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### Pathway Provider Programs: The International Student Experience

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**PATHWAY PROVIDER PROGRAMS:  
THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Aaron A. Mendez

PIM 79 IELR

An Independent Practitioner Inquiry Capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for a Master of Arts in International Education

School for International Training Graduate Institute

Brattleboro, Vermont

Advisor: Dr. Sora Friedman

May 11, 2021

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Student Name: Aaron Mendez

Date: May 11, 2021

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### **Abstract**

As part of their commitment towards internationalization, many higher education institutions seek new recruitment practices to increase international student enrollment, to both enhance cultural diversity and increase the potential for revenue. Partnering with third-party pathway providers offers international students an opportunity to refine their English language skills, all while taking for-credit-bearing academic courses that ultimately prepare them for their second year upon matriculating into their degree-seeking programs. One difference between direct-entry international students and pathway program international students is the additional level of support for the latter.

This study explores the following research question: What are the experiences of international students that have participated in a pathway provider program in the United States? Informed by Sanford's theory of "challenge and support," the value of the additional support international students receive during the pathway program is validated by the comprehensive data obtained by qualitative research methodology, which included surveys of pathway program alumni and pathway provider professionals as well as interviews with students. The findings of this study present seven themes describing the experiences of international students. They include rationale for studying in the United States, rationale for pursuing a pathway program, adjusting to new environments, pathway program experience, after the pathway program, advice and suggestions, and experiences from pathway program professionals. Implications for pathway programs include developing additional student programming to increase English language acquisition and socialization efforts with other students.

**Keywords:** International students, pathway programs, student support, student experience

### **Introduction**

As demand rises for more diverse and inclusive campuses, more specifically, a commitment towards internationalizing campuses, U.S colleges and universities are driven to employ new strategies, including increased international student enrollment. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*, a total number of 1,075,496 international students have enrolled at U.S. institutions of higher education during the 2019–20 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2020). This new report indicated that the number of enrolled international students declined by 1.8 percent from the last academic year (Institute of International Education, 2020). To achieve an increase in international student enrollment, institutions need to be aware of current recruitment strategies that have led other institutions to garner a large student enrollment. Choudaha and Chang (2012) presented three emerging recruitment practices: the use of social media and its profound success with alumni engagement, collaborative efforts on a state level, and, lastly, the use of recruitment service providers. Today, the latter has become an increasingly popular method for institutions in the United States, where most partner “with third-party service providers, such as commissioned agents and pathway programs” (Choudaha & Chang, 2012, p. 16). These pathway provider programs often referred to as pathway programs, are positioned to recruit and retain international students.

In the researcher’s previous work at a pathway provider program in partnership with a U.S. university, they advised and supported international students and witnessed various reactions throughout their programming, both rewarding and challenging. After completion, international students complete the rest of their studies as independent individuals with the necessary resources and knowledge to be proactive towards achieving their academic goals and

navigating challenges, such as acculturation, wellness, and so forth. An interest in understanding the international students' experiences and the overall sense of preparedness they have after participating in a pathway provider program is the primary goal for this study. There is a substantial amount of existing research examining the international student experience; however, it does not currently extend to capturing the experiences of students who have participated in a pathway provider program.

This research is grounded in Sanford's (1966, as stated in Jones & Abes, 2017) theory of challenge and support, which indicated that "students need an optimal balance of challenge and support for development to occur" (p. 145). Too much support can lead to students being too comfortable, which may mean that no development occurs, whereas too many challenges can be pretty overwhelming (Jones & Abes, 2017). Additional background information on pathway programs is stated in the literature review section of this paper.

The research question for this study was, "What are the experiences of international students that have participated in a pathway provider program in the United States?" The sub-questions include:

- What motivated students to pursue an education in the United States?
- What insights do students have on the level of preparedness they perceive after engaging as a matriculated student?
- What resources from their pathway program do students recommend for use by their college or university?

## **Literature Review**

There is an abundance of literature evaluating the international student experiences at institutions of higher education in the United States. While graduation and student retention rates are essential for institutions to use for evaluation purposes and prospective students to aid in their college search, they neglect to capture the experiences of the individuals who persisted in their studies. Upon arrival to the United States, international students are faced with many social and community factors that affect decisions they make to continuing their education or that pose a challenge. At the same time, they try to maintain their student status and gain memorable experiences. This section provides a background on pathway programs in the United States. Afterward, it examines the types of experiences international students face upon arriving in the United States.

## **Background**

For many U.S institutions of higher education, an increase in international student enrollment is one strategy implemented into their internationalization efforts. The prospective international student who meets the admissions standards at institutions may enroll and pursue their degrees. However, it can be pretty tricky and impossible for some students to register at some institutions, including those on top national rankings because of the level of English proficiency, low academic standings, or both. Thus, pathway programs help alleviate the student's poor academic performance and worry by serving as "a postsecondary program of study combining credit-bearing and developmental English as a second language (ESL) coursework to prepare a student who is unable to meet the English proficiency standards for admission" (SEVP, 2016, p. 2). Overall, pathway programs offer international students the opportunity to attend institutions of higher education in the United States and focus on refining

their English language skills in conjunction with attending academic courses that go towards completing their major and general education requirements before becoming a degree-seeking student. There are many pathway programs across the United States, and some are offered to both undergraduate and graduate students. Some recently established a partnership with a university or college that offers only a program for undergraduate students.

### **Language Barrier**

Language plays a crucial role in an international student experience. Several authors have recognized the social alienation international students experienced due to the language barrier and low quality of communication amongst initial encounters with domestic students, faculty, and staff (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Hubbert et al., 1999; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Kuo (2011) conducted a study of international graduate students who were challenged by the English language and found that participants have “difficulties in understanding lectures due to the speed at which the professors talked and their accents” (p. 40). Furthermore, Kuo (2001) also discussed the language barrier as lowering the international students’ self-esteem, as “they feel like children who are powerless and unable to express the thoughts and feelings they have because they are not well-versed using the English language” (p. 40). Additional research explored the further development of the language barrier and how it plays a prominent role in increasing stress levels towards international students studying in the United States. More specifically, Chen (1999) examined several common stressors among international students studying in a foreign country, especially in North America, and found that language barriers are among those top stressors. Language difficulty for international students is found to be a significant concern because “if international students do not have adequate language skills, they may find themselves at a disadvantage in their academic and social lives” (Chen, 1999, p. 51).

It is essential to understand that the level of language proficiency may impact the international students' validation to be in the host country and culture (Ishiyama, 1989). Not only does the language barrier affect daily routines, but it also impedes the capacity for social interaction amongst other students, faculty, and staff. According to Ishiyama (1989), international students are faced with a sense of incompetence and helplessness because of the level of their language proficiency that “serious problems sometimes develop when foreign students start staying only in a familiar and safe environment or preferring solitary activities over interacting with others” (p. 46).

