

The Undergraduate International Student Recruitment Experience
and the Effects of Institutional Outreach in
Supporting Their Feelings of Belongingness

by

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, post-secondary international student enrollment has grown in the United States (US). In part, this growth has been facilitated by an increasing number of third-party recruitment partnerships; wherein US universities sign agreements to allow parties to engage in the recruitment and advising of students. By creating and expanding partnerships the university seeks to enroll more students at their university. With these additional parties involved in the advising process, it is more important than ever that students have as much information as possible to make an enrollment decision that makes them feel like they are members of the campus community and that they belong. To attain feelings of membership and belonging the university staff and faculty should be reaching out to students early in their academic career about the resources that are likely to enhance their feelings of membership and belonging at university. To understand and improve students' feelings of membership and belonging the researcher developed a mixed-method intervention that included a control and experimental group. All groups completed a pre-posttest survey. The experimental group was exposed to 1:1 belongingness advising sessions and debriefing interviews. Twenty-two first-year international students participated in the study. The intervention had two objectives: 1) understand how a semester-long advising program, in the students first-year, enhanced international students feeling of membership and belonging at the university; and what components of the program were most effective and 2) based on how students were recruited to university, how did they differ in their developing feelings of belongingness and membership. The intervention was informed by agency theory, dropout model, and previous research on students' feelings of membership and belonging. The results

suggested that students in the experimental group were more likely to feel like members of the university when compared to their control group peers. Additionally, the results suggest that students in the experimental group were able to build relationships, knowledge, and support systems that enhanced their feelings of belonging. The discussion explains these outcomes as they are related to the research questions and extant literature. It also summarizes, implications for practice, future research, and lessons learned.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my family and friends. I cannot thank you all enough for your support and encouragement.

First and foremost, I dedicate this to my wife Samantha. The number of hours I spent away from you and the boys was tough on everyone, but you were and are nothing short of amazing. I am forever grateful for your understanding and love as I pursued this degree. Here is to a life that does not involve any more time in the “salt mine” :)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are over 1 million international students studying in the United States higher education sector (“Number of International Students in the United States Hits All-Time High,” IIE, 2019). From 2015 through 2019 international enrollment in the United States of America (US) was greater than 1 million students (IIE, 2019). International students select the US as a destination of study for a myriad of factors including the quality and capacity of our institutions, the ability or opportunity to work after graduation, and the social environment (Dreher & Poutvaara, 2011; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The desire for a student to study in the US is often matched by a university’s interest in enrolling them. The growth and interest in international student enrollments have been driven by declining domestic enrollments, cuts in public education funding, and the opportunities for new and diversified tuition revenue (Baker & Green, 2014; Cantwell, 2015; Lee et al., 2006).

An international student in the United States can be defined as an individual who is enrolled for credit on a temporary visa that allows for academic coursework (IIE, 2018). Furthermore, they are not an immigrant, or an undocumented immigrant, nor a refugee (How is International Student Mobility Shaping Up?, 2013). In the past, one could assume that most international students followed a simple and linear process that involved learning about and enrolling at a university through direct contact with a university’s admission/enrollment office. However, in today’s international education environment there are a growing number of third-parties that are sourcing/recruiting

international students from all levels of studies and nationalities to enroll at universities in the USA.

In my research, I define a third-party recruiter as an actor that is used by either the student, the university, or both to assist in the student enrollment process. In my research, a third-party recruitment source may be a commissioned-based agent, a university or high school partner, or a government sponsor. In my experience, international students who have been recruited through a third-party are prone to receive insufficient and/or inaccurate information about the university and about their possible enrollment choices. This typically happens because third-parties are not physically on the campus, have differing motivations when enrolling a student, and/or are not aware of all of the programs and resources available to their advisees. This is the case for many of the students at Colorado State University (CSU) where I work as the Associate Director for International Enrollment. In light of this information asymmetry, I have had several conversations with international students who enter their first-year with unrealistic expectations and confusion. This often leads them to feel like they do not belong. My action research investigated this problem by implementing a first-year advising intervention for international students. The intervention was focused on building an understanding of the campus-community and its associated resources so that students could enhance their feelings of belongingness and membership.

National Context

Universities are actively seeking new third-party recruitment partners to offset declining domestic enrollments and cuts in higher education funding at both the federal and state level (Saul, 2016). Consequently, the recruitment of international students to

study at the post-secondary level has become increasingly competitive and commercialized (Redden, 2018). As third-party recruitment sources are brought on board, the university delegates them to assist in recruiting international students. In doing so the university gives up some of its ability to inform the exchange of information between the third-party and the student. When a third-party sources a student to a given university, they have the access and ability to exert their influence on where, when, and often what a student will be studying. At Colorado State University we are often not involved in consulting with the students until the third-party passes along their application materials. The risk of this is that too often these parties have conflicting interests in the “best fit” or the likelihood that a student will succeed, but in maximizing their own financial or organizational enrollment goals. As a consequence of these actions the university may need to remedy a student’s dissatisfaction and provide the student with the resources they need to be successful. There are many things to consider when discussing student success, this includes, but is not limited to, a consideration of their personal backgrounds, prior preparation, academic goals, academic qualifications, as well as the type of campus and location they find most desirable and the financial costs (Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1996) .

When a university and its third-party partners fail to account for a student’s success the likelihood for that student to engage in the campus community and develop feelings of belongingness may be compromised. In some cases, a commission-based agent may misrepresent or conceal the relationships they maintain with a university when they are advising a student to enroll there (Golden, 2011). Simply put, they present a student with limited options of universities and often the list only includes universities

that compensate for enrollment. In extreme cases, a student's qualifications and the universities program requirements may be so mismatched that the student needs to transfer to another institution or return home (Saul, 2016). In my observation, the quality and brevity of the advising that a third-party provides to students has consequences in how a student establishes a feeling of belonging and membership at a university.

Situated Context

Colorado State University, established in 1870, is a large research institution that enrolls over 30,000 students at its main campus in Fort Collins, Colorado. Nearly 2,000 of these students currently qualify as international. In 2019, most of CSU's new enrollments came from China, India, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman. Of all the new international student enrollments in 2019 10% were sponsored by their government, 19% were sourced via a commission-based agent, 10% were enrolled through international exchange partners, and 61% were not attributed to a third party (null third-party source). There are three main offices at CSU that recruit international students. First is INTO CSU, which is primarily focused on enrolling students through commission-based agent recruitment. The primary goal of INTO CSU is to enroll students in pathway and/or ESL programs at CSU. Second, the office where I work (Admissions), which works primarily with undergraduate enrollment and recruits through direct engagement with students and/or their high school or university counselors. These students are typically not attributed to a third-party (null sourced). Third, is the Office of International Programs (OIP) which primarily recruits through third-party sponsors and partnership agreements to boost enrollments at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Combined, these offices partner with over a thousand third-party recruitment sources. Most of these parties are categorized as commission-based agents, but the portfolio also includes a large number of government sponsors as well as high school and university partners that all strive to send international students to CSU. Managing such a large network of third-party actors grants access to markets from all over the world. Many of these relationships represent student markets that we would otherwise not reach because we lack the staffing. While we have enhanced access to international student populations as a result of these partnerships, it is impossible to monitor their activities and provide them with adequate training(s) on what CSU has to offer each individual student. Consequently, the information that a third party possesses is often insufficient -or even inaccurate- to effectively advise a student about CSU.

At CSU we have a number of different degrees and programs in which international students can enroll. Often, the inability for a third party to appropriately place them in the best possible program based on their qualifications and preference leads to students' dissatisfaction with CSU. In extreme cases, this dissatisfaction may lead to students dropping out from CSU. I have observed that more and more of our international students in both the Academic English and Pathway programs are not matriculating to CSU for their degree. More frequently, however, dissatisfaction will make students feel like they do not belong to CSU. As a result, the student disengages from the campus community and they are less likely to form meaningful relationships with their peers, faculty, and staff.

Beyond new student orientation, the Office of International Programs (OIP) at CSU has had little structure to engage new international students and to provide them

resources that may cultivate their feeling of belonging and membership to CSU. Consequently, we have often learned about dissatisfied students when it is too late to change their negative feelings about CSU and to direct them to valuable campus resources and support networks. Because we do not engage early and often with students, we lack nuanced approaches to understand and address the specific needs of our students. There was a demonstrable need for us to become more engaged with our students. This was evident in our numbers. International student enrollment and retention rates have dropped at CSU. As an example, our undergraduate pathway enrollments have declined by 47% since the Fall of 2014 (Census Enrollment, 2017). This drop in enrollment coupled with the fact that our international freshman retention rate (defined as those that return for their second Fall) dropped to 79% in 2018 compared to 90% retention in 2017 is cause for concern (Retention Study, 2018). Both of these numbers indicate that we have struggled to attract and keep international students and it was time to consider new retention tools and models.

In response to declining numbers, the Vice Provost for International Education at CSU, in early 2019, reorganized part of the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) team to shift focus toward enrollment and retention initiatives. The work that this team has done to date has focused on keeping students in legal immigration status, but there was a desire to be more engaged with students regarding their academic and social outcomes on the campus. My intervention provided a protocol for a team of advisors in ISSS so that they could begin to engage with newly enrolled students in a proactive manner. The outreach was focused on connecting students with academic and social

resources that were likely to enhance their feelings of membership and belongingness at CSU.

My problem of practice was situated at a crossroad in an international student's enrollment journey—how they were recruited, how they felt like they belonged when they first arrived, and how we could enhance their feelings of belongingness. These students received admissions advice from a number of actors that were or were not acting on CSU's behalf. As much as I would have liked to control the behaviors of all of these actors and the ways in which they were recruiting and advising international students about CSU it was not doable. However, it was important to acknowledge that third-party's involvement with students is not solely responsible for feelings of belongingness. Thus, in my study it was considered a mediating factor. The ways in which third-parties have recruited and prepared the student for their time at CSU helped contextualize and understand the students' feelings of membership and belongingness. As a result of my limitation to govern and train all third-party actors, I focused my action research project on advising students as quickly and intrusively as possible once they arrived on-campus (ideally within their first or second semester of enrollment). This approach intended to engage them in a such a way that they were more likely to develop feelings of belonging at CSU and persist regardless of their recruitment experience.

INTO CSU. INTO CSU is the most complex model of international enrollment at CSU. INTO CSU is a joint venture between CSU and INTO University Partnerships that was established in 2012. INTO, established in 2005, currently maintains university partnerships in the United Kingdom and the United States (About INTO, n.d.). In the US they partner with ten universities (About INTO, n.d.). INTO has a physical presence on

the campus of CSU and supports international enrollment at the undergraduate, graduate, and non-degree seeking levels. When the agreement was finalized with INTO, CSU inherited a network that was comprised of thousands of commission-based agents and regional offices all over the world. The network's mission was to assist the university in finding and enrolling international students. In addition to a vast recruitment network, the partnership also provided an on-campus pathway program that was an option/program for international students as an alternative avenue toward enrollment. The on-campus pathway provides students an opportunity to take university coursework while simultaneously improving their English proficiency via ESL instruction/coursework. The initiation of this agreement was a continuation of a long line of internationalization efforts at CSU that dates back to over 100 years of hosting international students and faculty.

At INTO CSU the goal is to provide international students with additional support and enrollment options. The goal of the pathway program is to enhance a student's English and/or their academic qualifications so that they can successfully matriculate into the university degree programs and obtain a degree. At CSU the INTO partnership was put into place to complement traditional degree seeking enrollments by providing four key programmatic offerings for international students: 1) General English, 2) Academic English, 3) Undergraduate Pathways, and 4) Graduate Pathways. General English, which was discontinued in 2017, was "designed for students of all levels of English who want to develop communication skills and learn about American culture." Academic English "is designed for students who do not meet CSU's English language entry requirements for an Undergraduate or Graduate Pathway or for direct admission to the University."

Undergraduate and Graduate Pathways are designed for “international students who need additional English language and academic preparation before continuing to a degree program at a US university” (INTO Colorado State University Programs, n.d.).

At the time of this study, INTO CSU was currently serving 9% of the enrolled international student population at CSU. This percentage was below the enrollment goals that were set for the center at its inception. At the time of this study, enrollment growth for new degree-seeking students had also experienced a slight decline from an all-time high in 2015 of 2,192 to an enrollment 2,112 students in 2018. In an effort to assist the recruitment and admissions process of students within and outside of INTO CSU, I was hired as the Assistant Director of International Admissions within the Office Admissions.

My position within the Office of Admissions was newly rewritten and had a large focus on strategic international recruitment and fostering collaboration on international undergraduate admission practice and policy. The primary goal of my position was to increase international student enrollment by enhancing cooperation between all of the international recruitment arms of the university – Admissions, INTO CSU, Office of International Programs.

To enhance on-campus collaboration, I became an active participant in strategic enrollment meetings, INTO CSU board meetings, recruitment planning, budgeting and operations committees, and established an international enrollment working group. It was within these engagements that I realized our internal recruitment sources, strategies, and goals led to disparities in students’ information and knowledge about CSU. The consequences of recruiting students in different ways not only inhibited our ability to enroll students, but most importantly it inhibited our ability to properly advise them of all

of the enrollment options and resources available at CSU. When students were not fully informed of all of the options and resources that CSU had, they were less likely to utilize them. When students did not make these connections, I felt they risked dropping out because they lacked feelings of belongingness and membership.

To understand how international students varied in their feelings of belongingness and membership my research identified three different third-party international student recruitment sources: 1) commissioned-based agents, 2) university and/or high school partners, and 3) government sponsors. My study also considered a fourth group, which was students who were not attributed to a third-party by CSU and thus were considered null sourced. The third-party sourced students were often compared to each other as well as to the null source students. These four groups encompassed all of the degree-seeking enrollments at CSU (refer to Figure 1 below).



Figure 1. International Student Recruitment Sources.

Commission-Based Agents. A “student recruitment agent” in the context of international education can be defined as, “A company or individual contracted and paid by universities in other countries to advise and recruit students to their institutions,” (West & Addington, 2014, p. 7). These agents are typically for-profit businesses that maintain relationships with and recruit for multiple institutions/universities. The relationship may involve a number of different contractual elements. There is no official source for accrediting agents, in the U.S. or elsewhere. Consequently, there is little standardization between the way agents are employed by U.S. universities and how the respective agreements are structured. There have been attempts by organizations to help vet and control the actions of agents, namely American International Recruitment Council (AIRC), but there is no mandate for universities nor agents to use or comply with

the organization's frameworks. Each relationship may be different in contract periods, payment/commission structures, and offices involved in executing the agreements.

One area where commission-based agent international student recruitment is almost exclusively used is with third-party pathway, bridge, or foundational programs; all of which allow students to take a mix of ESL coursework and academic coursework. This type of partnership typically entails an academic as well as financial connection that allows for a commission per matriculated student between the private company/provider and a university (West & Addington, 2014). Partnerships between private companies and universities have existed in other countries since the early 2000's. However, in the U.S. these partnerships became more prevalent a few years later. In 2007, Kaplan International Pathways entered a partnership with Northeastern University that was labeled "the first of its kind in the USA" (The Kaplan International Pathways Story, 2020). In 2009, INTO University partnerships was the second company to enter the pathway market in the US with an agreement with Oregon State University. From there, partnerships of this nature grew rapidly. In 2011, there were three private company collaborating with eight U.S. universities and by 2016, there were eight providers collaborating with 54 U.S. universities (Smale, 2016).

The proliferation of commission-based recruitment has surged despite resistance in the higher education community; though pathways are the primary users of commission-based agents the concerns within the field go beyond these providers. The debate within the higher education community on how to use and manage commissioned agents has not been completely resolved- I contend this is in part due to lack of governance. Up until early 2013, the National Association for College Admission

Counseling (NACAC) had a strong stance against the use of agents by the higher education community. However, NACAC as a result of their Commission on International Student Recruitment report, allowed for its membership to begin employing agents in international student recruitment (West & Addington, 2014). In response, the pace in which U.S. universities have employed not only providers but also individual agents are increasing. The US department of state also softened its stance on the use of agents in the Summer of 2019 and allowed for agents to be present at their recruitment events/fairs. As such, I felt there was a need to examine closer the nature of these partnerships and to consider the influence and possible effects they have on international students who matriculate in U.S. higher institutions.

The effects of agent-based student recruitment and its possible ties to students' satisfaction and performance in the US has been unexplored; however, we know these students are joining U.S. campuses at an increasing rate. A recent study revealed that 37% of U.S. institutions work with agents and that 34% have started using them in the last three years (Studentmarketing, 2016). On average, a single U.S. institution works with 33 international student recruitment agents (Studentmarketing, 2016).

