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Miami, Florida

THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE: AN EXPLORATION OF THE  
IMPACT OF STRESSORS ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

by

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This dissertation, written by Elaine Micheline Hodge, and entitled *The International Student Experience: An Exploration of the Impact of Stressors on International Students*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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## DEDICATION

I express my deepest gratitude to Papa Dios for His unwavering guidance and strength throughout my life. I dedicate this work to my sweetest girls, my daughters Eva Maria and Ella Mia, who have always been my biggest cheerleaders; everything I do is for them. To my parents, Barbara and Carlos, your unwavering encouragement and belief in the value of hard work and dedication have been invaluable. Pa, your confidence in me has been a constant source of inspiration. Ma, your reminders to always say my prayers and to trust in Papa Dios' plan have been a guiding light. To my sister, Aisheline, your love, support, and constant reminder that “het komt wel goed” kept me motivated. Masha danki na bosotur! Nos a logranos meta! And lastly, to all international students on this journey of learning and discovering in a foreign land, remember that as long as you set your mind to it, you too can achieve great things!

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This quantitative study explored challenges international students encounter, helping us understand how their challenges and the support they receive from their peers and the university relate to their learning experience and academic performance. Previous research on this topic focused primarily on language and social/cultural challenges and their effect on student performance; however, this research also incorporated support received from university resources and academic advisors and its impact on their academic adaptation and performance. Data was collected via survey from 166 international students on F-1 visas. The Structural Equation Model (SEM) was analyzed using SmartPLS4. The findings of this research study show that the hypotheses explained the significant impact of language and social/cultural challenges on international students' adaptation. However, it also showed the importance of support these students require from university resources to adapt and perform well academically. To maintain their competitive advantage and keep these international students

enrolled, universities must ensure they receive the best educational experience. Universities depend on the tuition earned from these international students; thus, it is of utmost importance that the issues that international students face should be understood. Therefore, higher education institutions must allocate resources to ensure academic success despite these stressors. The study also provided evidence of the adaptability of the Job Demands Resources theory to studies in the context of international students in higher education because, in order to succeed, students also need to balance the challenges they face ( demands) with the support ( resources) they receive.

Keywords: International Students, Higher Education, International Student Stressors, Academic Advising, Service Quality

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### **Problem Statement**

When deciding to study abroad, international students do not take the decision lightly, as it greatly impacts them and their families. Moving to a new country that some may have never visited brings with it lots of stressors that may make it difficult to adjust to the host country. Typically, when students face acculturative stressors, it affects their academic performance and may ultimately prolong the time it takes to complete their degree.

An international student is classified as an F-1 or J-1 student. F-1 nonimmigrant students, as defined in section 101(a)(15)(F) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), are international students coming to the United States to pursue a degree in Student and Exchange Visitors Program (SEVP) approved schools while J-1 classification is reserved for those students who are sponsored by an exchange program designated by the US Department of State. With the global pandemic in 2020 came a change in the criteria for being considered an international student due to the border closures that prevented international students from attending US institutions. The term international students now also includes international students attending US institutions entirely online while residing in their home country.

There are over 320,000 students enrolled in the State University System of Florida, of which about 30,000 are considered international students and hail from about 200 countries. The Florida College System comprises 28 public community colleges and state schools and enrolls approximately 813,000 students. International students encourage cultural diversity, cross-cultural interaction, academic exchange, and revenue

generation for the institutions. Regardless of all the benefits of having an international student in the US, one could argue that international students moving to the US to further their education benefits both parties equally. Yet, the pressure an international student experiences in the acculturation process makes their transitions more taxing.

International students are a vulnerable and overlooked student population. For many of these international students, it is their first experience in the US educational system, living on their own and adapting to a foreign country, and even having to experience this while simultaneously learning a new language (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). International students experience quite a few changes as they embark on their new life and studies in the United States. International students' numerous coping behaviors to manage stress during acculturation have health and academic performance implications. Academic adjustments involve more than just a student's potential; it also encompasses factors such as motivation and the need to experience a sense of belonging (Bastien, 2018). These academic adjustment problems tend to focus on language issues, but research shows that language barriers are not the only issues they face.

International students are burdened with a triple transition when moving to the US (Pho & Schartner, 2021). Upon international students' arrival in a new country, they must adjust to the language, cultural differences, and the new educational system. Undoubtedly, this transition will bring about challenges; they will face academic, social, psychological, and language difficulties that they will need to tackle early on to succeed academically. Son and Cho (2020) suggest that the host country's academic culture and educational system significantly affect international students' academic performance.

This study explores factors that affect international students as well as factors that support academic performance and these students' satisfaction with their learning experience. The time it takes to complete a degree is an important factor since international students are typically granted a four or five-year student visa to complete their Bachelor's Degree. For international students, this means there is more pressure on the timeline for completing their degree; additionally, it also means that international students have a smaller margin of error than domestic students because they do not have the luxury of dropping and failing classes. Dropping a course could place them below full-time student status, which is in direct violation of their F-1 visa requirement. Dropping below the full-time student status would immediately prompt the student to be flagged in the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS) database, and failure to remedy the dropped class would cause the international student to be out of status by the Department of Homeland Security. The repercussions of violating their F-1 visa requirements make these international students unable to receive re-entry privileges, maintain on-campus employment privileges, and unable to enroll in classes the following term. These are just some reasons that international students have this added pressure while also facing challenges associated with adjusting to their new university or college environment. Thus, it is imperative that international students are able to adapt academically and have a satisfactory academic performance every semester.

Additionally, since state funding is linked to degree completion based on different metrics measures, the time it takes students to complete their degree would also impact funding and revenue generation for the university in general. Student satisfaction is a key factor that institutions need to consider because it can considerably affect international

student attendance, which is an essential portion of revenue generation. Universities must offer international students the best possible educational experience to ensure the institution does not lose its competitive advantage over other universities. International students attract family, friends, and acquaintances through word-of-mouth, and one way to ensure that these students recommend the university is by ensuring they are satisfied with their experience at the institution. Not only by acknowledging their challenges but also by ensuring there is support to mitigate these challenges. Therefore, universities must understand the challenges and issues that may affect their academic performances, which could affect their satisfaction and intention to return.

International students pay tuition rates equal to three times that of in-state students at certain institutions. The economic dependence of universities on fees from international students makes it critical for universities to fully understand the issues that confront these students and highlights the importance of studies on the academic performance of international students.

The National Association for Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA) Economic Value Statistics Report shows that international students studying in the US contributed \$28.4 billion to the US economy during the 2020-021 school year, of which \$1.1 billion was in Florida. Due to the levels of tuition revenue generated by international students, any decrease in the international student population would directly and negatively impact university resources that other sources of support would not easily offset (Bound et al.,2021). In this case, universities would suffer revenue loss based on the loss of international student tuition. Moreover, state funding could decrease due to the decline in graduation rates, decline in retention rates, and decline in net tuition and fees per 120

credits, all of which can be caused by the departure of international students. The increased tuition revenue generated from international students should encourage universities to commit to spending more on activities to increase academic performance, which will directly impact graduation rates. Additionally, universities can allot their monies to resources to create favorable outcomes for these students.

In 2014, the Board of Governors adopted the performance-based model, and since its implementation, state funding has significantly increased (Florida Board of Governors, 2020). The Florida Board of Governors' (2021) Performance-Based Funding Model includes ten common items for all institutions in the state university system (SUS). Some measures include students' degree completion timeline, second-year retention with an above 2.0 GPA, net tuition, and fees per 120 credits, and Bachelor's Degree completion in a strategic emphasis area. However, there is no distinction between student populations; thus, international students are grouped with all students and are not measured separately. Moreover, this enhances the international student population's contribution to the university; these students pay high tuition rates. Moreover, they are also included in the common items (# 3, 4-6 & 9a) that are measured on the metrics for state funding. Table 1 illustrates the ten common items that are included in the metrics.

It is important to note that international students are not tracked separately in the ten common items included in the metrics. However, they contribute to the outcomes, i.e., international students' graduation numbers contribute to the overall graduation rates of the different metrics measures. This means that despite having challenges that domestic students do not have, such as language challenges, cultural differences, academic challenges, etc., as far as the university is concerned, they must still graduate in the



required timeline, depending on their cohort. For example, despite being labeled by their F-1 Visa Status and having to follow specific requirements to maintain their status, they are not distinguished from domestic students when it comes to the metrics measures.

If an international student is labeled a First-Time-In-College (FTIC) student, they must graduate in four years, the same as any other FTIC student; if they are a transfer student with an Associate's in Arts Degree from one of the State of FL public institutions, they are required to graduate in two years, etc. So, these students are measured on the same level as domestic students, even though they face more challenges. These are some key reasons why international students must be provided additional help to ensure they graduate on time.

**Table 1 Performance-Based Funding Model**

Metrics Common to all Institutions	
1. Percent of Bachelor's Graduates Employed (Earning \$25,000+) or Continuing their Education	6. Bachelor's Degrees Awarded in Areas of Strategic Emphasis
2. Median Wages of Bachelor's Graduates Employed Full-time	7. University Access Rate (Percent of Undergraduates with a Pell-grant)
3. Average Cost to the Student (Net Tuition per 120 Credit Hours)	8a. Graduate Degrees Awarded in Areas of Strategic Emphasis 8b. Freshman in Top 10% of Graduating High School Class - for NCF and FL Poly only
4. Four Year Graduation Rate (Full-time FTIC)	9a. Two-Year Graduation Rate for FCS Associate in Arts Transfer Student 9b. Six-Year Graduation Rate for Students who are Awarded a Pell Grant in their First Year 9b.1 Academic Progress Rate, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year Retention for FTIC with a Pell Grant - for FL Poly only
5. Academic Progress Rate (2 <sup>nd</sup> Year Retention with GPA Above 2.0)	10. Board of Trustees Choice

Table 1 *Performance-Based Funding Model Overview 2021*. <https://www.flbog.edu/wp-content/uploads/Overview-Doc-Performance-Funding-10-Metric-Model-Condensed-Version-Mar-2021.pdf>

In recent years, the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors have been amplified due to their constant direct contact with students. Students are now viewed in

their entirety rather than just identified by their major of choice; advisors have become teachers, mentors, counselors, and coaches ( Crookston, 1972). Academic advisors are trained on all the university/college policies and procedures and support services offered to university students. They constantly pursue professional development opportunities to remain abreast of ways to provide support to diverse student populations. Academic Advisors help students connect with other students ( either through clubs or organizations or peer-to-peer connections)and are generally a guide to help students navigate the university.

The primary purpose of the research is to evaluate the effect of challenges and support on international students and amplify the role academic advising services play in these students' academic performance.

### **Significance of the Problem**

There is no distinction between local, out-of-state, and international students' contributions to the graduation rates. Hence, it is imperative that we study how challenges and support systems offered by the university can affect international students' academic performance, which could also directly influence their graduation rates.

Student retention and the number of years it takes to complete the degree affect graduation rates, ultimately impacting state funding. Ensuring international students are performing well academically and satisfied with their university/college experience can directly impact graduation rates and state funding.

With this research, the focus will be on the effect of the stressors, their impact on international students' academic performance, and how impactful support offered to these

students can be. Based on this information, future studies can be expanded to analyze whether international students significantly contribute to graduation rates.

### **Research Gap**

A fair amount of research has been conducted on the effects of acculturation on international students' academic performance. A considerable amount of research has also been conducted on international students' stressors affecting their retention rates. However, the role of academic advising and institutional support services and their role on academic performance regarding the international student population has not been researched much. Thus, there is not much research on the role of academic advisors in mitigating the challenges international students face while increasing support for these students. This study will examine the importance of having reliable and knowledgeable university or college academic advisors to help international students navigate their way around their new university or college campus.

### **Research Question**

This research will address the following question: What is the effect of challenges and support on international students' academic performances in public Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in South Florida?

### **Research Contributions**

Not all universities have assigned advisors for each student or international student. With this research study, I plan to illustrate the importance of having assigned academic advisors. Also, it will help further demonstrate how having assigned academic

advisors can improve international students' adaptation to university or college life in the US. The hope is that other institutions will adopt the assigned advisor model, even if only applied to the advisors' international student caseload. These students would be provided with a designated advisor who will serve as their source of information, someone they can reach out to whenever they face challenges, need answers to pressing issues or support them to help enrich their university/college experience. Moreover, this can help make their transition to life in the US more manageable, allowing them to adapt academically and ensure successful academic performance. International students' successful academic performance will enable the HEIs to increase retention and graduation rates, ultimately affecting state funding.

Studies in higher education are typically centered around student development theories, student integration theories, student involvement theories, student leadership development theories, and student departure theories. However, I will utilize an employee well-being model in this study, namely the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory. Another contribution to higher education literature would be using an employee well-being model, namely that of Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory. Using this theory gives a different perspective to demands and resources, namely that of challenges and support from a student's well-being perspective. This theory posits that when job demands are high, available resources must be positive or high to decrease stress, which could easily translate into an international student's transition. In this instance, job demands are equivalent to challenges that international students could encounter and face during their transition to life in the US and the US educational system. On the other hand, the resources would be regarded as the

university's support services, peer support, and academic advising services available to all students, even though this research focuses on international students. Utilizing this theory suggests that all university/college students have demands, albeit different from those of international students, and it is the university/college's responsibility to make resources available to mitigate these challenges and increase academic performance.

## CHAPTER II: BACKGROUND LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

From the reviewed literature, the consensus is that international students' adjustment to their new environment is based on numerous acculturation factors (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Cross, 1995; Sandhu, 1995; Barratt & Huba, 1994), some of which include country of origin, English fluency, and social support. Research studies done on international students reported many challenges experienced by this special student population, for instance, language barriers which, aside from causing academic difficulties in some students, have also shown to cause interpersonal problems due to the difficulty for some of these students to express themselves in the English language which may cause them to feel a sense of alienation (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Cultural differences (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992) also influence these students' willingness to interact with students from the host country. Homesickness also plagues these students, especially when they leave behind tight-knit families and communities to move to the US. They may experience a sense of loneliness because they do not know where to go or whom to turn to for support.

However, it is also necessary to state that these students have additional stressors that affect their performance, such as mandatory compliance, financial stressors, language challenges, social/cultural challenges, and academic challenges, to name a few. International students must enroll in at least 12 credits and maintain full-time status every semester. They are stressed with paying exorbitant tuition fees, maintaining good grades, and maintaining at least 12 credits per semester to remain in status with the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

Increased pressure due to finances and finding a job on campus may impact academic performance negatively. Additionally, international students on F-1 visas may work a maximum of 20 hours per week on campus. Even though international students are permitted to work on campus, they compete with citizen and permanent resident students eligible for federal work-study for on-campus jobs, and many departments give preference to students eligible for federal work-study. Additionally, there are limited scholarships that international students are eligible for. International students deal with multi-faceted factors daily, which can cause undue stress, adding to the stress students already encounter due to acculturation.

