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# Intercultural Communication in International Student Advisor-Advisee Relationships

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Intercultural Communication in International Student Advisor-Advisee Relationships

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A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in  
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Advisor: Dr. Sora Friedman

## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN ADVISOR-ADVISEE RELATIONSHIPS

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## ABSTRACT

International Student Advisors are expected to have an understanding of the cultural norms of the students they advise. Intercultural competency is a key expectation in the roles and responsibilities of advisors. They can use tools and theories, such as Edward T. Hall's Cultural Factors and Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, to help them better understand and be better prepared for the advising needs of their students.

This research aims to have a better understanding of the extent and importance of intercultural communication and competency in international student advising. The data collected was from an advisor perspective and related to their experience with intercultural communication. The study suggests that advisors would like to be more intentional, mindful, and aware of students' needs in their interactions with their advisees. However, factors such as limited resources, staff, and time inhibit this. Despite this, when it comes to incorporating intercultural communication theories and techniques into advising, the best way to truly learn and understand a student and their culture is to learn from them, through questions and conversation. The true intercultural learning comes not from trainings, workshops, and professional development, but instead comes simply from personal connections.

## Introduction

International Education professionals are tasked with a multitude of diverse responsibilities. From recruitment and admissions to advising and immigration regulations to advocacy and more, advisors must have a large skill set at their disposal. For international student advisors (ISAs), included in this skillset is the expectation that they have some level of intercultural competency in relation to the students they advise. This includes knowledge of their students' home countries, cultural practices, and so on. It is expected that advisors bring this knowledge with them when advising, utilizing the appropriate norms and expectations from student to student. Of course, this is the standard that most ISAs would like to be at in their advising. However, to what extent is this standard a reality and what are the implications of that?

Many international educators strive to be interculturally competent. However, there may be times when they view a student's actions through their own cultural lens, rather than that of their student's experiences. Having worked at AMIDEAST (an organization that works in the Middle East and North Africa) in the role of Fulbright Program Assistant and at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire as the Intensive English Program Assistant before that, I have both witnessed this with others and experienced it directly.

Founded in 1951, AMIDEAST (America-Mideast Educational and Training Services) is a private, non-profit organization, headquartered in the United States with more than 20 field offices throughout 11 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (AMIDEAST At A Glance). The mission of the organization is to “build cross-cultural understanding, expand educational opportunities, prepare individuals for jobs in the global economy, strengthen institutions and communities, and empower women and youth” (About AMIDEAST: Mission, 2017).

One method of achieving this goal is through administering the Fulbright Foreign Student Program for the Middle East and North Africa. The mission of the Fulbright Program is “to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries” (The Fulbright Program, n.d.). AMIDEAST is helping to achieve that goal by placing students in colleges and universities throughout the United States, advising students on immigration regulations and Fulbright policies, ensuring that they are following those regulations and policies, while also answering general questions from students. The Fulbright department at AMIDEAST also maintains student tuition and stipend payments. The department regularly communicates and coordinates with university partners, U.S. State Department staff and staff in the field. In the role of program assistant, I work with and advise grantees from Lebanon and Egypt on the items listed above.

With this program, it is possible to see a far-reaching impact, from Idaho to Texas and Los Angeles and New York City. This includes students’ engagement with their communities while on-program to the long-term impact they have once they return home. However, with students spread-out across the United States and the primary form of communication being email, it is often challenging to develop a meaningful advisor-advisee relationship. I started to wonder if this form of communication was the best method of advising for the student population, given that it tends to be an impersonal and distant form of communication. Is there a way advisors can communicate that is more culturally appropriate, personable, and can better meet students’ needs? What is the impact of this method of advising on the student experience?

Prior to working at AMIDEAST, I worked with international students as the Intensive English Program Assistant at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Within MENA, I worked with students from Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Syria, and Yemen to name a few. However, primarily,

students were in the program who were financially sponsored by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) scholarship. Outside of MENA, I worked with students from China, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, and more. I advised students on a range of topics, from academics and campus resources to housing and student life.

From both experiences I have found that discrepancies, on the part of the advisor or advisee, between expectations and reality can have a negative impact on the overall relationship. This can lead to frustration by both parties. Is this frustration a matter of a clash of personalities or is it a discrepancy between cultural values and expectations of the advisor and advisee?

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

International student advisors have several theories and frameworks to help them conceptualize the cultural norms of their advisees. These frameworks have developed through years of observing other cultures and their norms and practices. Through these observations, theories in intercultural communication have emerged. Two such theorists are Edward T. Hall and Geert Hofstede. These theorists analyzed several cultures and came up with dimensions or factors by which a culture can be described.

Tools, such as Hall's Cultural Factors and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, can be utilized when advising students to ensure that culturally appropriate advising methods are being used. When thinking of these tools, it is important to ask, are advisors taking these factors into consideration when advising? If so, what does that look like? If not, what tools, techniques, and training do they need to get there?

### **Hall's Intercultural Communication Theory**

When considering culturally appropriate advising methods, there are two theorists that have helped to "map" cultures around the world. In doing so, they have made it possible to better

understand and approach differences in culture. Discussed briefly above, one such theorist is Edward T. Hall. Hall was a cultural anthropologist who was among the first to study nonverbal communication and interactions between members of different ethnic groups (Grimes, 2009), pioneering the field of intercultural communication (Sheposh, 2018).

During his lifetime, Hall served during World War II, taught anthropology at various universities, worked for the State Department, and performed research for the Washington School of Psychiatry. Throughout this time, Hall made observations about how the different cultures he interacted with were communicating, both spoken and unspoken. He eventually compiled this information into a book titled *The Silent Language*, the first of several books Hall would publish on cultural differences and intercultural communication (Sheposh, 2018).

In his observations and research, Hall primarily focused on explicit and implicit communication, as well as how the concepts of time and personal space manifest in different cultures. Through this research, Hall identified three cultural factors that influence and determine the shape of personal, national, and organizational culture (Haburajova, n.d.). These cultural factors include high context versus low context, views of time, and space or territoriality (Khalida, Mohaini, & Amiruddin, Hall's Cultural Factors, 2014).

The differences between implicit and explicit communication can be seen in high- and low-context cultures. High-context cultures rely primarily on implicit, or unspoken communication to convey thoughts and ideas. High-context cultures tend to be those with close social bonds, a strong sense of community, and a highly centralized social structure. The society within high-context cultures has a long history of tradition with little change in demographics. Relationships in these cultures develop slowly and are dependent upon trust between individuals. As such, relationships tend to be more stable and communities are more close-knit and long-

lasting. High-context societies rely heavily on tradition, with knowledge being passed down through the group experience. Change is slow to occur, time is more casual, and life moves along at its own pace, with emphasis consistently being placed on individual or group considerations, rather than conforming to a set schedule (Sheposh, 2018).

With all of this in mind, it is easier to understand how the non-verbal cues and indirect communication style can exist in the close-knit high-context cultures. An instinctive understanding of cultural norms has developed amongst members of the group that do not need to be communicated amongst other members of the society. Nonverbal information and feelings can be expressed through body language, gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, and so on. More meaning is placed on non-verbal communication than verbal communication (Sheposh, 2018).

In low-context cultures, alternatively, members rely on explicit and direct communication where words are more important. In a low-context society, rules and expectations are defined in advance. Society, as a whole, tends to be more focused on individual, rather than group, achievements. As such, privacy is highly valued, with intrusions into personal life discouraged. Likewise, the boundaries of a social group are much less defined, with individuals coming-and-going. Authority is decentralized within the community, with a variety of leaders establishing the rules of the group (Sheposh, 2018).

In terms of communication, as mentioned above, use of direct communication is more common in low-context cultures, with limited use of non-verbal messages. Communication is clear, functional, written or spoken, and used as a way to share ideas and information. For example, if someone from a low-context culture is hungry, they would simply say “I am hungry.” Alternatively, a member of a high-context culture might ask, “When is dinner?” With the more direct communication of low-context cultures, society moves and changes more

quickly. Time is very much regulated, with a high importance placed on schedules and scheduling. Speed and efficiency are highly valued. Cultures that tend to be low-context are those that developed more recently and were formed by members of many other cultures (Sheposh, 2018). Without shared experiences and long-held traditions, members of these newly-formed societies need to rely more on direct and clear communication to exchange ideas.

Hall's cultural factors can be especially useful when it comes to advising international students from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. When thinking of high-versus low-context cultures, MENA and the United States are on opposite sides of the cultural spectrum. With its long history and established traditions, MENA cultures tend to be more high-context (Sheposh, 2018, p. 2). The United States, as a fairly new country, with its members coming from a variety of cultures, is more of a low-context culture (Sheposh, 2018, p. 3).

In terms of advising, if the international student advisor comes from the United States, or another low-context cultural background, their very direct way of communicating with a student from the MENA region, or other high-context culture, can seem abrupt and impersonal to the student. For the student, who may not be as strict on time, they may have difficulty being on-time for meetings and staying within the set time limit. Something that can be very frustrating for the advisor. As a Fulbright Program Assistant at AMIDEAST, much of the communication is done very directly with students over email. Rarely will communication include anything other than the task to be completed. While, for the United States, this is an efficient way to be working, what impact does that have on the MENA students being advised? What is the ultimate impact, overall, on the advisor-advisee relationship?

### **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory**

Another theorist who has made it possible to “map” and better understand cultures around the world is Geert Hofstede. Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist, who studied organizational culture and cross-cultural communication. Through his work, Hofstede developed the theory of cultural dimensions (Horowitz, 2016). First published in his 1980 book, *Culture's Consequences*, Geert Hofstede developed four, and later six, cultural dimensions used to classify culture (Horowitz, 2016). These dimensions are power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Added later are long-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint (The 6-D model of national culture, n.d.). These are each seen as a spectrum. A culture may fall anywhere on the spectrum in its manifestation of each particular dimension.

Hofstede developed this theory through surveying and documenting the attitudes, preferences, and perceptions about work in general of employees from the multinational company he worked for. In two studies that happened in 1968 and 1972, 116,000 questionnaires were distributed to employees from 40 countries. From these results, Hofstede noted that cultural variances seemed to be expressed, typically, on a national level. These response patterns helped to make up the cultural dimensions that can now be used to describe, interpret, and understand cultures around the world (Sorge, 1983).

However, there are some limitations and considerations to note from Hofstede's studies. First, it is important to point out that Hofstede is attempting to quantify culture, something that is very challenging to do with a topic that is intrinsically more qualitative. It should also be noted that the use of a standardized questionnaire can lead to some aspects of a culture to be

overlooked and not counted in the results. Luckily, Hofstede does recognize this as a possibility and included it in his findings (Sorge, 1983).

The other limitation of this study is that it was conducted in relation to work-place culture within a specific company. While the results are still informative, they do not take into consideration other aspects of culture, such as family interactions, or that of an educational setting. For example, “a large power distance in the enterprise, for instance, does not necessarily imply a corresponding large power distance in the family, such as between father and children” (Sorge, 1983, p. 628). In other words, because the focus of Hofstede’s study is on work-culture, one must be careful when generalizing the findings to other areas of life (Sorge, 1983, p. 628).

While Hofstede’s findings are clearly some of the first of their kind, for the purposes of this research study, one must be mindful of the fact that these findings are not indicative of how culture manifests in an educational setting. This being said, international student advisors, and professionals who work with international students in a variety of capacities, can utilize Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory as a tool in their work. This theory can be used to analyze, interpret, and understand the cultural background and influences of the students they work with. This theory can also be used as a means to find where similarities and differences lie between the cultural background of the advisor and that of the student.