Government Sponsors. International students studying in the US on a government scholarship or sponsorship is also common. Though the government sponsor is not working on a commission structure they may advise students to attend a particular institution based on memorandums of understandings (MOU) between a given university and their entity. These MOU's often entail special programmatic and financial considerations that entice the sponsor to source a student to a specific school- based largely on the government's preference. With that in mind, it is important to acknowledge

that different sponsors have different placement practices that may give more consideration to the students and universities preference/input. These preferences may in turn, influence how informed, engaged, and satisfied a student is at a given university. Most government sponsored students come from the Middle East. Though a government sponsored student may come for a short amount of time, one or two semesters, most are degree-seeking students.

Institutional Exchange Partners. It is also important to consider international students that are sourced to a university in the U.S. via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with an educational institution abroad. In my research an institutional exchange partner is most commonly a relationship in which one university sources students to another. An example of this would be a dual degree arrangement, whereby an institution abroad is sourcing the student to a U.S. institution to fulfill the requirements leading to degree from both institutions. It is important to note, these partnerships can also entail a university in the US obtaining international students through MOU's with English as Second Language (ESL) schools/providers, community colleges and international high schools.

The scope of these MOU's can be wide-ranging and may encompass student exchange for a short amount of time (one semester), dual-degree programs, a degree only from CSU, shared research and/or faculty exchanges. Depending on the type of agreement a participant is likely to have different levels of information and feelings about the exchange. As is the case with government sponsored students, students within these types of partnerships may be attracted to attend a given university based on the incentives the parties have negotiated. These may include, but are not limited to, credit articulations

and mapping that ensure the students can graduate on-time, partner scholarships and/or reduced tuition, and/or special advisors, to name a few.

Problem of Practice

I became increasingly more aware of the differences between how satisfied a student was with their experience(s) at CSU and how it connected with their recruitment experience. During my time at CSU, I had numerous conversations with underinformed, misadvised, or mis-admitted international students. Several times within a given semester (especially early in the semester), students voiced confusion and frustration about how they were admitted and why they were placed in a specific program. Often, the flash point went back to how they were recruited and advised (in their home country) about their admission options at CSU. If at the time of arrival, a student felt they were underinformed or misinformed by our third-party partners, international admission staff were often compelled, and best positioned, to address the student's concerns.

In advising these students, it became clear that they often felt like they did not belong socially and/or academically at CSU. They were not aware of key resources that could build a feeling of membership at CSU and enhance their satisfaction. Thus, my intervention was aimed at proactively engaging with these students by focusing on and cultivating their feeling of belonging and membership at CSU. If successful, I felt my intervention could make new international students more likely to retain and graduate from CSU regardless of their recruitment experiences.

In past conversations with international students, there was a multitude of concerns with third parties at various points in their enrollment and arrival process. In some conversations, I learned that commission-based agents often present students with a

pathway enrollment or a specific degree as their only choice (regardless of their academic qualifications) because it best serves their agents financial interests. In the case of an agent-sourced student, INTO and/or CSU pays a per-capita commission to recruiters who source them international students. If students were sponsored by their government, they were often frustrated by being influenced on what university to study at, the lack of majors that their government would approve for them to study, and the limitations they may have had on their duration of study. Lastly, if a student is sourced via a university partner, they are often disappointed that they cannot switch their degree because their “home” university will not take the credits.

In my role, I have dealt with the consequences of the decisions made by any third-party to source a student to CSU. As you will see in subsequent chapters, students who are sourced to CSU through third parties, especially commission-based agents, have been more likely than their non-sourced peers to have lower GPA’s (Appendix A). At CSU we have also seen our retention rates decline amongst international students. There are multiple factors to consider, but one mediating factor may be the proliferation of third-party recruitment sources and the advising or lack thereof they provided to students. This in combination with the lack of advising we were doing on-campus prompted my problem of practice.

My initial cycles of action research, along with my professional experiences at CSU, suggested that many of our international students entered the university with underinformed or misinformed expectations. As a result, many students did not feel a strong sense of belonging to the university and were more likely to dropout. This study sheds light on how a student’s feelings of belongingness, membership, and performance

(key elements of building connections to an educational institution) were affected by intrusive advising sessions that focused on explaining, cultivating, and enhancing these feelings. My research was also interested in how a student's recruitment source, as a mediating variable, may help explain the differences in these feelings. More importantly, I also wished to contribute, even if in a limited scope, to help students feel like they have the opportunity to get the information they need that could increase their likelihood to persist and succeed at CSU.

Purpose of the Study

Amid students' frustrations shared with our office that pertained to using a third-party recruiter; I designed an intervention aimed at addressing their misunderstandings on issues that involved tuition costs, scholarships, employment opportunities, English proficiency support, feelings of being mis-admitted or misguided to programs based on a mismatch of their (student) qualifications and program requirements, and/or the inabilities for a student to switch or add a major. Most importantly, the intervention addressed how these misunderstandings affected their feelings of belonging and membership.

The advising intervention aimed to enhance a student's feeling of belonging by addressing their barriers by getting them the information they needed to feel like they belonged. In order to understand their concerns, I invited all first-year students in the Spring semester of 2020 to take a pre and posttest survey. A small sample of these students were then invited to participate in a semester-long advising program aimed at guiding them towards the social and academic resources that were likely to assist them in their feeling of belonging and feeling of membership at CSU.

There were numerous studies that focus on the factors that affect international students' performance once they arrive on a college campus (Andrade, 2007, 2009; Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Hagedorn, & Ren, 2012; Kwai, 2009; Stoyhoff, 1997; Zhao et al., 2005). However, there was little literature that tied together students' feelings of belongingness and the students' social, emotional and performance outcomes in response to intrusive advising sessions. These studies also did not consider the recruitment experiences of international students as a mediating factor and how/if it helped explain their feelings of belonging. In response, I completed an advising intervention with the end goal of boosting their feeling of belonging to the campus community. Specifically, my intervention focused on giving advice and addressing assumptions on how students could quickly engage and become active members of the campus community, regardless of how they were recruited to CSU. When newly enrolled international students do not have an equal chance to succeed because they are not properly advised (either intentionally or unintentionally) CSU was best positioned to remedy the issue by explicitly engaging these students in an intervention that was aimed at enhancing their knowledge, relationships, and support. In doing so, it would impact their satisfaction of the university which could lead to enhancing their feeling of belonging. The following research questions were used to guide this study.

Research Questions

RQ1: How did a semester-long advising program, in the students first-year, enhance international students feeling of membership and belonging at CSU?

RQ1a: What components of the program were more effective and what components were less effective?

RQ2: Based on how students were recruited to CSU, how did they differ in developing feelings of belongingness and membership?

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH GUIDING THE PROJECT

“Recruitment is indeed a student service, whether or not U.S. institutions have recognized it as such, and whether or not those who provide the service are college or university employees.” (Irudayam, 2016, p. 59)

There are multiple theories and models that informed this intervention. This section is organized in four sections. First, I examined agency theory, as it helps to understand how and why misinformation exists when third parties are employed. The second and the third sections focus on the college student experience. I examined theories and models of student dropout and persistence. In the final section, I focused on the role of developing a feeling of membership and belonging and how this affects student engagement and retention. Finally, this chapter examined how my action research fits into and is informed by the existing literature.

Agency theory

Agency theory considers how multiple actors work with each other and the opportunities and risks that must be considered as a result of their working agreement. The emergence of the theory in the late 1960's and into the early 1970's was focused primarily on business and economic applications. The genesis of the theory was to explain the ways in which businesses were taking on, accounting for, and assessing risk when engaging with another actor in contract-based work (Eisenhardt, 1989). The theory assumes that the reason any organization engages with a third party on a contract basis is to maximize their reach and profitability. There are two main assumptions in agency theory. The first is that two disparate parties will not fully cooperate because their goals and desires are self-serving. The second assumption is that businesses or organizations

can never fully verify what the third-parties are doing on their behalf (Eisenhardt, 1989). To reconcile these problems, agency theory posits that an optimal relationship should be transparent and that each party within the relationship should share the same tolerance for risk. For example, a contract, when possible should have dual lines of reporting for key staff/positions within the relationship. Additionally, the contracting organization needs to assume a tradeoff between maximizing outcomes at the expense of not knowing all of the third-party's activities (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The relationship of agency has been around for centuries- in that any relationship between two parties designates an agent or someone who acts on another's behalf (Ross, 1973). Specifically, the theory can be defined as a "...relationship in which one party (the principal) delegates work to another (the agent), who performs that work" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 58). A key implication of the delegation process is that the principal typically gives some decision-making authority to the agent to perform work on their behalf (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

Like many theories, agency theory, has evolved and developed multiple streams over time. It is currently used to understand business, political, and marketing relationships amongst other fields (Berger & Di Patti, 2006; Dixit et al., 1997; Fayezi et al., 2012). In my study, I focused on the theoretical ties and literature that pertain to its organizational applications (Guo et al., 2016; Mitnick, 1992). In an organizational approach the researcher considers the structures, roles, and relationships between people and the roles they have in the agreement (DeGeorge, 1992). An important piece of the literature, theory, and my research was to understand the terms that are commonly used in this theory. First is the principal, the principal is the actor that is contracting another party

to advance their goals (Ross, 1973). In my research, the principal was CSU. Second, is the agent, the agent by contract has been designated to perform work on behalf of the principal (Ross, 1973). In my research the agent was the third party that was recruiting and advising international students on CSU's behalf. Lastly, the agent and the principal are working with a consumer (Ross, 1973). In my research, the consumer was the student. As previously discussed, the third party for the purposes of my research was a CSU exchange partner, commission-based agent, or a government sponsor. I selected agency theory for this research because it considered the consequence of a working relationship from multiple actor's points of view; whereas other theories, such as contract theory, are more narrowly concerned with the contract and the incentives within it through the views of the principal and actor (Leterre, 2011). Figure 2 below, demonstrates the hierarchy of the relationships within agency theory and provides a visual as to how the principal may not have direct access to the consumer when an agent is present.

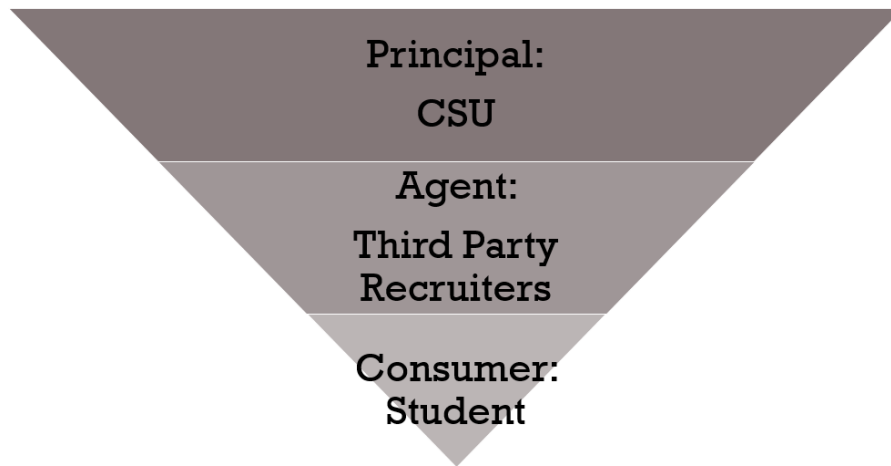


Figure 2. Agency Theory Applied.

The goal of both parties in engaging in a principal-agent relationship is to maximize utility (Ross, 1973; Jensen & Meckling, 1976). From the perspective of the principal they are contracting with agents in the hopes it will enhance the diversity of students, boost international enrollments, and increase tuition and fee revenues. From the perspective of the agent, they are contracting with principals so that they can provide consumers with more options and gain financial incentives that benefit their organization. In order to do so a number of assumptions are made. Foremost, both parties understand that there is a risk in entering into such a contract. The tolerances toward risk may vary throughout the relationship, but an asymmetry almost certainly exists between the way an agent and principal assess it (Wiseman & Gomez-Mejia, 1998). Another assumption is that there will be information asymmetry between the two parties as they are both seeking to gain or save themselves incentives. Often, it is assumed that the agent has more information than the principal has and may choose to withhold it to serve their self-interests. This information is of course a purchasable commodity should the principal choose to pay for it (Eisenhardt, 1989). In light of this assumption, the principal may further incentivize and/or expend additional resources to limit aberrant activities (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). All of these assumptions can be summed up by the contention that agents and principals, while agreeing to cooperate, will take different actions and have different goals within the relationship (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Lastly, it is important to point out that there is typically a transactional party or commodity involved in agency theory. That is the consumer. In my research, the consumer was the student. Within a business relationship between a university and a third party the student (consumer) suffers most from information asymmetry (Hagedorn &

Zhang, 2011). Ultimately, the principal is responsible for the satisfaction of the consumer. In my research, CSU was best positioned to solve the problem of information asymmetry for the student.

For my action research project, agency theory provided a framework to understand how a student may be misinformed about CSU as a result of the disparate information the university (principal), the third-party recruitment source (agent), and the student (consumer) possess. Using the agency theory framework, one could assume that students recruited by a third-party are being exchanged without any party having complete information of their specific interests. If and when a student's self-determination is compromised as a result of a business relationship, one may use agency theory to help explain and understand why they were or were not advised of all of their enrollment options.

Agency Theory Applied. This section focuses on how agency theory can explain the motivations and behaviors of different actors within the international enrollment setting. Within the context of agency theory, a third-party is referred to as an "agent". I begin with an overview of commission-based agents. According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) (2018) the definition for agents is as follows:

Commissioned agents are contracted and paid by colleges that partner with them to recruit international students to their institutions and to establish a local presence in particular regions abroad. Agents advise students concerning curricula, programs, and policies and may also provide in-country marketing or other services to their institutional partners. (p. 11)

The commission is typically disbursed on a per capita basis for any agent who sources a student to a university when that student enrolls. The university, as the principal in this theoretical framework, has contracted the agent to perform work on their behalf. In this study, the contracted work is to recruit international students to the university to enhance their enrollment and tuition revenue. In exchange, the university compensates the agent for the enrollments. It is important to note the commission compensation may vary, based on the program the student enrolls in at the university.

There are a number of partnerships/contracts/arrangements between agents and principals within international student recruitment. These partnerships, though unique in their own ways, all intend to increase international enrollments. Consequently, they provide the university with new revenue opportunities. In addition, they may also focus on enhancing the quality of students a university is enrolling and guaranteeing certain admission criteria and incentives that are mutually beneficial to the principal and agent.

This study was particularly sensitive to principal-agent agreements that are intended for joint-venture pathway enrollments. These ventures entail a for-profit provider partnering with the university to deliver the pathway. The main concern here is that compensation for agents to enroll students in pathways is often greater because the cost of tuition being paid by the students is higher. A pathway can be defined as a program in which a student's first-year is bundled together to combine English as second language (ESL) and academic coursework that is situated within a revenue sharing model (Aberola, 2017). The emergence and adoption of pathways is not only because of the possibilities of additional revenue for the university, but also the ability to tap into the wider recruitment network to attract more students. As part of the partnership, the for-

profit provider usually brings along a large commission-based agent network (Aberola, 2017).

When universities consider a pathway or working with any type of agent in any capacity, they must consider the “buy” versus “build” maxim options (Scoby, 2017). The “buy” option is to contract agents on a per commission basis. When a university chooses to “buy”, they contract with third parties, typically placed abroad, to recruit more students to the university. The “buy” option epitomizes agency theory in that the principal contracts with an agent to achieve a goal. When a university chooses to “build”, they invest internally in their own international student enrollment by building out programs and hiring staff that are based on-campus. The latter often involves hiring more admission counselors to travel internationally to recruit students directly to the university, thereby avoiding the need for growing third-party partnerships. Both approaches have been fast growing and often universities go for a mix of both (Klahr, 2015). A number of considerations need be made in both approaches. As it pertains to agency theory the risk involved in the “buy” model is far greater as the principal gives up considerable control in the recruitment and enrollment process.

Both in theory and in practice, agents pursue particular goals. This is a business, and the commodity is students. A higher commission being paid by a principal makes them a more attractive placement for the agent (Hulme et. al, 2013). Franklin (2008) adds that not all agents are misguided, but often they are going to send students to places where the commission is not only contractually agreed upon but being paid at a higher rate per capita than other institutions. An additional ethical issue is that agents are often getting paid by both the student and the university for their service (Lewin, 2008). These

payments are often not seen as an issue by families because the necessity of an agent in the college search process is seen as deep and strong in many parts of the world, particularly Asia (Franklin, 2008).