Language challenges could be considered the most pressing challenge for any international student. Language barrier or challenges can affect their self-confidence and make them self-conscious about expressing themselves. Most of the time, these students may know the English language. Still, they may not necessarily be aware of slang or local lingo used, which could affect their in-class participation and self-confidence, which, in turn, may also influence their academic performance (Andrade, 2006). Another challenge language challenges bring is that when students are self-conscious about speaking the language and communicating with peers, it could also make it difficult for them to make friends and create that social support system they require. These numerous challenges international students face warrant having support systems in place to help make the transition to life in the US while attending university or college a positive experience.

### **Academic Performance**

Numerous factors could influence an international student's academic performance. Academic performance evaluations have been a complicated construct due

to the numerous dimensions that could be measured (Braxton, 2006; Kuh et al., 2007). Previous work by Kuh et al. (2007) and Steinmayr et al. (2014) suggests that student success has a broad definition and includes academic accomplishment, engagement in educational activities, satisfaction, achieving desired knowledge and educational objectives, skills and competencies, persistence, and post-college performance. Even though the different markers of success are acknowledged, for the purpose of this study, I will utilize one of the most frequently utilized measures of academic performance, namely, the student's grades and grade point average (GPA). GPA has been shown to be a valid predictor of success (Burton & Ramist 2001) and also of subsequent success based on the meta-analysis conducted by Kuncze et al. (2005); however, it must be utilized with caution due to the frame-of-reference effect, which can distort the perception of the professor's evaluation of a student's performance. The student's GPA is determined by the average of the student's performance on examinations for each class they are enrolled in. There will also be a focus on students passing their course requirements on the first attempt with a grade of C or higher and satisfactory academic standing since these factors could also affect a student's time to degree completion (Andrade, 2006).

### **Academic Challenges**

A student's academic success largely depends on their first-year experience (Medved et al., 2013; Jean-Francois, 2019). A student's first year can often set the tone for their future academic performance; a successful first semester may give them confidence, and the reverse is also true. Moreover, a successful first semester may also provide them with the confidence to socialize with peers and engage with the university or college community. A student's environment impacts the development of required



competencies to succeed (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009); it also motivates student engagement in social and academic activities and influences personal and professional self-perceptions. Rugutt and Chemosit (2009) also argue that a student's involvement in learning is integral to their academic achievement. A student's involvement in their learning encompasses working on independent projects, studying, and discussing classwork with other students. Furthermore, student-faculty interactions also play an important role in a student's academic performance; when international students feel comfortable interacting with their professors, they are more inclined to engage in the classroom or reach out during office hours for extra help and support.

Typically, international students familiar with "the American way of doing things" were better equipped to manage academic and societal expectations. Al-Sharideh and Goe's (1998) assumption of international students' assimilation is that the more they can assimilate into American culture and learn to interact with Americans, the more successful they will be academically. Helping international students cope with adjusting to their new environment has become an important concern for university administrators due to the potential attrition that can affect the university's graduation rate and, in turn, affect performance-based funding. Academic adjustment requires more than just a student's potential- it also encompasses factors such as motivation and the need to experience a sense of belonging (Bastien, 2018). To ensure the continued enrollment of international students and facilitate academic success, higher education institutions should acknowledge these students' challenges. By meeting the needs of this unique population and implementing measures to ensure success, the institutions would ensure that the full benefits of diversity are recognized.

It is imperative to understand how to help aid and facilitate the adjustment of international students on college campuses to promote an enjoyable college experience that will manifest into a good academic experience for international students (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). Students must persist in their academic careers by integrating or adapting academically to graduate; they must also integrate socially by actively participating in the student culture and activities within and outside the learning environment (Tinto, 1998), which also applies to international students.

### **Language Challenges**

Having a language barrier is a challenge that affects many international students, especially first-year students. It impedes them from creating meaningful interactions and relationships with their peers and professors, according to Jean-Francois (2017). Students have their own perceived learning expectations and expectations for instructors' communication behavior due to cultural differences (Houser, 2005), and students who are not confident in communicating may forfeit these meaningful relationships with their professors.

Communication can be detrimental to those who do not necessarily follow the language, whose culture dictates conflicting behaviors, or who are not versed in the technology being utilized. Adequate language proficiency is crucial in preparation as international students embark on their academic journey (Park et al., 2017); it prepares them for success. An international student's English language proficiency greatly influences their academic achievement; it is vital for them to feel accepted by their peers and professors. Miscommunication occurs when no information is received or when the information received is not what the sender intended (Van de Ven, 2007). Accented

English causes two distinct problems for students: it causes communication challenges, and the accent makes it difficult for others to comprehend. A high level of English proficiency improves academic performance (Yeh & Inose,2003; Li et al.,2018), and a lower English language proficiency level is considered a primary challenge and barrier to academic success (Leong,2015). Students who lack knowledge of the English language usually fear engaging in classroom discussions or with peers. International students often have problems listening to a speaker or lecturer due to their limited vocabulary. This Fear can adversely affect their academic performance due to their vulnerability, and professors often fail to recognize the complexity of international students' language issues.

The international student's accent may cause communication difficulties; on the other hand, the Professor's accent could also cause comprehension difficulties for the students (Park et al., 2017). Challenges in communicating due to accented English can, directly and indirectly, affect the student's learning environment, which can negatively influence the student's academic experience and social adjustment.

### **Social/Cultural Challenge**

Cultural adjustment is described as ways students avoid or overcome specific problems that could affect their well-being (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 2017). Many international students face difficulties when adjusting to a new culture. An international student's presence contributes to the state's cultural and US diversity (Leong,2015). International students influence globalization in US institutions of higher education, and these students benefit from obtaining a US higher education degree. Emotions play a significant role in cultural adaptation because of one's values, norms, and beliefs (Molinsky, 2007). On the other hand, factors that affect international students' self-perceived level of

satisfaction vary depending on the student's home country, their proficiency with the English language, and peer, university, or faculty and staff support. Unfamiliarity with customs, norms, and American values may prove challenging for international students to adjust to their new life in a foreign country and still perform well academically (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998).

It is no surprise that international students sometimes have trouble adjusting to their new social environment; in fact, it is normal for most. An essential strategy by which international students seek to adapt to their new environment is establishing relationships with people of the same background or nationality. Students who feel at home, have formed relationships with other students and professors, and have participated in extracurricular activities are more likely to graduate (Rienties et al., 2012).

The ethnic and social ties these students create are then used as a coping mechanism to deal with issues that emerge during their studies; they aid in facilitating the adjustment process (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). An international student's proficiency in English may impact socio-cultural and psychological issues and, ultimately, academic success (Martirosyan et al., 2015). It is also a primary reason for isolation from local students and faculty members. America's culture is very independent, which usually shocks international students from countries that experienced close connections and interdependence on family and friends; these students were more prone to acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Of all the international students studying in the US, students from Asian countries are used to close familial connections and interdependence; they tend to have more difficulty adjusting than students from other countries.

An individual's self-esteem can be challenged by new encounters, different opportunities, or unexpected situations, which may alter a student's adjustment mechanism to positive or negative. Students entering the US may encounter and interact with people who have radically different customs, beliefs, and values, resulting in a reduction of students' competency. However, despite the potential struggles, academic difficulties, cultural adjustment issues, etc., faced by international students, they are resilient and persistent. They understand and value their opportunity and seek to make their family proud by achieving the goal they set forth.

### **Financial**

International students' tuition rates are double and sometimes even triple that of in-state students, which explains one of the reasons why international students contribute positively to the US economy, to individual state economies, and to their host institution's revenue generation. Many international students are awarded scholarships or assistantships by their home country that they must retain; they strive to achieve good grades to secure the continuity of their financial support (Abegaz et al., 2019). Being stress and worry-free may prevent academic struggles. For international students, this is especially imperative because they must remain enrolled in at least 12 credits for visa compliance, which means they do not have the liberty to drop a course. Additionally, their tuition rate is usually much higher than domestic students, and not passing a class is costly. And due to international students' work restrictions, they are only allowed to work at most 20 hours on campus; however, these students are not typically the first choice for on-campus employment, which can cause undue stress to these students.

## **University Support**

Previous research on organizational support found that members of an organization can attain job satisfaction when there is organizational support (Walumbwa et al., 2018). In the case of a university or college setting, international students thrive better and can acclimate to university life and their new society when there is organizational support (Cho & Yu, 2015). International students rely on their host institution for countless reasons; one of the most important is their "right of residence" (Cho & Yu, 2015) based on their admission to the institution. Upon admission, international students are provided with an I-20, which is a form that proves a student's legal enrollment in a program of study in the US. Receipt of their I-20 form is one of the first ways international students rely on the institution they were admitted into because they would not be allowed to live in the US without their admissions and acceptance.

Universities typically offer support to their enrolled students; however, these support services are sometimes unknown to international students because they are not a common service provided at universities in their home country. Upon their arrival and once enrolled in classes, the first struggle they may face is financial. International students are not privileged to work off-campus; they are restricted to working only 20 hours per week on-campus due to their visa status. This is even more reason for the university to provide financial support by way of providing them with on-campus jobs. Unfortunately, many on-campus jobs are federal work-study jobs that can only be occupied by native students who receive financial aid, which is not an option for international students.

Prior studies have focused on the importance of student identity in university or college settings. The Social Identity Theory by Tajfel & Turner, 1979, suggests that group members classify themselves based on the characteristics of the group and create social identities that allow them to feel as though they belong to the new environment. As a result, positive psychological support occurs when international students feel an increased sense of belonging due to numerous positive experiences. Psychological support has a lot to do with the feeling of belongingness (Cho & Yu, 2015), and as international students' sense of emotional belongingness increases, the more supported they feel and the easier they are able to adapt academically. Additional studies also found that "school-life satisfaction "(Cho & Yu, 2015) impacts a student's psychological well-being. Consequently, international students feel supported when they can identify with their institution; hence, institutions must provide a safe space for them to feel supported and connected to their institution.

### **Peer Support**

For international students living apart from their family and friends, for many, for the first time, social support from their peers will tremendously impact their adaptation (Cho & Yu, 2015). International students create connections with their peers, both domestic students and other international students. The university has numerous clubs and organizations that can help these students by bridging the cultural gap or finding students of similar cultures to make them feel at home. The more students socialize with other international students, the better they tend to perform academically (Pho & Schartner, 2021). Studies conducted by Schartner and Young (2016) found that these friendships are a significant contributor to their adaptation.

The institution an international student is affiliated with plays a vital role in their psychological support, which can be attributed to the sense of belonging that is important to international students (Cho & Yu, 2015; Cena et al., 2021). When international students feel as if they belong, they are more likely to perform well academically and have better social interactions and connections (Cena et al., 2021). A study by Mallinckrodt and Leong in 1992 found that social support was an integral aspect of an international student's support network, and this helped them to navigate through difficult times. Cultural differences may have an impact on an international student's perception of social support (Yeh & Inose, 2003); thus, it is imperative first to understand the kind of social support networks these students require. Besides a need to feel a sense of belonging to the university/college, they must also feel like part of their new community. Moreover, these international students must also maintain a sense of belonging to their home country. This multi-faceted need to belong can positively or negatively affect their adaptation; students who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to adapt, whereas the opposite may also be true.

### **Academic Adaptation**

Martirosyan (2015) states that besides English proficiency, issues such as academic culture shock associated with lecture style and relationships between students and professors have contributed to international students' potential for academic success. Positive learning experiences helped international students participate in class discussions. However, negative experiences, even though they provoked frustration, prompted students to respond with positive behaviors that exuded the will to learn and be successful.



The more students acclimate academically, the more successful they will become (Al-Sharideh & Goe,1998). However, overall, these students exuded more stress than native students. US teaching styles often differ from the international student's home country, which can have a negative effect on academic integration and adaptation, which would account for lower academic performance (Fass-Holmes,2016; Talley-Matthew et al., 2020).

The most influential factor in students' satisfaction is the Grade Point Average (GPA) (Walker-Marshall & Hudson, 1999). Students' satisfaction with their learning experience is crucial for higher education institutions and the individual student. It is vital for higher education institutions because student satisfaction can be attained when a student adapts academically. Student satisfaction then promotes word-of-mouth, and maximizing student satisfaction is also a measure of the success of an institution of higher education. In today's global world, many universities operate with online programs, making them accessible to almost anyone everywhere, so it is imperative that institutions provide students with the best experience possible.

Recent studies have shown that when students are satisfied with their learning experience, they are more likely to remain enrolled or return the following semester and oftentimes even recommend the institution to family and friends (Mihanovic et al., 2016) back home. Student satisfaction inspires students to return or remain enrolled, which is a vital factor for retention rates and ultimately can lead to graduation.

### **Academic Advising Services**

Theoretical approaches by Crookston ( 1972) and O'Banion ( 1972) were among the first seminal works that stressed the value of developmental advising and the role of

advisors. Crookston (1972) suggested that developmental advising is concerned not only with specific personal or career decisions that need to be made but also encourages interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and skills such as problem-solving and decision-making. Crookston (1972) highlighted the significance of the advisor-student relationship and the importance of a collaborative decision-making process; however, this premise was based on faculty also playing the advisor role.

On the contrary, O'Banion suggested that advisors should be separate from faculty members and detailed five steps to academic advising, which included exploration of goals, major/program, and course choice scheduling classes. Many institutions have now implemented professional advisors and have moved away from faculty having dual responsibilities (teaching and advising). Appreciative advising is a more contemporary approach by Bloom, Hutson & He, 2008 where advisors thoughtfully and deliberately reach out to students before they need it. In essence, academic advisors create a relationship with students to help motivate them through proactive intervention. In the advising process, Appreciative Advising encompasses six phases: disarm, discover, dream, design, deliver, and do not settle, which aims to increase positive and collaborative interactions between student and advisor (Bloom, Hutson & He, 2008).

It is crucial that students know that there's someone out there who has their best interest at heart, especially for international students who are sometimes alone, at least in the beginning phases of their life in the US. The critical role that advisors play in this instance not only encourages student engagement but also provides motivation, leading to persistence and, ultimately, increased academic performance. Moreover, it may also encourage students to promote advising services due to their positive experiences.

### **Sanford's (1962) Theory of Challenge and Support**

Sanford's (1962) Theory of Challenge and Support suggests that students experience challenges when they are not adequately prepared with the proper skills or knowledge for situations they may encounter. Support refers to the people in a student's environment (Virtue et al., 2021) and the services offered that help them navigate challenges successfully. What's very important to note is that research suggests that a student's perception of institutional support and their intention to persist are positively correlated, and students who have received help, support, and encouragement when they've experienced academic challenges are more likely to succeed (Bloom et al., 2011; Burnette, 2017).

