

Formative Interactions: International Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Academic Advising

W. George Longbottom, Temple University

Although research has extensively documented international students' adjustment and acculturation challenges, the role of academic advising in assisting with such challenges has received scarce empirical attention. This phenomenological study explored how international students' communications with their academic advisors influenced their educational adjustment and growth in a university setting. Semi structured interviews with 15 international students revealed three overarching themes: advisor-advisee interactions, quality of information, and advising limits vis-à-vis international student issues. Using validation theory, this study's discussion and recommendations centered on advising practices that fostered or hindered international students' perceptions of academic advising.

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International students maintain a sizeable presence in U.S. higher education. An *Open Doors*' estimate for the 2021–2022 academic year shows 948,519 international students pursued their studies in the U.S., a 3.8% increase from 2020–2021, likely from receding restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Institute of International Education, 2022). Given that U.S. higher education has attracted international students for decades, research has extensively documented their adjustment and acculturation challenges (Bista, 2015).

Although all students undergo varying levels of adjustment to higher education life and culture, international students' educational and cultural backgrounds typically exacerbate common stressors such as academic challenges, social isolation, and financial strain (Andrade, 2006; Andrade & Evans, 2009; Shu et al., 2020). While domestic students also face these stressors, concerns regarding English language proficiency increase international students' anxiety about the language demands of their coursework and their interactions with professors and domestic peers

(Scheyvens et al., 2003). Because of cross-cultural differences, international students must also navigate different educational norms (e.g., appropriate student-professor interactions and classroom expectations) that domestic students may not face (Ng, 2006). Additionally, international students lack access to most forms of financial aid and student loans because of their visa status.

Given the unique stressors international students typically face, the effectiveness of their support systems influences how well they adjust to and grow in their academic environment (Bhochhibhoya et al., 2017). Despite the large body of research on international students' adjustment and acculturation challenges, the role of academic advising in assisting with these challenges has received scarce empirical attention (Zhang, 2016). Academic and faculty advisors are among the most student-facing administrators on campus and provide vital information on curricular requirements, course selection, and scheduling (Gordon et al., 2011). Thus, international students' first interactions with their academic advisors lay the foundation for how they perceive the importance of academic advising and whether they will pursue deeper conversations about academic and professional development.

Many international students begin their studies with insufficient understanding or unrealistic expectations of academic advising (Zhang & Dinh, 2017). The few relevant studies suggest that international students come to value the advisor-advisee relationship and regard academic advising as a critical knowledge resource as they navigate their adjustment and growth in their academic environment (Zhang, 2016). However, additional studies on international students' lived academic advising experiences could reveal different factors that lead them to this same conclusion. This qualitative research study expands on Zhang's (2016) work by exploring how international undergraduate students' experiences with academic advising influence their adjustment to and growth in a university environment. Understanding how international students' academic advising experiences validate or invalidate their adjustment can help academic advisors better understand and meet international students' advising needs.

Literature Review

Many studies have explored international students' adjustment and growth in educational environments. Few have focused on academic advising. This review organizes pertinent studies into two categories: academic advising as a vital resource and advising communications.

Academic Advising as a Vital Resource

Students generally perceive academic advising as a vital resource for their adjustment to educational environments and academic growth (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Packard & Jeffers, 2013). Zhai's (2004) qualitative study found that although most participating international students primarily sought advice from family and friends, others noted that academic advising was an important resource. The findings suggested that if international students fully understand the role of academic advising, they may seek it more frequently than friends and relatives.

Lau et al. (2019) found that the use of university resources such as academic advising is positively correlated with international students' sense of belonging. However, only half of their study's sample indicated that they sometimes used academic advising, suggesting its underutilization. Accordingly, the authors suggested that institutions should continue their outreach to international students to ensure that they understand the role academic advising could play in their sense of belonging.

Based on validation theory (Rendón, 1994), Zhang (2016) analyzed international students' lived experiences with academic advising in a community college setting. Her findings revealed that international students acknowledged academic advising as a vital resource for academic and personal support that facilitated their successful transition to their academic environment. The findings also identified strategies that promoted positive perceptions of academic advising.