### **Student Adjustment**

The previous literature mainly discussed the language barrier international students are faced with when studying in the United States and how it puts a tremendous amount of emotional hardship that can lead to social isolation and feeling invalidated. However, it is crucial to be aware of other factors that may affect a student's adjustment to a new environment physically, socially, and academically. Wang (2009) stated that “international students who come from different cultures and circumstances face many changes in many aspects of their lives such as in geographical location, weather conditions, food, language, behaviors and values, social interactions, and educational systems” (p. 23). Several authors have recognized that the social interactions and friendships formed among international students and domestic students are quite low. Rajapaksa and Dundes (2003), for example, students felt lonely and homesick frequently and had no intention of making new friends with their domestic counterparts; however, to help alleviate such loneliness, they engaged and became friends with other international students, a type of coping strategy (Rajapaksa & Dundes, p. 19, 2003).

Previous research suggested that students identify coping strategies as they move and adjust to a new culture, including developing a “surrogate family.” Tseng and Newton (2003) found that the surrogate family may develop a close relationship with domestic students, other international students, and even faculty mentors. Different adjustment strategies to overcome adjustment issues include utilizing school resources, participating in on-campus activities, and even supplementing their English language skills through language support (Garza and Guzman, 2015).

### **International Student Support**

When problems do arise, either academically or socially, international students may be unaware of the types of on-campus services that exist and whether they meet their needs. Heggins and Jackson (2003) found that many Asian international students feel uncomfortable using support services on campus and prefer “creating a support system with other students that share the same commonalities” (p. 386). Also, according to Atkinson, Whitely, and Gim (1990, as cited in Heggins & Jackson, 2003), Asian international students tend to gravitate towards using close social networks, such as family members, friends, and religious leaders, rather than professional sources, when coping with psychological challenges, such as anxiety, homesickness, and so forth.

At U.S. institutions, there is an overwhelming number of tasks for international students to complete on their own upon arrival. According to Kher et al. (2003), figuring out the admission process, registration, residence life, and dining can be quite stressful to international students pre- and post-arrival, and a majority of the time, issues arise due to the lack of communication and level of comfort students experience with the staff. For example, an international student sought help from multiple departments on campus wanting to speak to

someone who is Indian. A "sigh of relief" was observed when a staff member from India came out to talk to the student in their native language. Overall, Kher et al. (2003) pointed out a critical need for institutions to identify new ways of supporting and meeting international students' needs on campus, emphasizing a proactive approach to assisting students upon initial arrival. Pathway provider programs offer robust student services for participants in their programs.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **Methodology and Rationale**

A qualitative research study was conducted to examine the international student experience within pathway programs in the United States. The first step to help gather comprehensive data, a survey was utilized, there, participants were invited to indicate if they are willing to be interviewed within that survey. A total of 16 survey responses were collected, and 11 of those agreed to interview. In addition, a survey was sent to professionals from various pathway programs to learn about their perspectives working with international students and on the different types of services offered. A total of three survey responses were received.

### **Sampling Strategies**

This study used a mix of purposeful samplings, which included criterion, convenience, and snowball sampling. Rossman & Rallis (2016) discussed that criterion sampling is situated to search for participants who fit the research study requirements. The study connected with four different pathway providers. Within each organization, there are partnerships with various institutions across the country, and programs are housed at those institutions. An invitation was sent out (see Appendix A), via email, to directors and staff members that worked closely with their participants in their respective pathway programs at their institutions. Furthermore, each

pathway program received an additional invitation letter for their staff (See Appendix B) to complete a survey (See Appendix C.) In total, invitations were sent to 35 different institutions across the country, and five responded willingly to share the invitation with their alumni and staff.

Snowball sampling, also known as chain sampling, is another way of getting a hold of participants who meet this study's criteria. The utilization of individuals who can help “generate a chain of interviewees based on people who know people who would be good sources given the focus of inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 451). The snowball sampling strategy allowed the staff at each program to share the invitation with their alumni. Furthermore, upon communicating with international students encountered through previous work, they were invited to share with their close group of friends they met through the program. Therefore, contact with former students has allowed a convenience sampling method to be utilized.

Convenience sampling is the method in which research participants are “selected based on their ease of availability” (Saumure & Given, 2008, as cited in Patton, 2015, p. 467). For this research study and mentioned previously, the research connected with some of their former students from one of the pathway provider programs they worked for through social media. A total of 16 former students expressed their interest in participating, therefore an invitation letter (See Appendix D) to their preferred emails.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

In the survey for international students (See Appendix E), general questions were included and open-ended questions about the participant's experiences in the pathway program. The interview questions (See Appendix F) for international students all were about the services

they received in addition to the experiences during and after the pathway program. The survey for pathway providers also contained general questions, thoughts about pathway programs, and an open-ended question about their experiences working with their students.

### **Ethics of Research**

It was crucial to be ethical throughout this research study. There were no minimal risks to the participants. The researcher clarified to participants that their personal information from the survey and interviews will not be shared with anyone aside from the researcher. Furthermore, participants' names were anonymous, using pseudonyms in the presentation of data section.

### **Researcher Positionality**

This study was inspired by the researcher's history working with international students within a pathway provider program and to better understand the international student experiences.

### **Credibility of Research Findings**

There are multiple strategies employed to ensure that research findings are credible. A participant validation strategy or member checking was utilized by providing the interview transcripts to the participants "as a method for eliciting further information and with emerging analyses" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 141). Another strategy is to use the community of practice strategy, an engagement between close colleagues that will further support the research process and findings overall (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). My colleagues in the Master of Arts in International Education program at the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute are examples of a community. Colleagues expressed their feedback and input on multiple drafts submitted throughout the research process.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

All of the data were collected and managed electronically onto a password-protected computer. All personal information of the participants and their institutions, including the names of states, cities, and regions, are omitted from the final transcript.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The researcher's prior position working in a pathway provider program has allowed him to access former students through social media. It was quite challenging to obtain student participation from the other programs across the United States due to not having a close network with the other third-party pathway providers. Moreover, many staff members, who were quite interested in this study, could not participate in this research opportunity with their alumni due to the universities' processes when requesting students for research studies. Because the international students who have participated in and completed the program are now official matriculated students, requests must go through the universities' institutional review board.

### **Presentation of Data**

For this research on the international students' experience of pathway programs, 16 international students representing nine countries completed a survey. Of these, 11 completed a follow-up interview. All the participants who completed the survey, had completed the program with one pathway provider. In addition, three pathway provider professionals, from two separate third-party providers, included a Director of Student Experience, a Senior Student Services Advisor, and an Assistant Academic Director, who all indicated that they are extremely involved with international student support and success. These three participants completed the survey but not the follow-up interview.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	Mei	Wonho	Adi	Gawa	Min	Zahid	Jin	Vamika	Trinh	Viktor	Rohan
<b>Home Country</b>	China	South Korea	Indonesia	Myanmar	Hong Kong	Pakistan	China	India	Vietnam	Russia	India

*Figure 1: List of Student Participants*

The study first discusses the participants' reasoning regarding pursuing education abroad, primarily through a pathway program. This is followed by a discussion of the student participants' experiences, as revealed by the survey and interviews including survey responses from professional staff. The final section presents the conclusion.