As an example, in advising Fulbrighters specifically from Lebanon and Egypt, the tool below can be used as a means to compare and contrast one’s own background (assuming they are from the United States) with that of their students. This “Country Comparison Tool” comes from the website, “Hofstede Insights” (Compare Countries, 2018).

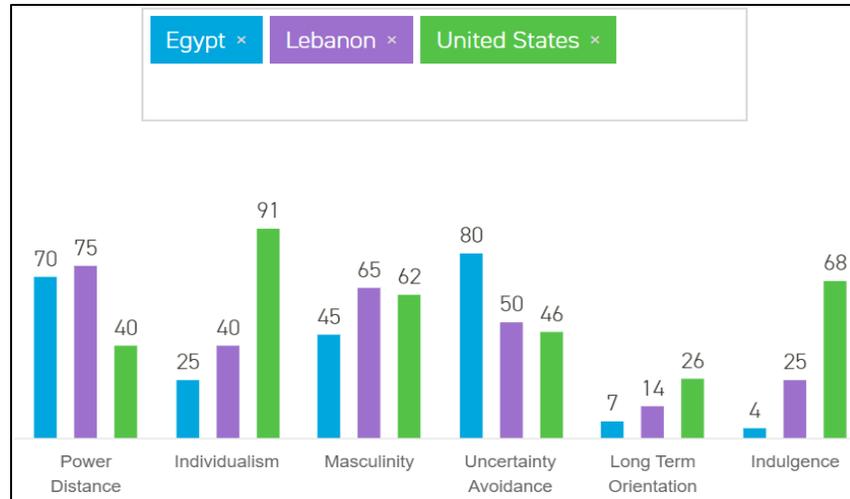


Figure 1: Country Comparison Using Hofstede's Theory (Compare Countries, 2018).

As can be seen from the above chart, there are some dimensions that vary greatly between the United States and the MENA countries. This can be noted in the scores received by each country for power distance, individualism (to a great extent), and indulgence. Likewise, the United States and Lebanon share similarities on the dimensions of masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, whereas, Lebanon and Egypt share more similarities when it comes to power distance. Finally, all three countries share a relatively low score when it comes to long term orientation (Compare Countries, 2018).

This information can play into the advising experience and the relationship between student and international student advisor in many ways. For example, knowing that the cultures of Egypt and Lebanon are more formal, through their higher power distance, than the United States, advisors can keep this in mind as they interact with students. An email greeting of "Dear Ms. Woodward" can seem very formal to someone from the United States, based on their cultural background and personal preferences. However, it is understood that, the advisor of this student is seen as a person of authority and, therefore, greeted with the level of formality as deemed appropriate by that student.

Similarly, thinking about what it means that Egypt, Lebanon, and the United States all share a low score when it comes to long term orientation can give advisors insights into the potential advising relationship. The website, “Hofstede Insights” explains long-term versus short-term orientation in the following way: “every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and the future,” then explains that societies prioritize these two goals in different ways (The 6-D model of national culture, n.d.). The site then explains that, “Societies who score low on this dimension...prefer to maintain time-honored traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion” (The 6-D model of national culture, n.d.). In terms of advising students from countries that score low on the long-term orientation dimension, especially coming from a country that also scores low on that dimension, it can be understandable that both sides would approach each other and the other’s culture with some signs of apprehension.

As mentioned previously, this data and information comes from the standpoint of organizational culture, rather than that of educational culture. When applying the above information (where a country lands on the various cultural dimensions) in an educational setting, one should be mindful that there may be differences in how these dimensions manifest both culturally as well as in personal preferences of the student. The Cultural Dimensions Theory should be used as a tool to help advisors better understand, approach, and empathize with students, in terms of background, culture, and so on. It is important to note that these dimensions may not be correct all of the time and can vary drastically from student to student and advisor to advisor.

## Comparison

To see how the MENA region and the United States compare along Hall's and Hofstede's dimensions, see tables 1 and 2 below. Please note that these are generalizations and the factors or dimensions may change depending on the specific country, group, or individual preferences.

| <b>Factor</b>        | <b>MENA</b>        | <b>United States</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Context              | High Context       | Low Context          |
| Time                 | Polychronic        | Monochronic          |
| Territoriality/Space | Low Territoriality | High Territoriality  |

*Table 1: Hall's Cultural Factors: Regional Comparison.*

| <b>Dimension</b>               | <b>MENA</b>                     | <b>United States</b>  |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Power Distance                 | Higher Power Distance           | Lower Power Distance  |
| Individualism vs. Collectivism | Collectivist                    | Individualist         |
| Masculinity vs. Femininity     | Moderate                        | Moderate              |
| Uncertainty Avoidance          | Moderately Uncertainty Tolerant | Uncertainty Tolerant  |
| Long-term Orientation          | Short-term Orientation          | Long-term orientation |
| Indulgence vs. Restraint       | Moderately Restrained           | Indulgent             |

*Table 2: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions: Regional Comparison*

Understanding these comparisons and how the characteristics of the two regional cultures are similar and different can help those who advise international students better meet the needs of their students. It can also help advisors empathize with the students' situation, especially when reconciling their home culture with that of their host culture in the United States

Using key cultural factors from Hall and Hofstede, one can expand upon those comparisons from the "Regional Comparisons" charts to compare and contrast the MENA and U.S. cultures. It should be noted that, even within MENA (as well as the United States), there are vast regional differences in cultures that can change how they are defined by the cultural factors.

The following sections will discuss a few key factors that may impact the relationship between student and international student advisor.

**Time.**

Considering views on time, Hall divided this cultural factor into “monochronic time” and “polychronic time.” The United States tends to fall on the side of monochronic time, having a very strict sense of time. One is expected to show up to scheduled events and meetings at the designated time. According to Hall’s Cultural Factors, characteristics of monochronic time include careful planning and scheduling, time management, emphasizing promptness, concentrating on the job at hand, and putting the job first, to name a few (Khalida, Mohaini, & Amiruddin, Hall's Cultural Factors, 2014).

In contrast, the cultures of the Middle East and North Africa have a less structured time orientation. Members of this culture express greater concern for what is taking place now, not what is scheduled to take place in the future (Henry & Fouad, Counseling International Students from the Middle East, 2007). This is considered “polychronic time.” Polychronic time is defined as valuing human interaction over time and material things. With less concern for “getting things done,” relationships are put first and being easily distracted is common, among other things (Khalida, Mohaini, & Amiruddin, Hall's Cultural Factors, 2014).

Coming from the U.S. culture where time is highly organized, and it is considered disrespectful not to follow this structure, this relaxed view of time may be a challenge when working with MENA students. International educators must be aware of this view of time orientation, and not take a student’s lateness as rudeness or disrespect. They must also appropriately inform the student of the expectations around time that they are now faced with. Just as ISAs and citizens of the United States must adjust when traveling to a new country,

advisors must allow international students time to adjust as well, while also being a positive resource to help in the initial adjustment to life in the United States.

**Individualism versus collectivism.**

Family plays a very important and essential role to the people from the MENA region, so much so that the foundation of Arab culture is based on loyalty, family cohesion, and interdependence. Family (including extended family) plays an important role in the individual and collective identities of most people from this region. This comes from the influence of Islam, which promotes a collectivist view of family and community (Henry & Fouad, *Counseling International Students from the Middle East*, 2007). Overall, these cultures tend to be more collectivist in nature, as compared to the highly individualistic culture of the United States.

According to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, collectivism represents a close community where individuals can expect their relatives or members of their particular group to look after them in exchange for complete loyalty. People's self-image in collectivist cultures is described as "we" (The 6 dimensions of national culture, n.d.). This is contrasted by the individualist mindset, which is highly prevalent in the United States and is defined as preferring loosely-knit society. Individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate family, rather than their extended family or community. Individualist cultures describe self-image by using the word "I" (The 6 dimensions of national culture, n.d.).

Many behaviors exist as a result of the MENA region being a collectivist culture. As mentioned above, in regard to time, human interaction and relationships are valued more than schedules and material things (Khalida, Mohaini, & Amiruddin, *Hall's Cultural Factors*, 2014). In addition, such a high value is placed on familial relations that family members are often consulted before a major decision is made. In contrast, in the United States, consulting one's

family before making a major decision is not expected. As a result, this behavior, from a U.S. perspective, may seem unfamiliar, indecisive, or as if the student's family is exhibiting too much control over their life. The reality, however, is that this is the decision-making process that is common to this region.

### **Power distance.**

The final dimension to be considered is power distance. This dimension comes from Hofstede. Power distance is defined as how people in society, especially the less powerful member, accept and expect that there is a hierarchy of power. This cultural dimension looks at how a society handles inequalities between people (The 6-D model of national culture, n.d.). MENA culture exhibits a high degree of power distance. Considering the family structure again, parents are more likely to use an authoritarian style of interaction with their children. The final authority exists with the father or eldest male in the family. As such, children are expected to respect their father's authority and are encouraged to obey orders, rather than explore new ideas (Abudabbeh, Arab Families: An Overview, 2005). Again, not only is family, in general, a factor in a student's decision-making process, the power structure and hierarchy plays an important role in that as well.

### **Conclusion**

Through these comparisons, one can begin to understand the complexities of a student's cultural background and individual personality and how those intersect with that of the international student advisor. This knowledge can go a long way toward creating a more empathetic and understanding relationship between student and advisor. Issues, such as a student showing up much later to a scheduled meeting, can be understood by the advisor. Cultural

expectations, such as views of time, can be discussed with the student and a plan can be created moving forward. Advisors can help to truly be the “bridge” for international students.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review provides an overview of the status of international student advising in the United States. It includes the current state of the field of international student advising, how the field has changed through the years, and how expectations placed on the advisor can impact the advisor-advisee relationship. This literature review also looks at the adjustment challenges and expectations that can impact the international student experience in the United States. In addition, public diplomacy programs, such as Fulbright, promote and contribute a number of international students studying in the United States. These programs seek to promote a particular foreign policy agenda of the United States and also encourage cross-cultural connections that may otherwise have not occurred.

### **Background and Challenges Faced by International Student Advisors**

International student advisors (ISAs) come from a variety of academic backgrounds. While more and more colleges and universities are offering programs in international education and international student advising, for many years there were just a handful of programs that offered a degree specifically in this field (Davis, 2009, p. 36). Other professionals have academic backgrounds in student affairs administration, education, international studies, foreign languages, and anthropology. Additionally, the field was once comprised largely of faculty members, who also served as ISAs. This role, however, has come to be comprised of administrative staff professionals (Davis, 2009, p. 37).

A 2004 study of international educator’s job satisfaction reported that that 75 percent of foreign student advisors were female and 82 percent were white. In the same study, less than

three percent of respondents reported that they were African American or Latin American, while less than five percent reported being Asian American (Davis, 2009, p. 38). It would be interesting to see how a study done of the field in 2018 compares to the one done in 2004 and how things have changed or remained the same.

The roles and expectations of the ISA and international educators, in general, have evolved since the first inception of the field. ISAs are expected to have strong counseling skills, be presenters, trainers, and plan events and activities that promote international and intercultural awareness. They are expected to have experience, knowledge, and skills in working with cultural differences (Davis, 2009, p. 39). With increasing internationalization on campuses, they are expected to be advocates for their students to the larger campus and local communities. At times, they may even be called to be advocates at a national or international level.