The last consideration within this dynamic and specifically for that of pathways is that international enrollments for ESL education within the United States. Given that ESL is a compulsory part of a student's program, why is it that more universities are creating a new supply for a declining demand? In their 2017 Open Doors Report, the Institute of International Education (IIE) reported a 62% decline in ESL enrollments among China, Saudi Arabia, and Japan which together constitute the three largest countries for ESL enrollment in the USA.

A 2011 study by Hagedorn and Zhang used agency theory to look at agent use in China. Specifically, their study was in place to better understand the rationale used by students and families for employing one. The top reasons participants cited for using agents was their lack of knowledge about the application process, their lack of knowledge about the visa process, their lack of knowledge about foreign institutions, and lastly was their belief that it would help them get accepted (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). On the contrary, the participants that chose not to use an agent cited a lack of trust in their services, their high costs, and that they could do it on their own and/or with familial or friend support (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). Another study by Sharma (1997) found that students were aggravated by not having a clear understanding of what the agent does as well as how they do it. This speaks to Agency Theory and its assumption that the agent and the principal likely know more than the consumer/student.

A study conducted by Hulme et. al (2013) focused on the value of an agent in the recruitment cycle through the eyes of the university, the student, and the agent. The study found that African students sourced by agents to study at higher education institutions in the United Kingdom were appreciative of their agents work. They responded that the agent's assistance was of great value and not a single student had a negative experience. Moreover, the students reported that the agents provided accurate advice on course availabilities, the application process, and the visa process (Hulme et. al, 2013). As for the agents and the universities input, it was concluded that ethical issues do arise, but the partnership as a whole has value and that international students are indeed viewed as a "tradable" service.

Dropout Model

An important premise of my research was to remember that higher education is voluntary (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000). Students are not bound to it by policy or age. Thus, it is unique in the formal education landscape and receives considerable attention as to the factors influencing one's decision to persist or dropout. Building on the work of William Spady (1970), Vincent Tinto (1975) posited a theoretical model on the factors associated with dropping out from higher education. In his sociologically based approach, he categorized these into student and institutionally driven factors. He found that student indicators for dropout involve their social status, their individual attributes, their career and educational expectations, and their motivation for academic achievement. On the institutional side, the student needs intellectual development, grade performance, peer group interactions, and faculty interactions (Tinto, 1975). Since Tinto, the literature on dropout has increasingly considered how different student groups may have different

needs and dropout predictors (see Rendon, 1994; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Yosso, 2005). In this section, I frame dropout through the factors Tinto identified and provide additional insights from other scholars.

Within Tinto's dropout model, student indicators for persistence include: 1) having a strong educational goal commitment, 2) strong performance in past educational experiences, 3) a predisposition to complete their studies at a highly ranked school, or 4) having fixed financial resources (Tinto, 1975). This means that a student with goals to maintain a 4.00 GPA or continue onto graduate studies may be more likely to persist than a student whose goal is to complete a bachelor's degree. Likewise, a student is more likely to persist if they have a strong high school GPA and/or a competitive high school curriculum (Hiss & Franks, 2014). Students may also persist if they are attending a school or program because, in their views or in others, it is prestigious or highly ranked. Lastly, a student (or a family) that is encumbering a debt to complete their higher education is less likely to dropout because the cost is too steep to fail.

Regarding institutional factors, dropout theory places an emphasis on facilitating social and academic interactions on a given campus. If a student is given ample opportunities to engage with peers, faculty, and staff they are more likely to be satisfied and persist (Tinto, 1975). This is critical as students, especially those in their first-year, are most likely to be psychologically vulnerable and insecure. Simply put, the inability to engage them as an active participant during their first-year compromises their persistence (Christie et al., 2008; Zepke et al., 2006). Like any community, individuals are more likely to struggle with their transition to post-secondary education if they cannot connect

with their school in a “familiar, understandable, usable and negotiable” way (Wenger, 1998, p. 153).

What is important to acknowledge in the theory of dropout is that students view similar situations very differently. Perceptions of reality have real effects on the observer and if a student feels their time and energies can be better spent outside of their education, they are likely to consider dropping out (Tinto, 1975). Of course, their inclination to do so is commensurate to their socio-economic background, status, expectations, etc. The key, then, for the institution is to make sure that it is providing platforms for academic development and social involvement (Tinto, 1975).

Running alongside of the sociological explanations are psychologically based theories. In this vein, student persistence is shaped by self-efficacy, peers, and past behavior (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Self-efficacy is the belief that a person is capable to accomplish their goals and exercise their influence over events that happen in their lives (Bandura, 1997). Strong associations with peers make it more likely for students to feel integrated academically and socially in the campus and positive past behavior and experiences give students the feeling that they believe in themselves and thus it enhances their likelihood to retain at a higher education institution (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Ideally, strong associations with peers happens with a diverse group. My research was mindful that international students often have strong “in-groups” that help them integrate to university life (Cartmell & Bond, 2015). An “in group” is comprised of students from the same country or background who rely on each other to learn about resources (Cartmell & Bond, 2015). With an understanding of these factors you can then, in combination with institutional factors, predict persistence. Persistence is shaped by a student’s entry

characteristics and their environmental interactions and these factors affect their outcomes, attitudes, intentions and behaviors (Bean & Eaton, 2001). A key outcome based on Tinto's model is that students develop an attitude that they "fit in" at the institution, which leads to loyalty, which results in persistence (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Tinto, 1975). What remains consistent across the dropout model is the care that must be given to psychological factors, a student's social involvement, and their academic integration.

Through the lens of dropout model my research was focused on how CSU could provide the resources needed to address student needs/indicators of persistence. The intervention focused on how students may become more socially involved and academically integrated through university led/facilitated advising interventions. In consideration of dropout model, my intervention provided advising that intended to enhance a student's feelings of belonging which as a consequence could enhance their likelihood of persisting at CSU. Figure 3 below, provides a visual of the key variables that dropout model considers when predicting persistence.

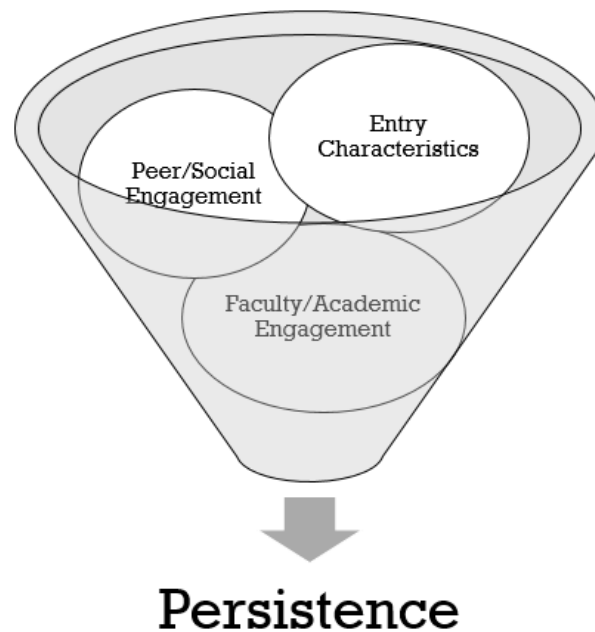


Figure 3. Dropout Model Applied.

Student Dropout in Higher Education. There are innumerable studies on post-secondary graduation success rates and degree progress. I highlighted those that relate to international students and their persistence in post-secondary education. More importantly I highlighted studies and models that emphasized the importance of student engagement and belongingness in boosting student persistence and success. In order to have an understanding of these studies I first looked at macro-level data and trends within the US and at CSU regarding persistence and graduation rates.

Persistence and Graduation Rates. In both perception and reality, it is difficult to complete an undergraduate degree in the United States. Roughly, half of those who start their degree achieve it in any length of time (Swail, 2004). The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center is a leading voice in helping practitioners and policymakers understand the longitudinal data surrounding post-secondary student success and graduation rates (Shapiro et al., 2017). In their 2018 report, they tracked the

success and progress of the 2011 cohort of first-time full-time undergraduate degree seeking students over the past six years. Including all institutional types (community colleges, colleges, and universities), 42.1% of students graduated within four years. Roughly 16.7% transferred at least once and 23.5% were no longer enrolled at the four-year mark. Within 6 years of entering higher education 63.1% of the cohort had graduated with an undergraduate degree and 16.7% had transferred at least once, and 27.4% were no longer enrolled.

Inclusive of all demographics at CSU, our first-time full-time undergraduate degree seeking students in the Fall 2011 cohort graduated in four years at a rate of 43.9%. This is 2.9% higher than other public institutions. The Fall 2011 cohort graduated in six years at a rate of 68% which is 1.6% below public institution peers. Of the Fall 2017 cohort 83.1% of CSU's first-time full-time undergraduate degree seeking students persisted to the Fall of 2018 (Retention Study, 2018). First-time full-time undergraduate degree seeking students who were identified as international students at CSU in the Fall of 2011 had a four-year graduation rate of 29.7% and a six-year graduation rate of 64.9%. Both of these graduation rates were below the overall student population (Retention Study, 2015; Retention Study, 2017). Regarding persistence, 79.3% of CSU's first-time full-time undergraduate degree seeking students that were identified as international persisted to the Fall of 2018 (Retention Study, 2018). This is an 11% drop from the prior year and is below the overall student body at CSU.

Persistence Studies. To understand what is leading to a lack of higher education persistence; several studies have considered key influencers in thwarting dropout. First, students with stronger high school curriculum and grades are more likely to persist

(Adelman, 1999). Second, students who take advantage of academic resources such as tutoring and faculty office hours are more likely to persist (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Third, when students are engaged and comfortable in the social setting of a campus community, they are more likely to retain. Fourth, and finally, when financial considerations and needs are met, students are more likely to persist (Tinto, 2004). With all that in mind, persistence studies continue to find that a student's entry characteristics in combination with their in-college experiences effect their persistence (Mamiseishvili, 2012).

There are a few key studies on persistence that focus on international students. International students as a demographic differ from studies on domestic students as it is generally assumed that international students have strong financial support, are academically well-prepared, and are planning to be in the country for a shorter duration of time (Andrade, 2009). With these assumptions in place, Mamiseishvili (2012) found through a longitudinal study of students beginning their post-secondary studies that meetings with academic advisors and involvement with study groups were significant predictors of international student persistence. These factors in combination with clear degree plans and a higher earned GPA also suggested persistence. For international students' negative indicators of persistence were those who entered with remedial English and who struggled to socially integrate. In research done by Zhao et. al (2005) using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), researchers found that international students experienced some culture shock, which impacted their initial studies and performance. As time passed, the researchers came to understand that

international students begin to take more advantage of faculty, enrolling in challenging coursework, and using informational technology resources than their American peers.

Belongingness and Membership

When someone feels important to someone or something else, then that person is likely to find belonging (Scholssberg, 1989). A feeling of belonging is fluid; it is a state a person finds and the feeling that one belongs is different for each person (Goodenow, 1992). In an educational setting, students benefit socially and academically when they feel that they belong at their school (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Goodenow, 1991). Belonging is a multifaceted feeling and can encompass having positive interpersonal relationships, feeling attached to their teachers, and being recognizable within their respective school setting (Allen et al., 2018; Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Baumeister & Leary, 1995, Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

When a student feels that they are not welcome, respected, or valued at their school they will begin to disengage (Allen et al., 2018; Finn, 1989). Simply stated, when a student does not have strong relationships with peers, teachers, or the institution they will not participate or engage in meaningful activities (Finn, 1989). Conversely, students that feel “accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment” are apt to have more motivation and achievement (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80; Weiner, 1990). Goodenow (1991) and Goodenow and Grady (1993) concluded that when students have a strong feeling of belongingness and membership at their school, they have higher grades, are more engaged in activities, and put forth more effort compared to their peers with a lower feeling of belonging.

In post-secondary settings, belongingness is often defined as a “students’ subjective feeling of overall fit within the university and the perception that they are personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others at the university” (Wilson & Gore, 2013, p. 178). One key facet in building their feeling of fit is providing opportunities for students to engage in group activities both in and outside of the classroom. If they do so, they are likely to have a stronger feeling of belonging to a given university (Hoyle & Crawford, 1994). Their likelihood to persist at a university is the result of how integral they feel in regard to intellectual and social activities (Hausmann et al., 2007; Tinto, 1987).

To cultivate a feeling of belonging a university and its associated staff must foster relationship-building opportunities and provide ample space for peers to build relationships (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). This begins at new student orientation and continues through a university’s commitment to provide co-curricular activities throughout a student’s degree completion (Berger & Milem, 1999). Optimally, students engage with all of their peers, but many students will find a sense of security and belonging by interacting with their own ethnic/cultural friends (Cartmell & Bond, 2015). Additionally, universities make students feel like they belong when they provide easy and consistent access to financial and academic advisors (Hu & St. John, 2001). In sum, students must feel like they have meaningful connections and support in order for belongingness to be realized (Hoffman et al., 2002). A closely related concept to belongingness is membership. As students feel like they belong they are likely to identify as members of their school.

The optimal outcome for all students regardless of their background is to find and engage in activities that allow them to feel like they belong and become a member of the community through mutually beneficial social relationship (Christie et al., 2008; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Wehlage, 1989). School membership has been defined as a student's perception that the school is there for them and that they matter (Wehlage, 1989; Degelsmith, 2000). As new students enter a university, they enter a completely new learning experience. As part of the process students have to balance the social, emotional, academic, and cultural components of a new school (de Jong et al., 2020). For some students, this balance may come easier than for others; thus, it is incumbent that the school provides adequate resources to meet their students' needs (Cabrera et al., 1999). This is particularly true for first generation students, and those who come from underrepresented populations or lower socioeconomic status as they may encounter greater difficulty finding membership relative to their peers (Thomas & Quinn, 2007). As an underrepresented population, international students need specific support, resources and activities to acculturate and find membership at the university (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Williams & Johnson, 2011). My research is aimed at assisting them in this process.

In summary, membership can be found in both the academic and/or social elements of the university (Tinto, 1975). Students are likely to feel like a member when they find a bond between themselves and others at the school while identifying strongly with their institution (Sancho & Cline, 2012; Wehlage, 1989). If students possess strong social and academic networks that are a result of their enrollment at the school, they are likely to have a strong feeling of membership- and in turn they are less likely to dropout

(Degelsmith, 2000; Tinto, 1993). As a result of a strong feeling of membership and feelings of belongingness there is a positive relationship in how committed a student feels to the institution and their intentions to persist (Hausmann et al., 2007).

Psychological Feeling of School Membership (PSSM)

Colorado State University uses PSSM and theories of belongingness to inform its Student Success Initiatives. The Psychological Feeling of School Membership (PSSM) measure developed by Goodenow (1993) examines students perceived belonging and their psychological membership to the school in which they are enrolled (see Appendix C to view the adolescent PSSM questionnaire/measure). Student Success Initiatives are part of the outreach that happens within the Office of Student Affairs. My research project and intervention were informed by these initiatives. Specifically, my research project was an extension of the advising framework being employed by our Academic Advancement Center (AAC). The AAC offers a number of advising programs to current students. The most intrusive program is a year-long advising program in which students, typically those with underrepresented identities, meet multiple times with a student success advisor to discuss how they engage with the campus community and build skills to be socially and academically successful.

Building on existing research that investigates social relationships and contexts, Goodenow in developing PSSM was specifically interested in understanding individual differences in how students find belonging and membership and engage with their school (1993). The scale has been used as a tool for administrators to identify potential students who are at risk of dropping out and to determine a response to the risk(s) (Goodenow, 1993; Alkan, 2016; Ye & Wallace, 2014). The PSSM scale features 18 Likert-type

questions that factor in students' responses for belonging, rejection, and acceptance (Goodenow, 1993; Hagborg, 1998). The scale has both positively and negatively worded questions (Goodenow, 1993).

There are a number of studies with middle school and high school populations that demonstrate positive links between school belonging and academic performance, measure in higher grades and motivation levels (Degelsmith, 2000; Anderman, 1999; Anderman, 2004; Goodenow, 1993; Hagborg, 1998). However, there are few studies on belongingness, as framed by PSSM, in higher education. A few notable studies stand out. Pittman and Richmond (2007; 2008) adapted the PSSM framework for a university setting. In their pretest-posttest study they collected PSSM questionnaires from college freshman, at a large public university, to examine the associations between belongingness and adjustment and how those factors may be associated with positive perceptions in competence and a decrease in problem behaviors. They concluded that a feeling of belonging at a university as measured by PSSM is indeed linked to positive self-perceptions and scholastic competence (p. 354).