**Rationale for Studying in the United States**

**Type of Programming.** All 11 participants had different reasons for pursuing an education in the United States, but most of these were quite connected. The first reason was the variety of programs available. Viktor, a game design major, stated that “the best universities in game developing are in the United States and there are no such programs in my country” (personal communication, February 02, 2021). Similarly, Min, also majoring in game design, stated that “the game industry in the United States is a lot better than in my country [Hong Kong]” (personal communication, January 17, 2021).

**Advancement.** A few other participants discussed the development of leading research, technology, and better opportunities. Trinh, majoring in biology, stated that the United States “is a developed country, I mean the education is one of the best in the world and my family believes if I study in the United States, I will have a bright future. The biology science is not as developed in my home country” (personal communication, February 01, 2021). Gawa, a biomedical engineering major, also stated that she might not return to her country after graduating, because “I don’t think I would be able to find a job with my degree if I go back because the technology is not as advanced” (personal communication, January 17, 2021). Rohan, also, described U.S.

universities as a leader in “the world ranking when it comes to higher education, which is my primary reason, and better opportunities than my home country” (personal communication, February 03, 2021).

**Educational Systems.** Participants also discussed the educational systems and its processes in their home countries, which is a significant factor in deciding to study in the United States rather than in their own countries. Wonho did not like the system in his country, where “if I wanted to go to a more prestigious [university] in my country, it requires entrance exams and it is much more difficult” (personal communication, January 13, 2021). Adi (personal communication, January 13, 2021) had his whole path lined up for him in sports; however, a significant accident directed him to pursue a different career. At the time, he decided to pursue higher education. However, by the time he returned to his country, the open enrollment cycle had ended, and he did not want to wait a whole year, so he considered getting an education abroad.

### **Rationale for Pursuing a Pathway Program**

**Education Agents.** In both the surveys and the interviews, the following questions were asked: “How did you find out about your pathway program?” The interviewed participants were asked: “What made you decide to pursue a pathway program?” The survey results indicated that 10 out of 16 students were introduced to pathway programs by educational agents. Nine out of 11 participants interviewed explained that the reason for working with an educational agent was the ease of access and the process for applying to universities. Jin said, “This so-called ‘going abroad industry’ in China is really going to an agent and they will help you apply. Basically, I got into this program because of how the agent helped me” (personal communication, January 23, 2021). Adi stated that, “the agency told me about pathway programs, and they explained it as

for international students, to help and guide you with your first-year study at the university in America” (personal communication, January 13, 2021).

**Unaware of Being Part of a Pathway Program.** When participants were asked about their decision to enter a pathway program, seven out of 11 participants indicated that they had not been aware that they were going into a pathway program. Mei said, “I didn’t know actually they [name of pathway program] were an actual pathway. I thought all of the first-year students are required to participate in the program” (personal communication, January 11, 2021). Vamika explained, “When I got a scholarship, the name of the program was listed on that document and I was not sure what the program was, but then, after coming to the United States, I realized it was a pathway program” (personal communication, January 18, 2021). Jin said, “I had no idea it was a pathway program. I only got an offer, and when I got here, I found out I was in a pathway program” (personal communication, January 23, 2021).

### **Adjusting to New Environments**

The adjustment period for international students was one of the top discussions amongst the interviewed participants beginning their studies in the United States. In the survey, 13 students indicated that it was not very difficult to adjust to the physical location. Still, all 16 students experienced one type of interpersonal adjustment issue, with nine indicating communication/language barriers as one of the top issues, followed by socializing and the academic environment, all of which correlate with problems with the English language.

**Communication/Language Barrier.** It can be very overwhelming and frightening for any international student to communicate outside of their native language, and it is no different for international students in a pathway program. In fact, according to the data retrieved from the survey and interview discussions, it is a great deal more complicated. In the survey, Mei

explained that “although I am an extrovert and lively person, my oral English is not very fluent. In daily life, I need to use translation to express myself from time to time” (personal communication, January 10, 2021). Trinh stated:

The language barrier is the biggest problem, because academic English and daily English conversation have a considerable differences. Specifically, I can understand and absorb the lectures, but it's extremely difficult for me to chat with foreign friends. I don't know about slang; I cannot catch their speaking speed and what topic they often talk about. In a conversation, I feel left out. (personal communication, January 31, 2021)

Jin also described her experience as frustrating, but the only way to learn is to “adjust and communicate more and tell them you are an international student and say, ‘I can’t follow you could you say it slower’ and most are understanding” (personal communication, January 23, 2021).

**Socializing.** Five out of the 16 survey respondents indicated that they struggled with interacting with domestic residents, including classmates and roommates, due to the communication/language barrier mentioned previously. In the survey, Min described her socializing experience as a problem, because -

I am lacking the confidence to speak English to the point that I avoid talking to my classmates and other people in the United States. Therefore, it is quite difficult for me to find any English-speaking friends here. Still, after all, I am studying and living in the United States, so speaking English is unavoidable. (personal communication, January 13, 2021)

Wonho wrote: “it was hard for me to make a conversation with others due to my lack of English skills” (personal communication, January 10, 2021). Min had very little socialization with her domestic roommate; she explained that “they [roommate] did show some interest but not very much. I don't know; if I talk too much, I think they will hate me” (personal communication, January 17, 2021).

Although socializing with domestic students was a key topic amongst all participants, some also discussed their lack of socialization with other international students in their program. For example, Gawa wrote in her response:

I have always been bad at socializing even back home, in my country with the culture I am very familiar with. However, I had a lousy time socializing with people from different cultures when I first arrived. My pathway program cohort was made up of people of different cultures and none of my own. Thus, I was quite isolated, and I could not fit in with the new environment. (personal communication, January 12, 2021)

Gawa provided a very good explanation as to why interaction with other international students is quite low; she explained that “the trend among international students is that they always stay in their own groups, especially if they are from the same country... I feel like I am unwelcome, because they would talk amongst themselves in their native language” (personal communication, January 14, 2021).

**Academic Environment.** A few participants discussed the academic setting's differences upon starting their coursework at an institution of higher education. Viktor said that he was used to his instructors in his home country using academic English; however, “when I came here [United States] and the professor doesn't speak academic English and speaks normally, for

example, he would say ‘hey, what’s up?’, it was very surprising” (personal communication, February 02, 2021). Mei discussed her time at an international school before transitioning to university-level coursework, and that schedules were set and the times were always the same. By contrast, now, “we get to choose our own classes and afterwards we need to find the classroom and interacting with the other domestic students ourselves. Which, in my case, there weren't that many international students in my classes, so the interactions with other students in class was also a challenge at first” (personal communication, January 11, 2021). In the survey, Jin wrote: “It was more challenging when I went to class, surrounded by native students and tried to catch up with their pace. I would try to communicate with them for daily socialization, explained my situation to them, and most of them would be really nice and understanding, the same for professors as well” (personal communication, January 23, 2021).