### **Tinto's Student Integration Theory**

Tinto's (1993) Student Integration model states that students need to integrate into formal and informal academic systems to persist. Formal academic systems are defined as activities that relate to enhancing a student's academic success and academic performance. Informal systems are defined as students having interactions with faculty and staff. Tinto (1993) also suggests that students must also integrate into formal and informal social systems. Formal social systems include extracurricular activities that students engage in, whereas informal systems include when students engage in peer-group interactions.

### **Job Demands- Resources Theory**

The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Theory posits that an imbalance between demands on the individual and the resources at their disposal to deal with those demands

causes strain. However, this research will apply a moderator, academic advising services, to mitigate this imbalance. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) JD-R theory suggested three propositions:

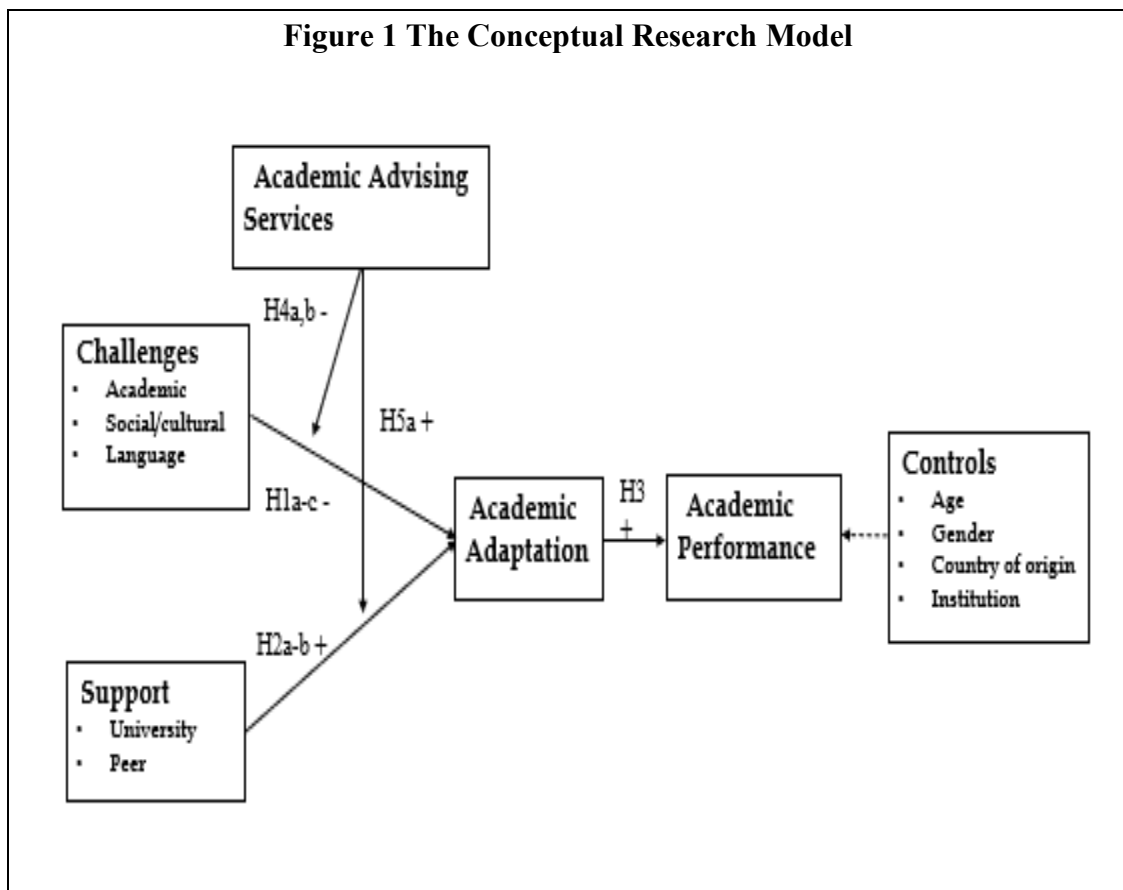
- 1) The theory can be applied to different work contexts.
- 2) Job resources are predictors of work engagement and motivation.
- 3) Job demands and resources affect well-being and indirectly affect performance.

The JD-R theory has been utilized to research organizational commitment, work enjoyment (Bakker et al., 2010), connectedness (Lewig et al., 2007), and work engagement (Bakker et al., 2007; Hakanen et al., 2006). The JD-R model has also been utilized to predict the effects of these factors on job performance (e.g., Bakker et al., 2008; Bakker et al., 2004). However, I have not found any studies utilizing the JD-R theory on higher education studies or international students with academic performance as an outcome. Due to the JD-R Theory's adaptability, it has become a popular, frequently used theory.

## CHAPTER III: RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1 summarizes the research model and hypotheses that will be tested. The model consists of the dependent variable, academic performance, and the independent variables, academic challenges, social/cultural challenges, language challenges, university support, and peer support, as well as a moderator and academic advising services.

### Conceptual Framework



## **Theoretical Development and Hypotheses**

The theoretical framework of this study, based on Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model and Sanford's (1962) Theory of Challenge and Support, are two theories that could serve to guide and contextualize the investigation of how different factors affect student academic performance. However, in this study, I will apply the JD-R Theory. The theory has been used in various work contexts. In this study, I will apply the JD-R Theory to the university/college context, focusing on international students. Job demands are physical, psychological, social, or organizational factors that require constant effort, whereas resources are the resources available to mitigate demands (Demerouti et al.,2001).

In this study, I will utilize the JD-R Theory to investigate how challenges and support influence international students' academic performance and the extent of their satisfaction with their learning experience at FL Public Higher Education Institutions. By understanding the difficulties experienced by international students and how they affect their academic performance and, subsequently, their overall satisfaction with their learning experience, we will better understand the effect on retention.

### **Academic Performance**

Academic performance, calculated by the student's Grade Point Average (GPA), is a crucial factor for international students and serves as the ultimate dependent variable of interest in this study. International students must maintain a 2.0 GPA to remain in good standing. Additionally, being dismissed from the university due to having a GPA below 2.0 for three consecutive semesters is not an option due to visa constraints. Hence, these students must remain in good academic standing every semester while enrolling in

12 or more credits and maintaining a 2.0 or higher GPA. Additionally, the time to degree completion is of the essence for international students, again, due to visa constraints, high tuition fees, and familial obligations. Due to these many constraints, international students must be determined to do well academically and successfully complete their degrees on time.

Student satisfaction with the environment has long been established as a critical factor in influencing academic performance, directly affecting students' decision to remain at the institution and complete their degrees. Hence, effective learning requires that an individual successfully interacts with and responds to their environment (Liu and Liu, 2000). Moreover, the commonality between integration and satisfaction is crucial to academic performance success.

### **Academic Challenges**

Rienties et al. (2012) suggest that research consistently showed that academic integration and adaptation influence academic achievement. Due to differential lecturers' expectations, non-native English speaker students may get fewer opportunities to participate in class than other students, which may lead to lesser engagement in learning activities that may be reflected in their final results (Park et al. 2017).

Besides English proficiency, issues such as academic culture shock associated with lecture style and relationships between students and professors have contributed to international students' potential for academic success (Martirosyan, 2015). Positive learning experiences helped international students participate in class discussions. However, negative experiences, even though they provoked frustration, students responded with positive behaviors that exuded the will to learn and be successful.

Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) suggest that the more students acclimate academically, the more successful they will become. However, overall, these students exuded more stress than native students. US teaching styles often differ from the international student's home country, which can have a negative effect on academic integration and adaptation, which would account for lower academic performance (Fass-Holmes, 2016; Talley-Matthew et al.,2020).

Sanford's (1962) Theory of Challenge and Support suggests that students who encounter challenges may have a difficult time adapting and performing well academically. At the same time, Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory suggests that students who cannot adjust to the academic environment may not succeed in their academic careers. Additionally, JD-R Theory ( 2007) indicates that demands, in this case, challenges, could negatively impact performance. Taken together, I anticipate that students who face academic challenges would have a more difficult time adapting to their academic environments compared to domestic students facing fewer or no academic challenges. I, therefore, offer the following hypothesis:

H1a: Academic challenges will have a negative impact on academic adaptation, such that as academic challenges increase, academic adaptation decreases.

### **Language Challenge**

Both domestic and international students face adjustment issues, but when compared, Andrade (2006) suggests that the main adjustment issue tends to focus on language issues for international students. Park et al. (201)7 posit that language barriers are the most common problem international students face, which can influence academic



difficulties, social exclusion, and psychological anxiety. Being adequately proficient in the host language is imperative for communication (Park et al.,2017), which explains why international students whose native language is not English are required to complete an English proficiency test as part of the admissions criteria. These students must be well prepared, which is crucial to their educational experiences. Jean-Francois (2017) suggests that first-year international students experience language barriers that prevent them from creating meaningful relationships with their professors and peers.

Students with higher writing skills performed better academically (Andrade, 2006). Their English proficiency influences international students' social-cultural and psychological adjustment; the more proficient they become in the English language, the lesser the challenge they will have adapting to the new culture. A high level of English proficiency improves academic performance (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Li et al.,2018). A lower English language proficiency level is considered a primary challenge and barrier to academic success (Leong, 2015). Students who lack knowledge of the English language usually fear engaging in classroom discussions or with peers, and international students often have problems listening to a speaker or lecturer due to their limited vocabulary, which can adversely affect their academic performance. McLachlan and Justice ( 2009) found that issues with English language proficiency can significantly affect international students' ability to succeed in academics. Understandably, knowing the host country's language is vital for communication, and proficiency in the host country's language plays a crucial role in international students' success. Chinese students who immerse themselves with their American peers can learn the English language quickly and become more acquainted with the ways of their host country (Al-Sharideh & Goe,1998; Leong,

2015). International students were isolated from faculty members and local students due to their English language skills (Martirosyan et al.,2015). However, this does not necessarily mean they were not proficient, but they did not feel as comfortable communicating in English.

Many international students struggle through their courses despite advanced English proficiency as they find the technical language too difficult (Doro,2010). Despite providing proof of acceptable TOEFL scores being a requirement for international students to apply to colleges in the United States, they still struggle with native speakers' idioms and jargon (Li,2018). The more professors and peers use jargon, the lower academic performance because sometimes slang is hard to understand even though students may have high English language proficiency skills. In many cases, English is not an international student's first language, so they may not be aware of American jargon or slang, which can cause miscommunication among these students.

Accentedness causes challenges for students; it causes miscommunication because it is difficult for them to be understood (Park et al., 2017) and can negatively affect students' academic performance and social networks. Problems due to different accents cause a significant issue in academic settings, making it difficult for some students to understand their lecturers and each other (Park et al., 2017).

Sanford's (1962) Theory of Challenge and Support suggests that students who encounter challenges may have a difficult time adapting and performing well academically. While Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory suggests that students who cannot adapt to the academic environment may not be successful in their academic careers. Additionally, JD-R Theory ( 2007) suggests that demands, in this case,

challenges, could negatively impact performance. I anticipate that international students who experience language barriers may have a more challenging time adapting to their academic environments than students who do not. Therefore, I offer the following hypothesis:

H1b: Language challenges will have a negative impact on academic adaptation, such that as language challenges increase, academic adaptation decreases.

### **Social/Cultural Challenges**

When international students maintain ties to their native culture while discovering the host culture, it can potentially minimize cultural adaptation challenges (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). Moreover, developing relationships and connections to the host culture may improve students' academic performance. A critical factor in student adjustment is their interest or knowledge of the host country; research can lessen culture shock and make the transition smoother. International students must contribute to the acculturation process (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998), and by researching their host country, they can help make the transition smoother. The effect of cultural adaptation can be two-fold; on the one hand, students who successfully adapt to their host culture adjust to American society and the American way of doing things, or students fail to adapt and suffer from depression, loneliness, or homesickness.

The shock of moving to a new country, experiencing a new culture, and potentially a new language may have an effect on the student's academic achievement and overall success (McLachlan & Justice, 2009). Individuals must deal with how to acculturate, and considering to what extent they are willing to maintain their cultural identity and characteristics, and to what extent they are becoming involved in other

cultural groups (Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005).

Sanford's (1962) Theory of Challenge and Support suggests that students who encounter challenges may have a difficult time adapting and performing well academically. While Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory suggests that students who cannot adapt to the academic environment may not be successful in their academic careers. Additionally, JD-R Theory (2007) suggests that demands, in this case, challenges, could negatively impact performance. When combined, I offer that international students who face social/cultural challenges will have difficulty adjusting to their academic environment compared to students who do not. I, therefore, offer the following hypothesis:

H1c: Social/Cultural challenges will have a negative impact on academic adaptation such that as social/cultural challenges increase, academic adaptation decreases.

### **University Support**

In 1997, Tinto updated his Student Integration Model to include the importance of classroom experience and faculty interactions on student success; he also advocated for the implementation of learning communities. Organizational support has a significant influence on the satisfaction of organizational members, and based on this theory of organizational support, university support is vital for international students' lives and experiences (Cho & Yu, 2015).

The relationships between students and faculty members have contributed to international students' potential for academic success, where positive learning experiences helped international students engage and participate in class discussions.

However, despite negative experiences provoking frustration, students responded with positive behaviors that exuded the will to learn and be successful. As Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support suggests, as there's an increase in support, students are more likely to perform well academically.

Sanford's (1962) Theory of Challenge and Support suggests that students who receive support may have an easier time adapting, which will help them perform well academically. While Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory suggests that students who can integrate into their new environment can adapt to the academic environment, which could give them more success in their academic careers. Additionally, JD-R Theory (2007) suggests that support, in this case, the support provided to international students could positively impact performance. Considering the theory, I expect that students with university support would have less difficulty adapting academically than students who do not have support. I, therefore, offer the following hypothesis:

H2a: University support will positively affect academic adaptation such that as university support increases, academic adaptation increases.

### **Peer Support**

International students who have an integration acculturation mode have the lowest level of acculturative stress, which explains their higher academic performance (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). Students with an extensive social network, including co-nationals and host nationals, have a more significant advantage in adapting to studying in the United States. Previous studies by Ye, 2006; Misra et al., 2003 and Cemalcilar et al. 2005 have found that social support plays an essential role in international students'

adaptation and their university experience in general. Studying academic subjects in a second language requires a considerable time commitment and a strong focus (Andrade,2017). International students may feel forced to choose between having a social life and doing well in their courses. An international student's social network is an essential factor in supporting the stress that they could endure while living in a new culture (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). International students who integrate and fully emerge in the college experience by joining clubs, socializing with their peers, and using campus resources have an easier time adjusting to their new home.