Though PSSM was developed for and primarily used for adolescent populations, it has since been adapted and useful for measuring membership in the higher education setting (Alkan, 2016; Pittman and Richmond, 2008; Kane, Chalcraft, & Volpe, 2014). In higher education applications, questions are typically reworded from Goodenow's (1993) version to better reflect the setting and organization (e.g. the word "teacher" changed to "faculty member" or "professor") (Alkan, 2016; Pittman and Richmond, 2007). In the case of all of the higher education applications of the survey the authors have found that

the changes in wording do not have an effect on the internal consistency of the scale (see Appendix D to view the university PSSM questionnaire/measure).

Nese Alkan (2016) used the PSSM framework to administer a one-time questionnaire to Turkish students at all levels/grades of undergraduate studies. They concluded that if students feel accepted by their peers and faculty, they have a strong and positive correlation on the belongingness measures. They also found a correlation between staff-student relationships and how a student feels they belong and learn at the university. Lastly, the study concluded that if students do not feel they belong they are more likely to be lonely and feel they should no longer be at the university.

Finally, Kane et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative study on how first-year students in their first semester felt they belonged. Using the PSSM scale, the questionnaires were administered in week 7 of their enrollment. The authors found that early engagement in curricular activities, orientation attendance, and the college being the students first choice had significant and strong correlations on a student's feeling of belonging. The study features robust quantitative information but is limited by the fact it did not have multiple administrations to measure how feelings of belongingness may change or be cultivated.

Our institutional experience as well as other literature has demonstrated that intrusive engagement and advising within a student's first semester, in particular their first forty days, has a positive impact on student performance and retention (Vinson et al., 2010). The early intervention is critical because we know that amongst university dropouts most will leave university in their first-year (Bradburn & Carroll, 2002; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). These engagements have a focus on students building relationships

with advisors/tutors, getting involved in extracurriculars, and attending orientation activities (Stuart et al., 2009; Kuh et al., 2008; Vinson et al., 2010). By undertaking these activities students are more likely to feel that they belong and have membership at their university and as a result student persistence is enhanced.

Previous Action Research Cycles

Previous cycles of action research have informed my action research dissertation. In the initial research cycle of this program (cycle zero), I pulled data that revealed variance in the GPA outcomes across the different recruitment source strata (Appendix A). I learned that international students who were sourced by agents had the lowest average GPA's vis-a-vis international students recruited in other ways. This was particularly true of students who used an INTO agent- regardless of whether that agent was used to help them enroll in a pathway or degree-seeking program. Their GPA versus their organically (null/non-source) recruited peers was .20 lower on average. In this cycle of research, it was important to acknowledge selection bias. Students sourced by INTO agents typically enroll in a pathway program as their first program of study at CSU; whereas other groups are typically enrolled in degree-seeking programs as their first program of study. Using the data from cycle zero, I expanded my research in subsequent cycles to investigate qualitative data through interviews.

After the first cycle of research I built on my problem of practice in cycle one. In this research cycle, I conducted semi-structured interviews with three currently enrolled international students to understand their experiences prior to and during their time at CSU (the interview guide I used is Appendix B). I learned how their home country experiences and their use or lack thereof of third parties shaped their

experience at CSU. Based on their responses, I was very surprised at how interested I became in understanding the students' recruitment journey and how it shaped their feelings as opposed to just looking quantitatively at how well they were performing as measured by their GPAs. I had become intrigued with looking at learning differences and performance based on how a student was sourced to CSU, but the data was telling me I should focus on something different. Powerful themes emerged around uncertainty and trust for these students and as such I brought the dropout and PSSM framework into the center of my research.

While the information and findings from previous cycles was informative, they were narrowly focused on the recruitment process and how I could "train" third parties to be better advisors for the students they served. The reality was that I was not going to be able to affect every third party within one semester so instead I developed an advising intervention to work directly with current students. The intervention focused on first-year students who were recruited by a third-party as well as those who were not.

The last and perhaps most significant piece of the work I did was to collaborate with our Student Success Initiative (SSI) teams and specifically those who advise underrepresented and first-generation populations in the Academic Achievement Center (AAC). From this collaboration, I observed first-hand how they advised their students. SSI holds two meetings throughout a student's first semester and one of those meetings takes place in the students' first forty days. For the students they serve the retention rate is 88%. This is compared to a 78% retention rate for students from the same demographic who do not participate in their advising models ("Retention Study Fall 2018," 2018). The

framework for what happens within the advising sessions is shaped, in part, by PSSM. (refer to Appendix E-H to see the meeting guides). Through these observations, I learned how advisors can approach different populations of students with customized advice that is geared at enhancing their feelings of belonging at CSU.

In summary, my action research questions in previous cycles were aimed at understanding and effecting third party behavior. Though I am still interested in understanding and influencing the behavior of these parties, it is clear through the students' responses and the design of this program that my research questions needed to change focus onto the student experience. In previous cycles, I was able to identify students concerns with CSU and I felt that an advising model focused on enhancing their feeling of belongingness and membership would have the biggest impact on their satisfaction and success while they were here.

Theories Applied. My research aimed to benefit newly enrolled international students at Colorado State University. It was informed by theory, models, and previous research that related to enhancing students' feelings of belonging and membership. The theories work in concert with each other. Agency theory helped us understand the complex relationships and motivations that exist at CSU with its third parties. Dropout model, as described by Tinto, identified the factors that explain students' persistence as well as the institutional factors that need to be in place to make them likely to continue their studies. Studies on belongingness emphasize the importance of connecting students to knowledge, relationships, and support systems and lastly, studies using the PSSM provided a way for me to measure and track

students' feelings of membership throughout the intervention. I believe that these theories and models when used in combination helps us understand and intervene in the problem of practice (refer to Figure 4 below to see how the models/theories build on each other).

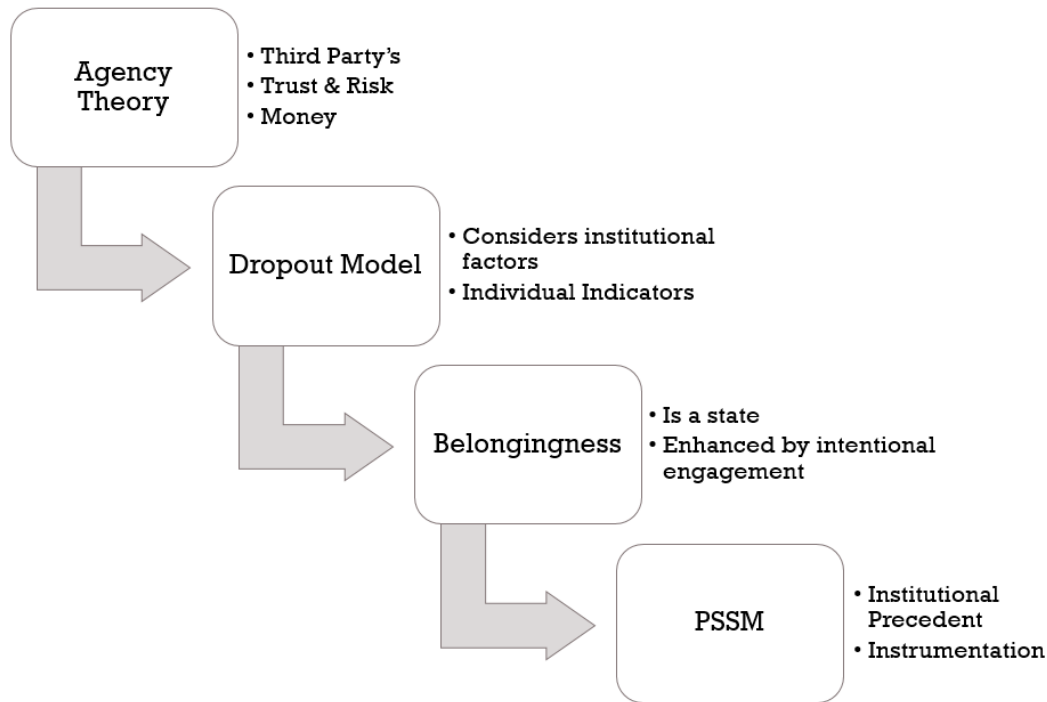


Figure 4. Theories and Research Guiding the Study.

International students face several acclimating obstacles when studying abroad, the biggest challenges center on navigating a new academic and social environment (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010). In the midst of these obstacles, the current and inconsistent issues that reside within our third-party partnerships, in my opinion, were unnecessarily hindering students' transition to CSU. I used mixed method research to measure the impact that my intervention had on international students' feeling of belongingness and membership. Furthermore, the action research measured

differences in students' feelings based on their recruitment source. With this information I identified what components were more effective and what components were less effective in enhancing their satisfaction, success, and persistence for this and future cohorts at CSU.

I completed an advising intervention with first-year students to address a gap in the outreach the OIP has provided to any/all new students. I felt that our lack of advising disproportionately affected students who were sourced to CSU via third parties. To address the problem and the differences among recruitment sources my intervention focused on cultivating students' feelings of belongingness and membership. Through mixed methods the goal of the research was to understand how my advising program enhanced students' feelings of belongingness and membership and if so in which ways.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Overview of Study

The purpose of my action research project was to explore the impact of a semester-long belongingness advising intervention on newly enrolled international students. The research was designed to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How did a semester-long advising program, in the students first-year, enhance international students feeling of membership and belonging at CSU?

RQ1a: What components of the program were more effective and what components were less effective?

RQ2: Based on how students were recruited to CSU, how did they differ in developing feelings of belongingness and membership?

The action research project was completed within my current work environment at CSU. I designed the intervention to incorporate OIP staff that are charged with retention duties. These staff conducted advising sessions with participants in the experimental group and I debriefed the experience with the participants at the end of the semester. Additionally, I interviewed 3rd and 4th year international undergraduate students to gain an understanding of their feelings of belongingness and how they developed it. The study also used the PSSM as a pretest-posttest instrument that was administered online to all participants in the study.

Action Research

Building off of the assumption that educators have not only strong professional expertise, but also particular local knowledge- action research can be defined as a systematic inquiry done by practitioners that have a direct and vested interest in understanding and improving issues within their own settings (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Mertler, 2012; Woodland, 2018). Action research is structured in such a way that the practitioner asks unique questions and seeks solutions to help them investigate and potentially solve their own problems. The research design is cyclical in nature and the practitioner is an active participant in all facets of the research (Fritz, 2014). The practitioner identifies the problem, builds a research plan, then acts on the plan through continuous cycles of research, in the last stage the practitioner reflects on the process (Mertler, 2012).

Action research positions the practitioner as the researcher. The researcher is deeply immersed in the problem and the investigation of it and as such, they are not objective in the study. Action research is a hands-on approach that investigates the gaps between desired and actual outcomes within a given setting (Woodland, 2018). Its strengths are in its flexibility and adaptability to address specific problems. Throughout the cyclical research process, the researcher obtains real-time information that can immediately enhance and shape the outcomes for participants (Brown, Dressler, Eaton, & Jacobsen, 2015).

Mixed Methods

Mixed methods research is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single study (Creswell, 2015) and is often used in action research because it allows researchers to consider problems in more complex ways. Notably,

mixed methods in action research produces more scientifically sound findings by weaving together the practitioner's qualitative engagement methods with outcome-based quantitative approaches (Ivankova & Wang, 2018; Ivankova, 2014). There are a number of different mixed methods designs. For my study, I used a triangulation design as it allowed me to obtain different, but complementary data in regard to my topic (Morse, 1991). Within mixed method triangulation there are numerous approaches. My research used the convergence model as it allows the researcher to compare, confirm, and/or corroborate the results and finding from each method (Creswell, 2005). Additionally, the convergence model allows the researcher to integrate the data throughout the research in order to find corroborative or contradictory results (Creswell, 2005; Caracelli & Greene, 1993).

Mixed methods were appropriate for this study as a single method approach was too limited to address the research questions. The study used a sequential approach and occurred in the following order: quantitative – qualitative – quantitative. The quantitative tools that were used only captured the students' responses at the extreme ends of the intervention - the beginning and end of their first or second semester at CSU. Though useful, this data was not able to provide insight on the students' growth and understanding of membership and belongingness in the ways that qualitative methodology does. By converging both approaches, I was able to achieve a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the themes that developed (Creswell, 2015).

Setting

My research took place on the campus of Colorado State University (CSU) located in Fort Collins, CO. CSU is a Carnegie Tier One research institution that serves approximately 35,000 students. Within that population, there are nearly 2,000 international students from 110 countries. As a large comprehensive university, CSU offers over 100 undergraduate degrees across its eight colleges. Students participated in the research at Laurel Hall, which is home to our Office of International Programs (OIP). Specifically, immigration and retention advisors (referred to in this study as belongingness advisors) intervened with participants in their offices during designated advising appointments.

Participants

Students. All incoming international undergraduate students who enrolled in either the Fall of 2019 or the Spring of 2020 were invited to participate in the study. They were made aware of the study design and their opportunity to participate in the experimental group in all recruitment communications. The differences between the control and experimental group are discussed in the procedure section below.

There were 184 students eligible for the study; 12% participated in some way ($N = 22$). Upon completing the pretest survey all participants were assigned a random two-digit participant ID. Eleven of the pretest participants were students who started their degrees in the Fall of 2019; the remaining eleven participants began their studies in Spring 2020. All participants were degree-seeking international students, fully enrolled in Spring courses (12 or more credit hours). None of the participants had prior degree-seeking enrollment at CSU. The background information for the PSSM Pretest participants are organized in Table 1 by their participant ID, citizenship, and their

recruitment source (Agent, Sponsor, Partner, Non-sourced). Figure 5 below detailed what actions each participant took in the intervention.

Table 1

Participants Background Information

n = 22		
Participant ID	Citizenship	Recruitment Source(s)
70	Saudi Arabia	Sponsor
91	Kuwait	Sponsor & Agent
40	Kuwait	Sponsor
80	United Arab Emirates	Sponsor
28	Oman	Sponsor
13	China	Null
57	China	Partner
78	China	Partner
85	Saudi Arabia	Sponsor
27	China	Partner
35	China	Partner
31	Norway	Agent
99	Vietnam	Null
66	Mexico	Null
45	Oman	Sponsored
42	China	Partner
12	China	Partner

83	China	Partner
47	China	Partner
98	China	Partner
51	China	Partner
55	China	Partner

	70	91	40	80	28	13	57	78	85	27	35	31	99	66	45	42	12	83	47	98	51	55	
PSSM Pretest	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Advising Session #1				X	X		X	X		X				X									X
Advising Session #2				X	X			X		X				X									X
Debriefing Interview				X	X																		X
PSSM Posttest		X		X	X			X		X									X		X	X	

Figure 5. *Intervention Participant Actions.*

The student participants ranged in age from 18-24 years old. Any eligible participant below the age of 18 was not considered. Some participants had transfer credit from other institutions, but students who had previously taken credit-bearing coursework at CSU were not eligible for the study. The study did not consider participants who were in their first-year but taking only English as Second Language (ESL) coursework.

However, three of the participants had successfully completed ESL coursework at INTO CSU and matriculated into their degree-seeking programs in advance of their participation in this study.

The study also recruited three senior international undergraduate students, those in their third or fourth year for interviews. The interviews were focused on getting feedback on what helped them develop a feeling of belongingness at CSU. These students did not participate in the intervention but provided information that informed the belongingness advising sessions. These participants were all purposively selected by me because they were very active and engaged student employees within the Office of International Programs. In addition to their employment in which they assist the office in student outreach, orientation, and campus programming they all had unique backgrounds, which helped me and the belongingness advisors get first hand tips and tools that helped them navigate their first-year at CSU. The information these students shared gave us firsthand accounts of what students can and should be doing early in their academic careers and how to best assist them. In regards to their backgrounds, one participant started as a first-year student here and was sponsored by his government, one participant had transferred to CSU and was unsourced, and the last participant I interviewed started here as a first-year student with an agent.

Role of the Researcher

Over the last four years I worked almost exclusively with international student recruitment and admissions at CSU. My position has oversight of all international undergraduate enrollment and has an active role in graduate recruitment and admissions. It was my observation that disparate recruitment sources led to inequalities on how a

student understood and engaged with CSU. In my experience, the way a student is sourced to CSU may affect which programs they may or may not be enrolled in and how they identify or feel like they belong to CSU. To address these differences, the study considered students recruited from all sources.

Given my role, it was important to acknowledge and consider positionality and bias in my research. As an administrator in international education at CSU, I am considered an insider. An insider researches and investigates their own practice (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This gets me close to the topic at hand and I have a tacit knowledge of the setting. In action research this is often described as the insider-outsider conundrum; the researcher is challenged with balancing their position/power, owning the problem, and representing it accurately (Ivankova, 2014; Herr & Anderson, 2005). To help overcome this potential bias, I used belongingness advisors to conduct the two 1:1 advising sessions. Belongingness advisors do not have any role with admissions so I thought they would be better positioned to discuss belonging and membership topics and that students would be more receptive to their direction.