Finally, ISAs are required to be immigration advisors. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the immigration regulations for international students have become increasingly complex and strict. ISAs are called upon to interpret these regulations for their students, ensure their students and institution are maintaining compliance, as well as follow a strict government reporting process (Katz, 2011, p. 82).

With increasing expectations to be a part of campus internationalization efforts, create and promote events, advise on immigration regulations and all things that come with being an international student in the United States, and more, it is understandable that the time and resources of ISAs are spread thin (Bista, 2015). On top of this, ISAs are expected to recruit and maintain international student enrollment, especially in light of declining international student numbers. Likewise, ISAs can have up to hundreds of advisees depending on the size of the institution. This can result in advising sessions and advisors themselves seeming less personable,

more distant, and less caring of international student needs and concerns. Of course, this is not a result of the ISA not caring, but simply they do not always have the time to build this type of one-on-one relationship with their advisees.

The profession of international student advisors is a constantly shifting and changing one, with no two roles looking exactly the same. The expectations of this position reflect both the political landscape of the United States and the prioritizations of campus leaders. The reality of both of these mean that ISAs serve as an “all-in-one” resource to the students they are responsible for.

### **Mental Health and International Students**

Mental health plays a unique role in the lives of international students. Not only are there the stressors of being a student, there are also stressors that come along with being an international student and facing a new and unfamiliar culture. There are several factors that can increase feelings of stress or depression related to cultural adjustment. These can include language barriers, adjustment issues, lack of social support, and lack of familiarity with systems in the United States (Prieto-Welch, 2016). Even causing further stress among international students in the United States can be pressures from outside factors, such as family expectations at home (Prieto-Welch, 2016).

In addition to this, there are factors of how similar the students’ home cultures are to that of the United States. For example, European students reported a much easier time adjusting to life in the United States. One explanation for this is that the United States and many European countries are individualistic cultures. This makes it easier for European students to navigate a system where independence, competition, autonomy, privacy, and assertiveness is valued (Prieto-Welch, 2016).

In contrast, many students coming from more collectivist cultures experience a more difficult time adjusting to life in the United States. Collectivist cultures include those of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and MENA as well. Students from these cultures “show lower levels of adaptation, more dissatisfaction, and higher levels of anxiety than do students from more individualistic societies” (Prieto-Welch, 2016). This is believed to be due to a discrepancy in values between individualistic and collectivist societies. Members of collectivist societies see themselves and guide their behavior in terms of their relationship and connection to others. Societal norms and obligations are determined by these relationships. A higher value is placed on the group (or family) over individual needs (Prieto-Welch, 2016). This is in stark contrast to the highly individualized societal structure of the United States that students find themselves having to navigate through.

Public diplomacy (government funded) exchange programs bring students to the United States who otherwise may not have had the opportunity to study here. These students have high pressure to perform well academically in their selected field of study and are expected to return home and start a career in that field. However, studying in another country can introduce students to other areas of study. “This can result in a sense of conflict and impasse, as they have been sent to achieve very clear, unchanging educational and career goals” (Prieto-Welch, 2016). For students who have this experience, attempting to address this conflict of expectations can result in its own challenges. Students must try to navigate this in an unfamiliar and, at times, unsympathetic, environment. The result of this added stress and challenges can be expressed as anxiety or depression (Prieto-Welch, 2016).

Research findings have suggested that support at the institutional and social levels promote positive emotional well-being. This includes adequate orientation and administrative

support for international students, as well as knowledgeable counseling staff members who are aware and able to address the mental health concerns of this group of students. Rather than relying on counseling and mental health professionals, international students may turn to academic advisors and colleagues for support (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007, p. 110). This may be, in part, due to individuals within campus support services being unfamiliar with the specific challenges faced by international students, even though they are responsible for assisting them (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007, p. 109). However, “international students who reported a more functional relationship with their advisors were less likely to report having an emotional or stress-related problem...and using counseling services” (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007, p. 109). This makes the relationship between international student and their advisor even more important as the student seeks support on campus.

Mental health is just one of many factors that can impact the student-advisor relationship for international students. However, the ability of an advisor to provide a support system where their advisees feel comfortable enough to approach them when issues arise is very important. Also important, is the ability of an advisor to recognize when something is wrong and guide their advisees toward necessary support services. With stigmas and unawareness of mental health issues and the availability of support services, the international student advisor serves as an intermediary to connect their students to this support.

### **Public Diplomacy and International Education Exchange Initiatives**

Public diplomacy programs, such as Fulbright, help to bring students from around the world to study in the United States and many other countries. Public diplomacy is not limited to educational programs or just to programs sponsored by the United States government; it can include a wide variety of programming, such as Voice of America. However, this paper will

focus on educational programs. The U.S. Department of State affirms that the mission of American public diplomacy is,

To support the achievement of United States foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world (Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, n.d.).

Others have defined it as a means to increase mutual understanding between nations and to shape the communication environment abroad. This is done in order to minimize the degree to which misperceptions and misunderstandings complicate the relations between the United States and other countries. Still, others have defined public diplomacy as a means to influence another country's view toward your own and to influence their own country. Some consider this a tool of the country's propaganda, promoting United States ideology and fostering positive views toward the United States abroad (About U.S. Public Diplomacy, 2018).

Possibly the most well-known public diplomacy programs are those that promote international education exchange. International education exchange refers to the movement of students and/or scholars between educational institutions in different countries (Education Abroad Glossary, 2011, p. 9). This can take many forms, from short-term exchange agreements directly between universities, to agreements between a third-party provider and an institution, to agreements between governments of different countries who agree to send or receive students or scholars as part of a mutual agreement.

It is the nature of these programs to attract students and scholars with substantial visions and goals for themselves and their home communities. By interacting with their host community,

students and scholars share their hopes and ideas, which, in turn, provides new perspectives and insights to that community. An exchange of ideas, ambitions, and motivations is able to take place, something that is much needed in today's quickly changing world (Dessoff, 2008).

There are many programs and organizations that fit into the public diplomacy sphere. Possibly one of the most well-known is the Fulbright program. The Fulbright program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and administered by several organizations. These organizations include the Institute of International Education (IIE), American Middle East Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST), Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), LASPAU: Academic and Professional Programs for the Americas, and more (Administrative Partners, n.d.). Since its inception in 1946, about 370,000 students, scholars, researchers, teachers, and professionals (inbound and outbound) have participated in the Fulbright program. In 2018, the program was operational in over 160 countries around the world and awarded around 8,000 grants each year (History: Fulbright Scholar Program, n.d.). Looking at the MENA region, specifically. AMIDEAST administers the Fulbright Foreign Student Program for this region, while IIE administers the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant program.

In addition to AMIDEAST, IIE, and the Fulbright program, there are many other organizations and programs that bring students from the MENA region to the United States to study at a higher education institution. Some of these include World Learning, American Councils on International Education, and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). Similarly, there are programs sponsored by foreign governments that seek to send their students to the United States for higher education study, including the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM).

Looking specifically at programs funded by the U.S. Government, one example of this is the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (Global UGRAD). This program brings undergraduate students to study for a semester in the United States. Similar to the Fulbright Foreign Student program, the Global UGRAD program seeks to “bring future leaders to the U.S. to experience the U.S. educational system, share their culture, and explore U.S. culture and values” (Global Undergraduate Exchange Program, n.d.). The goal of the UGRAD program is “to promote mutual understanding between people of the United States and other countries” (Global Undergraduate Exchange Program, n.d.). This, of course, meets the goal of public diplomacy in the United States to “expand and strengthen the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world” (Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, n.d.). The Global UGRAD program is administered by World Learning on behalf of the U.S. Department of State.

The Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program is another U.S. Department of State sponsored program that falls under the public diplomacy category. Specific to countries with a significant Muslim population, the YES program provides scholarships for secondary school students to spend one academic year in the United States (About Us, n.d.). The YES program was established in 2002, in response to the events of September 11, 2001, and is administered by a consortium of non-profit organizations that are led by American Councils for International Education (About Us, n.d.). The YES program is an effort to promote public diplomacy between the United States and countries with a significant Muslim population. Similar to UGRAD and Fulbright, this program “is designed to foster a global community of shared interests and values developed through better mutual understanding via first-hand participation” (Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange & Study Program, n.d.).

Of course, it is not only the U.S. Government that is promoting public diplomacy through international education programs. The two discussed in detail here are, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, sponsored by SACM, and the Brazil Science Mobility Program, sponsored by the Brazilian government. However, there are several notable programs worldwide. A few of these include the Congress-Bundestag exchange out of Germany, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program, Birthright Israel, and the Korean Government Scholarship Program.

The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) that is sponsored by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the United States (SACM) and the Ministry of Higher Education. This scholarship program was started in 2005 with an agreement between King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and U.S. President George Bush to increase the number of Saudi students in the United States. In 2012, there were more than 71,000 students studying in the United States through KASP. Students were funded for studies from English as a Second Language to undergraduate, graduate, doctorate degrees, and more (King Abdullah Scholarship Program).

As can be seen on their website, SACM holds similar public diplomacy goals to the United States. The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission continues to “enhance SACM’s role of strengthening the educational and cultural relations between the Kingdom [of Saudi Arabia] and the USA” (History, 2013). Similar sentiments can be seen in part of SACM’s mission statement,

The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), implements Saudi national educational and training policies to provide our country with qualified individuals capable of achieving the country's goals of progress and development... We also collect and disseminate information that reflects Saudi culture, tradition, and heritage through our active participation in academic, cultural, and social activities (Mission, 2013).

Through public diplomacy programs, countries around the world are trying to disseminate positive information about themselves, as well as create connections and promote mutual understanding across borders.

Another notable international education program (although not specific to the MENA region) is the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program (BSMP), also known as Brazil Science Without Borders (SwB) (McManus & Nobre, 2017). This program ran from 2011 to 2016 and provided undergraduate and graduate students from Brazil scholarships to study in the United States. Students in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields were eligible for this academic year-long scholarship (Brazil Scientific Mobility Program, 2019). Students were also eligible for a six-month language course prior to the start of their program and a two-month internship after the completion of their academic year (McManus & Nobre, 2017).

BSMP was administered by the Institute of International Education (IIE) and sponsored by two organizations, CAPES, an organization within the Brazilian Ministry of Education, and CNPq, an organization within the Brazilian Ministry of Science and Technology (Brazil Scientific Mobility Program, 2019). It was part of the larger goal of the Brazilian government to provide 100,000 scholarships to the best students from Brazil to study at the world's top universities. Positive impacts of the program include a higher number of post-graduate students (for those who participated in BSMP), high representation of low-income families (McManus & Nobre, 2017), and contribution to the academic and research exchange between the United States and Brazil (Brazil Scientific Mobility Program, 2019).

While public diplomacy programs (for educational purposes) allow students access to educational opportunities they may otherwise have not had (such as higher education and/or studying in another country), the additional impacts and outcomes may be of more significance.

This includes the impact to the host community the student finds themselves in. The student is not only learning from their community, but they are sharing something about their home country with those around them, who may otherwise have not had exposure to that country. Likewise, the student is learning from their host community, bringing this experience home with them, and sharing with their local community. A community, who similarly, may never have had exposure to the United States. The long-term impact of connections made and knowledge gained from public diplomacy programs is priceless. In today's ever-changing world, exposure to and understanding of a variety of cultures and people serves to benefit the world as a whole.