### **Pathway Program Experience**

In the survey, all 16 participants indicated a mix of emotions while in the pathway program, which included feeling excited, motivated, and confident, while also feeling anxious, frustrated, and fearful. These feelings were expressed through the experiences in which participants shared.

**Making Friends and Program Events.** All 11 interviewed participants shared their experiences of making new friends from within the program. Seven participants shared that the pathway program planned events were one of many ways that allowed them to make new friends. Rohan said, “we got to know about each other’s cultures and make new friends with other students” (personal communication, February 02, 2021). This resonated with Adi, Mei, Gawa, and Vamika; Vamika stated, “I met a lot of people too, people from different countries, backgrounds, cultures. It was nice that the program offered the opportunity to get everyone

together, it gave me a more diverse, open mind” (personal communication, January 18, 2021). Participants shared other examples of events available to them in the program. Mei stated that “we went to sporting events and also events held at the pathway program's office that involved getting to know each other’s cultures through food” (personal communication, January 11, 2021).

In addition to making friends through events hosted by the pathway program, participants shared social experiences with their roommates. All 11 interviewed participants lived with a domestic roommate(s). Adi explained:

They [domestic roommates] were pretty much kind of intimidating at first, in a good way. They were very curious, asking me questions like 'why come to this university?' 'What is it like in your country?' They always want to know why I chose this location; it was pretty interesting too, and I'm so glad to this day that I still hang out with them. (personal communication, January 13, 2021)

**General Education Coursework.** As mentioned previously, students felt a mix of emotions while in the pathway program; one emotion in particular, frustration, was reflected by half of the interviewed participants. The frustration experienced was due to the general coursework available to them. However, for any undergraduate student, domestic or international, general education courses are required to complete any degree program. Participants understood the premise of meeting general education requirements. However, most did not like how the pathway program constrained all participants. Adi explained:

I am trying to jump into my major, but the program put me in classes that are ‘gen eds’ [general education], which is fine, but I didn't know what kind of ‘gen ed’ it fulfilled.

When I realized, after doing research, it turned out that this class was unnecessary to me, because it's a 'gen ed' for other majors and not my major, which is business. I felt like the program should have put me in a class where I needed it for my major. These three credits, yeah, it helps to graduate, but I can use them for something else that is more important. (personal communication, January 13, 2021)

Trinh said, "I had to take some classes I think is useless for me and my major. For example, I took a drawing class in the spring, but I could have taken something else" (personal communication, February 01, 2021).

However, the other half of the interviewed participants rather liked taking general education courses. For example, Vamika said, "if you see a broader spectrum with the experience and exposure, it takes us to a broader possibility to take in general knowledge. Even when we are taking a few core subjects, the simpler subjects helped with balancing and to help boost our GPAs [grade point average] (personal communication, January 18, 2021). Similarly, Rohan admitted that the courses "were helpful in the sense they got me good grades and gave me an easier workload when arriving" (personal communication, January 22, 2021). Min said, "it would be great to focus on my major classes but learning about things about other subjects is great; I didn't have a problem with it" (personal communication, January 17, 2021). Viktor made a very good point that "it would be nice to have my schedule, however, with the pathway it was created with a purpose. If you didn't apply directly then you need to follow the rules of the pathway, you go through it" (personal communication, February 02, 2021).

**International First-Year Coursework.** After discussing general education coursework, participants shared their experience with the coursework specifically for pathway program participants. Some were opposed to this type of coursework. Wonho stated, "I think it was a

waste of time, first-year courses for international students especially. I wanted to choose more various courses and the courses that I want to take, but I felt they limited my choosing, my options, it was not good for me" (personal communication, January 13, 2021). Similarly, Zahid said, "the first-year courses we took for the program was kind of pointless because we really didn't learn anything" (personal communication, January 22, 2021).

However, most of the interviewed participants found the first-year courses beneficial in navigating unfamiliar environments in the United States. Gawa commented:

...when I was taking the class, people didn't really like that they had to take it because we are forced to take it, but I believe that it was quite helpful because, honestly speaking, I think it was better, because I would be able to adjust with the other students and future courses It really did help me with learning about preparing for after the program.

(personal communication, January 17, 2021)

Vamika explained that the course was "really interesting, it brought all the international students into one class and it made us learn about American politics and more information about America in general" (personal communication, January 18, 2021). Similarly, Mei explained that these first-year courses are offered to participants because, "the instructor is more aware of their teaching pedagogy, so they will adjust or design the class from an international student's perspective" (personal communication, January 11, 2021).

**English as a Second Language (ESL) Coursework.** A significant part of pathway programs comprises promoting and increasing English proficiency skills before matriculation into degree-seeking programs. Mei stated, "the class in the fall was great, but in the spring class we had the same teacher but there were one or two students that had a very bad attitude. I think

they are entitled and privileged so their behavior kind of impacted the experience of that course” (personal communication, January 11, 2021). Min did not like that the other students were always speaking in their native languages: “I don’t think I got much chance to practice my English-speaking skills” (personal communication, January 17, 2021). In addition, Min pointed out that the level “was quite low, I think they underestimated the level of students’ skills in English, not only me, but there are also other students in this course that think this was a waste of time” (personal communication, January 17, 2021).

**Soft Landing Services** The term, ‘soft-landing services’ is used to describe the types of small yet very effective support services that are provided to participants Rohan said, “I am grateful that the program is taking care of us upon arriving in the United States” (personal communication, February 03, 2021). In the survey, Min commented that she appreciated the help they had received with student banking and medical insurance (personal communication, January 13, 2021). Mei stated, “the program will help you a lot more because they will tell you step by step how to do certain things, like how to set up your email account, how to set up the health accounts, that sort of things. Just being there for those students is more helpful for them” (personal communication, January 11, 2021). Adi said that the program staff helped him and other students with registering for courses and explained that he had not been familiar with general education courses: “It was one of the helpful ways, I mean I know that, I realize that you can get this information by just asking someone, like in a class or on Google, but you know, it was the fastest way for me to get everything from the program” (personal communication, January 13, 2021). Likewise, Gawa stated:

Academically, I think they [pathway program staff] did really well. They always check out what classes you are taking and how to register for the classes, what to do and now I

think the best thing was, I was planning on taking some political science course and my advisor reached out to me and said that the class I signed up for is hard for international students, and that I should change it to something else. I feel very happy that they did that for me. (personal communication, January 17, 2021)

**Student Advising.** Participants were very vocal about the way advice and interaction with staff were handled during their program. According to the survey, eight out of the 16 participants rated their experience with program staff “good,” while three rated it “excellent,” three for “fair,” and two “poor.” Gawa, stated, “I believe that the staff tried their best in helping us and it always made me feel comfortable to talk with them” (personal communication, January 12, 2021). Viktor commented, “even though, the staff was always busy with something, they were always helpful” (personal communication, January 28, 2021). Vamika liked the interaction with an advisor and said, “I wouldn't do any better if I didn't have any guidance, that was mainly the reason why it was a smooth experience rather than not knowing what to do when arriving” (personal communication, January 18, 2021).