These considerations are important as participants may have been hesitant to share all of their experiences with me if they felt that I could influence their academic career based on their responses in the 1:1 advising sessions (Paulhus, 1991). Therefore, the belongingness advisors (within the OIP) and their role in this study were integral in controlling bias. It was important that I as the researcher, the belongingness advisors, and the participants had an open mind in this process so that biases did not have undue influence (Charmaz, 2014). While I took these precautions, it is important to acknowledge that bias altogether can hardly be eliminated. All of us brought different

views and backgrounds to the table and none of us were immune to this reality (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007).

Belongingness Advisors. The belongingness advisors are not the student's primary academic advisor as those roles reside within a student's specific department or college. Rather, their typical role in the OIP is to ensure the students are legally compliant throughout the semester based on their student visa status in addition to helping them navigate any challenges they may have with acculturation and university systems. The conversations and needs of each student differ, but the overarching goal of these appointments was to help the student maintain a good standing as an engaged and successful member of the campus-community. My intervention extended their work to focus on enhancing the international students/adviseses' feelings of belongingness and membership at CSU.

Three immigration and retention advisors served as belongingness advisors in the study. These three belongingness advisors conducted 1:1 advising sessions with seven student participants. Each belongingness advisor was assigned participants by me. Two belongingness advisors had two participants each and one belongingness advisor conducted sessions with three advisees. As part of my research and on behalf of the OIP, this team was engaged in assisting the international students' feelings and understandings of belonging and membership how that may enhance their social and academic outcomes.

All of the belongingness advisors have been at CSU for at least two years and are positioned within our international student services team at the Office of International Programs at CSU. As part of their preparation for this intervention, all of the belongingness advisors, in the Fall semester of 2019, completed a training with me that

covered the advising rubric. This allowed the belongingness advisors to see the framework and become aware of its associated resources across campus. In advance of their work and training on retention (as well as this study), all belongingness advisors took an international student recruitment trip in 2019 that allowed them to better understand the variety of different student recruitment sources. The Assistant Director of International Student Services manages the team of belongingness advisors and she allowed the team to assist in the study. The intervention and the timing of these belongingness advisors' actions in the research is detailed in subsequent sections.

Intervention

The intervention was focused on enhancing the feelings of belongingness and membership experienced as first-year international undergraduate students at CSU. In enhancing these feelings, my hypothesis was that students would become more engaged in the academic and campus life at CSU as a result of their participation in my intervention. In other words, the more engaged the students became, the more likely they would demonstrate improved academic performance and hence persistence (Baldrige, Kremerer, & Green, 1982). In order to develop these feelings, students in the experimental group completed a semester-long advising program that directed them towards institutional and personal resources that dropout model and PSSM have identified as critical provisions for students.

For the intervention, the study used belongingness advisors within the Office of International Programs at CSU. They focused on building the students feelings of belongingness, membership, and engagement to CSU. These belongingness advisors conducted semi-structured advising sessions with the participants and assisted them in

completing a written success plan. The study also incorporated feedback from more senior undergraduate students, those in their third or fourth year, to gain a better understanding of how new international students would benefit the most from developing their feelings of belongingness. Quantitatively, the study collected pre and posttest PSSM scores. All first-year undergraduate international students were asked to take the PSSM pretest and posttest (at the beginning and end of the Spring 2020 semester) to establish a control, and a small experimental group participated in the advising sessions (the intervention).

To answer my research questions in this study I used the PSSM scale as the pretest-posttest instrument. The scale is used to understand how students may build or already have a feeling of belongingness, membership, and engagement to the university (Goodenow, 1993). To address these feelings, students participated in a semester-long advising model that was guided and informed by PSSM and dropout models.

The intervention provided two 1:1 advising sessions for participants in the experimental group as well as one group debriefing session. The 1:1 session(s) were 30 to 60 minutes in length and the debriefing interviews with participants were approximately 30 minutes. The first 1:1 advising sessions were all held in person in the Office of International Programs. In advance of the first advising sessions, I shared the pretest survey responses with the belongingness advisors. The belongingness advisors were not given participant names and student ID numbers in advance of their first session. The second 1:1 advising sessions and the debriefing interviews were all conducted and recorded via Zoom. This change was made as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and the inability to hold face to face interactions. Each participant was assigned the same

belongingness advisor for both of their 1:1 meetings in the semester. Their advisor through the use of meeting guides prompted the participants to discuss their academic and social lives and made written notes as well as audio recorded the sessions. Additionally, the participants completed a written student success plan in their first meeting with the assistance of their advisor (Guides and plans are Appendices E-H).

I conducted semi-structured interviews with three senior international students, those in their third or fourth year of study in the United States. These interviews were completed in the fourth week of the Spring Semester. Their input informed the advising sessions that the belongingness advisors facilitated. These interviews were audio-recorded and shared with the belongingness advisors. A guide for these interviews with the senior students is Appendix J. I also led debriefing interviews at the closing of the semester and audio recorded the Zoom meetings. A meeting guide was informed by emergent themes from the 1:1 meetings; it had emphasis on their experience with the intervention and the effects (if any) it had on their engagement (Refer to Appendix I for guide).

Advising Sessions. The guided advising sessions were designed to elicit responses that informed all of the research questions in the study (Appendix F, Appendix H). The semi-structured format was designed to allow the advisor and participant to follow-up on any of the areas and questions within the advising guides. The purpose of the first session, in week 5 or week 6 of the semester, was to build a relationship with the advisee by creating their feeling of belonging, setting expectations, connecting them with student support services, and getting a feel for how the student enters CSU academically, mentally, and socially. These goals were approached holistically by talking with the

student about OIP activities, on-campus tutoring, housing, social and personal relationships, academic goals, and financial aid (refer to Appendix E). An example question was “Tell me about your living situation?” as well as “In what subject(s) might a tutor be most beneficial?” The advisor focused on advocating for and prescribing the student to connect and engage with appropriate campus and community partners throughout the conversation.

In the second advising session of the semester (in Week 11 and 12), the guide prompted the advisor and participant to review current and future academic goals. Additionally, belongingness advisors engaged with participants about planning for finals, their end of semester plans, registering for classes in the next semester, OIP engagement, their social and personal interests, preparations, and concerns (the guide and content is in Appendix H). An example question was “in what ways has tutoring been effective for you this semester?” and/or “What did you learn about the OIP and its programs this semester?”

The semi-structured sessions were held between belongingness advisors and the student. At CSU these sessions, and the model of two meetings in the first semester have proven to increase participants persistence rates in comparison to their peers with similar characteristics. It was appropriate that the belongingness advisors conducted these sessions on my behalf as that team was focused on and trained in providing international student services that relate to retention initiatives. The sessions were made by appointment and conducted in the advisor’s office. I greeted every student participant and physically walked them to their first advising appointments. The sessions were audio recorded and were sent to me for transcription.

Meeting Guides. The “Student Plan for Success” (Appendix G) provided insight into both of the research questions. Students completed this guide during the first advising session with their belongingness advisor and both the belongingness advisor and the student received a copy either physically, in-person, or both depending on the participants preference. This document provided tangible guidance for the student as they navigated the semester. It also gave both the student and the advisor a level of accountability, as it outlined, in writing, the engagements they planned for the semester. Once completed, the belongingness advisors submitted an electronic copy to me. With this information in addition to the notes taken in the “First Appointment Meeting Guide,” (Appendix F) I was able to identify emergent themes (if any) in the participants plans to engage and how we were or were not able to meet their needs. I worked directly with the belongingness advisors to assist them in identifying any resources we felt may enhance the student’s ability to develop a feeling of belonging to CSU at the second meeting.

Between the first and the second advising appointments there were emails exchanges between me and the advisor(s) and between the advisor(s) and their advisees. These emails reviewed the resources that belongingness advisors discussed with students i.e. those that were likely to enhance advisee’s engagement with activities that lead to a feeling of belonging or membership. The emails were specific to the parties involved and I did not have a template for the parties to adhere to. However, belongingness advisors did share notes on the meeting guides when the emails pertained to belongingness and membership. To the greatest extent possible, these notes were verbatim and dated.

The “Second Appointment Meeting Guide” (Appendix H) mirrors the students first appointment and it was used by the belongingness advisors to continue to address

their academic and social realities and concerns at CSU. Additionally, the second meeting guide allowed the advisor to record actions the student has taken throughout the first 11 to 12 weeks of the semester in fulfilling their Plans for Success worksheet (Appendix G). By recording this information, they worked with the student to identify areas where they have been successful in their “Student Plan for Success” (Appendix G) and where there were still opportunities for the student to engage before the end of their semester.

Data Sources and Collection

Debriefing Interview. Conducting a debriefing interview after the completion of the advising sessions allowed me to ask about emergent trends in the advising session data. Knowing what had been identified by these sessions as well as the PSSM pretest allowed me to develop a set of guiding questions that contributed to a better understanding of how the intervention impacted their feeling of belongingness and membership at CSU (Appendix I). Having the interview near the end of the study also allowed for a debriefing of the study. I was able to give participants further information about the results, allow them to ask questions, and thank them for their participation (Salkind, 2010).

PSSM Questionnaire. PSSM is an 18-item questionnaire with a 3-point response format that was delivered to students via online survey. Students were asked to respond to a statement, by identifying how they feel. The answer choices for how they felt in response to the statement were “Never,” “Sometimes,” or “Always” (the questionnaire is Appendix D). The same test was administered to the students prior to and after they had completed the advising appointments. The PSSM scale was used to answer both research questions.

Procedure

In the Spring of 2020 after receiving Institutional Review Board approval at both Arizona State University and Colorado State University I emailed all newly enrolled undergraduate students the PSSM pretest survey. The questionnaire was used to understand their opinion, attitudes, or characteristics of belongingness and membership by asking and tabulating their responses to the prompts (Creswell, 2005; Mertler, 2017). All eligible students were asked to take the PSSM pretest and were made aware via the consent form that there were additional opportunities to participate further in the study. After participants completed the PSSM pretest, student participants for the experimental group were selected via convenience sampling. To attract participants I sent out emails and printed out class schedules to identify where large populations were enrolled and contacted these students after their classes. The type of sampling used in this study restricted the representativeness of participants (Henry, 1990).

Initially, the invitation to participate was directed to those who were classified as freshman and beginning their first semester of degree-seeking study in the Spring of 2020. Due to low response rate, I expanded the sampling pool to include transfer students for the Spring 2020 semester. This approach did not significantly increase the participation rate, so I expanded to students who started in the Fall of 2019. For the entire population, I closed the survey after two weeks and after receiving 22 valid responses. Eleven of the responses were from students who started in the Fall of 2019 and eleven were from students who started in Spring 2020.

In week four of the Spring semester I also met with three international students who were more senior in their class standing at CSU. These students were all employees

of our office, so I scheduled an interview with them during their regular working hours. These students completed a written consent form and interviewed with me for approximately 20 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. I shared the audio recordings and the analysis with all of the belongingness advisors in advance of their first 1:1 advising appointments with the experimental group participants.

To obtain an experimental group I used convenience sampling. This type of sampling gave the best opportunity to garner participation. However, it severely limited my ability to obtain a representative population, which restricts the ability to generalize the research findings (Lavrakas, 2008). I initiated contact with participants and asked them to join the experimental group. This likely led to self-selection bias as participants decided for themselves if they wanted to participate and in doing so it was likely based on their predisposition of the topic or the researchers (Lavrakas, 2008). In late January, I also reached out to our sponsors and partner institutions by phone to help encourage their students to participate in the experimental group.

Self-selected participants comprised the experimental group. As a participant in the experimental group they consented to a pre and posttest as well as two one-on-one meetings and a debriefing throughout the Spring semester. As participants their opportunities for sharing and providing feedback throughout the semester on their feelings of belonging, membership, and engagement was greater than their peers. In education, the pretest-posttest design is employed when an intervention is being used to determine the effectiveness of a program (Frey, 2018). The design is typically used when the researcher is seeking a positive change in outcomes (Frey, 2018). In my research, this

method allowed me to evaluate differences between the experimental group participants (based on their recruitment source) as well as against the control group.

Other than the pretest-posttest online survey, the study's initial design was to complete all of the advising and group interviews face to face. However, in response to the coronavirus pandemic, CSU moved all students to online instruction as of March 14, 2020. In response, the second advising sessions for students and the debriefing interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Timeline. Participants were recruited electronically and in-person. To identify the appropriate population, I worked with an IT Analyst and SEVIS Manager in the OIP and the Statistical Analyst in the Office of Admissions. Electronic recruitment was done via email in the Spring of 2020. In-person recruitment for all groups was done during the first weeks of class in January of 2020. Recruitment for the experimental group was completed in person and online during weeks three and four of the Spring Semester. All eligible students who volunteered to participate filled the PSSM as a pretest during weeks two through four of the semester. In week four, I interviewed the more senior international students. In weeks 5 or 6, participants in the experimental group completed their first advising appointment with their belongingness advisor. Participants' second meeting with their belongingness advisor took place in week 11 or 12 in the semester. In week 14, all participants in the experimental group participated in a virtual group discussion facilitated by me. During this session, participants reflected on their experiences in the intervention. After that meeting concluded, in week 14 and onwards until the end of the semester, all participants, in both the experimental and control group, were asked to complete the PSSM as a posttest.



Figure 6. *Spring Semester 2020 Intervention Timeline.*

Data Collection Resources

Demographic data. Students were informed that their citizenship, age, gender, and recruitment source was collected as part of the online PSSM questionnaire.

Quantitative data. The research has one quantitative data source. This study utilized the PSSM scale that has been adapted for higher education audiences (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). The intervention collected and measured participant responses on the pretest-posttest PSSM questionnaire. The questionnaire was comprised of 18 questions. The data collected from this source helped answer research question 2 (RQ2): “Based on how students are recruited to CSU, how did they differ in developing feelings of belongingness and membership?”

Qualitative Data. The most common sources of qualitative data are derived from interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2002). In my research, qualitative data was collected from the following sources: audio-recorded senior international student interviews, audio-recorded advising sessions, advisor meeting guide notes, student success plans, and the semi-structured debriefing interview.

Audio Recorded Senior International Student Interviews. These semi-structured interviews were audio recorded. I transcribed verbatim, and coded, any responses that

related directly to membership and belongingness. The data collected from this source informed the 1:1 advising sessions. These recorded interviews were shared with the belongingness advisors in advance of their 1:1 advising sessions. The data from these interviews helped answer research question 1 (RQ1): “How did a semester-long advising program enhance international students feeling of membership and belonging at CSU?”

Audio Recorded Advising Sessions. One-to-one advising sessions between belongingness advisors and participants in the experimental group were audio recorded. I listened to and reflected on these tapes by taking written field notes. I transcribed verbatim any responses that related directly to membership and belongingness and coded for emergent themes. These recordings and transcriptions helped answer all of the research questions.

Meeting Guides and Student Plans. During the students first 1:1 advising appointments in week five or week six (students’ first 40 days) of the Spring semester, the student with the assistance of their Belongingness Advisor completed the “Student Plan for Success” worksheet (Appendix G). During the appointment the advisor also completed and took notes on the “First Appointment Meeting Guide” (Appendix F). In the students second 1:1 advising appointment in week 11 of the Spring Semester the advisor completed and took notes on the “Second Appointment Meeting Guide” (Appendix H). These recordings and transcriptions helped answer all of the research questions. The data collected was coded for emergent themes and informed the debriefing interview guide.

Debriefing Interviews – Advising Reflection. A debriefing interview was used in combination with other data gathering research methods because it allowed me to get an

additional view of the problem of practice (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2004). The format was loose in structure and involved me asking questions about the students' experience and outcomes with the intervention (Fontana & Frey, 1994). It also provided students an opportunity to learn more about the process and purpose of the study (Salkind, 2010). Lastly, the participants were able to share ideas on where the study was confusing or could be improved. The interviews, facilitated by me and conducted with participants in the experimental group, took place at the completion of the 1:1 advising and prior to the PSSM Posttest and was audio-recorded. The interviews were transcribed, and emergent themes relating to membership and belongingness were coded. This data source helped answer all of the research questions, but specifically it answered research question 1a (RQ1a): "What components of the program were more effective and what components were less effective?"