### **Research Methodology**

Data for this study was collected through surveys and interviews. The goal of the surveys and interviews were to elicit information about the advisor-advisee relationship from the perspective of both parties. Information gathered on the international student advisor side included the challenges they face in their work, considerations that are being given to students' cultural background, and the advising methods being implemented. In addition, information was gathered about the advisor-advisee relationship, including the reality of the relationship, the type of relationship that advisors would like to see, and any limitations to achieving that relationship. For the students, the surveys sought to understand the advising relationship from the advisee perspective. This includes the extent to which their cultural background impacts the relationship with their advisor, how important it is to the student that their advisor utilizes culturally-appropriate methods of advising, and potential challenges faced by students as they seek support from their advisors. Unfortunately, a lack of student responses made it challenging to analyze this side of the relationship.

Data for this project was collected at the post-secondary institutional level, using two research methods, surveys and interviews. International student advisors and students from the MENA region were asked to participate in anonymous surveys. The surveys were posted to two SIT Facebook groups, SIT International Education Group and SIT for all! They were also posted to several NAFSA Community and Interest Group Listservs, including the International Student Advising Network, the Intensive English Programs Network, and NAFSA Research Connections. The goal of posting to these nation-wide networks was to collect responses from a variety of institutional settings. This included large public schools, private schools, small, rural institutions, as well as a variety of institution-types (community college, university, religious, minority-serving, and so on). This provided a diverse data pool with institutions varying by size, location, and demographics. There was a total of 21 advisor participants, however, the student response was low at just one participant and provided insignificant data.

Surveys were anonymous unless the participant chose to disclose by opting-in to the interview. The only identifying factors were if the participant is an advisor or a student and demographic information about the structure of the institution and international office. However, in cases of institutions with smaller international student advising staff, this narrowed down the options of potential professional participants through the process of elimination.

Individual and institutional participants have not been disclosed by name in this final capstone project. Instead, institutions have been labeled as “Institution 1,” “Institution 2,” and so on. Since each institution had just one advisor that completed the survey, advisors are referred to as “Participant” by the institution they represent, for example, “Participant 1,” “Participant 2.”

Participants self-identified on their survey responses if they wished to be contacted for a further interview. The purpose of the interviews and surveys were to establish overall trends and

experiences held at the advisor level as well as at the student level. Interviews allowed participants to share more detailed information on their experiences. Two interviews were conducted through phone calls. With consent from the interviewees, interviews were recorded and notes were taken on a password protected computer.

### **Presentation and Discussion of Data**

#### **International Student Advisor Survey Responses**

Twenty-one participants, representing 21 higher education institutions completed the advisor survey and of those, two completed the follow-up interview. Of these institutions, 15 are classified as universities, four as community colleges, one as a college, and one as a university with an English Language Institution program. Among the participants, a majority of them (10) indicated that they were not a special-interest institution. Five participants indicated a liberal arts focus, three a religious affiliation, one is minority-serving, and another has a technology focus. Of the 21 participants, only one indicated multiple special interests, including health care, research-focus, and minority-serving.

Institutional participants have a variety of total student populations, from small schools of less than 5,000 students to a large school with a population of over 30,000. Seventeen of the 21 institutions reported total student populations up to 15,000. There was a large range of international students at each institution, from less than 200 to more than 5,000. However, the most common international student population was between 200 to 500 students, with nine of the institutional participants reporting this as their international student population. This means that the percentage of international students at each institution ranges from less than one percent to higher than 33 percent. Of these students, the number from the MENA region ranged from less than 20 to more than 500.

An average of 57 countries are represented at each institution, with a range from 18 to 101 countries. Of the top five sending countries for each institution, only nine institutional participants listed a country from the MENA region.

| <b>Institution</b> | <b>Institutional Classification</b> | <b>Special Interest?</b>                                   | <b>Total Student Population</b> | <b>Total International Student Population</b> | <b>Students from MENA Region</b> |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Institution 1      | University                          | Technology focus   | 10,000 to 15,000                | 5,000 or more                                 | 50 to 100                        |
| Institution 2      | University                          | Religious affiliation                                      | 10,000 to 15,000                | 1,000 to 2,000                                | 500 or more                      |
| Institution 3      | University                          | Religious affiliation                                      | 10,000 to 15,000                | 1,000 to 2,000                                | 200 to 500                       |
| Institution 4      | University                          | Liberal arts focus   | 5,000 to 10,000                 | 200 to 500                                    | 0 to 20                          |
| Institution 5      | University                          | Healthcare institution, research-focus, & minority-serving | 5,000 to 10,000                 | 500 to 1,000                                  | 20 to 50                         |
| Institution 6      | Community College                   | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 20,000 to 25,000                | 0 to 200                                      | 0 to 20                          |
| Institution 7      | University                          | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 5,000 to 10,000                 | 0 to 200                                      | 0 to 20                          |
| Institution 8      | University                          | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 5,000 to 10,000                 | 200 to 500                                    | 200 to 500                       |
| Institution 9      | University                          | Minority-serving   | 30,000 or more                  | 2,000 to 5,000                                | 50 to 100                        |
| Institution 10     | University                          | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 0 to 5,000                      | 200 to 500                                    | 0 to 20                          |
| Institution 11     | University                          | Religious affiliation                                      | 0 to 5,000                      | 0 to 200                                      | 0 to 20                          |
| Institution 12     | College                             | Liberal arts focus   | 0 to 5,000                      | 200 to 500                                    | 0 to 20                          |
| Institution 13     | Community College                   | Liberal arts focus   | 10,000 to 15,000                | 200 to 500                                    | 0 to 20                          |
| Institution 14     | Community College                   | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 0 to 5,000                      | 200 to 500                                    | 0 to 20                          |
| Institution 15     | University with an ELI program      | Liberal arts focus   | 10,000 to 15,000                | 200 to 500                                    | 20 to 50                         |
| Institution 16     | University                          | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 0 to 5,000                      | 0 to 200                                      | 20 to 50                         |
| Institution 17     | University                          | Liberal arts focus   | 0 to 5,000                      | 200 to 500                                    | 20 to 50                         |
| Institution 18     | University                          | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 20,000 to 25,000                | 500 to 1,000                                  | 100 to 200                       |
| Institution 19     | Community College                   | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 0 to 5,000                      | 200 to 500                                    | 0 to 20                          |
| Institution 20     | University                          | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 20,000 to 25,000                | 5,000 or more                                 | 100 to 200                       |
| Institution 21     | University                          | No, my institution is not a special-interest institution   | 10,000 to 15,000                | 0 to 200                                      | 0 to 20                          |

Table 3: Institutional Survey Data

While the overall international student population ranges from less than 200 to more than 5,000, the corresponding number of international student advisors at each institution only ranges from one to five advisors. This means that advisors have a student load as low as 30 students to as high as 1700; see Table 4.

| <b>Institution</b> | <b>Number of International Student Advisors</b> | <b>Number of Student Each ISA Serves</b> |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Institution 1      | 5   | 1700                                     |
| Institution 2      | 4   | 400                                      |
| Institution 3      | 4   | 400                                      |
| Institution 4      | 1.5   | 200                                      |
| Institution 5      | 1   | 100                                      |
| Institution 6      | 1   | 87                                       |
| Institution 7      | 1   | 135                                      |
| Institution 8      | 4   | 100                                      |
| Institution 9      | 1   | 200                                      |
| Institution 10     | 1   | 300                                      |
| Institution 11     | 2   | 50                                       |
| Institution 12     | 2   | 150                                      |
| Institution 13     | 1   | 200                                      |
| Institution 14     | 3   | 100                                      |
| Institution 15     | 2   | 250-300                                  |
| Institution 16     | 3   | 150                                      |
| Institution 17     | 3   | 90                                       |
| Institution 18     | 2   | 710                                      |
| Institution 19     | 1   | 200                                      |
| Institution 20     | 5   | 650                                      |
| Institution 21     | 2   | 30                                       |

*Table 4: International Student Advising Overview*

Despite, in many cases, there being one or two ISAs to advise all international students, advisors still took a broad view when it came to their role in the education and experience of international students. This can be seen in Figure 2 below. The question asked was a multiple choice response. As can be seen in Figure 2, of the 21 participants, a majority of them responded positively to at least six of the roles listed. Two participants responded with “other,” indicating

that they also have staff dedicated to admissions, while one indicated that they also have dedicated recruitment and administrative staff.

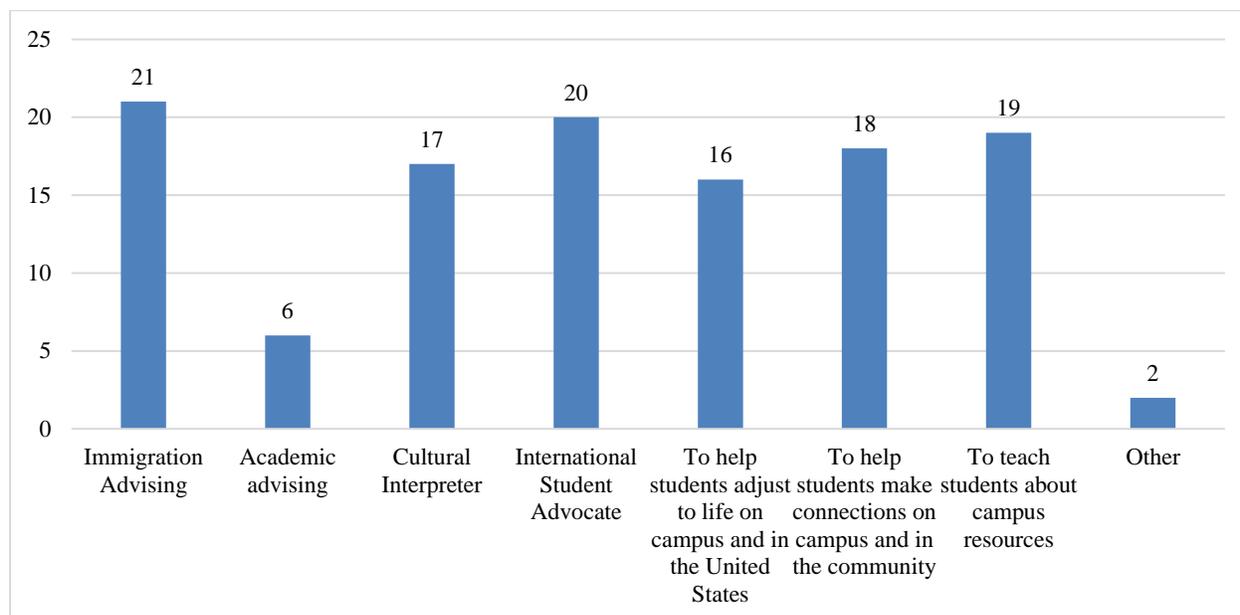


Figure 2: How ISAs View their Role in the Experience of International Students

ISAs bring to their roles and positions a large variety of experiences and training, seen in Tables 5 to 7 and Figures 3 to 5 below. A majority of advisors have a degree at the master’s level or higher. Of the 21 participants, just two have a degree in International Education, four have degrees in Higher Education, but most have fields of study within the social sciences.

| Institution   | Highest Level of Education Completed | Most Recent Field of Study           | Had you been familiar with intercultural communication theories and practices prior to this survey? | Have you received training on these or similar intercultural understanding and communication practices? |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Institution 1 | Master's                             | International Communications/History | Yes   | Yes   |
| Institution 2 | Master's                             | Higher Education Administration      | Yes   | Yes   |
| Institution 3 | Master's                             | History                              | Yes   | No  |
| Institution 4 | Master's                             | Counseling                           | Yes   | Yes   |
| Institution 5 | Bachelor's                           | International Relations              | Yes   | Yes   |
| Institution 6 | Doctorate                            | Higher Education Leadership          | Yes   | Yes   |
| Institution 7 | Master's                             | History                              | Yes   | Yes   |
| Institution 8 | Master's                             | International Education              | Yes   | Yes   |

|                |             |   |     |     |
|----------------|-------------|---|-----|-----|
| Institution 9  | Master's    | Higher Education, currently pursuing doctorate in Ed Leadership | Yes | No  |
| Institution 10 | Doctorate   | Philosophy  | Yes | No  |
| Institution 11 | Master's    | MBA - Marketing   | Yes | Yes |
| Institution 12 | Bachelor's  | Anthropology  | Yes | No  |
| Institution 13 | Master's    | Counseling  | Yes | No  |
| Institution 14 | Master's    | Student Development Administration                              | Yes | Yes |
| Institution 15 | Master's    | International Education   | Yes | No  |
| Institution 16 | Master's    | Higher education administration                                 | No  | No  |
| Institution 17 | Master's    | ESL   | Yes | Yes |
| Institution 18 | Bachelor's  | Education   | Yes | Yes |
| Institution 19 | Associate's | Marketing   | No  | No  |
| Institution 20 | Doctorate   | MS- IT Management   | Yes | Yes |
| Institution 21 | Master's    | Applied Linguistics and Intercultural Communication             | Yes | Yes |

Table 5: Background Experience of International Student Advisors

In addition to formal education, ISAs received a variety of training to help them prepare for their positions. All participants have attended professional development workshops and conferences. Additionally, most of the participants utilize resources such as online webinars and training series and articles and books on topics related to their positions. No one had indicated that they had not received training outside of their formal education (see Figure 3 below).