Although these studies affirmed the positive experiences of international students who used academic advising, they also indicated that others had invalidating or no experience with academic advising. More research on international students' advising experiences could reveal what lead them to acknowledge it as a vital resource and seek it over other sources. Understanding such factors could help university academic advisors reassess and refine how they present the

importance of academic advising to the international student community.

Advising Communications

The effective advising of international students depends on advisor communication at all stages of advisees' studies. Zhang (2015) and Zhang and Dinh (2017) studied the intercultural communication competencies of community college academic advisors and university engineering advisors respectively. These studies found that the academic advisors acknowledged their international advisees' cultural backgrounds and worked to help them overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, often without the benefit of professional training. By respecting international students' culture, showing patience as they navigate their program requirements and empathy by trying to place themselves in their students' position, academic advisors created connections that facilitated international students' adjustment and growth. These studies emphasized that institutions should offer training in areas such as intercultural communication.

Lin and Liu's (2019) reflective inquiry of composite stories from five Chinese undergraduate students revealed the academic expectations, parental pressure, and social anxiety typically faced by Chinese international students at a Canadian university. Their study asserted that academic advisors should deepen their understanding of their advisee's native culture and its intersection with their adopted campus culture. The study also suggested that academic advisors should encourage students to maintain their bilingual fluency and identity to form a bicultural identity.

These studies suggested that effective advisory communication facilitates international students' learning experiences. Intercultural awareness helps academic advisors understand their international advisee's cultural and educational backgrounds. Not all academic advisors have experience advising international students, so understanding communication strategies that international students have found helpful can facilitate productive advisor-advisee relationships.

By understanding international students' validating and invalidating advising experiences, academic advisors can reassess how they interact and guide their international advisees. This study explores the following research question: How do international students' communication with their

academic advisors influence their educational adjustment and growth in a university setting?

Theoretical Framework

International students become one of many minority groups on U.S. campuses when they transition out of their native culture and into a new educational environment for their academic studies. Because of their international background, the educational challenges these students face do not wholly align with other underrepresented domestic groups. Therefore, they require careful academic advising to facilitate successful integration into their new educational environment. Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) can facilitate an understanding of international students' academic advising experiences by focusing on their ongoing developmental processes in their educational environment. Internal agents (i.e., academic advisors) and external agents (i.e., close friends) facilitate academic and interpersonal growth as these students encounter unique challenges navigating numerous stressors of college life and culture, especially at the outset of their studies.

Rendón (1994) broadly characterized validation as both academic and interpersonal. Academic validation concerns a student's "innate capacity to learn and acquire confidence in being a college student" (p. 36). This occurs when advisors effectively share knowledge that facilitates advisee's understanding of their curriculum program and educational adjustment. Interpersonal validation concerns a student's adjustment to university life and culture and how well they see themselves as a student acquiring knowledge. With validation from their academic advisors, international students may recognize that they are capable of learning and succeeding in their educational environment, while overcoming potential linguistic and cultural barriers.

Methods

This study used a phenomenological research design to explore how international students' communications with their academic advisors influenced their adjustment and growth over time. Phenomenology focuses on individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (e.g., advising interactions), emphasizing what and how they experienced it (e.g., validating or invalidating advising experiences; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This qualitative approach can provide a better understanding

of international students' experiences interacting with academic advisors and the impressions left by the advising experience. It can also reveal advising practices that international students find beneficial, helping academic advisors reassess interactions with their international advisees.

Research Setting

This study was conducted in the fall of 2021 at a large urban R1 institution in the northeastern U.S. The institution has multiple schools and colleges that offer undergraduate degrees; each has their own academic advising unit, signifying a decentralized academic advising structure. All incoming undergraduate students must attend new-student orientation where they receive important information about their program requirements and expectations. Students are strongly encouraged to interact with their academic advisor throughout their studies to ensure they remain on track.