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

This research study sought to better understand how students' feelings of belongingness and membership were impacted as a result of their participation in a semester-long advising intervention. This research also examined what elements of the intervention were more effective in enhancing students' feelings of belongingness. Lastly, the research compared students by their recruitment sources to see if their feelings of belongingness and/or membership differed. In the following sections I present how I conducted my quantitative data analysis, the results of the quantitative data, the qualitative data analysis, the results of the qualitative data, and the impact the findings had in affirming my research questions. The research questions were:

- RQ1: How did a semester-long advising program, in the students first-year, enhance international students feeling of membership and belonging at CSU?
- RQ1a: What components of the program were more effective and what components were less effective?
- RQ2: Based on how students were recruited to CSU, how did they differ in developing feelings of belongingness and membership?

Data Analysis and Results

Data analysis was focused on meaning-making of the data (Flick, 2014). I, as the practitioner researcher sought to arrive at generalizable themes by comparing all of the materials produced within the study (Flick, 2014). This process involved data collection

and organization, generating themes, coding, testing emergent understandings, searching for alternative explanations, and synthesizing the findings in a written report (Lee & Lee, 1999). The data analysis for this study described what happened to participants throughout their first-semester experience at CSU and provided an explanation of the different student indicators and institutional resources that influenced their feelings of belongingness and membership. My qualitative data collection focused on gathering subjective experiences that were derived from advising sessions and debriefing interviews. My quantitative data analysis focused on descriptive statistics derived from the PSSM surveys.

A visual of my data collection process is in Figure 7. The figure briefly outlines the contents of my intervention, the sequence, the population, and the analysis.

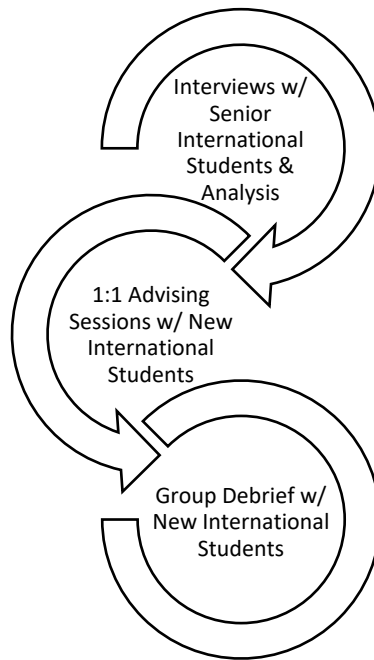


Figure 7. *Qualitative Research & Analysis Roadmap.*

Rigor, Validity, and Trustworthiness

My action research project used a mixed method design. This design was necessary, as I felt my previous cycles of research failed to effectively utilize, understand, and triangulate my data in the ways in which mixed methods can (Ivankova, 2014). By considering four qualitative and one quantitative data source my research had multiple indicators to help me triangulate the findings. By triangulating my data (converging sources) I built a more complete understanding of the phenomena (Frey, 2018).

Triangulation as well as member checking conveyed trustworthiness in my findings (Frey, 2018). My research also had evidence-based validity that was derived from intrusive advising interventions at CSU – intrusive advising involves early and proactive outreach to new students (Bradburn & Carroll, 2002; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Vinson, et al., 2010). Evidence based validity is realized when a test or intervention correlates with changes in behavior or attitude (Miller et al., 2013). The intrusive advising programs at CSU have been shown to increase academic performance and retention amongst student participants (refer to page 44 for an overview of outcomes). With these precedents in mind I constructed my research.

Previous implementations of the PSSM questionnaire have proven to be both valid and reliable in the higher education setting to measure students' feelings of membership and belonging. (Alkan, 2016; Pittman and Richmond, 2008; Kane, Chalcraft, & Volpe, 2014). The PSSM generated quantitative data. Because of my low response rate, I elected to use descriptive statistics to measure the relationships between and within the experimental and control group results. Descriptive statistics was an appropriate tool for my research because of its acceptability for small sample sizes and

for its ability to succinctly summarize information (Coolidge, 2012; Fisher & Marshall, 2008). I used and analyzed the descriptive statistics to identify mean values in participant responses, their variance(s) based on the pretest and posttest, and their dispersion or deviation based on the intervention (Shi & McLarty, 2009).

For qualitative analysis, I identified themes and created assertions that emerged from the advising sessions (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). During the debriefing interviews, I had an opportunity to discuss the themes I had identified from the sessions as well as give the students opportunities to expand and share their reflections. This sequential method allowed me to confirm, triangulate, and build depth in the findings. Lastly, I conducted member checks with both the belongingness advisors and the experimental group participants after all of the data was collected to confirm an accurate interpretation of the responses (Lietz et al., 2006). Checking and validating my assertions of the data provided transparency in the study and built trust in the findings.

Quantitative Analysis Process

To evaluate the effectiveness of the advising sessions with the pretest and posttest instrument (PSSM), I used descriptive statistics. The instrument measured and scored the responses on an ordinal level - which scores participant responses on a hierarchal order (Fisher & Marshall, 2008). On the ordinal scale, 3 = always, 2 = sometimes, and 1 = never. The descriptive statistics include frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations to analyze the data. This design allowed me to measure differences in the pretest and posttest PSSM results for both the experimental group participants (based on their recruitment source strata) as well as against the control group. There were 15 students in the control group and the experimental group was comprised of 7 participants.

With such a small number of participants in the research, having more students in the control group enhanced the statistical precision for the group as it allowed me to obtain the best possible estimates in my findings (Cohen, 1988).

In the pretest-posttest PSSM analysis I developed four different constructs. The constructs replicated much of the research done by Ye and Wallace (2014) and that of Alkan (2016). I replicated the constructs formulated by these authors because my sample size was too small to develop my own constructs through exploratory factor analysis, (de Winter et al., 2009). The constructs were as follows: 1) identification and participation in university activities (6 items), 2) perception of fitting in among classmates (5 items), 3) generalized connection(s) to their professors (4 items), and 4) acceptance by faculty members (3 items) (Alkan, 2016; Ye & Wallace, 2014). The items in each construct are listed in Appendix K. Items 3, 6, 9, 12, and 16 in the survey were negatively-worded items; and, as such, they were reversed coded so that higher scores indicated a stronger sense of school membership. I used SPSS to analyze and present the data.

Results for Quantitative Data

The results of the quantitative portion of the study are presented below. In Table 2, I present the reliability of the PSSM pretest survey across each construct for all participants ($N = 22$). I also present the pretest ($N = 22$) and posttest ($N = 8$) means and standard deviations for the PSSM survey by question (Table 3); then by constructs (Table 4). In Table 5, I compare the posttest PSSM means between the experimental group ($N = 5$), participants that completed the pretest survey, the 1:1 advising sessions, and posttest to the control group ($N = 3$). Lastly, Table 6 compares PSSM survey results by recruitment source type. In light of the small sample size in my survey, I only used and

presented descriptive statistics. As a reminder, Table 1 and Figure 5 in the previous chapter provide an overview of the participants citizenship, recruitment source, as well as the activities they completed as participants in the intervention.

Reliability of the PSSM Instrument. Prior to mean and standard deviation analysis, I used SPSS to identify Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficients for each factor under examination. Reliability can be defined as an assessment of the degree of consistency between multiple measurements of a variable (Hair et al., 2006). In the table below, the reliabilities indices are presented for each of the four constructs within the Pretest PSSM survey ($N = 22$). The sample size was too small ($N = 8$) in the Posttest survey to calculate Cronbach’s Alpha.

Table 2

Cronbach Alpha Reliabilities of Pretest PSSM Survey

PSSM Constructs	Pre-Advising
Participation in University	.76
Activities	
Fitting in with Classmates	.69
Connection to Professors	.54
Acceptance by Faculty	.17

The alpha scores across the four constructs varied significantly. A .65 reliability coefficient ($\alpha \geq .65$) can be considered with moderate reliability in consideration of the survey instrument only having a three item Likert scale and studies small sample size (Hinton et al., 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013; Vaske, 2008). Only two of my constructs,

“Participation in University Activities” and “Fitting in with Classmates” met this standard. With low reliability coefficients in the other two constructs, I did not consider them for analysis.

While the “Connection to Professors” and “Acceptance by Faculty” constructs did not meet the desired reliability index, it is worth noting that items 2, 5, and 15 (from within those constructs) had some of the highest positive mean variations of any/all items in the posttest survey (+0.47, +0.45, +0.52). The results of these items suggest participants responded people on-campus noticed when they were good at something, the instructors became more interested in them throughout the semester, and people on-campus knew they could do good work.

The means and standard deviations for all of the questions in the PSSM survey are presented in Table 3. The data is derived from a three-point Likert-scale survey based on student’s levels of agreements with the questions. Negatively worded questions have been reversed scored. Of the 18 questions there were gains in agreement on 15 of them.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations for PSSM by Question

Questions	Pretest Survey <i>N</i> = 22		Posttest Survey <i>N</i> = 8	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. I feel like a real part of CSU.	2.14	0.56	2.50	.54
2. People at CSU notice when I’m good at something.	1.91	0.43	2.38	.52

3. It is hard for people like me to be accepted at CSU.	2.41	0.59	2.63	.52
4. Other students at CSU take my opinions seriously.	2.27	0.77	2.75	.46
5. Most instructors at CSU are interested in me.	2.18	0.59	2.63	.52
6. Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong at CSU.	2.55	0.60	2.88	.35
7. There's at least one instructor or staff member at CSU I can talk to if I have a problem.	2.73	0.55	3.00	.00
8. People at CSU are friendly to me.	2.77	0.43	3.00	.00
9. Instructors at CSU are not interested in people like me.	2.73	0.46	2.88	.35
10. I am included in lots of activities at CSU.	1.77	0.75	1.88	.64
11. I am treated with as much respect as other students.	2.77	0.43	2.63	.74
12. I feel very different from most other students at CSU.	2.00	0.62	2.00	.00
13. I can really be myself at CSU.	2.59	0.67	3.00	.00
14. The instructors at CSU respect me.	2.91	0.29	3.00	.00
15. People at CSU know I can do good work.	2.36	0.66	2.88	.35
16. I wish I were at a different school.	2.45	0.60	2.75	.46
17. I feel proud of belonging to CSU.	2.64	0.49	2.50	.76

18. Other students here at CSU like the way I am. 2.36 0.49 2.25 .46

The means and standard deviations for “Participation in University Activities” and “Fitting in with Classmates” constructs, as measured in the PSSM survey, are presented in Table 4. Both of these constructs gained in participants levels of agreement. The direction of the gains was positive (+0.16 and +0.25, respectively).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for PSSM by Construct

PSSM Constructs	Pretest		Posttest	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Participation in University Activities	2.26	.60	2.42	.46
Fitting in with Classmates	2.48	.59	2.73	.29

In Table 5, I calculated the means for both the experimental group and the control group in the PSSM Posttest Survey. The difference is shown by construct. The experimental group had higher means than the control group in all constructs. The largest variance in mean scores between the two groups (+0.20) was in the “Fitting in with Classmates” construct. The smallest difference (+0.13) between the two groups means score was in the “Participation in University Activities” construct.

Table 5

Mean Comparison for PSSM Posttest by Group

PSSM Constructs	Control Group (<i>N</i> = 3)	Experimental Group (<i>N</i> = 5)
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>
Participation in University Activities	2.34	2.47
Fitting in with Classmates	2.60	2.80
All Constructs	2.47	2.64

The pretest control group was comprised of sixteen students. The group consisted of:

- Four government sponsored students,
- One student who was recruited by both a sponsor and a commissioned based agent,
- Eight partner students who were recruited by a third-party,
- One student who was recruited by a commission-based agent, and
- Two students who did not use a third-party (null).

Of the sixteen students in the pretest control group only three completed the posttest. The three students who completed the posttest were from partner schools and the other student was recruited by both a sponsor and a commissioned based agent.

The pretest experimental group was comprised of six students. Five of the six were recruited from third parties. Two of the students were recruited by a government sponsor, three were partner students, and one had no third-party source (null). All of the

students in the pretest experimental group also completed the posttest except for the student with no third-party source (null).

In Table 6, I calculated the survey means for participants in the experimental group by recruitment source. Because of the low number of participants, students from partners, agents, and sponsors were aggregated (via recoding in SPSS) into one group and were labeled “third-party”. Participants in the study who did not use a third-party were listed as null “recruitment” source. The experimental group had six ($n = 6$) students take the pretest and five ($n = 5$) complete the posttest. The control group had sixteen students in the pretest ($n = 16$) and three completed the posttest ($n = 3$).

Table 6

Mean Comparison by Recruitment Source

Recruitment Source	Pretest		Posttest	
	Control Group $N = 16$ M	Experimental Group $N = 6$ M	Control Group $N = 3$ M	Experimental Group $N = 5$ M
Third-Party	2.40	2.61	2.50	2.72
Non-sourced	2.05	2.39	-	-

Within the third-party recruitment sourced students grouping, those in the experimental group had higher means in both the pretest (+0.11) and posttest surveys (+0.22) when compared to the control group. However, the direction of both groups was positive and there was only a slight difference (+0.01) between the control and experimental group gains. Regardless of the group, third-party students also had higher means in the pretest (2.40, 2.61) than the null sourced students for both the experimental

(2.39) and control groups (2.05). Regrettably, no null sourced students completed the posttest.

The results of the Posttest survey for third-party recruitment source, within the experimental group, revealed many similarities as well as one notable difference. In the Posttest all of the participants responded that they **always** felt like they belonged, had a staff member they could talk too, felt people were friendly to them, could be themselves, and felt their instructors respected them. Conversely, **none** of the participants, regardless of recruitment source, felt they were always noticed when they were good at something. In terms of difference, two of the three partner students responded that instructors were **never or only sometimes** interested in them, while the government sponsored students both responded that the instructors were **always** interested in them. Lastly, within the posttest control group it is worth noting that student 91 had a decrease in their mean score (-0.11) when compared to their pretest.

Summary. Inferences from the quantitative results should be made with caution. Low response rates and the reduced number of constructs (due to low reliability coefficients) limit the ability to discern the impact of the findings. The posttest means for both the control group and experimental groups show movement in a positive direction. The differences between the two groups was negligible with only a 0.01 mean variation. The PSSM Survey indicated that participants in the experimental group entered and completed the study with higher mean scores. Thus, they were more likely to respond positively when answering questions in both the pretest and posttest administrations. The positive response rates in the experimental group were true of all participants regardless of their recruitment source. Whereas, in the control group one participant had a drop in

their mean score while the other two measured increases. Regrettably, comparisons against the control group by recruitment source were limited in the pretest and not possible in the posttest.

Qualitative Analysis Process

In the analysis process, I compiled the transcripts from the audio-recorded interviews, advising sessions, and debriefing interviews and interpreted the content for meaning-making (Saldaña, 2015; Schreier, 2014). Meaning making involved a cognitive and emotional processing that helped me interpret, understand, and thematize the data in relation to my research questions (Saldaña, 2015). Researchers and participants alike cannot control their cultural or historical predispositions in data analysis (Freeman et al., 2007); but to the best of my ability I presented the interview responses in their own words and sought to understand the participants current state, their experiences, and their observation of the world (Holme & Rangel, 2012). My analysis took these responses and built an understanding of the phenomenon with an emphasis on answering the “what”, “why”, and “how” (Remenyi, 2014) of the living moment (Given, 2008) through the development of themes, categories and assertions (Schreier, 2014).

I had multiple data sources from which to build, confirm, and verify my analysis. The documents collected (advisor meeting guide notes and student success plans) were key to building and verifying the interview transcripts and all of these documents were analyzed through the development of codes. Developing codes was an essential piece of my process as it reduced the amount of data my study had produced (Gibbs, 2007). Codes are data points, often developed by counting recurring instances of words or phrases in the material (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These codes assist the researcher to identify key

categories or themes within the qualitative sources (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I then grouped the codes together into categories, which involved converging similar codes into chunks or units that represent a similar phenomenon (Spiggle, 1994). With the data sources placed into categories I then reviewed for similar meanings and developed themes to encompass them. From the themes, I then interpreted the meaning and significance of the findings to make inferences/assertations about the data (Willig, 2014).

My multiple data sources when converged allowed me to develop a more complete understanding of the phenomena. I incorporated the views of different participants, senior international students as well as new international students, and engaged with them regarding their feelings of belongingness. These engagements were done with different instruments, in different platforms, and completed by different interviewers. For example, 1:1 sessions with belongingness advisors were held face to face and/or virtually (via Zoom) within a belongingness advisors office setting while the individual virtual debriefings were conducted by Zoom with me.

My research design involved data collection and analysis happening simultaneously (Merriam, 2009). I collected data from senior international students to inform my intervention. The week of February 10, 2020 I completed and recorded three face-to-face interviews with more senior international students; I used my researcher-developed interview guide. I audio recorded the interviews on my phone and took field notes. The recordings were then transcribed. With both the transcriptions of the recordings and my field notes I read and sorted the text for significant statements. These statements included the importance that more senior students placed on utilizing advising resources, befriending their residential assistants, and using the health center. To help

prepare the belongingness advisors for their first meetings with newly enrolled students I held a short meeting in which I shared the significant statements captured from my interviews with more senior students and also shared redacted audio recordings of all three interviews with the belongingness advisors.