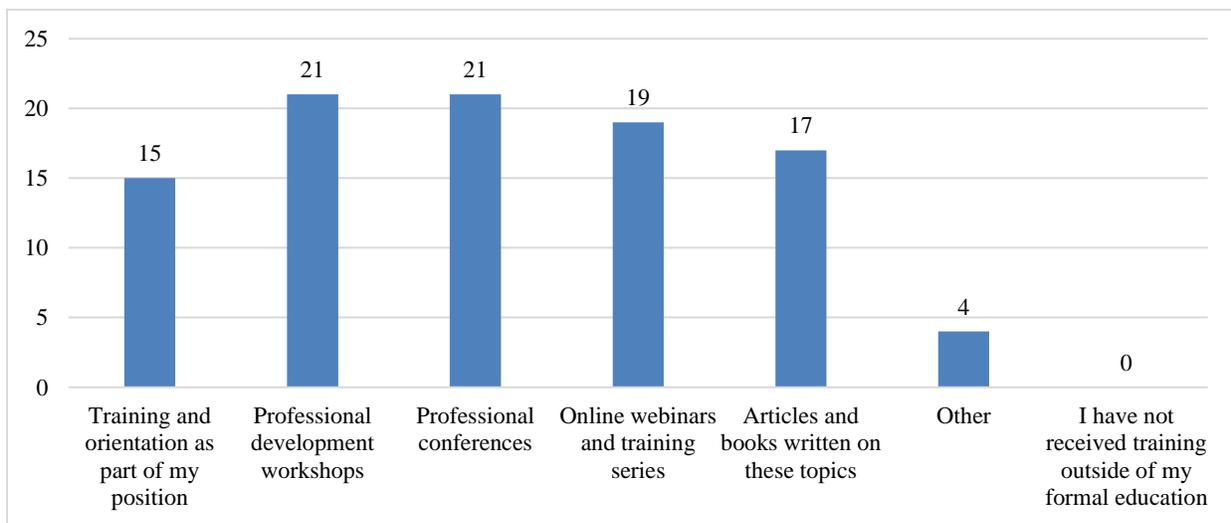


Figure 3: Training Received to Help Prepare for Current Position

All but two of the participants had been familiar with intercultural communication theories prior to the survey. For those that indicated they had received training (13 participants), a majority of that training came through professional development workshops, articles and books, conferences, and through formal education (see Figure 4 below).

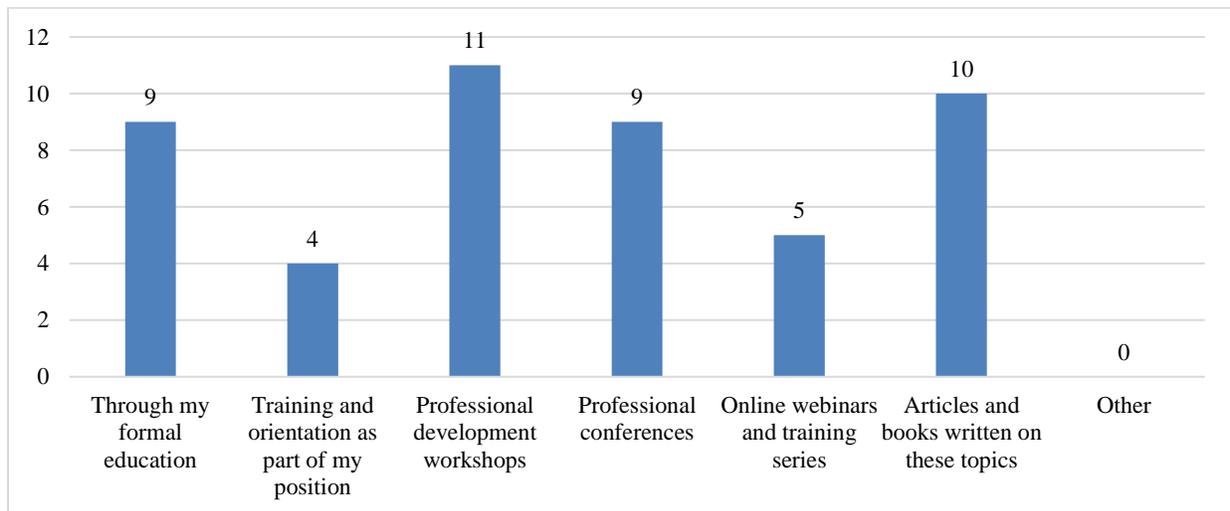


Figure 4: Where ISAs Have Received Their Intercultural Communication Training

Eight participants indicated that they had not received training on intercultural communication practices. For those that had not received training, the biggest reason was due to lack of resources, other factors included lack of time and this being outside of the duties of their position (see Figure 5 below).

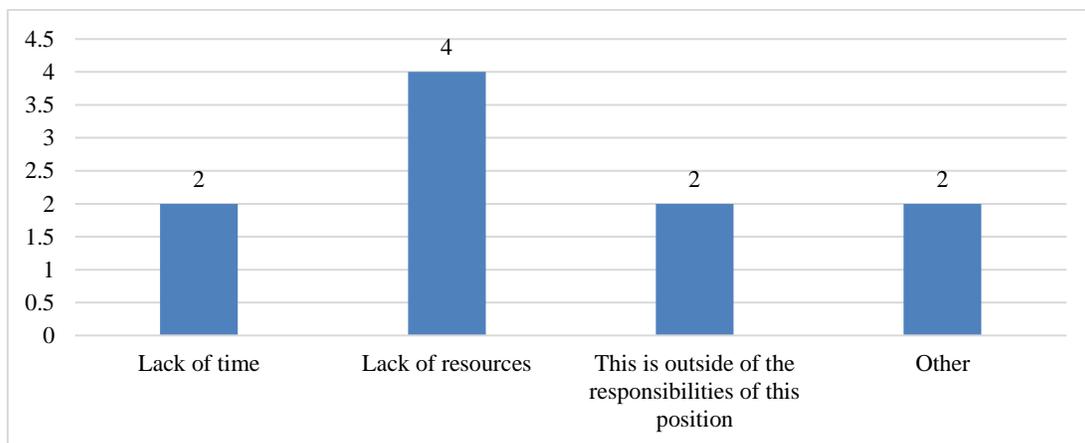


Figure 5: Factors Inhibiting Training on Intercultural Communication Practices

For participants who had received intercultural training, there were many ways that their advising strategies benefited from this training. Benefits included having a better understanding and context of the situation, being more adaptable to students’ needs, understanding and utilizing different verbal and non-verbal communication styles, and so on (see Table 6).

| Institution    | How has your training on intercultural understanding and communication helped you be better prepared in your advising strategies?  |
|----------------|--|
| Institution 1  | Without some kind of knowledge of how we communicate differently - one cannot be successful in this field.   |
| Institution 2  | Having training in intercultural communication tactics have helped me to give better context to the situation when I am meeting with students. If I understand a little bit about their culture it can help me adapt my style to be more accessible to the student. For example, I know that Chinese culture emphasizes the importance of power based on position and age. I want to minimize that when I am working with Chinese students so I try to relax my body and tone and push the student to speak for themselves and make their own decisions instead of giving my suggestions too strongly. |
| Institution 4  | Once being made aware of the dimensions of culture and how these can affect communication, you purposefully begin to watch for the miscommunications they cause and adapt your counseling approach to overcome them.   |
| Institution 5  | A good example of this is understanding views of gender, as all the student and scholar advisers in our office are female, we've run into issues with male students not listening or asking us questions because of the way females are viewed in their home country. Really delving into intercultural competencies has helped us better interact with students that view the professional and academic environment very differently.   |
| Institution 6  | Gives me a foundation to work with international students  |
| Institution 7  | <i>No Response</i>   |
| Institution 8  | It is important to rely on research to inform our practices. We also use Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions in a training we do with faculty called "Engaging and Supporting International Students." We do a "spotlight" on Saudi Arabia by demonstrating the tool since 80% of our international students are from Saudi Arabia.   |
| Institution 11 | I have become more aware of my cultural preferences, and how those may impact my communication with students. I also have learned how to anticipate cultural preferences of students, and adjusted my communication with them accordingly. I also try to share this understanding and theory with students to help them reflect on their experiences.  |
| Institution 14 | Understanding about other cultures, understanding different communication styles, identity development   |
| Institution 17 | <i>No Response</i>   |
| Institution 18 | It gives me a better idea of how to communicate with students and how to interpret some of their non-verbal communication.   |
| Institution 20 | As communication is what the listener does, it is important that I understand how my words and actions may be interpreted. I am from the South, so even communication with my northern colleagues can be different.  |
| Institution 21 | It is invaluable to making interpretations and decisions about how to help students adjust and move forward.   |

Table 6: How Intercultural Training Has Better Prepared Advising Strategies

For those who indicated they have not received training on intercultural communication theories, a variety of reasons for this were cited (see Table 7). The reasons included both insufficient funding, resources, and staff to be able to focus on this type of training. One participant responded that their role was primarily on visa regulations, but indicated that they would be interested in hiring more staff to focus on this type of communication training.

| Institution    | Explanation of factors inhibiting training on intercultural communication.  |
|----------------|---|
| Institution 3  | <i>No Response</i>  |
| Institution 9  | Insufficient funding to send to trainings re: Intercultural Competence  |
| Institution 10 | My role is F-1 regulations, but I would love to have more employees that can focus on intercultural communication more directly.  |
| Institution 12 | All of the offices that I've worked in were understaffed and extremely busy offices where our priority was on fulfilling immediate needs. Additionally, I was familiar with the concepts and taught it in workshops to students not to mention my own experience navigating cross-cultural experiences personally and professionally gave me the skill set that I needed to be successful without needing to dedicate time and resources to formal study. I really do not believe that having formal study or training in these things are 100% necessary to gain the skills - having the name for these concepts also doesn't impact your ability to apply them intuitively. |
| Institution 13 | <i>No Response</i>  |
| Institution 15 | <i>No Response</i>  |
| Institution 16 | I haven't been sent to formal intercultural training because I have not worked at an institution that had the resources to pay for that.  |
| Institution 19 | <i>No Response</i>  |