Participants

After receiving approval from the institutional review board, international undergraduate students were recruited through an invitation letter detailing the purpose of the study and participant criteria. The institution's International Student and Scholars Service (ISSS) office sent invitations to all enrolled international students in the fall semester of 2021. From the international students who responded, purposeful sampling was used to screen interested participants for eligibility and to ensure that they could provide detailed experiences that aligned with the purpose of the study (Maxwell, 2005).

This study focused on international undergraduate students who started their studies as first years to capture the newness of their experiences with university academic advising. To participate, international students must have graduated from high school in their home country and begun their academic studies at the U.S. institution as first-year students. This study excluded international students in their first year at the time of this study because of their limited experiences at that point. Fifteen undergraduate students who met the eligibility requirements participated, representing 11 countries (see Table 1). All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Table 1. International Participant Demographics (Fall 2021)

Name ^a	Year	Age	Home Country	First Language
Aisha	4th	21	India	Hindi
Yu-Jun	4th	22	South Korea	Korean
Thais	3rd	23	Brazil	Portuguese
Fatima	4th	23	India	Hindi
Eun-U	4th	22	South Korea	Korean
Li Jie	4th	21	China	Chinese
Aneni	2nd	20	Zimbabwe	Shona
Levi	3rd	23	Israel	Hebrew
Seo-Jun	4th	23	South Korea	Korean
Chien-hung	4th	21	Taiwan	Chinese
Haoyu	2nd	26	China	Chinese
Tamar	2nd	19	Israel	Hebrew
Catalina	3rd	20	Russia	Russian
Anirban	3rd	21	Bangladesh	Bengali
Maya	3rd	20	India	Delugu

^aPseudonyms used for identity protection.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants completed a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of the study, participants could opt to be interviewed via Zoom rather than face-to-face. The interviews ranged from 40 to 63 minutes and consisted of open-ended questions, allowing participants to narrate their experiences with academic advising as it related to their adjustment and growth (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). At the start of each interview, the researcher briefed the participants on the study aims and asked them whether they wanted to participate. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Through member-checking, the participants received a copy of their interview transcript and had the opportunity to edit it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

The researcher used open coding to note statements characterizing each participant's experience with academic advising. Axial coding identified common categories among the statements and formed broad themes regarding advising experiences. The researcher removed all identifying information, including references to the participants' program of study and mentions of specific advising units, from each interview transcript.

Findings

Three key themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews: advisor-advisee interactions, quality of information, and advising limits vis-à-vis international student issues.

Advisor-Advisee Interactions

Participants broadly asserted that their continual interactions with their academic advisors allowed them to perceive academic advising positively. They noted advisor patience, trustworthiness, and listening ability as characteristics that made academic advising a vital resource. Many participants noted that language barriers constituted an obstacle to acquiring new academic information, especially at the beginning of their studies; however, their academic advisors employed communication strategies to assist them. Haoyu recalled her own linguistic challenges and her advisor's patience as she attempted to verbalize her questions and concerns:

She was really patient. Language is a big problem for Chinese students, and I was not that confident to talk to people. So even she was patient. I still feel a little bit nervous because I did not understand what she said sometimes. She would give me lots of questions to make sure all things are on the right way.

Haoyu's advisor's willingness to carefully explain the program requirements without judging her

English proficiency helped calm and empower Haoyu to communicate more. Her advisor's desire to learn more about her academic goals also helped further her appreciation of academic advising. Similarly, Fatima recalled that her current academic advisor would listen without judging her accent and would recommend resources specific to her concerns:

She listened to me thoroughly. She tried to understand my concerns and she was very patient with me. . . . So, whenever I would tell her, "Oh, I do not know what is going on with this class, like, I think I am having a hard time." She would try to just help me understand how to tackle problems and, like, she helped me find resources too. . . . I had an accent back then, and she was fine with understanding what I was saying, and she did not look annoyed.