The belongingness advising sessions (between participants in the experimental group and their belongingness advisors), conducted in February and April, resulted in 295 pages of transcriptions. As I read through the transcripts, I began tallying the experiences that students were having in response to my research questions. I had a particular interest in experiences that related directly to the participants' feelings of membership and belonging. Specifically, I looked for topics in the transcripts where students talked positively about fitting in with CSU faculty, relationships with their peers, and participating in activities. I also tallied areas in the transcripts where students talked about their challenges with adjusting to life at CSU, which included making friends, keeping up with assignments, and acculturating to life in the U.S. This tallying was done via highlighting in Microsoft Word and writing comments in the margins. After completing this preliminary analysis, I went back through the transcripts and began to develop initial categories and codes (Merriam, 2009; Schreier, 2014). This involved writing simple words/phrases for my highlighted text such as "Friends", "Faculty", "Belonging" and others. Codes were grouped to look for regularities in the data and redundant codes were removed (Creswell, 2015). I coded inductively and grouped codes to develop themes. Categories were derived from the initial codes and consolidated based on their similarities. I then placed the categories into themes. Figure 8, below, provides an

example of how “Support Systems” was identified as a theme through the development of a category and the codes that informed it.

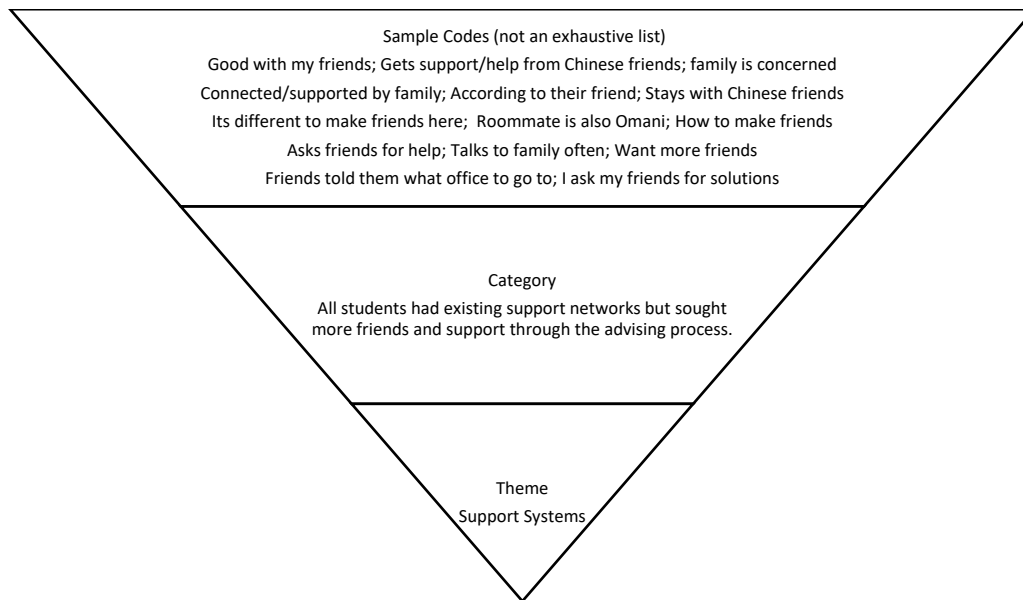


Figure 8. *How Support Systems Emerged as a Theme.*

Figure 9, below, provides an overview of how I processed the qualitative data and reduced the material into three themes.

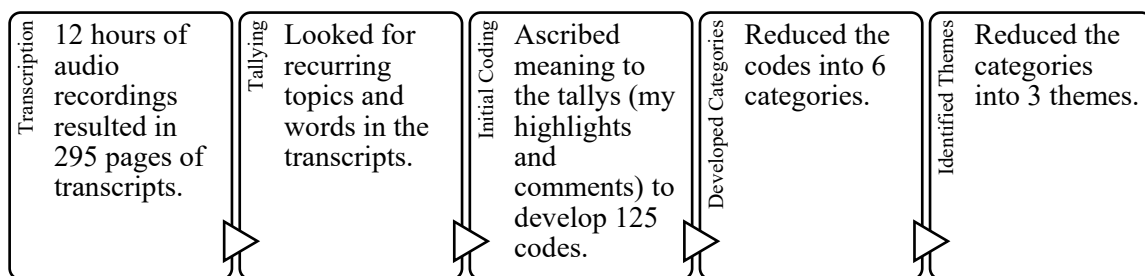


Figure 9. *Qualitative Data Processing.*

Data collection and analysis was ongoing in my research. The advising sessions, as described above, produced data that were collected and analyzed to inform the debriefing interviews at the end of the semester. In reading the transcripts, I noted that the advising sessions provided the participants with lots of information about engaging with

on-campus staff, faculty, resources, and peers. Furthermore, the transcripts revealed that participants were able to develop new and meaningful relationships with the belongingness advisors as well as other members of the campus community. I used the debriefing interviews, in part, to confirm these assertions. I did this by asking the students directly about their experience with the belongingness advisors and whether their interactions were positive or not. I also confirmed with students' about the steps in their action plans they were able to execute. I also used the debriefing interview to learn more about the students' recruitment experiences and how actions taken during or as a result of the intervention related directly to their feelings of belongingness and membership. I wanted to know more about these two areas as I felt they were lacking in the transcripts from the advising sessions and could enhance my understanding of the problem of practice. Lastly, I asked more questions about the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of the belongingness advisors and the overall program.

Once I had the transcriptions of the three debriefing interviews, I used the same inductive process described in Figure 8. I then compiled all of my qualitative data and analyzed the materials to develop themes. My analysis focused on saturation of the data. Saturation is a deductive process in which categories are consolidated and regularities emerge via coding to the point where no new information is obtained (Given, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once each data source was saturated, I compared the categories, created themes, and made inferences/assertation that were specific to their relationship with the research questions (Creswell, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1997; Saldana, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, I inferred from the data that knowledge building, relationship building, and support systems were the three most emergent themes in my

analysis. The themes, the categories that comprised them, and my assertions of how they related to the data and my research questions are presented in the table below (Table 7).

Table 7

Themes, Categories, and Assertions from Qualitative Data

<i>Themes & Categories</i>	<i>Assertions</i>
<p><i>Knowledge Building</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students asked lots of questions about CSU resources and the belongingness advisors were key in their knowledge acquisition. 2. Students were able to get real time help regarding immigration. 3. Students developed and focused on fulfilling their “plan for success” to enhance their knowledge. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students engaged more with campus resources when they were given the knowledge and plans on how to do so.
<p><i>Relationship Building</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Belongingness advisors encouraged students. 2. Students highlighted having more connections with staff/faculty. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Students wanted to build more and deeper relationships with other students; as well as faculty/staff.
<p><i>Support Systems</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All students had existing support networks but sought more friends and support through the advising process. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Students wanted to grow their support networks on campus to enhance their feelings of belongingness and membership.

Results for Qualitative Data

Recruitment Experiences. Before discussing the themes, categories, and assertions there is value in understanding the recruitment experience of the participants in the experimental group. The participants were from partner institutions, government sponsors, and null sources. The following insights help contextualize how they all learned about and were recruited to CSU, which may in part, have affected how they approached knowledge building, relationship building, and support systems once they were here. Additionally, I have shared a couple of quotes and examples of how the students felt they belonged at CSU upon arriving.

Each student in the experimental group had unique recruitment experiences. Differences emerged in their recruitment stories. They shared their experience(s) with the recruitment process and what motivated them to study in the USA. For some, learning about the institution was simply following the direction of their government sponsors. For others, the motivation was to obtain a specific degree. In this section, I highlight how students engaged with others, third parties, friends, family, to learn about CSU resources.

For partner students in the experimental group the decision-making process on attending CSU was straight forward. Student 55, 78, and 27 were all partner students from China and worked with their international offices to get approved to study at CSU. Student 55 shared that they found out about CSU via their former's school's website. They saw that we were a partner institution and at that point, their decision was made. They stated, "I kind of felt like I don't have a choice. [laughs]" When I asked them why they felt that way, they followed up with, "CSU is best because it's the only University [that] can provide me some scholarship and maybe it's something my best opportunity because I can get two degrees, one for this university and one from my previous

university. If I choose another university with, I was like, "Stanford first." I cannot get another degree, you know." While financial and dual-degree incentives were key to their decision to attend CSU, Student 55 and 27 shared that they had little knowledge initially about the university and its resources. In particular, they would have liked to have known more about orientation activities and choosing classes (advising) prior to and very early in their enrollment process. They added that they got to know more about the school once they were admitted and started getting excited about coming here after they received messages from the Office of Admissions and were able to compare CSU to their home universities.

Colorado State University (CSU) worked with a government sponsor to recruit and enroll Student 80 from the United Arab Emirates. The student talked about studying in the US and pursuing the government sponsorship as a result of their desire to leave their country to get a specific degree. They stated, "Higher education for example, maybe for me data science isn't really available back home. That's my major. I had to find a university that had data science and was suitable for me." In my debrief, they shared that family and their sponsor influenced their decision to attend CSU.

When I asked Student 28, a government sponsored student from Oman, about how they came to enroll at CSU we had a robust exchange about their personal preferences and the influence their sponsor had on their recruitment experience. They applied and were selected by their government to study in the USA. This was based on their good grades. Because of their qualifications they shared they were given "a list of 40 universities...They're all pretty good universities as well. I remember some places like Florida, Arizona, Kansas, New York... we have about 2 weeks to pick 5 choices". They

considered their options and choose CSU as their first pick and were awarded the spot by their sponsor. The choice to attend CSU was, in part, based on the climate (wanting to see snow and being afraid of snakes) as well as peer support. The student shared they had both a cousin and a friend that were already here from the same sponsor and told them “CSU an amazing university, you'll love it.”

Even with familial support Student 28 shared there were still some challenges upon arriving at CSU. They shared, “So when I first came to the university, of course, I was a bit hesitant talking to teachers, supervisors, and such.” Student 28 talked openly about being shy and not working on making new connections prior to the intervention, but when they saw the recruitment email about the intervention they thought “I got nothing to lose.”

Student 66, from Mexico, did not use a third-party (null source). They navigated the recruitment process mostly on their own. They came from a demanding curriculum school in Mexico and learned about CSU with some assistance from their guidance counselor. They selected CSU because of a specific degree and the opportunity to receive a merit-based scholarship. She shared that not coming with a third-party as well as being from a country that was underrepresented on our campus made her “feel out of place sometimes because it's like-- am I American enough to be with the Americans? Am I Asian enough to be with the Asian students? I don't know. Sometimes, it's cool having different types of friends but not -- I don't feel like I have a specific place where I belong.”

Who and how assisted students in their recruitment process at CSU is an important backdrop for my study. It helps understand how the student entered the

university and gives us insight into who they may or may not have been able to rely on in building their feelings of belonging and membership. The null sourced student navigated the recruitment process mostly on their own, the partner students got some assistance and approval from their home universities, while the sponsored student's recruitment and placement were ultimately decided by their government(s).

Knowledge Building. *Assertion 1 - Students engaged more with campus resources when they were given the knowledge and plans on how to do so.* Students were often asked by their belongingness advisors if they had any questions or concerns about campus resources. This was inclusive of financial resources, academics, tutoring, social media use, extracurricular involvement, housing and components of campus life. Their responses in the advising sessions and in the debriefing interview resulted in my assertion that when they knew more, they engaged more. This assertion was informed by the following categories: (1) Students asked lots of questions about CSU resources and the belongingness advisors were key in their knowledge acquisition. (2) Students were able to get real time help regarding immigration; (3) Students developed and focused on fulfilling their "plan for success" to enhance their knowledge.

Knowledge Building: *Students asked lots of questions about CSU resources and the belongingness advisors were key in their knowledge acquisition.* In the advising sessions and debriefing interviews, students responded and shared what they did and did not know about CSU. The students asked questions about resources that could enhance both their academic and personal lives. They asked questions related to scholarships, job opportunities, and sought information and resources on summer courses. In these exchanges the advisors were key in their knowledge acquisition as they answered the

student's questions and directed them towards resources that aimed at building students' knowledge about CSU.

Students asked their belongingness advisors about possible scholarships and job opportunities. Student 55 asked their belongingness advisor about the availability of additional scholarships. They shared their doubts about what they were eligible for and how to find the information. Their advisor directed them towards our CSU directory of scholarships, and they made an application for these scholarships part of their plan for success. Likewise, Student 27 shared with their belongingness advisor that they did not know where to start when looking for a job or scholarship. When asking about working on campus they stated, "Can I ask you or do I need to go ask the career center?" The advisor responded, "... The best resource is the career center. They're the experts. I can give you non-expert advice. But if you want expert advice, the career center is really good. They are doing virtual advising like this. Have you ever been to the career center in the students' center before?" To which the student responded "No". As the conversation flowed another question emerged about their personal finances and scholarship. Student 27 stated, "I just have a little question about my scholarship...so the first semester we will get \$4,000? I want to ask if we can apply (for) more scholarships, if we can do it or not." The advisor recognized this was a partner scholarship and gave the following advice, "So you have a partner student discount... there might be organizations or other avenues that might be able to provide you with scholarship funding...we have a link on our website that has international student scholarships, I'll show it to you." Giving students the opportunity to talk about their financial and employment options created

opportunities for the belongingness advisors to share and direct them towards important resources that built their knowledge.

Students also sought knowledge from the belongingness advisors about their enrollment options. Enrollment in summer courses became a topic of questions especially as it related to the impacts it might have on their immigration status. Student 55 asked if taking summer courses would allow them to graduate earlier while Student 27 wanted to know if there was a cap on how many courses they could take. Respectively, their belongingness advisors informed them it was likely they could graduate sooner and that there was no cap on how many classes they could take. In both instances the students were reminded by the belongingness advisors that there were no immigration requirements that required them to be enrolled in the summer. In their second belongingness advising session Student 78 also had questions about summer courses. They asked, “I don't know if I come back to China to study my summer course if there is any interference. Because I know the time is different so will the video have any effects on my course credits.” The advisor provided the student an assurance that they could take the credits online and also informed the student that, “It will not have any consequence on your immigration records, and I just think it's important for you to make sure you have a good internet connection.”

The discussions also included the value of orientation, learning about new offices on campus, and connecting them with resources and personnel that were specific to their experience as an international student. In a debriefing exchange with Student 28, they discussed the value of orientation and what was gained by learning more about it from their belongingness advisor.

Student 28: ...When I went to the orientation, I've heard about it but I was never really open to that idea I guess. Because it's just any other orientation, or you come and hear about stuff you never use. But when I was talking to the advisor, he really emphasized on how important it was using the material, using the resource given to us with no extra costs, it's all included in our orientation which was-- he showed me, you should use them so yeah, why not try them.

Stene: Okay. Yeah, and that helped a lot? The one-on-one with the belongingness advisor showed you all of that?

Student 28: Yeah.

Relatedly, in my debrief with Student 55 on their experience with the advising session they stated it was both enjoyable and that they, "...also learned something. For example, the advisor told me that if I want to do some internship it has to be related with my courses here, and I didn't realize it before so I'm happy to learn it."

There was also a discussion in which Student 27 was concerned about the cost and location of off-campus housing. They stated, "I think now, our apartment is a little far and a little expensive." The advisor was able to offer advice about how to find a new apartment, "So there's a place called Off Campus Life. It's located in the Lory Student Center and they will help you to find apartments... they have all of these different rental searches, housing fair, apartment complex, lease. They can help you..."

Providing resources to participants about careers, housing, scholarships, and coursework gave the participants new knowledge about the university. The belongingness advisors were able to give out information, but almost always referred students to the offices that knew best, such as Off-Campus Housing or Financial Aid. In the case below, the belongingness advisor was able to highlight staff within the counseling center that was dedicated to international students. Student 28, disclosed that they were already

under the care of a mental health counselor and was excited to learn there was a specific counselor that specialized in supporting international students:

Advisor: It sounds like you already know about it. So you can go any day of the week. They have walk-ins. There's one counselor who's our international student specific counselor.

Student 28: Really?

Advisor: Yeah. He works with everybody but he specifically works with our office. His name is xxxx and he works on Fridays.

Student 28: xxxx?

Advisor: Yeah. Right here. He's one of my friends, xxxx, and those are his hours.

Student 28: 12:30 to 4:00

Advisor: On Fridays.