Similarly, Zahid spoke about the ease of access to an advisor; he explained that “I had someone to talk to who knew everything. If I was confused, they could help me figure out where to go for help. If you make friends, they may not help out with a lot of stuff or some questions would be darn stupid to them so that is why I liked having an advisor” (personal communication, January 22, 2021).

Alas, despite the above good experiences, some participants did not like having an advisor all the time. Viktor said, “I would say it was helpful in the first and second semester when advisors helped out, but I don't want it to be constant. It is helpful for the two semesters but

after that the student should already know what to do” (personal communication, February 02, 2021). In the survey, Min stated that:

I like the pathway program staff; however, when it came to academic affairs, I felt like not all the staff knew about it. I remember one time I went to their office because I didn’t know which course to choose. The staff couldn’t answer most of my questions and it took quite a long time to get an answer. (personal communication, January 13, 2021)

Next, communication between pathway program staff and students was discussed.

**Communication.** In the survey, the international student participants were asked about consistent communication from staff and how satisfied they were with that type of support. Two participants indicated “very satisfied,” while eight participants indicated that they were “satisfied” and six were “neutral.” Participants had the following to say about their experiences with communication. Rohan stated, “my advisor reached out to me every few days and it gave me something else to do that day or to talk to someone. It was nice” (personal communication, January 19, 2021). Viktor wrote, “I think it’s good, because international students need attention and need someone to talk with if they have difficulties” (personal communication, January 28, 2021). During the interviews, participants further explained their satisfaction with the communication, especially between advisors and students. Gawa said, “I don’t think she [advisor] contacted me a lot but even if she did, it was on a regular basis, so I think it’s good to know that there is someone checking up on me” (personal communication, January 17, 2021).

Student participants were not too annoyed with the communication from staff, Gawa said, “I believe the communication was just right” (personal communication, January 12, 2021).

Rohan wrote, “my advisor reached out to me every few days and it gave me something else to do

that day or to talk to someone, it was nice” (personal communication, January 19, 2021). Trinh emphasized, “I think it’s good because international students need attention and need someone to talk with if they have difficulties” (personal communication, February 01, 2021).

### **After the Pathway Program**

According to the survey, participants felt a mix of emotions after completing their programming and matriculating into their degree-seeking programs. The highest number of eight participants indicated happiness, followed by seven who indicated excitement, satisfaction, and even anxiety. In terms of how well-prepared participants felt, eight of them said “somewhat prepared,” seven said “very prepared,” and one said “not at all prepared.” Mei wrote, “in the program, it helped me complete a lot of general education classes. At the time I finished the program, I was prepared and able to focus more on my major classes” (personal communication, January 10, 2021). Gawa wrote, “having to take courses about globalization and cultures recommended by the program really helped me in learning more about different cultures and adjusting to a new environment here in the United States” (personal communication, January 12, 2021).

**Non-Existent Services.** Participants were asked about services they liked while in the program that does not exist as an on-campus services. Although not every student enjoyed having an advisor consistently communicating with and monitoring them, most were very grateful. Rohan said, “during the program, I felt like they [advisors] were pretty helpful with how they guided me with everything” (personal communication, February 02, 2021). Adi stated, “I remembered the pathway program put a lot of attention on me. It was really nice, like wow, I felt like they really gave attention to what to do, why you need to do these things and they gave me ideas on how to approach my studies” (personal communication, January 13, 2021). Vamika

said, “when you have doubts, you can clarify immediately with advisors, but with on-campus advisors it would need to take two weeks for an appointment, so the advisors in the program are faster and much more convenient” (personal communication, January 18, 2021). Trinh said, “I really like when they give announcements often to give good information for international students” (personal communication, February 01, 2021).

Jin and Min made the point that it is best for first-year international students. Jin said, “for me, I think it’s helpful where there is an advisor there to help out during our first year, where they help academically and also as an emotional support” (personal communication, January 23, 2021). Min said, “I know there are students who are very homesick and quite depressed and if there are any services like this, maybe they could get help” (personal communication, January 17, 2021).

Pathway programs creating additional programming for students was another service most really enjoyed. For example, Jin, Min, Gawa, and Wonho all participated in an English conversation program to help increase their speaking and listening skills through conversational practice with fluent international students and domestic English-speaking students. Wonho said that this was a memorable part of his program experience because the English course was beneficial to him and to his classmates. For him, it did not feel like an English course; it was very informal and a great way to meet new people, especially domestic students (personal communication, January 13, 2021).

**Campus Support Services.** The interviewed participants were then asked about their experiences using campus services after the pathway program. As mentioned previously, all interviewed participants had a designated student advisor to help guide them and consistently communicate with them throughout the program; however, participants no longer had that

advisor after completing the program, so instead, all participants go to their major academic advisor for help. Gawa said:

I really connected with the academic advisor. I switched my major to biomedical engineering during the summer and then I met up with this advisor for like seven or eight times now. I think she is very much of help to me, because whenever I feel all stressed about something about school or anything else, I can email her, and she would always help me. (personal communication, January 17, 2021)

Jin discussed her experience as one of the few international students in the dance program: “The staff in the dance program are so nice and if I have any technical questions or need help for scheduling, I can reserve a time for my advisor from the arts program. He [academic advisor] helps me a lot with managing my time with classes” (personal communication, January 23, 2021). Likewise, Wonho, Adi, Mei, Viktor, Min and Rohan went to their academic advisors for help; however, if they are unable to answer their questions, “they will tell me where to go” (Viktor, personal communication, February 02, 2021).

Other services which the interviewed participants mentioned utilizing are the library, writing center, tutoring center, LGBTQ+ resource center, career services, internship center, and the individual departmental offices. When asked about seeking help from the International Student and Scholar Services, all participants stated that they do not go to them for help but only for immigrant-related problems. Rohan said, “not very often, you go to them if you have questions about the visa. Apart from that, I have never gone to them for other questions.” Min said:

I only went to their [International Student and Scholar Services] office to sign my I-20 form [a governmental form for international students to enter the United States to study], but overall, I don't think they did much. To be honest, they have a bad reputation among international students because I heard some students complain that they were slow or don't reply, so I don't go there much. (personal communication, January 17, 2021)

**English Proficiency.** Pathway programs focused on English proficiency and participants discussed their thoughts on their proficiency level after the program. Six of the 11 interviewed participants agreed that their English language proficiency improved because of the program. Gawa said, “I think I improved a lot, especially after the second semester and the program writing courses, it helped a lot” (personal communication, January 17, 2021). Similarly, Vamika said, “taking all those courses, like the writing classes, helped me a lot and I improved more. It was nice, it did help me a lot to get much better at my English” (personal communication, January 18, 2021).

The remaining five participants, Wonho, Jin, Min, Rohan, and Trinh did not think the pathway program was a key contributor to their improved language skills as a lot of it was due to immersion. Rohan said, “I wouldn't give one hundred percent credit to the program, but just the surroundings, because you will learn the language and things just through the surroundings and not entirely through the pathway program. I think that is important to improve your language skills” (personal communication, February 03, 2021). Wonho said, “I am still not good enough at it, but it is more proficient than in the beginning because of new friends” (personal communication, January 13, 2021).