Sanford's (1962) Theory of Challenge and Support suggests that students who receive peer support may have an easier time adapting, which will help them perform well academically. While Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory suggests that students who can integrate with their new environment can adapt to the academic environment, which could provide them with more success in their academic careers. Additionally, JD-R Theory ( 2007) suggests that support, in this case, support provided to international students, could positively impact performance. Taken together, I anticipate that international students who receive support from their peers will have a positive impact on academic adaptation. Therefore, I offer the following hypothesis:

H2b: Peer support positively impacts academic adaptation, such that as peer support increases, academic adaptation increases.

### **Academic Adaptation**

Research consistently showed that academic integration/ adjustment influences academic achievement (Rientes et al., 2012). Moreover, common features of the US

pedagogy, such as class presentations, group projects, and class discussions, might be uncommon to international students, and this poses a challenge to these students (Bastien et al., 2018). First-Time-in-College international students have a different experience than students who transfer from other US institutions. Moreover, these First-Time-in-College international students could be unfamiliar with American teaching methods, making adapting academically challenging (Fass-Holmes, 2016); Talley-Matthew, Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2020).

Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model suggests that students who can integrate successfully into their university's academic environment are prone to persist, which would lead to them being successful. On the other hand, those who fail to adapt academically are more likely to fail. Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory suggests that students who integrate with their new environment can adapt to the academic environment, which could provide more success in their academic careers. I, therefore, offer the following hypothesis:

H3: Academic adaptation positively impacts academic performance, such that as academic adaptation increases, academic performance increases.

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**Moderator:** Academic Advising Services

Academic advisors are typically one of the first contact students make upon arrival at a university or college. They are the first to inform students of policies, procedures, and critical requirements for successfully completing their degree (Zhang, 2016). Advisors are considered a bridge between the student and university or college life, but they also serve as the go-to resource for these students. The advisor's role has gained recognition as playing an essential role in bridging the gap between students and the

university's mission of fulfilling the teaching and learning objectives of higher education (NACADA, 2006). It is not uncommon for faculty to request an advisor's assistance for students at-risk of failing their classes or for them to encourage students to reach out to their advisors to help them navigate the university.

Some institutions assign students an academic advisor within their college or school; these advisors are considered vital to a student's academic success. Academic advisors create a special relationship and often mentorship with their students by providing guidance and support during their academic careers. An academic advisor aids in the transition by helping these students get acclimated to university life by providing them with information about the numerous resources the institutions have to offer. By understanding international students' challenges, advisors can help with creative ways to solve their problems, motivate them when needed, and be a safe space.

On the other hand, if an advisor gives inaccurate information, it could delay the student's time to degree completion, which could also cost the student more. Thus, an advisor's role is imperative in ensuring students receive accurate information by having a wholesome evaluation of the student's path and goals rather than just determining which classes are required for the major (White, 2015). Additionally, by putting an emphasis on each individual student, academic advisors can foster a culture of learning (White, 2015). Academic advising is at the core of higher education; it is the connector between the student and the university or college and, frankly, part of the institution's educational mission. Furthermore, academic advising helps the institutions reach their goals while ensuring that students are able to enjoy wholesome academic and university or college life experiences, which ultimately can lead to an increase in retention, word-of-mouth,



and graduation rates.

I therefore propose:

H4a: Academic Advising Services moderate the relationship between academic challenges and academic adaptation, such that in the presence of academic advising services, academic challenges will have less of an impact on academic adaptation as compared to an absence of advising services.

H4b: Academic Advising Services moderate the relationship between social/cultural challenges and academic adaptation, such that in the presence of academic advising services, social/cultural challenges will have less of an impact on academic adaptation as compared to an absence of advising services.

H5a: Academic Advising Services moderate the relationship between university support and academic adaptation, such that in the presence of academic advising services, university support will have more of an impact on academic adaptation as compared to an absence of advising services.

**Control Variables:** gender, age, country of origin

The main reason for the above control variables is that it is undeniable that diverse groups will have different experiences due to their respective cultures, gender, age, etc. However, there will also likely be common experiences across acculturating groups.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Participants

Purposive sampling was utilized to target international students pursuing a Bachelor's Degree or an Associate's Degree at a State of Florida public institution. For this study, I focused on international students on an F-1 visa. The international student population at a State of Florida Public institution in the southeastern part of Florida consisted of about 4,380 graduate and undergraduate students. However, the target population for this study was undergraduate international students pursuing any major, accounting for 3,127 students. The sample size was 342, which was calculated using the "Online Sample Size Calculator" <https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/research/determine-sample-size/sample-size/>

The study adopted the survey method for data collection, and the survey was administered to international students in a public university in the southeastern part of Florida. All undergraduate international students enrolled were invited to participate in an online survey about the challenges of living and studying in the US and the effect on their academic performance. Depending on an international student's previous educational experience, they were assigned different subgroups. These subgroups were not a target population; however, I acknowledged the possibility of having various types of international students when the demographic results were in.

Initial cultural exposure to the host country may differ between students who never attended university and those with university experience in their native country but not in the host country. Additionally, international students who have transferred from a

US institution may have a different experience than those who have transferred from an institution in their home country.

Based on the numerous types of students attending universities in the US, I have identified four types of international students:

1. First-Time-in-College (FTIC) (international) students. These are non-native students who have not previously attended college.

2. International transfer students. These are students who have completed a semester or more in their home country.

3. International transfer students from a Florida public college or university. These are international students who have completed some credits or an Associate of Arts degree at a Florida public institution.

4. International transfer students from other US institutions. These are international students who were initially admitted to another US institution and later transferred.

## **Procedure**

The Qualtrics platform, which was utilized to host the online survey, permitted respondents to take the survey online. After having obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the international student office and academic advisors were contacted to distribute the survey to students in their database. The purpose of the survey, the time required to answer the survey, participant identity confidentiality, and data protection assurances were all stated in the email. Participants were asked to consent

to participate before entering the survey. The study participants were not compensated for their participation in the study. Email reminders were sent following the initial invitation to increase participation rates.

### **Research Design**

Data collection was enabled through Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Qualtrics enabled survey participants to complete the survey online. The Informed Consent was embedded within the instrument as a required prerequisite to survey completion. The survey utilized a Likert Scale, where a score of one suggested that the respondent strongly disagreed with the statement, and the highest score of five indicated that the respondent strongly agreed with the statement.

The survey examined the importance of the variables affecting academic performance. The survey asked questions to determine international students' stressors and, how these challenges affected academic adaptation, and whether the support these students received could increase academic adaptation. The outcome determined the effects on these students' academic performance. A moderating approach was used to determine the impact of academic advising services on these students.

The survey was distributed to the international students via the international students' office, academic advisors, and professors teaching numerous classes at the institution. Participants in this study were not compensated for their time. The structural equation model (SEM) was used to analyze the direct hypotheses and moderating hypotheses.

## **Measurements**

### **Demographics Survey**

Respondents were asked to provide information about their age, gender, country of origin, racial background, and their native language. The demographics survey questions can be found in Appendix II. A few examples of demographic questions can be found below:

"Are you an international student on an F-1 visa?"

"What is your country of citizenship?"

"What is your native language?"

### **Academic Performance**

The dependent variable was measured by the student's current GPA. Students were asked to self-report their current GPA; this dependent variable was also measured by a few survey questions such as "I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance to date" and "I expect to complete my degree in the allocated timeframe." The entire survey instrument can be found in Appendix III.

### **The Self-reported Fluency of English Scale (SRFES) Yeh and Inose (2003)**

The SRFES assessed the participant's perception of their English fluency and consisted of three questions:

1. What is your present level of English fluency?
2. How comfortable are you communicating in English?
3. How often do you communicate in English?

The total score ranges from 3 to 15 on this scale, and higher scores indicate greater fluency reported by the subjects. Previous studies by Barratt and Huba (1994) and Cross (1995) have utilized this method of English language fluency. The Cronbach's alpha for the 3-items was 0.78 (Yeh and Inose, 2003).

### **Academic Advising Services**

Parasuraman et al., 1988 SERVQUAL model measured customer satisfaction using five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy. A recent study by Ismael et al., 2021 utilized Parasuraman's SERVQUAL model and adapted it to measure students' perception of the service quality of academic advisors. This study will use the measurement instrument to measure international students' perception of the service quality of academic advising services.

The adapted version of the SERVQUAL survey consists of 11 survey questions. It measured students' experience with academic advisors by measuring reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness and will be measured on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree-1, disagree-2, neutral-3, agree-4, and strongly agree-5). Previous studies have utilized the SERVQUAL survey; for instance, a study by Chuah and Sri Ramalu (2011) found that empathy, responsiveness, and assurance were the three dimensions of the SERVQUAL survey that were significantly related to a student's satisfaction. Another study by Sin, Yusof, and Sin (2018) also had similar results even when applied to international students specifically.

In Appendix III, the complete survey is listed, but a few sample survey items can be found below:

"I can depend on my advisor to advise me accurately on my academic requirements."

"My advisor provides individualized attention to me."

" My advisor assists and provides prompt service within a particular time."

### **Academic Adaptation**

The nine-item Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS) by Anderson, Guan, and Koc (2016) was utilized to measure Academic Adaptation. The nine-item scale was created to measure academic adjustment, which could be used on local and international students as long as they are attending higher education institutions. In this study, the focus was on international students pursuing higher education in a new culture. The scale consists of three subscales: academic lifestyle, academic achievement, and academic motivation. The scale was validated and deemed reliable by three different studies conducted by Anderson, Guan, and Koc in 2016. Cronbach Alpha's ranged between .79 and .86

Below are a few examples of survey items; the complete survey is available in Appendix III;

“ I am enjoying being a university student.”

“I expect to successfully complete my degree in the usual allocated timeframe.”

“ I think I am as academically capable as any other student.”

### **Academic Challenges and Social/Cultural Challenges**

All other independent variables (Academic challenges, Social/Cultural challenges) were measured using the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker & Siryk, 1984/1989). This scale has gained importance due to its use in an academic context; its four dimensions (academic adaptation, social adaptation, personal-emotional adaptation, and institutional adaptation)

are considered essential for the students enrolled in higher education; thus, utilizing this scale for international students adapting to college in the US could be beneficial as well.

The SACQ has been modified to exclude certain items in different studies conducted by Taylor & Pastor (2007), Soledad et al. (2012), and Dominguez et al. (2019). In this study, I utilized the academic adaptation dimension survey questions to measure the academic challenges construct and the social adaptation dimension survey questions to measure social-cultural challenges. The full scale is available in Appendix III; below are a few sample questions:

"I feel I am very different from other students at college in ways that I do not like."

"I am aware of or have utilized learning support services /resources offered by the college/university."

"I have not been functioning well during examinations. (R)"

"I am not working as hard as I should at my coursework. (R)"

### **Peer and University Support**

The Sense of Belonging Scale by Hoffman et al. (2002) consisted of 50 items to measure student/peer support and 35 items to measure faculty relationships. I have adapted the survey and selected 11 items that will be used to measure peer support and university support. The questionnaire developed by Hoffman et al. (2002) resulted from a qualitative study conducted by the research team. Five factors were the result of the study: perceived peer support, perceived faculty support, perceived classroom comfort, perceived isolation, and empathetic faculty understanding; the revised scale combined compassionate faculty understanding and perceived faculty support to create four factors. In this study, I focused on the survey items that measure "perceived peer support" and



“perceived faculty support.” The complete survey is found in Appendix III, and below are some example survey questions:

"I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help if I do not understand course-related material."

"I feel that a faculty member or university staff would be sensitive to my difficulties if I shared them."

" I have met with classmates outside of class to study for an exam."

"I have discussed personal matters with students who I met in class."

I used the SmartPLS4 software tool to analyze the structural equation model (SEM) in this research study. The reliability of the research model was measured by looking at the individual item reliability, composite reliability, and the average variance extracted (AVE). The discriminant validity was measured using HTMT discriminant validity. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) measured the quality of the constructs utilized in the research model. Additionally, the structural model was analyzed by the path coefficient of the research hypotheses, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), Effect size ( $F^2$ ), predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), and goodness of the fit of the model (GoF).

Bootstrapping was utilized to calculate the confidence interval ( lower and upper levels).

## CHAPTER V: DATA ANALYSIS

### **Informed Pilot Procedure**

An email invitation was sent to higher education professionals to request their participation in the informed pilot. The informed pilot was conducted with higher education professionals who work with or have worked with international students in different capacities. Selecting this group of subject matter experts ensures that the survey items included in the questionnaire are relevant to the international student population.

The informed pilot consisted of four participants: one former (international) student from Venezuela, one with prior experience working in the international students' office at a university, one academic advisor, and one higher education administrator. The informed pilot was conducted via the Zoom platform and lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. As a result of the informed pilot, I made revisions to the survey items; most of the revisions were due to the ambiguity of some survey questions. The phrasing of the questions was edited to include the revisions suggested by the informed pilot participants.

### **Pilot**

The survey was disseminated via email to International Students attending a public state university in the southeastern United States. Academic advisors provided the email addresses of the international students for the pilot study. Reminder emails were sent to the students every two weeks to increase survey responses. In total, 138 students responded to the survey. The data was cleaned by removing incomplete surveys and respondents who did not pass both attention checks. After the data was cleaned by removing incomplete surveys and surveys that did not pass the attention checks, 83

surveys were retained. The analysis was conducted for the three types of international students: First-Time in College (FTICs) international students, international transfer students from a US institution, and international transfer students from an institution in their home country). SPSS Statistics 29, statistical software developed by IBM, was used to compute descriptive analysis, while Smart PLS, a software used for variance-based structural equation model (SEM), was used to test the reliability and validity along with the discriminant validity (HTMT) of the constructs and their indicators.

The sample consisted of 83 participants, of which 25 (or 30.1%) were male and 58 (or 69.9 %) were female, as indicated in Table 3. As shown in Table 2, the age distribution of the participants who identified as male was as follows: 14 participants ( or 56%) were between the ages of 18-21 years, 7 participants (or 28%) were between the ages of 22-25 years, 3 participants (or 12%) were between the ages of 26-29 years and 1 participant (or 4%) was 30 years or above. The age distribution of the participants who identified as female was as follows: 35 participants were between the ages of 18-21 years (or 60.3%), 20 participants (or 34.5%) were between the ages of 22-25, 1 participant (or 1.7%) was between the ages of 26-29 and 2 participants (or 3.4%) were 30 years or above. The respondents' class level, as indicated in Table 4, were as follows: 16 (or 19.3%) identified as Freshman, 12 (or 14.5%) identified as Sophomores, 26 (or 31.3%) identified as Juniors, and 29 ( or 34.9%) identified as seniors. As indicated in Table 5, of the 83 respondents, 12 (or 14.5%) reported that they transferred from another institution in the US, 26 (or 19.3%) reported they transferred from a State of FL public institution, 8 (or 9.6 %) reported they transferred from an institution in their home country and lastly, 47 ( or 56.6%) reported to have started as Freshman (first-time-in-college).