Table 7: Factors Inhibiting Intercultural Communication Training

This study also provided insight into what ISAs would like to see in terms of advising and the factors that might be preventing this. This data will be analyzed in further detail in the “Conclusions” section. In short, when asked about what their ideal interactions with advisees would look like, many of the responses indicated that they wanted their interactions to be more meaningful and personal (see Table 8). Similarly, when discussing the factors that are inhibiting this, a common trend amongst advisors was lack of time and resources (see Table 9).

| Institution    | Ideally, what would you like your interactions with your international student advisees to look like?   | Are expectations being met? |
|----------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Institution 1  | Less transactional. Our office is under-staffed (like most international offices), but I feel like I could be working with the students more to help them be successful.  | Sometimes                   |
| Institution 2  | Sometimes students need short and sweet answers, but I always end our conversations with "How is everything else going? How are your classes? Family?" This usually brings out other details or areas where they might need more support. Other meetings are very complex in terms of immigration related regulations and how they interact with the university policy and those take more focus.   | Yes                         |
| Institution 3  | I think most of our students prefer a face-to-face meeting over most other forms of communication. We do our best to be available for walk-ins every day and make setting up appointments as easy as possible.  | Yes                         |
| Institution 4  | I would like the students to understand that I am always completely honest with them and that I am there to help them understand what is going on and how they can approach the issue constructively. I believe that there can be little effective communication without the building of trust by being honest. I want to help students develop the ability to put their concern or issue in perspective from the framework of both cultures and then meld the two into something that will work for them in this setting. I believe strongly that students will only learn this by doing it and that our focus should be in fostering the cultural understanding and helping the student see their options and develop a plan. | Yes                         |
| Institution 5  | Obviously advising them effectively on immigration matters, but being able to be a resource for other areas as well.  | Sometimes                   |
| Institution 6  | Students feeling more confident in life   | Sometimes                   |
| Institution 7  | <i>Requested to not be quoted</i>   | Yes                         |
| Institution 8  | Ideally, I would like a more reasonable work load and system for handling volume so that my interactions with students can be more meaningful. Instead, I often feel behind the eight ball and maybe I don't give the best service that I could give.   | Sometimes                   |
| Institution 9  | Reaching a common ground, ensuring they understand requirements, ensure they are comfortable and doing well in this environment   | Sometimes                   |
| Institution 10 | I would like them to take the regulations seriously and not see me as an enemy. I'm here to help them and my goal is to protect them. Sometimes they see me as a hand of DHS, so they take any anger they have against the U.S. government or the "dumb rules" out on me.   | Sometimes                   |
| Institution 11 | I would prefer more time and capacity to meet with students individually and in-person  | No                          |
| Institution 12 | I like my interactions to be a bit informal with students because that's how we build the rapport. I always have an open door policy & I always try to ask about the student personally or about something they are doing outside of just the immigration aspect. I'm very honest with them too about why something can't work or isn't happening a certain way which means I tell them things they don't always want to hear but they most often truly appreciate it.  | Yes                         |
| Institution 13 | Empathetic, comfortable for the students, "open door"   | Yes                         |
| Institution 14 | Respectful and culturally sensitive, active listening to then provide assistance where possible   | Yes                         |
| Institution 15 | Not so brief  | Sometimes                   |
| Institution 16 | Ideally, we want our students to feel welcome and comfortable in coming to our office for any concern or question they have. We want to foster a sense of independence as they progress and develop in their academic and professional journey, so we expect to have a lot of contact in the first and second semesters, and less as they become integrated and comfortable with the larger campus community.   | Sometimes                   |
| Institution 17 | Each student feels valued and heard   | Yes                         |
| Institution 18 | I want to provide the best service to give them an enjoyable experience at our institution.   | Yes                         |
| Institution 19 | <i>Requested to not be quoted</i>   | Sometimes                   |
| Institution 20 | Warm, compassionate, factually based advice   | Yes                         |
| Institution 21 | A time when they gain insights on how to be successful in the US  | Sometimes                   |

Table 8: Ideal Interactions with Advisees

Similarly, when asked about what factors might be inhibiting the ideal interactions with advisees, advisors gave a variety of responses. Of course, the common factors that came up are those experienced across many international education offices, lack of time and understaffing

(see Table 9). To help mitigate this, international student offices are attempting to streamline their processes, strengthen online and printed resources, and advocate for more staffing.

| Institution    | What factors might be inhibiting the ideal?  | What strategies do you use to move closer to ideal?  |
|----------------|--|--|
| Institution 1  | Time. We advise 1700 students - in addition to meetings, presentation, and document creation. Other institutions with our numbers have at least 10 advisors. The minimum advisee load should be no more than 1000 students.  | At the moment, we can only keep explaining to upper-administration the importance of this department and that more staff is needed.  |
| Institution 2  | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 3  | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 4  | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 5  | Cultural barriers of social norms. Example: we had a Chinese visitor having a really rough time with roommates, and she ended up leaving the U.S. early because of it, and when we asked her why she hadn't come to us for help, she said she didn't want to disgrace her respect for America.   | Being proactive in reaching out to students to check in about their transition to life in the U.S., organizing social, casual events where we can check in with students face-to-face in a relaxed environment (ex. we are instituting a monthly international coffee hour to work toward this goal).  |
| Institution 6  | Age, family  | I am open to connect with all my students.   |
| Institution 7  | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 8  | As mentioned in my previous answer, lack of appropriate staffing.  | Enforcing walk in times (we used to allow students to come in any time) and strengthening our self- service materials (handouts, websites, google forms, etc.)   |
| Institution 9  | Language ability--I don't speak Arabic or other related languages  | I speak slower and work with the students and students who can assist.   |
| Institution 10 | The political climate has made it much more difficult to do my job. New tighter regulations and interpretations, and the constantly changing information from USCIS makes students see us as mean and unreliable.  | I try to help students understand that I am interpreting regulations carefully as they arise. The vast majority of students see me as very trustworthy, so this usually works great. Male students do have a harder time taking me seriously though because I am a younger woman.  |
| Institution 11 | Not enough resources (time and staffing) allocated to our office   | Look for inefficiencies in other areas to free up more time to connect with students   |
| Institution 12 | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 13 | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 14 | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 15 | Lack of time/staff   | None currently   |
| Institution 16 | We have issues on campus when it comes to "ownership" of students & struggle with other departments referring international students back to our office for things that their offices really should be able to help the student with, such as career advising & financial aid information. It is true that options are limited for international students in some cases, but the expectation to be a one-stop-shop for all international issues is there, it can be overwhelming for a small staff who don't necessarily have expertise in financial aid or career advising. | Learning as best we can how to help the students in the above mentioned areas. A lot of my strategy in the field has been to just become as knowledgeable as I can about institution practices and policies, as well as areas outside my expertise (like career placement and advising, financial aid resources, academic coaching and advising) so that when students get turned back to the "international office" because they are international, they don't get discouraged. We are also working with other departments in efforts in promoting more of "shared students" mentality across the campus community. |
| Institution 17 | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 18 | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 19 | Scheduling Appointment online  | Trying to set up the website   |
| Institution 20 | <i>No response</i>   | <i>No response</i>   |
| Institution 21 | My understanding of their perspective, their lack of willingness to see things from a different perspective, culture shock, personal bias  | Examples, discussion   |

Table 9: Factors Inhibiting Ideal Advising

The data has shown that there are many similarities experienced across participants in regard to advising strategies, techniques, and obstacles. Each advisor and student brings their own viewpoint and experiences to their institution. This makes it so that each participant has its own very unique set of challenges and methods of overcoming those challenges.

### **International Student Advisor Interview Responses**

The participants from Institution 5 and Institution 12 participated in the optional follow-up interview. The interview went into further details on their experiences, training, and strategies for international student advising. The interviews brought out the pedagogy of the participants, while allowing them to share their views in relation to intercultural theories and knowledge.

Institution 5 is a minority-serving university, with a focus on healthcare and research. Of its total population of 5,000 to 10,000 students, 500 to 1,000 are international students. These students represent 60 countries of origin. On the survey, Participant 5 indicated that there was just one ISA focusing on international students. To further expand on that, in the interview, this participant shared that there is a total of five staff members in the international education office.

During the interview, Participant 5 discussed their training strategies, support network, and advising strategies. To help continue their learning and professional development, the international education staff at Institution 5 utilizes a variety of resources, many coming from NAFSA. This includes training webinars and podcasts related to international student advising and immigration regulations (the Klasko podcast was also an example). Institution 5 also utilizes the Advisor's Manual, Healthcare Institution interest group, and participates in the regional conferences.

The staff at Institution 5 also took a variety of strategies to support their international student advising. One strategy was to meet with students in-person and reiterate policies and

topics that had been discussed in the past. Participant 5 mentioned that, for some students, gender was an issue, specifically when it came to a female ISA advising a male student. In these instances, the ISA would continue to reiterate the information to the students. Another advising strategy used by Participant 5 for all students was asking questions of their advisees to make sure they understand the information that is being presented.

Finally, in their interview, Participant 5 mentioned that their office hosts a lot of cultural events as an opportunity for students to meet and connect with each other, as well as staff. This has been beneficial as a means for international education staff to get to know their advisees better than they otherwise would have. It has also provided an opportunity to further the ISA's knowledge of intercultural communication and understanding. As Participant 5 explained, the learning directly from students and scholars has been the best form of increasing intercultural communication and knowledge.

The second interviewee was Participant 12. Their institution is a college with a liberal arts focus. The total student population is up to 5,000 students with an international student population of 200 to 500 students. These students represent 59 home countries and there are two ISAs who each support around 150 students. In their interview, Participant 12 drew from their own professional experience, not necessarily specifically as it relates to Institution 12.

In the interview, Participant 12 also cited the challenge of gender differences in advising. Specifically, as it relates to a female ISA advising a male student. This participant shared that some male students would not respect a female in a position of authority and, instead, would seek out the male sponsored student coordinator. In this case, all international education staff work closely to make sure that students received the same response and answers, no matter which advisor they went to.

As an advisor, Participant 12 recognized the need to check their own beliefs and curiosity about other cultures to respect the choices and experiences of their advisees. In situations where advisees were less open, this participant noticed that talking to students, asking questions, and getting to know them was helpful to their advising. As an advisor, Participant 12 seeks to make sure their advisees know that their office is a safe, understanding, and respectful space.

Throughout their interview, Participant 12 emphasized the importance, from their perspective, of having real interactions with international students. This participant takes an informal approach when advising students. Through this approach, Participant 12 seeks to better understand and learn from their students by having the opportunity to have informal conversations with their students.

Finally, Participant 12 shared a great piece of insight as to their view of intercultural communication training. In their interview, this participant shared that they are not a huge fan of intercultural communication training. In their view, it provides names of concepts but does not actually train advisors to be more culturally competent. This is best done through real interactions with members of a different culture.

### **Conclusions**

When asked about what their ideal interactions with advisees would look like, ISAs gave a variety of responses, but many of them indicated that they wanted their interactions to be more meaningful, personal, and less transactional (see Table 8). They wanted to have more one-on-one interactions with students. Several participants stated that they wanted their students to feel like they were able to approach them for a variety of issues, not only immigration-related questions.