### **Advice and Suggestions**

Lastly, participants were asked to provide any advice they have for current and future students in the pathway program and to offer suggestions to pathway programs and institutions to further support all international students' needs further.

**For Institutions.** All of the interviewed participants would like to see more opportunities on-campus to improve their English language skills, whether through a club run by students or through a department. Vamika said, “I haven’t heard of any clubs on campus to help improve English conversation which would be a good advantage for international students” (personal communication, January 18, 2021). Trinh said that conversation clubs “would be very helpful to practice English with domestic students” (personal communication, February 01, 2021). Min stated, “it would be great for international students to have an opportunity to meet domestic students; it is the only way for us to improve” (personal communication, January 17, 2021).

**For Pathway Programs.** Participants mainly discussed logistical aspects that need to be evaluated and further implemented for future cohorts. Zahid said, “I have to say the class scheduling dilemma was one thing” (personal communication, January 22, 2021). Rohan said:

...one problem that I did have, which I realized now, is when they [pathway program] helped out with class scheduling, it was pretty bad. When I first moved here, we didn't get a notice, I didn't know we had to schedule classes. I was a high school student, and I wasn't familiar, so when I first came here, I had a few days to register, and I had to decide and pick classes for my major which I was kind of exploring so I think a few days is definitely not enough time. (personal communication, February 03, 2021)

Min had a similar experience, except that it concerned waiting for a more extended period of time during a part of their orientation:

When I came to the school and we had to register for our classes, I remembered I was sitting in a computer room with a bunch of students waiting. Basically, we were waiting to register for our math courses, and it was really confusing. We didn't know what we were waiting for or how long. It was kind of a waste of time; I remember sitting there for a few hours. (Min, personal communication, January 17, 2021)

Communication was also discussed. Rohan said:

Number one would be related to communication. I think communication is really important, but effective and honest communication would be great. Because, for example, my first semester [summer], we were about to enter finals week. We were told that accommodation was filled up on campus and that we had to find our own place, or the program would provide accommodation for us. It would be great if they updated us sooner. (personal communication, February 03, 2021)

Mei discussed communication between the pathway program and departments on campus:

The communication between departments, I think these types of issues are inevitable but sometimes get delayed on certain things. Like the International Student and Scholar Services office and the pathway program are two different departments. Sometimes, the information exchanged will cause a misunderstanding between the office and the student, so the student sometimes will experience confusion and stress. (personal communication, January 11, 2021)

**For Future and Current Students.** All 11 interviewed participants shared some advice and tips when navigating a pathway program. Regarding academic studies, Jin said, “get good grades but do not cheat” (personal communication, January 23, 2021). Min advises students to learn how the system works at the institution. “I didn't know there were general education courses and that we have to take them; really basic things that can be searched before coming to the United States is important” (personal communication, January 17, 2021). Viktor discussed the importance of listening and being attentive when working with an advisor: “I think there were situations in the program when a student wanted something and the advisor provided the answer, but the student asked the same question again” (personal communication, February 02, 2021).

A majority of the participants discussed the overall environment and culture of the United States and on campuses. Adi said, “I know students want to live in a big city or state such as California, New York, Chicago. I know those are really big cities, which is easy for students to adapt to, but try out other smaller cities. You will be more focused on your studies” (personal communication, January 13, 2021). Gawa said:

I think it has to do with the culture, so I would say nobody can help you; if people are not helping you, they are not being mean and it is just the culture. You have to stand up for yourself. At first, some people are pretty mean or not helping much, so I think the best way is to educate the culture more. (personal communication, January 17, 2021)

### **Experiences from Pathway Program Professionals**

As mentioned at the start of the section, in addition to the international student responses, three pathway program professionals also submitted survey responses, however interviews were

not conducted. Participants included Jamie, a Director of Student Experience, Sam, a Senior Student Services Advisor, and Marissa, an Assistant Academic Director.

**Success Rates.** Pathway professionals were asked about the success of pathway programs and what are the comparison between pathway program students and students who enter the institutions directly. Overall, all three professional staff stated that the success is very positive for their programs. Marissa, stated that she does not –

have access to international student data outside of the pathway and therefore cannot compare students within the program to students who enter through the university's channels directly. However, students in the pathway have above a 90% completion rate, meaning they successfully meet the requirements to matriculate fully into their degree program. (personal communication, January 24, 2021)

However, Jamie's pathway program does have access to data where –

recent years show that pathway students perform on par or better than non-pathway students. They have higher GPAs [grade point averages]. They have higher persistence rates than non-pathway international students. We do have hard data for all programs/colleges, however, anecdotally, we make a huge difference in student's comfort and familiarity with both inside and outside the classroom U.S. cultural expectations. (personal communication, February 05, 2021)

**Student Support Services.** In pathway programs, participants are offered services that are not provided to traditional international students. Pathway program professionals shared the different types of services available. Marissa stated that at their pathway program -

offer[s] tutoring services that are complementary to the university's existing services. For example, the university does not have tutors for graduate programs, so we hire tutors based on program size; we also have a high-touch approach to advising and connecting with students regularly throughout the semester. (personal communication, January 24, 2021)

Sam explained that the services included “pre-arrival steps communication, executing a virtual student mentoring program, advice, housing/health insurance arrangement, and translation services based on students’ needs” (personal communication, February 04, 2021). Jamie elaborated that the program provides -

‘soft-landing’ services: airport picks ups, help with email activation, securing housing, registering for classes, insurance, health and safety. Mental health in multiple languages, and we also offer leadership opportunities/student employment opportunities. We try to program around the following themes: Successful transition to the university, connecting to a community, interaction with the American people and culture, opportunities to celebrate international diversity. (personal communication February 05, 2021)

**Communication.** The pathway program professionals were also asked about communication with their students. Marissa (personal communication, January 24, 2021) explained that the advisors contacted students every week. Jamie said, “as needed, and more than just advisors reaching out” (personal communication, February 05, 2021). Sam explained that the answer varies, in that they contact students every day, but not every student; however, “when it is routinely, then it’s every week or every two weeks, based on the student’s GPA and academic standing” (personal communication, February 04, 2021). When asked about the type of

communication platforms used to contact students, all participants indicated email; however, to get to a student quickly, they used applications such as WhatsApp, Line, GroupMe, and WeChat.

Although most participants have no communication issues with staff, what happens to students who fail to keep up with the communication or fall between the cracks? According to the survey responses from pathway professionals, there are a few practices to ensure students are well cared for and to ensure their safety. Marissa wrote, “we have an escalation protocol in place, and we start by reaching out to a student’s in-country connections, which may include parents, sponsors, or recruiters. If those efforts are unsuccessful, we ask public safety to do a wellness check” (personal communication, January 24, 2021). Sam stated that they “reach out to their instructor, their academic advisors, their mentor. Every new student in my program is paired with a virtual student mentor, and I manage the mentors), and call the student directly via WeChat or WhatsApp” (personal communication, February 04, 2021).

