his major to Biochemistry. Salwa’s love for Philosophy and Arabic influenced her to select philosophy as her major. Charlie and Aalia liked the Computer Science and Biotechnology classes respectively, which they took in high school, and decided to continue with them in college. Thus, participants selected major that reflected their prior interests or future career plans. Despite having some prior knowledge and interests about major/careers, there were a couple of students who changed their initial majors. During that time, these participants sought help from their academic advisors.

Reflective Memo #8: Advising is a support system for new students

According to Warada, advising is a much-needed support system for students who are new to a country and who are unfamiliar with institutional rules and regulations. Upon coming to a host country, students are being exposed to a new system, a new environment, and a new technology. Thus, having someone to explain the new territory
is a valuable experience for many students. Warada reveals, unlike Tanzania, at this university, “you choose your classes, you choose your time, [and] you choose your teachers. You choose what you are going to study now, what you are going to study later.” Many international students are not accustomed to these practices; thus, support is critical for them to become acclimated to the university and course requirements. Sara, who is from Malaysia, concurs with Warada. She was very happy when her academic advisor helped her with transferring courses from Malaysia. Without the advisor’s help, Sara would have had to take additional courses to graduate, which is not only costly for international students but also it would have delayed her graduation. As a senior, Sara believes faculty advisors are more knowledgeable and helpful to her than academic advisors. However, she acknowledges that during “freshman year it was definitely helpful to have someone—especially an international student to have someone to guide me, show me what [the university] is, explain to me what I need to do, you know how to pick classes and all those very basic things.” Warada and Sara’s statements demonstrate that advising has supported them immensely as international students.

Reflective Memo #9: Satisfaction with advising/advisors

Although there were some expectations from academic advisors/advising, overall, participants were satisfied with academic advising and academic advising. They were happy with the service and believed that it was instrumental for them as international students. Due to advising, the transition period for these students was less stressful. They appreciated that someone was there to guide and assist them. Although many believed faculty advisors were more knowledgeable than the academic advisors, they
recognized the assistance they received from academic advisors with placement testing, course selections, transfer courses and majors. Many expected their advisors to be more proficient about graduate school and training opportunities. A few expected their advisors to know more about the major and courses required for the majors. Nonetheless, due to academic advising/advisors, they were able to learn about various resources at the institution that helped them with their academic plans and goals.
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