A few techniques for doing this were considered. For example, Participant 2 ends conversations or meetings with their students by asking how everything else with the student is

going. In their experience, asking these types of follow up questions usually brought out other areas where the student needed support. This strategy was also seen by Participant 12. In their response, the participant indicated that they try to be somewhat informal with the students as a means of building rapport and familiarity. Similar to Participant 2, Participant 12 stated that they also try to ask more personal questions of their advisees. Another technique for achieving the ideal interactions with students that advisors use is honesty. Several participants stated that they try to be as honest as possible with their students. While these are not always the answers the students want to hear, in the long term, this creates a better, more trusting relationship between the advisor and advisees.

There were many unique factors inhibiting ideal interactions with students. One of these was the cultural barriers between the students and advisors, including cultural differences and culture shock experienced by students. In one example, Participant 5 shared an experience where a student left the United States early due to roommate issues they were experiencing. When asked why that student had not reached out for help, they stated that they did not want to show disrespect toward the United States. One method for mitigating similar issues in the future was for institutions to be more pro-active in checking-in and reaching out to students. Methods included organizing different events, arranging one-on-one advising meetings, holding discussions, and, perhaps, informational sessions about life in the United States. Another factor that is preventing the ideal interactions with students was that of changing immigration regulations. For institutions with a high advisor-to-advisee ratio, a majority of their time and communication is spent interpreting, advising, and enforcing the immigration regulations. With regulations that are always changing, this can make positive communication difficult on the part of ISAs and can lead to frustration on the part of students.

Throughout the surveys and interview responses, advisors repeatedly expressed that they focused on getting to know their advisees as an advising technique. Through this technique, they hoped to make their advisees feel comfortable coming to them with any questions and issues. Advisors also indicated that they did their best to incorporate best practices in intercultural communication in their interactions with students, or at least used the theories to inform their communication strategies. While utilizing intercultural communication theories, advisors also do their best to avoid stereotyping a student and their culture. Recognizing that individual students may have different cultural values and practices, advisors also focus on asking questions and getting to know their advisees as individuals.

### **Limitations**

Reaching student participants proved to be a challenge. Unfortunately, the student survey response was much lower than hoped as only one student responded to the survey. Other limitations are that the information provided may not have been completely accurate. For example, Participant 5 stated that they have 500 to 1,000 international students, but also stated that there is just one ISA at the institution who serves 100 students. This means that there would only be 100 international students at that institution or that there would need to be five to 10 ISAs. In this example, the results may have skewed the data slightly.

Similarly, one survey participant indicated that they represented the English Language School at Institution 15. Their results were specific to the language school and did not represent the institution as a whole. Thinking along these lines, other participants could have represented a smaller component of the larger institution (for example, a specific college or language school). If this was the case, the make-up of the larger institution, in terms of the international student office, could have looked very different than what was reported.

Finally, due to timing, response rate, and scheduling conflicts, only two interviews took place. While the two interviewees provided great data and good insights into their advising strategies and training, more interview participants could have yielded more insights.

### **Recommendations**

Further research on this topic could be done by broadening the population of participants, both in terms of advisors as well as students. While participants came from a variety of locations and institutions, receiving additional feedback would be helpful in learning more about this topic. On the student side, it would be even more beneficial to look at the student experience as a whole, not simply focusing on one home region in particular.

### **Final Discussion**

This study explored ISAs overall advising strategies, hopes, and challenges in relation to intercultural theories. Many ISAs would like to have more one-on-one and personal conversations with their advisees, but often times, factors outside of their control prevent this from happening. Advisors try to mitigate this through techniques, such as streamlining processes, being proactive when it comes to possible student issues, and making more information readily available to students, thus freeing up more of the advisor's time.

The results of this project show that when it comes to incorporating intercultural communication theories and techniques into advising, the best way to truly learn and understand the student and their culture was to learn from them, through questions and conversation. The true intercultural learning comes not from trainings, workshops, and professional development, but instead comes simply from personal connections. As international education professionals know, making these kind of personal connections is one of the many goals of international education.

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## **Appendix A - Informed Consent Form**

**Title of the Study:** Intercultural Communication in International Student Advisor-Advisee Relationships

**Researcher Name:** Stacy Woodward

My name is Stacy Woodward; I am a student in the International Education program at SIT Graduate Institute. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for partial fulfillment of my MA in International Education. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy of this form.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the role that intercultural communication and intercultural training play in creating an effective and meaningful advisor-advisee relationship. As a current employee of an organization that works closely in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the focus of this study will be on International Student Advisors and their advisees from the MENA region. My final goal is to understand the extent that intercultural communication and training has on creating a successful advisor-advisee relationship.

### **STUDY PROCEDURES:**

Your participation will consist of one or both of the following:

1. Participation in an anonymous survey regarding your experience in advisor-advisee relationships. Completion of the survey will require approximately 20 minutes of your time.
2. Participation in an optional interview that will allow you to provide further details and information about your experiences. The interview will require around 30-45 minutes of your time and will be audio-recorded with your consent. Participants who do not wish to be recorded can still participate in the interview.

The data being gathered is solely intended for informational purposes. Professionals who advise international student and international students from MENA are encouraged to participate.

### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:**

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the interview, you have the right not to answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY:**

There are no anticipated benefits to participants and/or society as a result of this study. However, a potential indirect benefit may be coming away with a better sense of the advisor-advisee relationship and additional strategies for creating a more successful relationship.

**PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION:**

Participants will not receive payment nor compensation for their participation.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

When the results of the research are published, or discussed in conferences, no identifiable information will be used. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and participants' names and the institutions they represent will not be disclosed. Instead, names will be changed for the final capstone paper and project. All data will be stored on the researcher's password protected phone and/or computer and no one else will have access to this data.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:**

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

**CONSENT TO QUOTE FROM SURVEY RESPONSE:**

The researcher may wish to quote a response from your survey in the final capstone paper and/or in presentations resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used in order to protect your identity and that of the institution you represent.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to be quoted from a response on my survey

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to be quoted from a response on my survey

---

"I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older."

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**CONSENT TO OPTIONAL FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW:**

Please indicate below if you would like to participate in a follow-up interview regarding your experiences on this research topic.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to participate in a follow-up interview
- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to participate in a follow-up interview

**Consent to Audio-Record Interview:**

Interviews will be audio-recorded with the participant’s consent. Recordings will not be shared and will solely be used for the purposes of this study. If the participant does not give consent to being audio-recorded, the researcher will instead take notes on what is discussed in the interview.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to be audio-recorded during my interview
- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to be audio-recorded during my interview (notes will be taken during the interview instead)

**Consent to Quote from Interview:**

The researcher may wish to quote from your interview in the final capstone paper and/or in presentations resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used in order to protect your identity and that of the institution you represent.

**Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to be quoted from my interview
- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to be quoted from my interview

---

“I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.”

Participant’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**VERBAL CONSENT:**

“I, (state your name), have read the Informed Consent Form and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study (and optional follow-up interview). I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.”

Please state if you consent to the following:

1. Consent to be quoted from a response on my survey
2. Consent to participate in the optional follow-up interview
3. Consent to be audio-recorded during my interview
4. Consent to be quoted from my interview

---

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION:**

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by an SIT Study Abroad Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at:

School for International Training Institutional Review Board  
1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676  
Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676 USA  
[irb@sit.edu](mailto:irb@sit.edu)  
802-258-3132

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**RESEARCH INFORMATION:**

If you are interested in receiving a summary of the final capstone project, please provide an email address. This information will not be share.

Participant's email address: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B - International Student Advisor Survey Questions**

### **MEMO/EMAIL INTRODUCTION TO SURVEY:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the role that intercultural communication and intercultural training play in creating an effective and meaningful advisor-advisee relationship. The focus of this study will be on International Student Advisors and their advisees from the Middle East and North Africa region. My final goal is to understand the extent that intercultural communication and training has on creating a successful advisor-advisee relationship.

I am conducting this study for partial fulfillment of my MA in International Education. Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue at any time. Participation in the survey is anonymous and will require approximately 20 minutes of your time. If you would like to be contacted to participate in an optional follow-up interview, you will be asked to provide your name and email address at the end of the survey. The interview will require around 30 to 45 minutes of your time.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to read the informed consent form on page one of the survey. By clicking “I agree” you are demonstrating your consent to participate in the survey.

### **For Advisors:**

In order to gather data from the students’ perspective, I would also appreciate your assistance in sharing this survey with your international students from the MENA region. Please forward to the survey link to students who meet the survey criteria and are able to complete the student portion of the survey.

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM:**

The informed consent form will be added at the start of the survey.

### **FILTERING QUESTION:**

1. Please indicate if you are an international student advisor or if you are an international student:
  - a. I am an advisor
  - b. I am a student

### **ABOUT YOUR INSTITUTION:**

2. Please indicate the name of your institution (from the drop-down menu). If your institution is not listed, please select “other” and list your institution below. This information will not be disclosed; it is solely intended for the researcher.

3. Are you an employee within the International Education Office (or similar office) of your institution, indicated above?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If no, please explain:

4. How would you classify your institution?

- a. University
- b. College
- c. Community College
- d. Vocational/Technical School
- e. Other; please describe:

5. Is your institution a special-interest institution? For example, does your institution have a religious affiliation? Is it a minority-serving institution? Do you have a focus on research, technology, or another field? This is a multiple-choice response.

- a. Religious affiliation
- b. Minority-serving
- c. Research focus
- d. Technology focus
- e. Liberal arts focus
- f. Other, please describe:

#### **ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT POPULATION:**

6. What is, approximately, the total population of students at your institution?

- a. 0-5,000
- b. 5,000-10,000
- c. 10,000-15,000
- d. 15,000-20,000
- e. 20,000-25,000
- f. 25,000-30,000
- g. 30,000 or more

7. What is, approximately, the total population of international students at your institution?

- a. 0-200
- b. 200-500
- c. 500-1000
- d. 1000-2000
- e. 2000-5000
- f. 5000 or more

8. How many countries of origin are represented at your institution? (numerical response)
9. What are the top five sending countries for your institution?
10. According to UNICEF, the following countries are part of the Middle East and North Africa:
  - a. Algeria
  - b. Bahrain
  - c. Djibouti
  - d. Egypt
  - e. Iran
  - f. Iraq
  - g. Jordan
  - h. Kuwait
  - i. Lebanon
  - j. Libya
  - k. Morocco
  - l. Oman
  - m. Qatar
  - n. Saudi Arabia
  - o. Palestine
  - p. Sudan
  - q. Syria
  - r. Tunisia
  - s. United Arab Emirates
  - t. Yemen

Using the list above, approximately, how many international students from the MENA region are hosted at your institution?

- a. 0-20
- b. 20-50
- c. 50-100
- d. 100-200
- e. 200-500
- f. 500 or more

#### **ABOUT YOUR OFFICE STRUCTURE:**

11. How many international student advisors are at your institution?
12. Approximately how many students does each advisor serve?
13. Can you describe how students are assigned to their international student advisors? The following is a multiple-choice answer. Students are assigned to an advisor based on their:
  - a. Major or degree area
  - b. Country of origin
  - c. Assignments alphabetical, by the students' name
  - d. Program type (for example: exchange, sponsored, or degree-seeking student)
  - e. Other; please describe:
14. Are students assigned one advisor or multiple?
  - a. One
  - b. Multiple

If you would like, you can provide further explanation:

15. How do you view your role as an international student advisor in the education and experience of international students in the United States? This is a multiple-choice response:

- a. Immigration advising
- b. Academic advising
- c. Cultural interpreter
- d. International student advocate
- e. To help students adjust to life on campus and in the United States
- f. To help students make connections on campus and in the community
- g. To teach students about campus resources
- h. Other, please explain:

**TRAINING RECEIVED:**

16. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- a. High School
- b. Associate's
- c. Bachelor's
- d. Master's
- e. Doctorate

17. What was your most recent field of study?

18. Outside of your formal education, what type of training have you, as an international student advisor, received to help you prepare for your position, if any? This is a multiple choice response.