### Conclusions

This study was intended to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of international students that have participated in a pathway provider program in the United States? In the context of the theoretical framework, Sanford’s theory of “challenge and support,” international students are faced with many challenges that require the necessary support, however, there needs to be a balance. The following statements recap the key findings of this research study:

- **Communication:** Between international students and pathway program staff, communication platforms like WhatsApp, WeChat, emailing, etc. were heavily utilized. Students appreciated the outreach from staff at the start of their first semester

- because most were unfamiliar with the wide arrange of resources available to them upon arrival to their campus.
- **Language Barrier:** International students were faced with the language barrier that prevented them from expressing themselves more fully. At times, students were frustrated with how it affected their academic lives while also adjusting to other aspects like transportation, culture, and food.
  - **Socializing:** The language barrier also posed as an additional challenge towards socializing for students. A lack of confidence in speaking English prevented students from socializing with their domestic peers. In addition, international students did not socialize with other international students due to students from the same country sticking together and speaking in their native language discouraging other students from socializing.
  - **Coursework:** International student participants discussed the various coursework available to them during the program including general, international first-year, and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Students rather enjoyed the first-year and ESL courses to help improve their language skills and navigating unfamiliar environments in the United States; however, a handful of students did not like the general education courses for they did not relate to their majors.
  - **Student Advising:** A majority of international students enjoyed having a designated student advisor to help support and motivate them throughout their entire programming. To some, the ease of access to an advisor helped students feel less stressed when an answer to their questions can be completed promptly. Additionally,

- students felt comfortable with their advisors which aided in their homesickness and adjustment to living in the United States.
- **On-Campus Support:** Students discussed the services available to them as matriculated students including academic advising, the writing center, tutoring services, LGBTQ+ resource center, career services, etc. However, the type of services they would have liked the campus to include were from the support services the pathway program offered which included availableness of student advisors, co-curricular English language programming, and
  - **English Proficiency Levels:** Lastly, international student participants shared their thoughts on their level of English proficiency after completing the pathway program. Although students agreed that their language skills have improved because of the program, others stated that their skills improved due to immersion.

### **Implications**

Overall, the research investigated international students' experiences during and after their participation in a pathway program. Understanding the challenges and memorable aspects of participating in a pathway program will help professional staff and on-campus staff approach international student support differently. First, it is important to understand that the success of supporting one international student does not mean that it will be the same for other students. Thus, individuals working with international students must listen and understand the students' individualized experiences and then provide the necessary support.

To reiterate, this research was grounded by Sanford's theory of "challenge and support," in terms of which students develop or grow through the challenges they face either internally or externally. Advisors and other staff working with international students must understand that too

much support can lead to students being too comfortable and development becoming stagnated. For example, a pathway program student may be failing a course due to a large number of missing assignments, so the student will heavily rely on their pathway program advisor to resolve the problem by communicating with the faculty member on the student's behalf. Instead, the advisor should encourage the student to proactively reach out to the faculty member by email or during open office hours. In the end, this should help the student to be responsible, and should this incident reoccur, the student will know what to do.

By contrast, if the challenge is too great and the support level is low, students will retreat. For example, if a student is having trouble with a roommate in the campus dormitory that significantly affects the student's emotions, they will want help from the program staff. The staff member may encourage the student to communicate with their roommate and resolve the issue themselves; however, it will frustrate the student even more when the roommate is not cooperating. Although the student may be independent, this does not make it appropriate for the staff member to provide little support. This is not to say that advisors and staff must not help students; that is not the case: "challenges are a necessary and usually unavoidable part of the college experience, professionals should not seek to eliminate them, but to support students through these challenges" (Bohan, n.d., para. 1). Adi stated: "seek out new challenges, but do not waste the opportunity of not using the support services while in the program if the challenges are heavy" (personal communication, January 13, 2021).

Overall, based on the research, pathway programs should adopt the following to help current and incoming international students:

**U.S Higher Education System:** A discussion about the higher education system and its processes in the United States with participants should be held prior or at the start of the

program. The discussion may clear up any confusion for students like registering for courses that are not related to their major.

**Language Exchange Programming:** Students want to improve their English conversational skills outside of the classroom. Pathway programs should develop or collaborate with the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program to offer their students the opportunity to help lead and design the program. In addition, domestic and international students may form new friendships.

**Peer Mentor Programming:** Students would like to make friends with domestic students. By pairing up international students with domestic students, for the academic year, will not only promote global student exchange but also it may evolve into long lasting friendships. Pathway programs may collaborate with degree programs with an international emphasis to encourage domestic students to participate and help international students feel welcomed to campus.

### **Further Research**

This research focused on the experiences of international students who have participated in one pathway program through one third-party pathway provider. More research can be done by including participants from various pathway programs and different third-party providers. Furthermore, the research gathered data from three different pathway program professionals by way of complete surveys; thus, adding interviews could provide more qualitative data for further review.

Finally, it would be interesting to see the enrollment numbers of pathway programs with existing international student enrollment data. The numbers can serve as an indicator for interested or curious institutions partnering with third-party pathway providers.

### **Final Thoughts**

This study identified and described the experiences of, and the types of support offered to, international students at a pathway program using one third-party provider. Seven main themes were identified and described to gain a complete understanding of the international student experience that might help pathway programs and host campuses navigate their programming to fulfill current and incoming international students' needs.

The language barrier and the social and academic adjustment challenges discussed in the literature review are reflected in the research findings. From the perspective of colleges, they are turning to third-party pathway providers for one reason, "to grow the population of full-pay international students, and in turn the revenue they bring" (Redden, 2018, para. 2). It is important not to group international students as simply "consumers," and the provision of services and support for students may help alleviate their frustrations and concerns.

Overall, pathway programs offer a helpful approach by providing international students the opportunity to receive a higher education in the United States effectively, where student support is a critical feature identified by this research study. It is imperative for pathway programs to closely identify and apply an appropriate level of student support programming to meet the needs of future international students. If effective, the international student experience is more likely to be unforgettable.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix A: Invitation Letter for Pathway Provider Programs at Institutions of Higher Education

Dear staff of the **Program Name** at **Name of Institution**,

My name is Aaron Mendez. I am a current graduate student pursuing my Master of Arts in International Education at the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute. I would like to ask if you would be willing to forward the attached invitation titled “Invitation Letter for International Students” along with the attached “International Student Informed Consent Letter” to your alumni you are familiar with who may fit the criteria listed below to participate in this research study. Furthermore, I would also like to get an insight from pathway provider staff with the “Invitation Letter for Pathway Provider Staff” and “Pathway Provider Staff Informed Consent Letter” included in this letter.

I would like to contact international students who:

- Have recently participated in your pathway provider program, preferably from the 2019-2020 academic year, including the summer semester.
- Completed one or two semesters as a matriculated student after successfully completing your program.
- Are pursuing an undergraduate degree in any major.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences faced by international students who have participated in a pathway provider program.