**Table 2 Age of Participants**

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
18-21	49	59	59
22-25	27	32.5	32.5
26-29	4	4.8	4.8
30+	3	3.6	3.6
Total	83	100	100

**Table 3 Gender Distribution**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Male	25	30.1	30.1
Female	58	69.9	69.9
Total	83	100	100

**Table 4 Class Level Distribution**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Freshman ( 20-29 credits)	16	19.3	19.3
Sophomore ( 30-59 credits)	12	14.5	14.5
Junior ( 60-89 credits)	26	31.3	31.3
Senior ( 90+ credits)	29	34.9	34.9
Total	83	100	100

**Table 5 FTIC/ Transfer Distribution**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes, from another US institution	12	14.5	14.5
Yes, from a state of FL public institution	16	19.3	19.3
Yes, from a college/university in my home country	8	9.6	9.6
No, I did not transfer	47	56.6	56.6
Total	83	100	100

A simplified model was created to assess the reliability and validity of the indicators for the following constructs: Academic Challenges, Social/Cultural Challenges, University Support, Peer Support, Academic Advising Services, and Academic Adaptation. Language Challenge, an independent variable, was not included in the analysis since the construct uses a measure different from the Likert Scale used on the other constructs. Language Challenge uses a distinct scoring system based on the adoption of the Self-Reported English Fluency Scale by Yeh & Inose ( 2003). Additionally, the dependent variable, academic performance, could not be included in the analysis despite being part of the model because different facets of academic performance could not be included in the EFA. The distinct aspects of academic performance are examined in relation to their present performance, such as their current GPA and ability to pass a class with a grade of C or higher on the first attempt. However, the survey items also include future aspects of academic performance, such as their perception of their academic performance, their expectation of completing their degree in the allotted timeframe, and lastly, their desire to earn good grades in their classes. Due to these varying aspects of academic performance being measured, they would not covary. Therefore, including these items in a factor analysis, which assumes survey items measure the same construct, would not be appropriate and thus were excluded from the EFA.

The reliability test measured the internal consistency of the factors, and the Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) and Cronbach alphas were recorded. The Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) and Cronbach alpha scores suggest the degree to which items on a

subscale consistently measure the same construct, which should be at least 0.70. A reliability test was conducted on the survey items that loaded on the respective factors.

I utilized SmartPLS 4 to assess the reliability and validity of the survey items. The outer loadings of the survey items were evaluated to determine indicator reliability, which is the extent to which the indicators explain the constructs; a factor loading above 0.70 is a recommended value (Vinzi et al., 2010). After each cycle of the EFA, items that were low-loading (less than 0.70) on the factors were removed. Once the EFA was completed and items were satisfactorily loaded in the constructs with a value of 0.70 and above, the indicators were retained. However, I also elected to retain survey items with factor loadings below the recommended 0.70, namely 0.614 (Q15\_2 Social/Cultural Challenge) and 0.696 (Q10\_4 Academic Adaptation). Table 6 shows the outerloading values of the retained items. The survey, in its entirety, consisted of 47 items. However, the survey items analyzed during the pilot consisted of 38 items (this excluded Language Challenge and Academic Performance). After verifying the outer loadings, 27 items were retained. The 27 retained items can be found in Appendix III.

Academic Advising Services retained 12 items which included:

Q12\_6, Q12\_3, Q12\_5, Q12\_4, Q20\_4, Q20\_6, Q20\_5, Q12\_2, Q20\_1,  
Q20\_2, Q12\_1, Q20\_3

University Support retained 3 items which included: Q19\_5, Q19\_2, Q11\_2.

Peer Support retained 4 items which included: Q19\_4, Q11\_5, Q19\_1, Q11\_4

Academic Challenges retained 2 items which included: Q15\_4R, Q22\_4

Social Cultural Challenges retained 3 items which included: Q15\_1, Q18\_3, Q15\_2.

Academic Adaptation retained 3 items which included: Q10\_4, Q10\_6, Q10\_2.

**Table 6 Outerloadings**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	<b>Academic Advising Services</b>	<b>Academic Challenges</b>	<b>Peer Support</b>	<b>Social/Cultural Challenges</b>	<b>University Support</b>
Questions						
19_5						0.876
19_2						0.875
11_2						0.78
15_1					0.814	
18_3					0.791	
15_2					0.614	
19_4				0.864		
11_5				0.846		
19_1				0.801		
11_4				0.763		
15_4R			0.901			
22_4			0.817			
12_6		0.916				
12_3		0.914				

**Table 6  
(continued)**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	<b>Academic Advising Services</b>	<b>Academic Challenges</b>	<b>Peer Support</b>	<b>Social/Cultural Challenges</b>	<b>University Support</b>
Questions						
12_5		0.904				
12_4		0.885				
20_4		0.872				
20_6		0.859				
20_5		0.852				
12_2		0.846				
20_1		0.819				
20_2		0.798				
12_1		0.712				
20_3		0.709				
10_4	0.696					
10_6	0.725					
10_2	0.844					



After reviewing the outer loadings, the focus shifted to the reliability and validity of the indicators. The reliability and validity of the indicators are assessed utilizing Smart PLS 4. The reliability of the survey items was analyzed to measure the internal consistency of the factors; the Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) should be above 0.70, the minimum acceptable value; this indicates that the survey items consistently measure the same construct. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the constructs were all above 0.50, which is the minimum acceptable level for convergent validity. Complete results regarding the reliability and validity of the measures can be found in Table 7. As indicated in Table 8, the Language Challenge, which included 3 survey items, had a high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.887. Table 7 shows Academic Adaptation, which included 3 survey items, had high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.801 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.574, Academic Advising Services, which included 12 items, had a high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.967 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.711, Academic Challenges, which included 2 survey items, had a high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.850 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.740, Peer Support, which included 4 survey items, had a high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.891 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.672, Social Cultural Challenges, which included 3 survey items, had a high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.787 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.556 and University Support, which included 3 survey items, had a high reliability with a Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.882 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.714.

**Table 7 Construct Reliability and Validity Overview**

	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>Composite reliability (rho_a)</b>	<b>Composite reliability (rho_c)</b>	<b>Average variance extracted (AVE)</b>
Academic Adaptation	0.654	0.725	0.801	0.574
Academic Advising Services	0.964	0.987	0.967	0.711
Academic Challenges	0.655	0.691	0.850	0.740
Peer Support	0.84	0.875	0.891	0.672
Social/Cultural Challenges	0.611	0.652	0.787	0.556
University Support	0.806	0.854	0.882	0.714

**Table 8 Reliability\_Language Challenge****Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.887	3

The Discriminant Validity ( HTMT) assesses to what extent the survey items for one construct differ from those for other measured constructs (Hair et al. 2010). Of most importance is ensuring that survey items for constructs are not highly correlated. In this analysis, a value of 0.85 demonstrates discriminant validity, meaning the measured survey items are distinctly different for each construct. As indicated in Table 9 below, all survey items belonging to the constructs are distinct and not similar to any other survey items.

**Table 9 Discriminant Validity- Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)- Matrix**

	<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	<b>Academic Advising Services</b>	<b>Academic Challenges</b>	<b>Peer Support</b>	<b>Social/Cultural Challenges</b>
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>					
<b>Academic Advising Services</b>	0.175				
<b>Academic Challenges</b>	0.636	0.195			
<b>Peer Support</b>	0.598	0.352	0.392		
<b>Social/Cultural Challenges</b>	0.762	0.452	0.76	0.763	
<b>University Support</b>	0.565	0.546	0.329	0.596	0.564

### **Pilot Summary**

The purpose of the pilot study was to test the different components of the study with a focus on the recruitment of study participants, the length of the survey, factor analysis, and the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument. The eligibility criteria did not require any changes, as the focus was on international students on F-1 visas. The measurement instrument did not require any changes, given that the results of the pilot study confirmed factor loadings were adequate and that the instrument supported the validity and reliability of the measures. Given the feasibility of the pilot study, I proceeded with the main study.

### **Main Study**

The survey was disseminated via email to the International Students attending a public state university in Miami, Florida. Academic advisors provided the email

addresses of the international students for the main study. Reminder emails were sent to the students every two weeks to increase survey responses. In total, 277 students responded to the survey. The data was cleaned by removing 71 incomplete surveys, where respondents started but did not complete the survey, and 40 surveys that did not pass the attention checks. After the data was scrubbed, 166 surveys were retained.

A descriptive analysis of the international student sample was conducted to understand the population surveyed. The analysis was performed for the three types of international students: First-Time in College (FTICs) international students, international transfer students from a US institution, and international transfer students from an institution in their home country. SPSS Statistics 29, statistical software developed by IBM, was used to compute descriptive analysis, while Smart PLS, a software used for variance-based structural equation model (SEM), was used to test the reliability and validity and the discriminant validity (HTMT) of the constructs and their indicators. The aim of this study was to answer the following research question: "What is the effect of challenges and support on international students' academic performances in public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Florida?".

### **Descriptive Statistics**

I conducted a quantitative analysis using Descriptive Statistics in SPSS 29 to describe the collected data. The first portion of the survey included items used to collect relevant information about the sample population. Information collected from demographics is presented in Tables 10-14 below.

Gender Distribution: Table 10 represents the sample collected, which consisted of 166 participants, of which 66 (or 39.8%) were male, 99 (or 59.6 %) were female, and 1 (or 0.6%) participant self-identified as non-binary.

Age Distribution: Table 11 shows the age distribution of the participants where 99 participants ( or 59.6 %) were between the ages of 18-21 years, 59 participants (or 35.5%) were between the ages of 22-25 years, 3 participants (or 1.8%) were between the ages of 26-29 years, and 5 participants (or 0.5%) were 30 years or above.

Class Level: Table12 shows the respondents' class levels, which were as follows: 32 (or 19.3%) identified as Freshman, 32 (or 19.3 %) identified as Sophomores, 53 (or 31.9%) identified as Juniors and 49( or 29.5%) identified as seniors.

FTIC or Transfer Information: Table 13 shows the transfer information of the sample population. Of the 166 respondents, 26 (or 15.7%) reported that they transferred from another institution in the US, 28 (or 16.9%) reported they transferred from a State of FL public institution, 25(or 15.1 %) reported they transferred from an institution in their home country and lastly,87 ( or 52.4%) reported to have started as Freshman (First-Time-In-College).

Table 14 indicates the respondents' living situation. Of the 166 international students who completed the survey, 110 (or 66.3%) live in off-campus housing, 53 ( or 31.9%) live in on-campus housing, and 3 ( or 1.8%) are part of the fully online program.

**Table 10 Gender Distribution**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Male	66	39.8	39.8
	Female	99	59.6	59.6
	Non-binary/third gender	1	0.6	0.6
	Total	166	100.0	100.0

**Table 11 Age Distribution**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	18-21	99	59.6	59.6
	22-25	59	35.5	35.5
	26-29	3	1.8	1.8
	30+	5	3.0	3.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0

**Table 12 Class Level**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Freshman (0-29 credits)	32	19.3	19.3
	Sophomore (30-59 credits)	32	19.3	19.3
	Junior (60-89 credits)	53	31.9	31.9
	Senior (90+ credits)	49	29.5	29.5
	Total	166	100.0	100.0

**Table 13 FTIC/Transfer Student Distribution**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Valid	Yes, from another US institution	26	15.7	15.7
	Yes, from a state of Florida Public Institution	28	16.9	16.9
	Yes, from a college/ university in my home country	25	15.1	15.1
	No, I did not transfer.	87	52.4	52.4

**Table 14 Living Situation**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Valid	On-Campus housing	53	31.9	31.9
	Off-Campus Housing	110	66.3	66.3
	Not applicable: The program is online	3	1.8	1.8
	Total	166	100.0	100.0

### **Reliability and Validity of Scales Utilized**

The reliability and validity of the indicators were assessed utilizing Smart PLS 4. The reliability of the survey items was analyzed to measure the internal consistency of the factors. When measured, the Composite Reliability (rho\_c) should be above 0.70, which is the minimum acceptable value; this indicates that the survey items consistently measure the same construct. Additionally, the constructs' Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were all above 0.50, which is the minimum acceptable level for convergent validity.

As seen in the Table 15 below, Language Challenge, which included 3 survey items, had a high reliability with a Composite Reliability (rho\_c) of 0.910 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.773, Academic Adaptation, which included 3

survey items, had high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.807 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.583, Academic Advising Services, which included 12 items, had a high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.973 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.752, Academic Challenges, which included 3 survey items, had a high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.809 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.586, Peer Support, which included 4 survey items, had a high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.861 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.676, Social Cultural Challenges, which included 3 survey items, had a high reliability with Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.807 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.584 and University Support, which included 4 survey items, had a high reliability with a Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) of 0.869 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.624. Table 15 shows Composite Reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs listed below.

**Table 15 Construct Reliability and Validity**

	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>Composite reliability (<math>\rho_a</math>)</b>	<b>Composite reliability (<math>\rho_c</math>)</b>	<b>Average variance extracted (AVE)</b>
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	0.64	0.642	0.807	0.583
<b>Academic Advising Services</b>	0.97	0.975	0.973	0.752
<b>Academic Challenges</b>	0.645	0.649	0.809	0.586
<b>Academic Performance</b>	0.66	0.672	0.795	0.492
<b>Language Challenges</b>	0.854	0.924	0.910	0.773
<b>Peer Support</b>	0.776	0.907	0.861	0.676
<b>Social/Cultural Challenges</b>	0.662	0.72	0.807	0.584
<b>University Support</b>	0.798	0.804	0.869	0.624



The Discriminant Validity ( HTMT), found in Table 16, assesses to what extent the survey items for one construct differ from those for other measured constructs (Hair et al., 2010). In essence, it measures the extent to which the measured items are not highly correlated. In this analysis, a value  $< 0.85$  demonstrates discriminant validity, meaning the measured survey items are distinctly different for each construct. As indicated in Table 16, all survey items belonging to the constructs are distinct and not similar to any other survey items, demonstrated by a value of  $< 0.85$ .