- a. Training and orientation as part of my position
- b. Professional development workshops
- c. Professional conferences
- d. Online webinars and training series
- e. Articles and books written on these topics
- f. I have not received training outside of my formal education
- g. Other, please explain:

**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE:**

19. Using the chart below, please describe your methods of communication with your students and how frequently it is used:

|                                | Very Often | Frequently | Occasionally | Rarely | Never Used |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------|------------|
| In-person, one-on-one meetings |            |            |              |        |            |
| Group advising                 |            |            |              |        |            |
| Walk-in appointments           |            |            |              |        |            |
| Email                          |            |            |              |        |            |
| Text message                   |            |            |              |        |            |
| Social media                   |            |            |              |        |            |

20. Are you familiar with intercultural communications theories and practices (such as Geert Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory or Edward T. Hall’s Cross-Cultural Communication)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

21. Have you received training on these or similar intercultural understanding and communication practices?

- a. Yes
- b. No

22. If you answered “yes” to question 6, please explain in what context you have received these trainings (multiple-choice answer).

- a. Through my formal education
- b. Training and orientation as part of my position
- c. Professional development workshops
- d. Professional conferences
- e. Online webinars and training series
- f. Articles and books written on these topics
- g. Other, please explain:

Please move on to question 9.

23. If you answered “no” to question 6, please explain the factors that are inhibiting you from doing so (multiple choice answer).

- a. Lack of time
- b. Lack of resources
- c. This is outside of the responsibilities of this position
- d. Other, please explain:

Please move on to question 11.

24. Do you feel that your training on intercultural understanding and communication has helped you be better prepared in your advising strategies?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please explain your response:

25. How do you seek to incorporate intercultural theory and practice in your interactions with students?
- My communication styles
  - My approach to advising
  - My awareness and understanding of my students' cultures
  - I do not seek to incorporate intercultural theories and practices (please explain):
  - Other, please explain:
26. What methods do you use for seeking feedback from your advisees about their experience in working with you and your office?
- Anonymous surveys
  - In-person meetings
  - Use of a third-party to collect feedback (indirect)
  - We do not have a process for receiving feedback
  - Other, please explain:
27. Ideally, what would you like your interactions with your international student advisees to look like?
- What factors might be preventing this?
  - What strategies do you use to move closer to this ideal?

Thank you for your time and completing this advisor survey on The Impact of Intercultural Communication on Advisor-Advisee Relationships between International Student Advisors and Students from the Middle East and North Africa.

If you would like to participate in a follow-up interview on this topic, please include your name and email address below. You will be contacted via email to arrange an interview time and contact method.

Name:

Email:

### **Appendix C - International Student Advisor Guided Interview Questions**

1. Could you elaborate more on your educational and professional background and what has led you to international education and international student advising?
2. How has the professional training you've received (as indicated in your survey) helped you prepare for your position as an international student advisor?
3. What has your experience been in working with students from the MENA region?
  - a. What challenges, if any have you faced?
  - b. What have been your successes?
4. What do you think has contributed to your challenges or successes in advising students from MENA?
5. How have you implemented any past experiences (education, training, or professional development) in your current advising methods, specifically with your student from the MENA region?
6. What strategies do you use to evaluate best practices for advising international students?
7. Is there some type of intercultural training that you wish you could receive? If so, what does this look like?
8. Is there additional support you wish you could receive when it comes to assessing, determining, and implementing best practices for advising?
9. Is there any additional information you wish to share on this topic that you feel has not been covered in the survey or interview?

Once again, thank you for your time and completing this advisor interview on The Impact of Intercultural Communication on Advisor-Advisee Relationships between International Student Advisors and Students from the Middle East and North Africa. If you have any follow-up questions or concerns regarding the study, please feel free to contact me. If you would like to receive a copy of the completed capstone paper, please let me know and I will be happy to email that to you.

## **Appendix D - International Student Survey Questions**

### **MEMO/EMAIL INTRODUCTION TO SURVEY:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the role that intercultural communication and intercultural training play in creating an effective and meaningful advisor-advisee relationship. The focus of this study will be on International Student Advisors and their advisees from the Middle East and North Africa region. My final goal is to understand the extent that intercultural communication and training has on creating a successful advisor-advisee relationship.

I am conducting this study for partial fulfillment of my MA in International Education. Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue at any time. Participation in the survey is anonymous and will require approximately 20 minutes of your time. If you would like to be contacted to participate in an optional follow-up interview, you will be asked to provide your name and email address at the end of the survey. The interview will require around 30 to 45 minutes of your time.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to read the informed consent form on page one of the survey. By clicking “I agree” you are demonstrating your consent to participate in the survey.

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM:**

The informed consent form will be added at the start of the survey.

### **INFORMATION ABOUT YOU:**

1. Please indicate the name of your institution (from the drop-down menu). If your institution is not listed, please select “other” and list your institution below. This information will not be disclosed, it is solely intended for the researcher.
2. What is your current level of study?
  - a. Associate’s
  - b. Bachelor’s
  - c. Master’s
  - d. Doctorate
  - e. Other (please explain)
3. What is your current field of study?

4. Please indicate your home country from the drop-down list (included on the final survey).

- |             |                 |                         |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| a. Algeria  | h. Kuwait       | o. Palestine            |
| b. Bahrain  | i. Lebanon      | p. Sudan                |
| c. Djibouti | j. Libya        | q. Syria                |
| d. Egypt    | k. Morocco      | r. Tunisia              |
| e. Iran     | l. Oman         | s. United Arab Emirates |
| f. Iraq     | m. Qatar        | t. Yemen                |
| g. Jordan   | n. Saudi Arabia |                         |

5. What is your purpose for studying in the United States?

- a. Short-term exchange program (1-2 semesters)
- b. To earn my degree
- c. To conduct research
- d. English language training
- e. Other (please explain)

6. How long have you been in the United States?

- a. 0 – 6 months
- b. 6 months – 1 year
- c. 1 – 2 years
- d. 2 – 4 years
- e. More than 4 years

7. What type of preparation did you have prior to beginning your studies in the United States?

- a. Pre-departure orientation
- b. Orientation upon arrival at my institution
- c. Communication with my international student advisor prior to my arrival
- d. Communication with alumni or current students prior to my arrival
- e. Other, please explain:

**ABOUT YOUR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR(S):**

8. In what ways does your international student advisor communicate with you and how often? Please indicate on the chart below:

|                                | Very Often | Frequently | Occasionally | Rarely | Never Used |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------|------------|
| In-person, one-on-one meetings |            |            |              |        |            |
| Group advising                 |            |            |              |        |            |
| Walk-in appointments           |            |            |              |        |            |
| Email                          |            |            |              |        |            |
| Text message                   |            |            |              |        |            |
| Social media                   |            |            |              |        |            |

9. Please rank your most preferred to your least preferred options of communication from your international student advisor(s) with 1 being your most preferred to 5 being your least preferred:

|                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| In-person, one-on-one meetings |   |   |   |   |   |
| Group advising                 |   |   |   |   |   |
| Walk-in appointments           |   |   |   |   |   |
| Email                          |   |   |   |   |   |
| Text message                   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Social media                   |   |   |   |   |   |

10. Can you explain your ranking from question 9? Why did you choose the options that you did?

11. In a typical semester, how often do you meet with your international student advisor?

- a. Never
- b. 1 to 2 times
- c. Once a month
- d. Once a week
- e. Other (please explain):

12. What topics do you usually discuss with your advisor? (multiple choice):

- a. Immigration questions
- b. Employment
- c. Academics
- d. Tuition/bills
- e. Health-related questions
- f. Student-life questions
- g. Questions about campus opportunities
- h. Other (please explain):

**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE:**

Many academics have developed theories to help explain (and navigate) differences cultures, known as intercultural communication. Two of these theorists are Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall.

Hofstede defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others.” Through his research on culture, Hofstede identified six dimensions of culture that represent a preference for one condition over another. These are power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long term vs. short term orientation, indulgence vs. restraint. Similarly, Edward T.

Hall also identified three dimensions that cultures can show a preference for. These are high vs. low context, concept of time, and concepts of space.

These theories state that an organization, country, or cultural (or even an individual) fall somewhere along a spectrum of these six dimensions. Through understanding this spectrum and how different entities can express their preferences, we can better understand our cultural differences.

13. Had you ever heard of intercultural communications theories and practices (such as Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory or Edward T. Hall's Cross-Cultural Communication) before this survey?
- Yes
  - No
14. Based on the above descriptions, do you feel like your international student advisor implements advising and communication methods that are representative of your culture?
- Yes
  - Sometimes
  - No

Please explain your response:

15. From your understanding of intercultural theory, how do you see your advisor incorporating intercultural theories into their advising?
- Their communication styles
  - Their approach to advising
  - Their awareness and understanding of my culture
  - They do not incorporate this into their advising
  - Other, please explain:

### **ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISORS:**

16. How do you view the role of your international student advisor in your education and experience in the United States? This is a multiple-choice response:
- Immigration advising
  - Academic advising
  - Cultural interpreter
  - International student advocate
  - To help me adjust to life on campus and in the United States
  - To help me make connections on campus and in the community
  - To teach me about campus resources
  - Other, please explain:

17. Does your advisor meet these expectations?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please explain your response:

18. What methods does your International Education Office use for seeking feedback from the international students at your institution about their experience in working with their office?

- a. Anonymous surveys
- b. In-person meetings
- c. Use of a third-party to collect feedback (indirect)
- d. There is no process for receiving feedback
- e. Other, please explain:

19. Ideally, what would you like your interactions with your international student advisor to look like?

- a. What factors do you think might be preventing this?
- b. How could be done to improve?

Thank you for your time and completing this advisor survey on The Impact of Intercultural Communication on Advisor-Advisee Relationships between International Student Advisors and Students from the Middle East and North Africa.

If you would like to participate in a follow-up interview on this topic, please include your name and email address below. You will be contacted via email to arrange an interview time and contact method.

Name:

Email:

### **Appendix E - International Student Guided Interview Questions**

1. Could you elaborate more on your educational and professional background and what has led you to choose to study in the United States?
2. What are your goals for studying in the United States?
3. How does your interaction with your international student advisor in the United States compare to your interactions with advisors in your home country?
4. What has your experience been with your international student advisor?
  - a. What challenges, if any have you faced?
  - b. What have been your successes?
5. What do you think has contributed to these challenges and successes in your interactions with your international student advisor?
6. Is it important to you that your international student advisor implement approaches in their advising that are appropriate to your culture and background?
7. What additional support, if any, do you wish you could see from your international student advisor?
8. Is there any additional information you wish to share on this topic that you feel has not been covered in the survey or interview?

Once again, thank you for your time and completing this advisor interview on The Impact of Intercultural Communication on Advisor-Advisee Relationships between International Student Advisors and Students from the Middle East and North Africa. If you have any follow-up questions or concerns regarding the study, please feel free to contact me. If you would like to receive a copy of the completed capstone paper, please let me know and I will be happy to email that to you.