Students will be invited to complete a survey, which will take 10 to 15 minutes. I will then contact those who indicate that they are available and who meet the criteria to invite them to an online interview via Zoom, a video communications platform that will last between 30 to 45 minutes. Those students who choose to participate in the interview process will be recorded visually and audibly with their permission, and afterward, the interviews will be transcribed using pseudonyms. In addition, the recordings and all other information obtained during the research process will be kept confidential and in a secure file only accessible by myself, the researcher. Participants will be able to withdraw at any point without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact me by email at [aaron.mendez@mail.sit.edu](mailto:aaron.mendez@mail.sit.edu) or by phone (385) 535-9066 or my advisor Dr. Sora Friedman at [sora.friedman@sit.edu](mailto:sora.friedman@sit.edu). Questions about the participant’s rights may be directed to the School for International Training Graduate Institutional Review Board (IRB) at [irb@sit.edu](mailto:irb@sit.edu) or 802-258-3132.

Thank you for your consideration.

### **Appendix B: Invitation Letter for Pathway Staff**

Hello,

My name is Aaron Mendez. I am a current graduate student pursuing my Master of Arts in International Education at the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute. I would like to ask if you would be willing to complete a survey about your experience working with international students within your program.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences faced by international students who have participated in a pathway provider program.

Staff are invited to complete a survey, which will take 5 to 10 minutes.

The survey can be found here: [Survey for Pathway Provider Staff](#)

For those who choose to participate will be asked to also complete a release form attached with this invitation letter, allowing me to use the data from the survey and include it into my final results. In addition, all information obtained during this research process will be kept confidential and in a secure file only accessible by myself, the researcher. Participants are free to terminate their participation without consequence at any time.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact me by email at: [aaron.mendez@mail.sit.edu](mailto:aaron.mendez@mail.sit.edu) or by phone (385) 535-9066 or my advisor Dr. Sora Friedman at [sora.friedman@sit.edu](mailto:sora.friedman@sit.edu). Questions about the participant's rights may be directed to the School for International Training Graduate Institutional Review Board (IRB) at: [irb@sit.edu](mailto:irb@sit.edu) or 802-258-3132.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Aaron Mendez

**Appendix C: Survey for Pathway Provider Staff**

1. How long have you been in this particular position?
2. In what capacity are you involved with international student support and success?
3. Tell me about your pathway program at your institution? When did you first begin the program? What are enrollment numbers like?
4. How has your program affected international students' retention and overall success?
5. How often do advisors with your pathway program contact students?
6. What types of communication platforms does your team utilize to contact students?  
(Please select all that apply)
7. If you are trying to reach a student and they are not responsive, what is your next step?
8. What type of services do you offer to help support the needs of international students?
9. What is your job title?
10. Is there anything that you would like to add?

### **Appendix D: Invitation Letter for International Student Participation**

Hello,

My name is Aaron Mendez. I am a current graduate student pursuing my Master of Arts in International Education at the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute. I would like to invite you to participate in a study on the international student experience from participating in a pathway provider program.

I would like to speak to international students who:

- Have recently participated in your pathway provider program, preferably from the 2019-2020 academic year including the summer semester.
- Completed one or more semesters as a matriculated student after successfully completing your pathway program.
- Are pursuing an undergraduate degree in any major.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences faced by international students who have participated in a pathway provider program.

For this study, you will need to complete a survey, which will take 10 to 15 minutes. Once you have completed the survey, please read and sign the informed consent letter attached with this letter and email it to me.

The survey can be found here: [International Student Survey \(link to Survey\)](#)

I will then contact those who indicate that they are interested and available and who meet the criteria to invite them to an online interview via Zoom, a video communications platform, that will last between 30 to 45 minutes. For those students who choose to participate in the interview process, the interview will be recorded visually and audibly with their permission, and afterwards, the interviews will be transcribed using pseudonyms. In addition, the recordings and all other information obtained during the research process will be kept confidential and in a secure file only accessible by myself, the researcher. You are welcome to discontinue participation at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact me by email at: [aaron.mendez@mail.sit.edu](mailto:aaron.mendez@mail.sit.edu) or by phone (385) 535-9066 or my advisor Dr. Sora Friedman at [sora.friedman@sit.edu](mailto:sora.friedman@sit.edu). Questions about the participant's rights may be directed to the School for International Training Graduate Institutional Review Board (IRB) at: [irb@sit.edu](mailto:irb@sit.edu) or 802-258-3132.

Thank you for your consideration.

## Appendix E: Survey for International Student Participation

### PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. Are you an international student who completed a pathway program and successfully become a matriculated student?
2. What is the name of the pathway program provider that offered the program in which you participated prior to matriculating into your institution?
3. How did you find out about your pathway program?
4. How many semesters did you complete with the pathway program?
5. What are you majoring in?

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

6. What is the length of time you have been in the United States as an international student?
7. How difficult did you find adjusting to your pathway program's location if at all?
8. What types of adjustment issues did you experience? (Select all that apply)
9. Please explain your adjustment experience.
10. Who did you approach for help, if anyone?
11. What kind of emotion(s) did you experience while in the pathway program? (Select all that apply)
12. What kind of emotion(s) did you experience after the pathway program?
13. How would you rate your experience with the pathway program staff?
14. Could you explain why you chose that specific option?
15. If your pathway program consisted of constant communication from staff (e.g. an advisor contacts you every week to check up on you). How satisfied were you with that type of support?
16. Please explain why you chose that option? (e.g., If you chose very dissatisfied, did you feel it was too annoying?)
17. Upon completion of your pathway program, how well prepared did you feel to start your degree program?
18. Please explain why you chose that option?
19. What recommendations do you have for the staff at your pathway program regarding how to help international students?

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

20. What country are you from?
21. Select Gender
22. Select Age Range
23. Please indicate your willingness to participate in an interview.
24. Email address.
25. Is there anything that you would like to add?

**Appendix F: Interview Questions for International Students**

1. Why did you want to study in the United States?
  - a. (Generalization: to gain a better resume? “I studied in the United States” etc.)
2. What made you decide to pursue a pathway program?
3. What challenges, if any, did you face before coming to the United States?
4. What challenges, if any, did you face after arriving in the United States?
5. Did you face any adjustment challenges?
  - a. How did you address those challenges?
6. What support services did you have access to, if any?
  - a. What were your thoughts on the support services available to you during your program?
7. Do you feel comfortable using the student services on your current campus? (Career Services, Counseling Center, LGBT Resource Center, etc.)
  - a. How often do you use these services?
8. Could you tell me about how you felt about the courses you attended while in the pathway program?
9. Did you have any good memorable experience during the program? If so, please explain.
10. Did you have any bad memorable experiences during the program? If so, please explain.
11. Do you feel you are proficient enough in the English language after completing this program?
  - a. If not, what are some things you are doing now to improve your English language skills?
  - b. What would you like to have on campus to help support your language learning?
12. Are there any student support services you liked while in the program that does not exist as a matriculated student? If so, what are some examples?
13. Do you have any advice for current and future students in pathway programs?
14. Is there anything else you want to share?