Because the advisor's recommendations were specific to her concerns, Fatima recognized the benefit of a close advisor-advisee relationship. Eun-U also appreciated her advisor's willingness to listen without interrupting and to act as a teacher during their sessions. She also noted her advisor's experiences with international students:

Oh, she was a good listener. She waited for me to end the sentence of my speech. I think she met many international students. . . . She is not only helping me a lot, but, like, gave me a lesson on how to do this or do that.

Given these participants' different educational backgrounds and limited understanding of American higher education, their advisors' willingness to create a safe space and know them as capable individuals facilitated their ability to express questions, concerns, and goals. Through their interactions, the participants gained a clearer understanding of their program requirements and expectations. Reflecting on her advisory relationship, Thais remarked that international students benefit from an active relationship with their academic advisors:

They get to know you and they know how to cater to your specific needs. . . . So, building that relationship, it allows the international students to have someone that they can rely on whenever they have a question, and help

them feel like they are not lost and see multiple people.

Although the participants expressed appreciation for their academic advisors' supportive guidance, several recalled interactions that made them question the usefulness of academic advising at certain points in their studies. During her first year, Fatima remembered feeling frustrated because her first academic advisor assumed she knew what to expect from her advising sessions, stating, "She assumed that I knew what academic advisement was, first of all. She assumed what to expect out of this meeting." This compounded with her anxiety about navigating her new educational environment.

Tamar recalled one of her first interactions with an academic advisor, who gave her a list of courses to register for and assumed she understood how they fit into her program requirements: "She just told me what classes I should register for and she really did not explain why, which was fine, but I would want to know." This interaction left Tamar unsure about the importance of academic advising.

International students appreciated their academic advisors' patience, listening ability, and trustworthiness as they navigated their new educational environment. Knowing that they could speak without judgement for their language proficiency or limited knowledge of their program requirements allowed international students to open up more easily to their academic advisors. However, several participants reported that advisors' assumptions about their prior knowledge and understanding of program requirements resulted in doubts about the utility of academic advising. While students may feel frustrated when academic advisors assume their understanding of academic advising and program requirements, international students may feel particularly disadvantaged because of their limited understanding of the higher education system.

Quality of Information

Despite some participants' concerns, the participants broadly affirmed that academic advisors effectively communicated information related to their program requirements and scheduling procedures. Many shared that their academic advisor's use of visuals and step-by-step instructions regarding scheduling and course selections constituted an important part of their relationship with their academic advisor. At the beginning of

his studies, Levi recalled that his academic advisor allayed his initial confusion about his program requirements by walking him through them and his course selection options: "He made my schedule, but he explained me how and why he did it. So, this way, I understood exactly what he's doing and why . . . so I could go back home and do it myself." This enabled Levi to become self-sufficient in planning his remaining courses.

The participants noted the use of visuals as helpful guides. Yu-Jun, for example, always appreciated that her academic advisor reviewed her program flowchart in a step-by-step manner so that she could complete it on her own.

I think the charts that the advisors go through with you while advising. They send a copy of that form after the advising session's over. It becomes way more unambiguous. Yeah, it is like graduating from high school where everything is so structured, and when I got to college, it is like everything is so unstructured, so I had no idea how to plan for things. . . visuals helped me navigate when the contrast was so stark.

Using visuals to map program sequencing is a vital resource for students. For international students, such visuals offer an organizing framework for how their curriculum works and progresses, especially considering their general education and elective options. Through careful guidance from their academic advisors, the participants noted that they had become more self-sufficient in sequencing their course loads.

Despite the participants' broad agreement that their academic advisors shared information effectively, several recalled instances where academic advisors provided vague or inaccurate information. Seo-Jun recalled that the start of her first semester was when her advisor informed her that she needed to complete a specific general education course, even though she later discovered that her major exempted her from it.

I am a [. . .] major, so I didn't have to take an [. . .] gen. ed. class, but she let me take it the first semester. So, at the time, I did not know that, but after I figured that, oh, actually, I did not have to take it.

Providing inaccurate information not only hindered the development of an effective advisor-

advisee relationship but also resulted in Seo-Jun paying tuition for an unnecessary course and delaying the start of the required general education courses.