**Table 16 Discriminant Validity- Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) Matrix**

	AA	AAS	AC	AP	LC	PS	SCC	US	AA S x AC	AAS x US
AA										
AAS	0.422									
AC	0.438	0.552								
AP	0.802	0.441	0.620							
LC	0.366	0.171	0.195	0.311						
PS	0.381	0.262	0.306	0.325	0.231					
SCC	0.488	0.137	0.144	0.218	0.250	0.698				
US	0.676	0.532	0.707	0.548	0.135	0.502	0.277			
AAS x AC	0.111	0.127	0.369	0.267	0.059	0.114	0.091	0.140		
AAS x US	0.259	0.145	0.152	0.214	0.178	0.089	0.128	0.169	0.51 5	
AAS x SCC	0.173	0.052	0.105	0.176	0.053	0.182	0.109	0.129	0.03 6	0.273

## Hypotheses Analysis

Table 17 provides the path coefficients for the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

**Table 17 Path Coefficient**

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values
Academic Adaptation -> Academic Performance	0.532	0.547	0.062	8.643	0.000
Academic Advising Services - > Academic Adaptation	0.140	0.133	0.068	2.044	0.041
Academic Challenges -> Academic Adaptation	0.002	0.026	0.081	0.030	0.976
Language Challenges -> Academic Adaptation	0.168	0.166	0.065	2.592	0.010
Peer Support -> Academic Adaptation	-0.035	-0.020	0.089	0.395	0.693
Social/Cultural Challenges -> Academic Adaptation	-0.237	-0.229	0.089	2.672	0.008
University Support -> Academic Adaptation	0.353	0.345	0.090	3.928	0.000
Academic Advising Services x Academic Challenges -> Academic Adaptation	0.002	-0.001	0.085	0.028	0.977
Academic Advising Services x University Support -> Academic Adaptation	-0.058	-0.050	0.087	0.660	0.509
Academic Advising Services x Social/Cultural Challenges -> Academic Adaptation	0.046	0.041	0.073	0.637	0.524

## Research Model Analysis and Results

In this section of the chapter, I present the results of the analysis of the research

model's hypotheses presented in Chapter 3. Table 17 represents the hypotheses and their path coefficient and p-values. The research model presented in Figure 1 consisted of 9 hypotheses; the prediction and results follow below:

*Hypothesis 1a* predicted a negative relationship between academic challenges and academic adaptation, such that international students facing academic challenges would also be dealing with issues in their academic adaptation. The results for this hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.002$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.976$ ) did not provide support for the hypothesis, as the path connecting the two constructs was not significant. Therefore, there is no evidence that academic challenges faced by international students impact their academic adaptation in this sample.

*Hypothesis 1b* predicted a negative relationship between language challenges and academic adaptation, such that international students facing language challenges would also be dealing with their academic adaptation. The results for this hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.168$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.010$ ) resulted in a supported hypothesis, as the path connecting the two constructs was significant. The Language Challenge Survey items were measured in such a way that a higher score indicated having less challenge. Therefore, the fact that the path coefficient is positive ( $\beta = 0.168$ ) is in line with the predicted hypothesis. International students who face language challenges have difficulty adapting academically, and those who do not face language challenges would have less difficulty adapting academically.

*Hypothesis 1c* predicted a negative relationship between social/cultural challenges and academic adaptation, such that international students facing social/cultural challenges would also be dealing with their academic adaptation. The results ( $\beta = -0.237$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.008$ ) provided support for the hypothesis, as the path connecting the two constructs was

significant. The results showed a negative correlation, as predicted in the hypothesis, such that the more difficulty international students experienced adapting to social/cultural challenges, the more difficulty they would have in adapting academically.

*Hypothesis 2a* predicted a positive relationship between university support and academic adaptation, such that international students receiving university support would also adapt academically. The result of this analysis ( $\beta=0.353$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.000$ ) provided support for this hypothesis, as the path of the two connecting constructs was significant. Therefore, there is evidence that the support international students receive from the university impacts academic adaptation in this sample.

*Hypothesis 2b* predicted a positive relationship between peer support and academic adaptation, such that international students who have peer support would also see an increase in their academic adaptation. The results of this analysis ( $\beta=-0.035$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.693$ ) did not provide support for this hypothesis, as the path connecting the two constructs was not significant. Therefore, there is no evidence that peer support impacts academic adaptation in this sample.

*Hypothesis H3* predicted a positive relationship between academic adaptation and academic performance, such that international students who experience positive academic adaptation would also experience positive academic performance. The results of this analysis ( $\beta=0.532$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.00$ ) provided support for this hypothesis, as the path connecting the two constructs was significant. Therefore, there is evidence that academic adaptation impacts academic performance.

*Hypothesis 4a* predicted that academic advising services moderate the relationship between academic challenges and academic adaptation, such that international students'

academic challenges will have less of an impact on academic adaptation if they seek academic advising services. The results of this analysis ( $\beta=0.002$ ,  $p\text{-value}= 0.977$ ) did not provide support for this hypothesis, as the path connecting the constructs was not significant. Therefore, there is no evidence in this sample that academic advising services have a moderating relationship between academic challenges and academic adaptation.

*Hypothesis 4b* predicted that academic advising services moderate the relationship between social/cultural challenges and academic adaptation, such that international students' social/cultural challenges will have less of an impact on academic adaptation if they utilize academic advising services. The result of this analysis ( $\beta= 0.046$ ),  $p\text{-value}= 0.524$ ) did not provide support for this hypothesis, as the path connecting the constructs was not significant. Therefore, there is no evidence of academic advising services having a moderating relationship in this sample.

*Hypothesis 5a* predicted that academic advising services moderate the relationship between university support and academic adaptation, such that international students who receive university support will have more of an impact on academic adaptation if they use academic advising services. The result of this hypothesis ( $\beta= -0.058$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.509$  ) did not provide support for this hypothesis, as the path connecting the constructs was not significant. Therefore, there is no evidence of academic advising services having a moderating relationship in this sample.

The results of the moderating hypotheses ( H4a, H4b, H5a) were not significant, signifying the extent to which international students sought academic advising services did not have an effect on the level of academic challenges (H4a), social/cultural challenges ( H4b), nor university support (H5a) they experienced and this also did not

impact academic adaptation in this sample. Due to the non-significant results of the moderating variable, I suspected an issue with range restrictions. I further elaborate on range restrictions in the analysis section below.

### Summary

The chapter included the demographic characteristics used in the study to better understand the sample population. This was followed by an analysis of the indicators, where reliability and validity were discussed. Finally, a complete analysis of the tested hypotheses concludes the chapter. Table 18 provides detailed information on the results of the hypotheses, including their path coefficients, p-values, and final results, and Figure 2 displays the structural model with path coefficients and p-values.

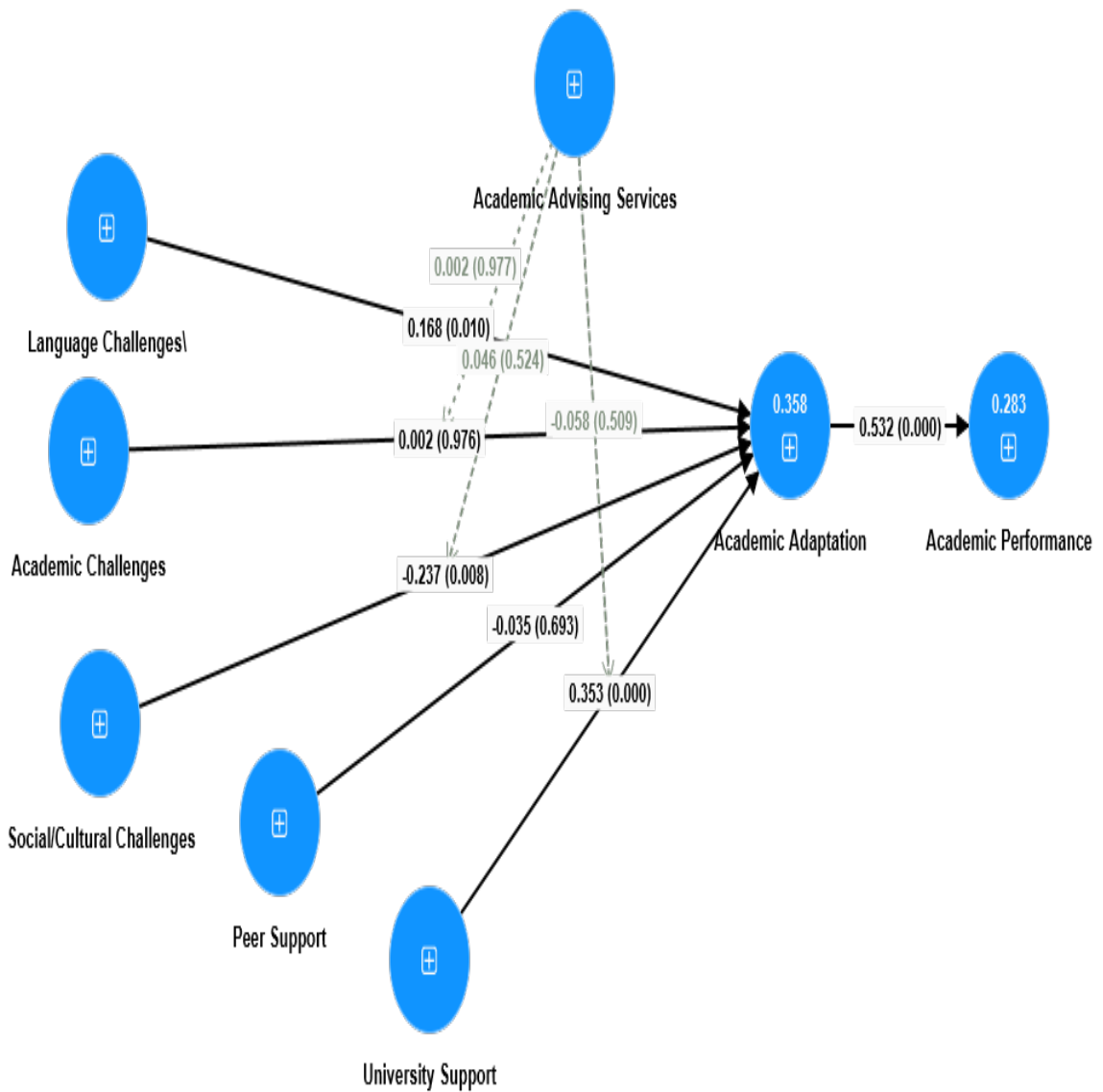
**Table 18 Hypotheses and Results**

<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Final Results</b>	<b>P-Value</b>	<b>Path Coefficient</b>
H1a: Academic challenges will have a negative impact on academic adaptation, such that as academic challenges increase, academic adaptation decreases.	Not Supported	0.976	0.002
H1b: Language challenges will have a negative impact on academic adaptation, such that as language challenges increase, academic adaptation decreases.	Supported	0.010	0.168
H1c: Social/Cultural challenges will have a negative impact on academic adaptation such that as social/cultural challenges increase, academic adaptation decreases	Supported	0.008	-0.237

**Table 18 Continued**

<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Final Results</b>	<b>P-Value</b>	<b>Path Coefficient</b>
H2a: University support will positively affect academic adaptation such that as university support increases, academic adaptation increases.	Supported	0.000	0.353
H2b: Peer support positively impacts academic adaptation, such that as peer support increases, academic adaptation increases.	Not Supported	0.693	-0.035
H3: Academic adaptation positively impacts academic performance, such that as academic adaptation increases, academic performance increases.	Supported	0.000	0.532
H4a: Academic Advising Services moderate the relationship between academic challenges and academic adaptation, such that in the presence of academic advising services, academic challenges will have less of an impact on academic adaptation as compared to an absence of advising services.	Not Supported	0.977	0.002
H4b: Academic Advising Services moderate the relationship between social/cultural challenges and academic adaptation, such that in the presence of academic advising services, social/cultural challenges will have less of an impact on academic adaptation as compared to an absence of advising services.	Not Supported	0.524	0.046
H5a: Academic Advising Services moderate the relationship between university support and academic adaptation, such that in the presence of academic advising services, university support will have more of an impact on academic adaptation as compared to an absence of advising services.	Not Supported	0.509	-0.058

**Figure 2 Structural Model**



**Additional Analysis**

After further examination of the non-significant hypotheses ( H1a, H2b, H4a, H4b, H5a), I performed additional analysis on these hypotheses that were not supported. The distribution of the survey responses of the not-supported hypotheses did not have a large



variance in responses. For all the non-supported hypotheses, most of the responses were >50% skewing towards the agree and strongly agree Likert scale response, which was concluded by performing frequency analysis for each survey item of the not-supported hypotheses. The non-significant hypotheses survey responses were not normally distributed based on the distribution percentages displayed in Tables 19 -21. Due to the non-significant results of the hypotheses H1a, H2b, H4a, H4b, and H5a, I suspected this could be due to not having enough variation of responses in the data I collected, which would be deemed a range restriction (RR). Range restriction is considered a limitation that could be due to different aspects of an experimental design, such as measurement procedures or sampling methods (Aguinis et al., 2017). Therefore, the small range of responses in this study impacted test moderation because it did not encompass the full range of possible responses.

In this instance, range restriction (RR) occurred because the study did not represent the full range of possible survey responses. Not showing a full range of possible responses could have a negative effect on the hypothesis because the responses are skewed to one side rather than being normally distributed. In this case, the responses were skewed and represented the tails of the distribution, making it challenging to generalize (Sears, 1986). Therefore, I suspected that range restriction (RR) could explain why the moderating effects appeared smaller or provided a non-significant statistical value (Aguinis et al., 2017).

Tables 19-21 and Figures 3-5 indicate examples of survey items and their skewed response distributions; as indicated in the tables, the responses skewed toward the tails further emphasizing the possible range restriction issue I suspected. Range restriction

issues affect hypothesis testing in the sense that correlation values are decreased due to the minimal variance in survey responses.

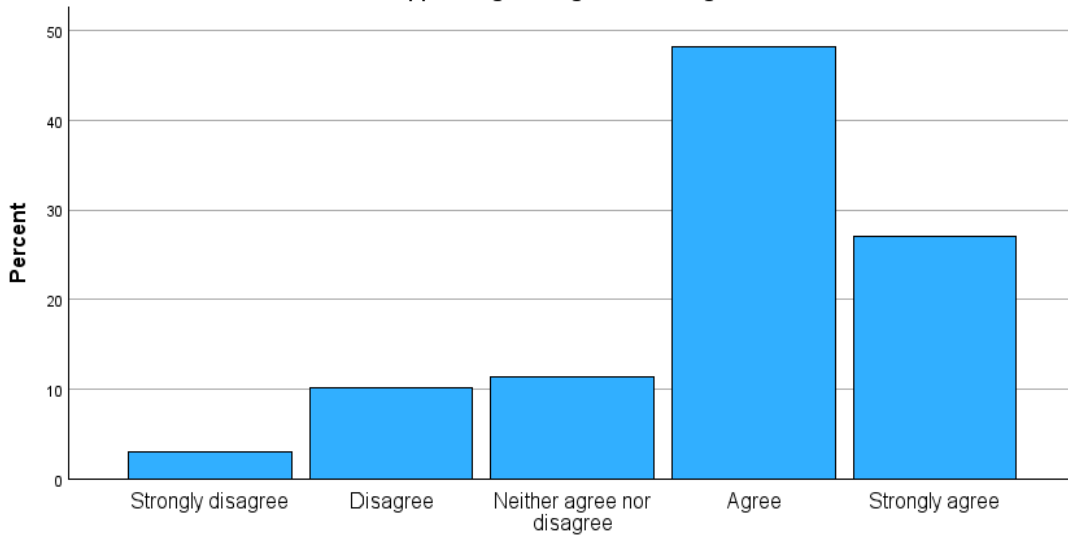
**Table 19 Distribution of Survey Items**

**I have enough social skills and support to get along well in college.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	5	3.0	3.0
Disagree	17	10.2	10.2
Neither agree nor disagree	19	11.4	11.4
Agree	80	48.2	48.2
Strongly agree	45	27.1	27.1
Total	166	100.0	100.0

**Figure 3 Bar Chart Distribution of Survey Items**

Please select to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements. - I have enough social skills and support to get along well in college.



Please select to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements. - I have enough social skills and support to get along well in college.

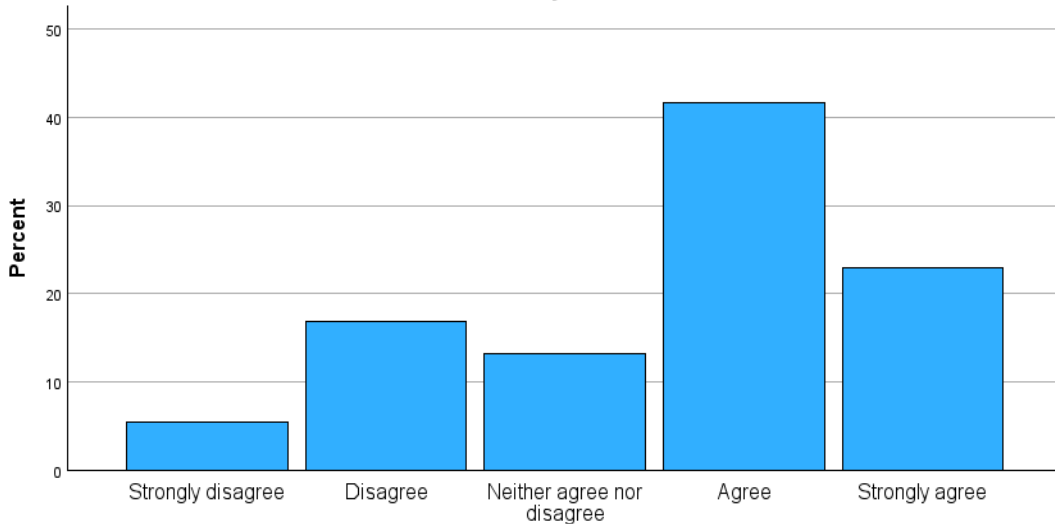
**Table 20 Distribution of Survey Items**

**I know which courses I need to enroll in every semester.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	9	5.4	5.4
Disagree	28	16.9	16.9
Neither agree nor disagree	22	13.3	13.3
Strongly agree	38	22.9	22.9
Total	166	100.0	100.0

**Figure 4 Bar Chart Distribution of Survey Items**

Please select to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements. - I know which courses I need to enroll in every semester



Please select to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements. - I know which courses I need to enroll in every semester

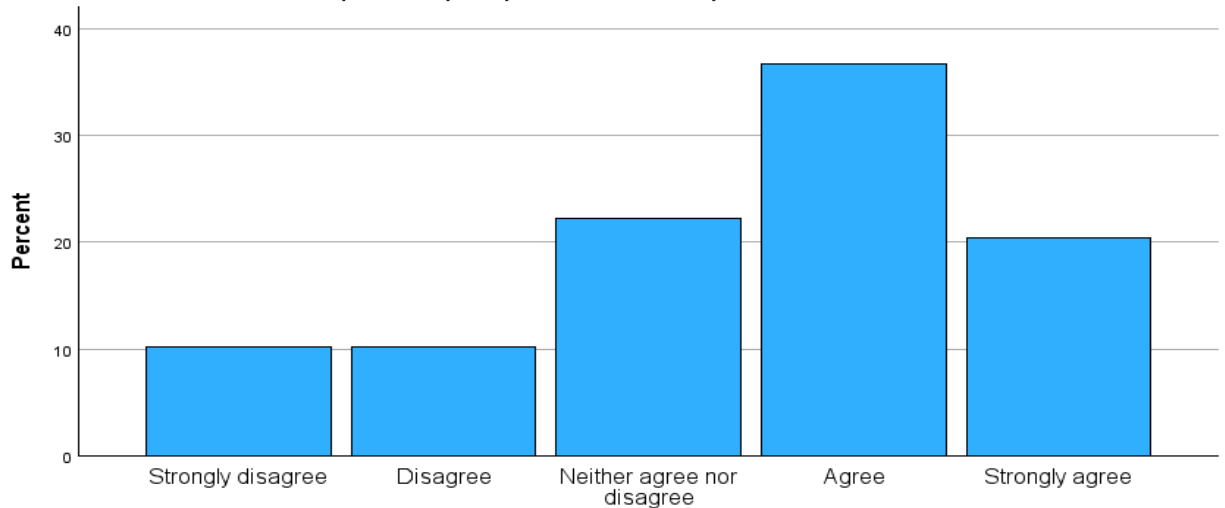
**Table 21 Distribution of Survey Items**

**My advisor assists and provides prompt service within a particular time.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	17	10.2	10.2
	Disagree	17	10.2	10.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	37	22.3	22.3
	Agree	61	36.7	36.7
	Strongly agree	34	20.5	20.5
	Total	166	100.0	100.0

**Figure 5 Bar Chart Distribution of Survey Items**

Please select to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements. - My advisor assists and provides prompt service within a particular time.



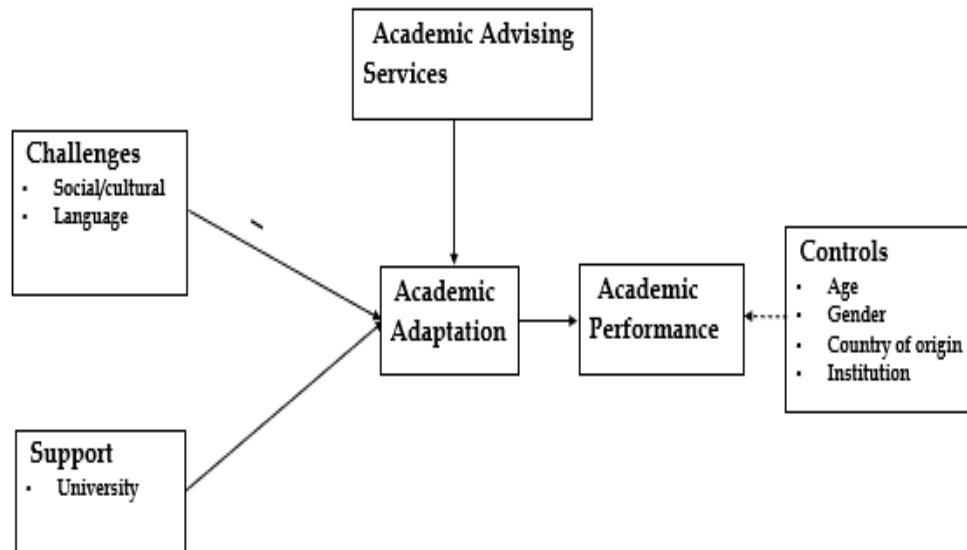
Please select to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements. - My advisor assists and provides prompt service within a particular time.

### Revised Research Model

After conducting my research model analysis, I developed a revised model indicated in Figure 6. This revised model was based on the analysis results of my study

that showed a positive direct effect on the relationship between Academic Advising Services and Academic Adaptation, as indicated in the Bootstrapping analysis ( $\beta= 0.140$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.041$ ), suggesting a significant, positive direct effect. Additionally, in order to develop the revised model, I omitted the constructs that did not provide support for the predicted hypotheses and only retained constructs that provided significant results. The revised model, which is speculative in nature, is based on the results of the sample in this study and would still need to be validated by collecting additional data in a future research study. The revised model with constructs that provided supported hypotheses can be found in Figure 6.

**Figure 6 Revised Research Model**



## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My research study explored how challenges faced by international students can affect their academic adaptation and, ultimately, their academic performance.

International students, regardless of their country of origin, face many adversities upon arrival in the US. This study was meant to highlight how these challenges, including language, social/cultural, and academic challenges, affect their adaptation to life and studies in the US, along with what kind of impact they would have on their academic performances. Moreover, the research also emphasized that the support that international students receive could impact their adaptation to life in the US and their academic performance.

The impact of an international student's success is not only on their personal goal attainment but also substantially affects the university's metrics and goals, especially in terms of retention rates, graduation rates, and revenue generation. Therefore, the results of this study highlight why it is crucial to support international students in a way that would help position them for success. This research answered the following research question: What is the effect of challenges and support on international students' academic performances in public Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in South Florida? An overview of the findings is provided in Table 18.

#### **Discussion**

The results of this analysis provide evidence that the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theoretical framework by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), where job demands, in

this context, are equivalent to the challenges faced by international students, was supported through the reported hypotheses ( H1b, H1c). Additionally, resources that are equivalent to support in this context are supported through hypothesis (H2a). The JD-R Theory (Bakker &Demerouti,2017) is applicable in more contexts than just the most popular utilized employee well-being studies. This study provides evidence that the JD-R Theory is equally applicable to studies involving international students and their well-being during their academic careers in the US.

However, a key finding of the study also proved that academic challenges did not necessarily support the original hypothesis. Academic challenges did not significantly impact academic adaptation; thus, the extent of international students' challenges, or lack thereof, did not impact their academic adaptation. This finding speaks to the resilience of international students, who, regardless of whether or not they faced challenges, did not impact their academic adaptation. These students have to persevere and succeed despite the challenges they face. They also have to persevere due to the added pressures of familial obligations and knowing the exorbitant amount of money spent and continues to be spent on them during their studies in the US. These international students are less likely to drop classes due to their visa restrictions and having to maintain a 12-credit courseload, aligning with their need to push through and succeed regardless of setbacks. Furthermore, due to the limited time their F-1 visa is valid, these students are forced to complete degree requirements on time. Therefore, whether they face academic challenges or not is not regarded as an excuse not to adapt and succeed.

On the other hand, language challenges (Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015)and social/cultural challenges affected the international students' academic adaptation, yet

they still succeeded in their academic performance. Previous research shows that international students generally face language, social/cultural, and academic challenges (Pho & Schartner, 2021) that can affect their performance. However, they also face copious amounts of pressure, yet they succeed academically.

Another interesting finding was the fact that social/cultural challenges showed a significant impact on academic adaptation, which I hypothesized, but peer support did not, as initially hypothesized. Students who live off-campus typically go to campus, take their classes, and return home; they are less likely to socialize and partake in on-campus social activities when they do not live on campus. On the other hand, those living on campus have more opportunities to be more involved in on-campus activities and potentially have more access to peer support. Despite students living on campus and having more access to peer support, there is still no difference in impact on academic adaptation compared to those living off-campus. This finding indicates that international students place more emphasis on social/cultural challenges that affect their academic adaptation than on the possible positive impact of peer support on their academic adaptation. The findings thus suggest that international students are potentially more affected by the lack of social/cultural adaptation than by the lack of peer support. These students miss their home and everything that is familiar to them more than they care about making new peer connections. Understandably, international students emphasize wanting to feel at home since that is where they feel safe and loved.

On the other hand, university support significantly affected academic adaptation, and international students who received more university support significantly impacted their adaptation. This finding indicates the importance international students bestow upon



support from university resources to help them achieve success. Support from the respective university begins upon acceptance to the university, and students rely on this support to remain on track. International students assigned to advisors feel comfortable contacting advisors because they are regarded as university support staff they can trust and count on to give valuable advice.

Even though Academic Advising Services as a moderating variable had no significant effect on the various independent variables ( academic challenges, social/cultural challenges, university support), as indicated in Table 17, it showed a significant direct effect on the academic adaptation of international students which was not in my original model. This reiterates the important role academic advisors play for international students. Additionally, advisors are seen as support offered to this particular group of students, thus further emphasizing the importance of having assigned advisors, especially for international students. As a former international student, I can attest that my academic advisor quickly became my go-to person for any issue I faced. I felt comfortable talking to him, and I always felt that following his advice would keep me on the path to success. Advisors are one of the first faces students encounter during their first semester on campus, and they are oftentimes the only constant in their academic journey since they are the students' go-to from day one until they graduate, which makes it easy for international students to depend on their advisors for their every need, concern, and even advice.

As listed in Table 18, there were a few non-significant hypotheses results, and possible reasons for these non-significant results stemmed from the variety in survey data; many responses for the hypotheses that were not supported were very similar in the sense

that students agreed on the positive experiences of academic advising services. As previously mentioned, as a moderator, academic advising services did not have an effect; however, it was significant as having a direct effect on academic adaptation. Presenting these results that international students appreciate and highly seek out academic advising services is a positive finding to report to administrators at the university. This shows that students feel supported by advisors and that advisors are a great asset to the university because advisors help students adapt, ultimately allowing them to succeed academically.

The results of my study also provide evidence that the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) can be utilized in other contexts besides employee well-being studies. In this context with international students and specifically in my sample, certain challenges, such as academic challenges, may not be as relevant as language and social/cultural challenges. Still, they face challenges that affect them nevertheless. Moreover, certain support received in this context may also not be as relevant as others; for instance, peer support did not prove to be as much of an essential aspect of support as the support they would receive from the university. This result emphasizes the importance of academic advisors, as university support staff, as proven by the direct effect analysis, where advisors play an integral role in the academic adaptation of an international student.

As a former international student, I always sought advice from my academic advisor, even for non-academic-related issues, because I felt I could trust his advice. Fast forward to the present day, I am now an academic advisor, and I have found that students seek my advice for personal/life decisions they need to make or even if they need someone to vent to. So, in my role as an advisor, I wear many hats, and it spans more

than just being their academic support resource; advisors are regarded as the liaison to many other university support services, and advisors are also a safe space for the students.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The implications of this study are related to numerous challenges faced by international students in higher education institutions in the US. Moreover, it also expands on the extensive need for support that the university ( university resources) must provide to help mitigate these challenges and provide these students with resources that lead them to success.

The Job Demands-Resourced (JD-R ) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) utilized in this study is an employee well-being theory typically used in business practices. Through this study, I found that research in higher education can also benefit from this theory and potentially other theories specifically used in employee well-being studies. This study supported the hypotheses that challenges, specifically language and social/cultural challenges faced by students, significantly impact their adapting to the US education system. Moreover, the hypothesis also proved that support, specifically university support offered to international students, significantly impacts their adaptation to the US education system. The academic adaptation/academic performance hypothesis was also significant, which further supports a key aspect in the theory that a balance between challenges experienced and support received is required to achieve student well-being and student success.