Fatima recalled receiving vague advising from her first advisor about withdrawing from a class as a first-year student and was unsure whether doing so was a good idea:

During freshman year, I had no idea you could even drop a class up to two weeks. . . . Like, you can switch classes? Would the professor not mind if you just jumped out of their class? These were very common terms used in America, but for us they were new. . . . That happened when I was getting an A-, so I thought getting an A would be super important, so I withdrew from the class and my academic advisor said, "It is up to you." I wish they told me what withdrawing meant and what the aftermath of withdrawing from a class was.

Anirban recalled regretting taking Spanish as an elective at his advisor's recommendation, complaining that international students do not necessarily have the same experiences with world language instruction in high school as their domestic counterparts:

I was upset, very upset, because it brought my GPA down a lot. And I hated the class. It was so hard, because I think the teachers expected some students to already know a little Spanish from living here, or taking Spanish in high school, but I did not have any of that.

These findings reveal that while participants benefited from the information provided by their academic advisors, instances of inaccurate and vague information challenged some participants' perceptions of academic advising and may have made effective academic planning more challenging.

Advising Limits vis-à-vis International Student Policies

Although participants appreciated their interactions with their academic advisors and the information they provided, several participants expressed either resigned acceptance or disappointment that their advisors had limited or no knowledge of issues specific to international student such as visa

status, curricular practical training (CPT) and optional practical training (OPT) procedures, and internship and job opportunities. In discussing his visa status with his academic advisor, Anirban recalled that, over time, he began to accept that his advisor did not have the knowledge to offer in-depth guidance on maintaining the appropriate visa status:

I would not be upset or frustrated because I understand she is more of an academic advisor and she is . . . I can tell she not very used to international advising, and . . . I would not be surprised if all my international questions were sent to another office.

Similarly, Aneni lamented that her academic advisor could not provide her with specific guidance on internship opportunities open to international students:

When I was trying to understand the internship and job opportunities available to me, I was once again referred to links which did not tell me much because those links were more so, written to the American population rather than international students. The information was not written necessarily . . . for international students. And so, the experience was different.

Aneni felt that links containing information on internships did not account for international students or the restrictions they faced in their internship searches. Most international students must maintain full-time course loads that preclude them from most forms of employment outside of CPT or OPT. Aisha remarked that her academic advisor also had limited knowledge of these procedures:

I wish I knew more about OPT and CPT because I feel like that's very limited to just the ISSS. . . . I feel like if academic advisors knew more about that, academic advisors would be able to help international students see what opportunities they actually have after graduating, and before graduating.

Despite the academic and interpersonal support many participants received from their academic advisors, some, such as Aneni and Aisha, felt that their advisors' limited knowledge of these issues made navigating them more challenging. Academic advisors and advising units should collaborate with international offices to ensure a

better understanding of issues specific to their international advisees. Aneni noted the importance of this: "I think that the academic advising department and ISSS should consider collaborating in order to really provide international students with better guidance, and with accurate and detailed information."

International students depend on their academic advisors for information about their academic studies. Visa issues, CPT/OPT processes, and internships may be relevant to these discussions. Although academic advisors may not be expected to have expertise in these areas, knowing how these intersect with academic issues helps advisors better understand their international advisee's needs and how these needs contrast with their domestic counterparts. Not all participants mentioned these issues, but the findings suggest that communication between advising units and international offices may be important in clarifying the roles and expertise of both sides.

Discussion

Academic Advising Implications

This study explored international students' academic advising experiences in a university setting. Based on validation theory (Rendón, 1994), this study's findings highlight how academic and interpersonal advising experiences validated and invalidated students' university adjustment and academic growth. When reviewed holistically, the findings suggest that academic advisors can continue to learn from international students, particularly to increase awareness of how international students' educational experiences intersect and diverge from those of their domestic counterparts. Furthermore, the findings suggest that academic advisors and advising units should proactively initiate interdepartmental collaborations and training with international offices on campus to refine their knowledge of international advisees' needs.