The results of this study provided evidence that an employee well-being theory, such as the JD-R Theory ( Bakker & Demorouti, 2007), holds true in other contexts besides employee well-being studies and thus can also be utilized in this context with

international students. When international students face challenges or demands, as long as they are provided with support resources, they can adapt and, in turn, successfully complete their degree.

### **Managerial Implications**

Institutions recruiting international students will need to pay closer attention to the types of students being admitted; as apparent from the study, international students come with baggage that causes challenges, and they need support to adapt and, in turn, be successful. The findings of this study could help institutions implement programs to provide international students with additional resources not typically available.

Since orientation is one of the first experiences international students have on their new campus, the orientation office could expand the international student orientation to include workshops and even encourage current international students to be guest speakers at orientation sessions and provide their experience at the institution. Additionally, regardless of whether they complete the TOEFL and pass it for admissions purposes, the institutions could offer English programs to help with the language barrier. This could be as simple as providing FTIC international students with a different First-Year Experience course or providing transfer international students with workshops geared towards the use of the English language in slang and the use of the language in academic and social settings.

Secondly, universities could promote social programs to help mitigate social and cultural challenges and get students involved on campus. Based on the findings of my study, international students don't all live on campus; some are commuter students, so by providing social programs/ events on campus geared toward international students, they

may be more prone to staying on campus and becoming more involved with campus life.

Additionally, the findings of this study suggested that international students are impacted more by their social/cultural challenges. Thus, introducing social gatherings that help them feel at home may make them more prone to adapting. Some institutions have clubs, such as the Caribbean Student Association, Indian Student Associations, Latinos Unidos, etc., but international students may not be aware of these clubs. Thus, by promoting clubs at orientation sessions or during workshops, they could become aware and join to be around peers from their cultural backgrounds. This will help students feel at home and allow them to create lasting friendships/relationships with their peers, which would be challenging if they were not living on campus.

Advisors play an important role at institutions of higher education. They are the liaison between the institution and its students, ensuring students are aware of codes of conduct, university policies, and requirements to complete their degrees on time. Advisors are also trained to be knowledgeable about the resources offered at the university to help students during their academic careers. They are vital in assisting international students to mitigate their challenges. Advisors are educators, mentors, connectors, confidants, and the list goes on.

As a connector, advisors connect students from the same background to each other to help them feel at home; this is especially true for international students. Creating connections helps international students cope with their social/cultural challenges by allowing them to connect with peers from their home country, enabling them to speak their native language, which, from personal experience, feels like home- no matter where you are. Furthermore, advisors quickly become familiar faces on campus since they are

one of the first contacts international students make upon their arrival at the institution. Advisors are usually easily accessible, which promotes their willingness to help and support students.

Advisors are considered mentors and confidants, and students count on advisors when they need to make tough academic decisions, when they need to vent, or when they need personal, non-biased advice. Advisors are trustworthy, and students rely on the fact that advice provided by advisors always considers their special circumstances and requirements as international students.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

A research study is never perfect, and these limitations must be reported. One major limitation is that the international students in this study attended the same institution in a large, metropolitan city. International students attending universities or colleges in large metropolitan areas would have a different experience than international students who attend small colleges or institutions in rural areas or college towns. Additionally, the institution is largely a commuter school, which means that there could be a lack of peer interaction with international students. Many students live at home and are from the local area; their friends are usually the same friends they have always had, and they do not necessarily feel the need to create new friendships, which can further isolate international students since they are not necessarily interacting with local students. Future studies should include institutions in various cities and states where international students could possibly have different experiences due to a lack of diversity, different standards, distinct university cultures, or even limited social circles, which could potentially encourage students to lean more on their peers alongside the university for

support in adapting academically.

A second limitation is that the desired sample size was not achieved, 342 study participants were required; however, only 166 valid responses were recorded. This suggests that the sample size during the study is not representative of the general international student population at the institution, and the results could not reflect the challenges of all international students at the institution. This limited number of valid survey responses and limited variation in responses may have caused range restriction due to the inability to capture the full range that may be present in the population (Aguinis et al., 2017). However, this does not signify validity or reliability issues; limited variation in data may have caused the range restrictions. Moreover, this may have also been caused by selection or recruitment issues; admissions criteria may weed out students who may face academic challenges due to high GPAs and high admissions standards. For instance, there is no way to determine whether the range restriction issues were due to respondents who ignored the survey being the ones facing academic challenges or whether students who responded to the study did not, in fact, face any challenges and perceived themselves to be doing well adapting to their life in the US.

Thirdly, only undergraduate students were surveyed in this research study; however, graduate students may have a different experience with challenges and may require different support resources offered by the university. Future research could include both undergraduate and graduate students. Some international students who attend US institutions have completed bachelor's degrees in their home country, which may afford them a different experience with challenges, and the support resources required by these students from the university may be different than those needed by

first-time college students (FTICs). Additionally, some international graduate students may be older, making it more challenging to adapt to certain aspects of life in the US due to social/cultural challenges, whereas in other areas, such as academics, adaptation could be more manageable.

Lastly, international students from English-speaking countries can be compared to international students from non-English-speaking countries since the latter may have a language barrier as opposed to the former. A comparison study could be conducted to analyze the differences between these students' social/cultural challenges and academic challenges and whether students from non-English-speaking countries would predict a significant result of these challenges. In order to conduct such a study, however, study participants will have to be recruited from numerous institutions in numerous states/cities to accurately determine whether the native language would play a role in the results.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, this study presents valuable insights into the importance of support resources universities should offer, especially to international students. These resources are essential to help these students adapt to the US educational system and help them deal with social and cultural challenges. Providing resources to help them succeed not only benefits the students but also enriches the university's diverse student body. An international student's success is beneficial not only for the student and their family but also for the university. Successful students positively affect graduation and retention rates, which are crucial measures in the metrics outlined in Table 1, especially in Florida public institutions. Additionally, these students help increase revenue generation due to their high tuition rates every semester. If the university makes these international students feel



welcome, appreciated, and supported, they could also promote the institution to other international students from their home country.

This study also highlighted that the JD-R Theory ( Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) could be applied in contexts other than employee well-being studies, and the results provide evidence of that. This study showed that language and social/cultural challenges, or demands as described in the JD-R Theory, faced by international students could significantly impact their adaptation to the US education system and, on the other hand, university support offered to international students or resources as described in the JD-R Theory, impacts their adaptation to the US education system. Additionally, when these students have adapted to the US education system, they perform well academically, allowing them to complete their degree successfully within the suggested timeline. As the theory suggests, as long as there's a balance of challenges and resources offered to help mitigate these challenges, students can be successful, which at the end of the day is in line with the university goals and their metrics, as well as in line with the student and their family's goal.

## Timeline

Label	Dependency	Apr-23	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan-24	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	
IRB Approval			5-May														
<b>Informed Pilot</b>																	
Recruitment Materials		4/21															
Executing Informed Pilot	1a		4-May														
Revisions and Documentation	1b																
<b>Qualtrics and Survey</b>																	
Design and Implementation	1c		6-May	X													
<b>Pilot/Data Analysis</b>																	
Data Collection	0, 2						20-Sep										
Data cleaning/scrubbing	3a			15-Jun					15-Nov								
Descriptive Analysis	3b								20-Nov								
Factor Analysis/Revisions	3c								30-Nov								
<b>Main Pilot</b>																	
Data Collection	2											15-Feb					
Data cleaning/scrubbing	4a												1-Mar				
Descriptive Analysis	4b												15-Mar				
Factor Analysis/Revisions	4c												20-Mar				
<b>Manuscript</b>																	
Draft Analysis Write Up	4d														1-Apr		
Conclusion, Contribution, Limitation	4d														30-Apr		
Final for UGS	5,5a, 5b															15-Jun	

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## APPENDICES

Appendix I- Definitions

Appendix II- Demographics Questions

Appendix III- Survey Instruments

APPENDIX I

<b>CONSTRUCT</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>	<b>REFERENCE</b>
Student and Exchange Visitor System (SEVIS)	A web-based system for maintaining information on nonimmigrant students and exchange visitors in the US Program.	<a href="https://www.ice.gov/sevis">https://www.ice.gov/sevis</a>
F1-Visa	Academic Student Visa that allows students to enter the US as a full-time student at an accredited academic institution.	<a href="https://www.uscis.gov/laws-and-policy/legislation/immigration-and-nationality-act">https://www.uscis.gov/laws-and-policy/legislation/immigration-and-nationality-act</a>
Academic Adaptation/ Adjustment	How students manage their social, psychological, and academic challenges as they transition to higher education and the process of integrating and adapting within the academic community.	Bastien, 2018; Anderson, Guan & Koc, 2016
Academic Performance	Measurement of student achievement across various academic subjects/ expressed through Grade Point Average (GPA).	
Academic Challenges	Understanding the academic program structure and classroom behavior.	Al-Sharideh & Goe,1998
Social/Cultural Challenges	Difficulty adapting to the American way of doing things while maintaining their own culture.	Berry, 1997
Language Challenges	Communication difficulties due to language barriers.	Jean-Francois, 2017; Park et al., 2017
University Support	Participation in on-campus activities, interacting with faculty, and utilization of campus resources (tutoring services, writing center).	Cho & Yu, 2015
Peer Support	The need for students to create relationships and connections inside and outside the classroom.	Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015
Academic Advising Services	A student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals by using institutional resources.	Crookston,1972

## APPENDIX II

### DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

**1. Are you currently or have you ever been an International Student on an F-1 Visa?**

Yes

No

If no, then the participant will be exited from the survey.

**2. What is your gender identity?**

Man

Woman

Other gender identity

I prefer not to answer

**3. What is your age?**

18-21

22-25

26-29

30+

I prefer not to answer

**4. What is your country of citizenship?**

-dropdown with countries listed

**5. What is your native language?**

- student must fill in or select

I prefer not to answer

**6. What is your class level?**

Freshman (0-29 credits)

Sophomore (30-59 credits)

Junior (60-89 credits)

Senior (90+ credits)

**7. Did you transfer from another institution?**

Yes, from another US institution

Yes, from a state of Florida Public Institution (e.g., Miami Dade College/Broward College)

Yes, from a college/ university in my home country

No, I did not transfer

**8. Which of these best describes where you are living while attending college?**

On-Campus housing

Off-Campus Housing

Not applicable: The program is online

I prefer not to answer

**9. Since you've been in the US, on average, how often do you seek advice from an academic advisor per semester? ( via Zoom, phone, email, or in person)**

once

2-3 times

4 or more times

Never

## APPENDIX III

### SURVEY QUESTIONS

#### **Academic Challenges (AC.)**

- AC1. I am finding academic work at college difficult
- AC2. I know how to select my courses every semester
- AC3. I know where to go if I have questions about my academic career
- AC4. I am aware of or have utilized learning support services /resources offered by the college/university
- AC5. I have not been functioning well during examinations. (R)
- AC6. I am not working as hard as I should on my coursework. (R )
- AC7. I haven't been very efficient in the use of study time lately. (R )

#### **Social/Cultural Challenges (SCC)**

- SCC1. I have difficulty adjusting to the new culture I am living in
- SCC2. I have an open mind about the new culture I am living in
- SCC3. I am still learning about the new culture I am living in
- SCC4. I am having difficulty feeling at ease with other people at college.
- SCC5. I feel I am very different from other students at college in ways that I do not like.
- SCC6. I have been feeling lonely a lot at college lately.
- SCC7. I have several close social ties at college.
- SCC8. I am satisfied with the extent to which I am participating in social activities at college.
- SCC9. I am very involved with social activities in college.

#### **Language Challenges (LC)**

##### **The Self-reported Fluency of English Scale (SRFES) (Yeh & Inose,2003)**

- LC1. What is your present level of English fluency?
- LC2. How comfortable are you communicating in English?
- LC3. How often do you communicate in English?

#### **Academic Adaptation (AA.)**

- AA1. I am enjoying being a university student.
- AA2. My education is not worth time away from my work or my family ( R).
- AA3. I do not have the academic skills needed to enjoy being a student. (R ).
- AA4. I think I am as academically capable as any other student.
- AA5. I am satisfied with my ability to learn at university.

#### **Academic Performance (AP.)**

- AP1. I expect to successfully complete my degree in the usual allocated timeframe.
- AP2. I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance to date.
- AP3. My current GPA (student must fill in) (*best guess or drop down?*)
- AP4. I pass my classes on the first attempt with a grade of C or higher.

**University Support (USUP)**

USUP1. I feel comfortable talking about a problem with faculty or university staff

USUP2. I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help if I do not understand course-related material.

USUP3. I feel that a faculty member or university staff would be sensitive to my difficulties if I shared them

USUP4 I feel that a faculty member or university staff would be sympathetic if I was upset

USUP5. I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help with a personal problem

**Peer Support (PSUP)**

PSUP1. I am meeting as many people and making as many friends as possible in college.

PSUP2. I could contact another student from class if I had a question

PSUP3. I am very involved with social activities in college.

PSUP4. I have enough social skills and support to get along well in college.

PSUP5. I have met with classmates outside of class to study for an exam

PSUP6. I have discussed personal matters with students who I met in class

**Academic Advising Services (AAS)****Reliability (AASREL)**

AASREL1. My advisor delivers services as promised.

AASRE L 2. I can depend on my advisor to perform the promised service.

AASREL 3. I can depend on my advisor to advise me accurately on my academic requirements.

**Assurance (AASA)**

AASA 1. My advisor has the knowledge to answer questions regarding my academics or concerns.

AASA 2. My advisor shows courtesy to their students.

AASA 3. My advisor is able to inspire, convey trust and confidence.

**Empathy (AASE)**

AASE 1. My advisor provides individualized attention to me.

AASE 2. My advisor promotes a student-centered environment.

AASE 3. My advisor is caring.

**Responsiveness (AASRES)**

AASRES 1. My advisor assists and provides prompt service within a particular time.

AASRES 2. My advisor is willing to help and provide a response to emerging situations.

## VITA

### ELAINE MICHELINE HODGE

2002-2005	Bachelor of Business Administration Florida International University Miami, Florida
2006-2007	Master of International Business Florida International University Miami, Florida
2010-2014	Adjunct Instructor-The First Year Experience Florida International University Miami, Florida
2023- Present	Adjunct Instructor-Human Resource Management Florida International University Miami, Florida
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### PRESENTATIONS

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)

Regional Conference 2014, Savannah, GA

Title: Calling All Academic Advisors...IMPROVe your skills!

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)

National Conference 2016, Atlanta, GA

Title: A Pocket Guide to Online Advisement

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)

National Conference 2017, St. Louis, MO

Title: FIU Graduation Success Initiative: A Toolset to Guarantee On-Time  
Graduation

Engaged Management Scholarship (EMS)

Doctoral Consortium 2023, Alberta, Canada

Title: The International Student Experience: An Exploration of the Impact of  
Stressors on International Students