Academic Experiences

Participants broadly agreed that academic advising constituted a vital resource throughout their studies. Most expressed surprise and appreciation that their academic advisors proactively and patiently reviewed their program requirements and took the time to get to know them. Validation occurs when internal agents actively communicate with their advisees to facilitate their adjustment processes (Rendón, 1994). Academic advisors motivate their international advisees to become

proactively involved in understanding their academic planning when they carefully explain their program requirements and expectations. Using visual materials to review program information fostered interactions that allowed participants to visualize their progress. This validation supported their adjustment to their new educational environment as they became more knowledgeable about their curriculum requirements and more proactive in mapping out how their progress should unfold each term.

Because academic advisors worked with them, the participants became confident in their ability to proactively manage their program planning and saw themselves succeeding in their academic environment. These findings align with those of Zhang (2016) and Zhai (2004), who found that effective academic advising plays a vital role in international students' adjustment to their academic environment and growth as they progress toward graduation. These findings validate academic advisors' use of visual materials to facilitate international students' understanding of their curriculum requirements. Moving forward, academic advisors should ensure that visuals support effective communication when discussing program requirements.

Rendón (1994) asserted that an internal agent's ability to share knowledge effectively constitutes a hallmark trait of academic validation. This was evident in this study. Although most participants actively sought their academic advisors' guidance and recommendations regarding their studies, several experienced instances of academic invalidation due to vague or inaccurate information. Anirban, Fatima, and Seo-Jun all experienced this. These invalidation experiences highlight the importance of academic advisors' effective and thorough communication, the importance of accuracy, and awareness of the needs and backgrounds of their international students.

To mitigate these instances, academic advisors could first check their international advisees' comprehension of their program requirements and course selections. In Fatima's case, her academic advisor could have discussed the common reasons students may pursue withdrawal; this would have allowed Fatima to critically assess the validity of her concerns and ultimately decide herself. Such discussions could also cover grade meanings, given that she felt that an A- grade warranted withdrawal. Advisors can remember that international students may not be familiar with the meaning of the standard American grading system.

In Anirban's case with the Spanish elective, academic advisors should attempt to include their international advisees in the decision-making process on course selections, especially regarding course options for general education requirements and free electives. Many domestic students have experience with Spanish at the start of their university studies because it is one of the most taught world languages in American high schools. Being from Southeast Asia, Anirban complained that he did not have the same world-language experience as his domestic counterparts. Furthermore, the linguistic contrasts between Anirban's native language, Bengali, and Spanish may have made the course challenging for him. While advisors' course recommendations can certainly be helpful, explaining course options of general education and free electives may empower international advisees to make their own selections based on their level of preparation and interests.

Seo-Jun's registration for an unrequired general education course at her academic advisor's recommendation may have resulted in delayed progress. This type of error may also result in course-sequencing challenges, especially in highly structured majors such as engineering (Zhang & Dinh, 2017). International students at the beginning of their studies may struggle to understand the purpose of general education courses. Taking an unrequired course may not only diminish the international student's perception of such course but also the role of academic advising, as in Seo-Jun's case. Advising units could consider yearly curriculum training to review the general education requirements, exceptions, and changes as well as training to explore and review the needs of international students in relation to these requirements.

Another area of academic invalidation concerns academic advisors' limited knowledge of issues specific to international students (e.g., visa status, CPT and OPT procedures, and internship and job opportunities). Participants either accepted their academic advisors' limited knowledge or felt disappointed. Again, these findings suggest that academic advisors may benefit from greater understanding of how these policies intersect with the academic studies of their international advisees.

Unlike their domestic counterparts, international students must complete a full-time course load each semester to maintain their visa status and remain in the U.S. Furthermore, job and internship opportunities are mostly limited to

CPT or OPT. These are challenges that their domestic counterparts do not face. When academic advisors cannot help their international advisees navigate these issues, these students may perceive little benefit from their educational experience. To address this, academic advising units could collaborate and train with international student offices. Such efforts could help advance academic advisors' knowledge about these issues and clarify when and where to refer their international advisees for assistance. Such collaboration could clarify the roles of both offices and enhance academic advisors' ability to help their international advisees navigate these issues.

Interpersonal Experiences

This study's findings confirmed the broad presence of interpersonal validation. Rendón (1994) explained that effective interpersonal validation refers to interactions that allow students to believe that they can excel in their environment. Academic advisors facilitate international advisees' understanding of their program requirements and how to navigate university resources. Participants recalled their initial surprise and gratitude that their academic advisors willingly and patiently learned about them and discussed their program requirements. Participants cited their advisors' patience, trustworthiness, and listening ability as characteristics that aided their positive perceptions of academic advising. They recalled that the first advising sessions led to productive advisor-advisee relationships, in which subsequent collaboration ensured that they progressed in their programs. Aligned with the findings of Zhang (2016), academic advisors should spend their first advising sessions with international advisees establishing rapport including assessing what they may already know about academic advising, resolving misconceptions, and gauging how well international advisees understand their advisors' communications.

Given the importance of interpersonal communication with advisees throughout their academic studies, academic advisors should continue to reevaluate their communication skills to ensure that their international advisees benefit from their guidance. Zhang and Dinh (2017) found that academic advisors sometimes researched cultural awareness on their own because of a lack of training on intercultural communications. One suggestion could involve collaborative training with an existing Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL)

program or an English language (ESL) program at the advisor's institution, if available. Both programs would have personnel with expertise in teaching and interacting with international students with varying levels of English language proficiency. Academic advisors could learn intercultural and instructional communication strategies to integrate into their own advising practices. For example, knowing how to effectively break down new information in comprehensible chunks, avoid idiomatic expressions and jargons, and assess international advisees' prior knowledge would go a long way to ensure international students feel less intimidated and process new information more easily.

Limitations and Potential Future Inquiries

This study had several limitations. First, the participants indicated that they had been performing well academically. Future studies could explore how academic advisors assist international students navigate academic challenges such as academic probation. Second, this study focused on international undergraduate students who began their studies as first years. Other populations, such as transfer and graduate international students, may have different advising perceptions and experiences worth exploring. Third, the few extant studies on international students and academic advising have largely employed qualitative methodologies. Future studies could use quantitative methodologies to identify potential correlations between international student satisfaction and the quality of advisor information or other variables.

Summary

Using validation theory (Rendón, 1994), this study explored how international students' communication with their academic advisors influenced their educational adjustment and growth in a university setting. Findings revealed that international students receive academic validation through careful explanations of the program requirements, course-selection choices, and connections to their personal and professional interests. Additionally, interpersonal validation showed itself through the academic advisor's patience, trustworthiness, and listening ability as the international students adjusted to their educational environment. Invalidating experiences tended to focus on specific instances rather than on broad advising experiences.

International students will continue to have an important presence on American university campuses. Learning about the unique challenges that

international students face—linguistic barriers, cross-cultural differences, and international student policies—will facilitate better advisor-advisee communication and promote validating advising practices.

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Authors' Note

W. George Longbottom is an associate director of Graduate Programs at the Fox School of Business at Temple University in Philadelphia. He has extensive experience teaching English as a Second Language and academic advising international students. His research interests center on how academic advising influences educational adjustment and growth and identifying effective advising practices. Dr. Longbottom can be reached at george.longbottom@temple.edu.

Appendix A. Interview protocol

1. How did you become acquainted with academic advising for the first time?
2. How would you describe your first academic advising experience?
3. How did you initially perceive the role of your academic advisor?
4. What were some specific memories you have of your first academic advising sessions?
5. How have you felt your academic advisors have perceived you as an international student?
6. What were your academic advising experiences like as your studies progressed?
7. How do you feel academic advising influenced your management of your undergraduate program requirements over time?
8. What have you learned now because of your academic advising sessions that you wish you had known before starting your undergraduate studies?
9. What do you feel academic advisors should know more about international students?