Student 28: These are the walk-in hours?

Advisor: Yeah, those are the walk-in hours so you can just go there at that time.

Student 28: Yeah.

Advisor: You can go there any day--and you can see whoever but xxxx is on call those days. He's really great. I recommend him but I'm sure there's a lot of good people.

Student 28: It's fine. I'll most likely go to him.

Throughout the belongingness advising sessions the participants looked to their belongingness advisors for firsthand information. The conversations above demonstrated how willing the participants were to ask and receive advice about several areas where they lacked or wanted more knowledge. Amongst other areas, the participants benefited from exchanges that helped them plan their studies, secure financial resources, and act on information that was specific to their status as an international student. The knowledge

the students sought, was often different based on their recruitment source. Partner students (27, 55, 78) shared concerns about the online delivery of courses due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the sponsored students (28, 80) often asked questions about sponsor authorizations and approvals for their travel plans. All of the students asked questions about staying in legal immigration status while exclusively learning online.

The exchanges demonstrate how rich in knowledge the belongingness advisors were about CSU resources and their willingness to share that information with the participants. The participants were able build their knowledge of the university and how they could use the belongingness advisors and/or the advice they were given about campus-community resources to benefit their feelings of membership and belonging.

Knowledge Building: Students were able to get real time help regarding immigration. Students took advantage of the opportunity to get their immigration questions answered when meeting with their belongingness advisors. Within the meetings, students were able to get I-20's created, as well as get employment and travel information and updates. In the exchanges below you can see that belongingness advisors were able to get quick and accurate updates and information to the students. Many of these students were making decisions about employment and travel plans with incomplete knowledge that could have had serious impacts on their immigration status. This became particularly important as Covid-19 travel and immigration restrictions were implemented in the Spring of 2020.

In the discussion below, the advisor and Student 55 discussed working on campus as part of the student's experience. The advisor was specifically informing the student

about their ability to work on campus as defined by their visa type. The exchange about the student's intentions and the regulations they needed to be aware of are below.

Student 55: Actually, I don't have a job on-campus, but I have applied for a summer internship.

Advisor: Great. And you know about applying for Curricular Practical Training if they're off campus?

Student 55: What is that?

Advisor: I'll show you the steps... For anything that you do off campus, it needs to be authorized. It's perfectly fine for you to do an internship as long as you get permission from us first. So Curricular Practical Training (CPT)... It's for F-1 students who want to work off campus...once you have an interview and you get a job offer, they (the employer) will fill out this page...But, they do need to sign here, and check that they understand that it's a temporary employment....Do you want me to email this to you?

Student 55: Yes, if it's okay?

As a participant in the intervention, this student was able to get knowledge about CPT. Without this knowledge they would have likely been subject to a number of legal visa compliance consequences and their membership at CSU would have been compromised. As participants in the intervention, the students were also able to get real-time immigration service from the belongingness advisors. In the exchange below, Student 80 was able to get a new immigration document (I-20) printed immediately and they also learned about what is needed to properly exit the US on their given visa.

Student 80: I think I need new I-20, I came a couple of days ago (to OIP). They said that you have to –

Advisor: Update it?

Student 80: No, mine got ruined... I kept coming out after class. They are (OIP) probably closed as well. My schedule wasn't really fitting.

Advisor: That's an easy fix. I can print one for you before you leave.

Student 80: Thanks. I have a question about leaving the USA.

Advisor: Okay.

Student 80: I don't really understand the concept. I don't have to come to get a signature from you before leaving to USA. I can re-enter or be allowed to be re-entered? Is that correct?

Advisor: You don't need anybody's permission to leave the US but the spirit of the signature...is the passport control officers just want to see it, because it indicates that even though you've left the USA, your program is still ongoing and you're continuing to be a student.

The advising sessions referenced above created opportunities for students to get real time guidance and documentation from the belongingness advisors who were all designated school officials (DSO's). DSO's are trained in federal regulations on how to keep international students in legal immigration status. The knowledge the belongingness advisors possessed and shared helped the students build their understanding of immigration issues.

Knowledge Building: Students developed and focused on fulfilling their “plan for success” to enhance their knowledge. The six participants that met with their belongingness advisors on two separate occasions all identified and completed a student plan for success. In doing so, they established academic and non-academic goals. Unfortunately, the campus closure because of the coronavirus pandemic limited participants ability to complete several non-academic goals. However, there were several notable fulfillments in their success plans regarding their academic goals. Students shared these achievements with their belongingness advisors in the second advising sessions as well as with me in the debriefing interviews.

In the exchange below, Student 66 had a number of college level equivalency courses that did not initially transfer to CSU. In the student's first meeting with their advisor, one of the academic goals in their "plan for success" was to meet with their academic advisor to get these credits applied. The discussion regarding the progress of this goal when they met for the second time is below:

Advisor: Did you ever get in contact with your academic advisor about those IB courses?

Student 66: Yes, I got the IB credits. I actually talked to her... on Monday.

Advisor: Okay, do you feel ready to register for fall? Do you have all your classes.

Student 66: Yes.

Advisor: ... Perfect. Are those IB courses going to transfer in?

Student 66: Yes...

Likewise, in their second meetings with their belongingness advisors both Student 27 and Student 28 shared that they were able to complete their goal to attend office hours prior to and after the Coronavirus changed the format of office hours. Student 28, stated, "I forgot to mention that I went to two of my professor's office hours. The advisor followed with some praise, "Very good. I think that was one of your goals, right?". Student 27 also talked about fulfilling the office hours goal they had set. The exchange regarding this goal being met is as follows:

Advisor: ... Good job. Despite all of the changes, you still went to office hours even if they were virtual office hours.

Student 27: Yes.

Advisor: Good job. You succeeded in that goal.

Having students complete a “plan for success” provided a tangible document for belongingness advisors and advisees to hold each other accountable. The plans were an instrument through which students could take actions to fulfill goals that were likely to enhance their knowledge of relevant personnel and resources on-campus.

Relationship Building. *Assertion 2 - Students wanted to build more and deeper relationships with other students as well as faculty/staff.* In advance of their first meeting(s) with students, the belongingness advisors were given the PSSM Pretest Survey results for each of their advisees. Knowing the advisee’s responses gave the belongingness advisors insight into when they did not always have a strong feeling of membership at CSU. They were able to use this information to initiate conversations with students; however, most of the belongingness advising sessions started with small talk. The conversations covered shared interests in board games, music, relationships, and traveling among other areas.

More pertinent to this research, the students talked about their fears with acculturation and how they could use the support of the belongingness advisors and staff to help with their feelings of belongingness and membership as they progressed in their studies at CSU. The belongingness advisors encouraged close contact throughout the semester and expressed confidence in the student’s ability to follow through on their plans to feel like they belong and are members of the CSU campus-community. I identified two categories that informed my assertion of relationship building; (1) Belongingness advisors encouraged the students; (2) Students highlighted having more connections with staff/faculty.

Relationship building: Belongingness advisors encouraged students. Students felt like they got enough information from the belongingness advisors and felt encouraged to build supportive and engaged relationships with the advisors. In my debrief with Student 55 they acknowledged that students wanted to feel like they belong, have the tools to do it, and with some encouragement, it is up to them to engage as the snippet from my debrief with them demonstrates:

Student 55: I would just say I think the resources are enough because every day we can receive so many emails that says, "Hey, we have activity," and "Hey, what are we going to do?" I think is kind of enough and sometimes I think if you do too much it will make us maybe not so comfortable...Some International students want to have more belonging. That feeling of belonging. I think if we realize this by ourselves, we can make it...but I think maybe the direction can be just like my teachers and classmates did over the last semester. Let us feel like we can do it.

As the conversation continued, Student 55 and I talked about how the advising sessions also helped them feel connected. They acknowledged learning new things about tutoring and other campus resources throughout the semester all of which, they said made them feel supported and equipped to make new connections and relationships.

In addition to providing direction that encouraged students to get involved in activities or clubs to help with feelings of belonging, Student 28 talked about the follow-up and follow-through that they got from their advisor throughout the semester:

“xxxx has been such an amazing guy. Like I can't stress it enough, he's helped me a lot, and even after our talk, he sent me an email with literally everything we talked about and helping me. Like I remember we talked about how to join our team and stuff like that. After we finished our talk, he sent me a link with everything on it which was really helpful.”

Students reiterated how important the belongingness advisor's relationships and commitments to their plans were. The plans for success they worked on created

accountability and often provided the students with specific directions on what staff and offices to utilize throughout the semester (refer to Appendix L to see a completed plan for success). Students confirmed during our debriefing session that they maintained ongoing relationships with their advisors and received continued encouragement. The students shared, among other issues, that their advisors kept in contact with them about updates on the coronavirus pandemic (Students 27, 55, 66, 78), helped them with sponsorship issues (Student 80), as well as how to manage all of the information they were getting from CSU (Student 78).

The participants in the study utilized relationships with their belongingness advisors to get information and encouragement throughout the semester. In one case, the advising sessions provided enough information for the student to act on the plan themselves, while in another case the belongingness advisor's follow-up emails with the student proved to be an integral resource for their relationship and for their ability to stay in touch. Amongst, the third-party recruitment sourced students the sponsored students stayed very connected with their advisors and me to help them navigate sponsor and immigration issues. Their willingness to relate to and stay in touch with the belongingness advisors was a source of encouragement and likely enhanced their feelings of belonging and membership.

Relationship building: Students highlighted having more connections with staff/faculty. The belongingness advisors were a primary resource for the students in this intervention. They also encouraged students to utilize other relationships on-campus that were supportive. In their first meeting with their belongingness advisor, Student 66 talked

about the confidence they received from their departmental academic advisor. The conversation stemmed from the student's response in the PSSM Pre-Survey:

Advisor: You said that you feel like there's at least one instructor or staff member at CSU you can talk to if you have a problem? Do you want to talk more about that?

Student 66: It's xxxx.

Advisor: Okay, I know her. She's awesome... You find she's helpful with more than just academics?

Student 66: Yes, she is my academic advisor... I remember I asked her a lot of things. She's like, "Oh, yes, we're going to have this event and this day is a holiday," things like that.

While this was a pre-existing relationship, the belongingness advisor encouraged the student to use that relationship to get help on other issues (refer to page 95 and the IB credit discussion) and the student was able to follow through. The students also discussed how they got to know more OIP staff throughout the intervention and how their feelings of belongingness from staff and faculty across campus were impacted. Student 78 shared that as the semester continued, they had an increasing connection with their composition professor. This relationship was being built by the student attending more office hours to address some of the writing struggles they were experiencing.

Building connections through the intervention was a great opportunity for students to be able to talk with us, have access to us, and get assistance on navigating challenges in their first semester or their first-year. Student 80 also shared that they were grateful for getting to know someone in the OIP:

Stene: Did you know anybody in the Office of International Programs before? Like, do you remember anybody's names or anything like that, before this?

Student 80: Honestly, I don't think so.

Stene: So, now you got two of us, the advisor and myself.

Student 80: Yes. I really appreciate you guys. Thank you.

By building relationships, the participants came away from the intervention knowing more people and feeling more supported. Students were likely to feel like they fit in because they were encouraged by members of the OIP, as well as the broader campus community to build or maintain relationships. A key component of belonging is the feeling of being recognized (Goodenow, 1993), and the students shared that because of the relationships they had built they had fostered recognition.

Support Systems. *Assertion 3 - Students wanted to grow their support networks on campus to enhance their feelings of belongingness and membership.* The advising sessions were intentional in encouraging students to make more friends and get more involved on-campus (Appendix E). As discussed below, several of the participants were excited and ready to engage in new activities. Many of the students were unsure of where to start because they were not always sure of how they “fit-in”. All the students were made aware of clubs, organizations, and activities that were likely to build on their existing support networks. I identified one category that informed this assertion; (1) All students had existing support networks but sought more friends and support through the advising process.

Support systems: Students sought more friends and support through the advising process. In several of the conversations, students mentioned the support they had from family and friends, but it was evident they were all still trying to grow their network by further acculturating to life at CSU. They made statements about struggling to

understand American cultural references, the English language, and where and how to meet more people. Many of the students also referred to strong support networks with students from the same countries.

Students who had strong support networks with others students from the same country had “in- groups” to help them navigate the university. In-groups are a group of peers who share a similar background (language, historical, social, ethnic) and rely on each other to help navigate an experience; because, based on their shared characteristics, they are more comfortable with one another (Cartmell & Bond, 2015). All of the partner students (55, 78, and 27) referenced their Chinese friends or roommates as strong supports and resources. The sponsored students (80 and 28) also discussed getting advice from their in-groups. Student 28 lived with another Omani and “talked to all of the other Omani’s” about where to live and what to do on-campus. Likewise, Student 80 lived with a fellow Emirati and shared that they relied on their roommate for information. Student 66, who did not use a third-party and came from Mexico did not have the support of an in-group. When the belongingness advisor asked about not knowing any other students from Mexico, they admitted it “sometimes makes me feel out of place.” However, they turned to Greek Life to build a network of support and shared that it helped them meet new people and learn about the university.

Whether students had in-groups or not, they were all directed by their belongingness advisors to find additional support networks that could support them academically and socially. There were examples of students wanting to engage more with fellow students. The partner students often mentioned communication as limitations. Students 27 and 78 felt left out because they could not connect and/or understand their

American professors and/or classmates. Student 27 stated, “it’s challenging” to understand American students, “because of the pronunciation and the accents in the students so it’s difficult; I can’t understand in class.” Along the same lines, Student 78 admitted they “sometimes” struggled in their astronomy class because they could not understand the professor. They stated, “It has a difference between my study (and) when I studied in China.” Student 55, also a partner student, then discussed how they had built new support systems as they progressed from their first semester to their second.

Student 55: I think in the first semester when I choose classes, the first thing I would do is try to find some Chinese students who are in the class and then we do the homework together... this semester, I just changed my strategy. I do try to make friends with like native students or other countries students, and we make some groups to do our homework. I think it is very helpful.

Stene: Okay, very good. So why? Why did you change your strategy?

Student 55: Well, actually I think the first semester, why I choose to change because I kind of like become isolated. I'm so afraid to communicate with native students because we have some cultural barrier I think or language barrier... mostly language barrier. So I'm kind of afraid of making friends with them. And yeah, and I think a good beginning is very important. In the first semester, I think my beginning is maybe not so good. So I guess strategy is to start differently in the second.

As my exchange with Student 55 continued they talked about how feedback from their belongingness advisor, friends, and teachers influenced their shift in strategy to be more outgoing. In addition to the barriers Student 55 mentioned (language and cultural), Student 28 mentioned having some support, but explicitly stated they wanted more friends. Their belongingness advisor informed them of an OIP BBQ that happens every Friday at the International House. The student shared they did not know that the activity existed, so they added attending the event to their plan for success.

The exchange with Student 28 demonstrated that even though they had friends and a strong support network they wanted advice on how to get more friends. In addition to providing specific times and places for new social activities, Student 27 and their belongingness advisor reflected on their acculturation challenges. The student shared that they asked their Chinese friends for help but continued to struggle to understand Americans. They stated making friends was a challenge, “It’s a little different because before I went to CSU, I think a lot of Americans are outgoing and really true friends...but it’s so hard to communicate with them...” In response the belongingness advisor shared potential ways to find new friends and support networks. In this case, the belongingness advisor shared a resource with the student. The belongingness advisor told Student 27 about the Student Leadership, Involvement, and Community Engagement Office (SLICE) and shared how they have peer advisors that, “...can tell you about all of the different clubs and opportunities.” The belongingness advisor then showed Student 27 how to access the SLICE website to set up an appointment.

The exchange with the Student 27 demonstrated how open they were in the advising process to learn about where and how to make new friends. It showed their willingness to take the advice of the belongingness advisor to build on their existing support networks. This conversation, along with the others in this category, demonstrated that students had existing support networks, but their networks were limited. Many of the students relied on their current friends or in-groups to help them understand Americans, but their friends were often also international so their understandings were limited. The belongingness advisors were able to ask the students specific questions about how they were engaging and provided them with specific resources that were likely to grow their

networks and in turn enhance their feelings of belongingness and membership on-campus.

Summary of Results

The quantitative results demonstrated that students in the experimental group were more likely to record higher mean scores on the PSSM Posttest Survey than those in the control group. The results also showed that the means for both groups moved in a positive direction. In the Posttest, the participants in the experimental group had the largest mean difference in the Fitting in with Classmates construct (+0.20). In the PSSM Posttest there were only negligible differences between the control and experimental groups based on a student's recruitment source.

The experimental group was comprised of six students. Five were recruited by third parties (two from government sponsors and three from institutional partners). There were two first-year government sponsored students (Oman, United Arab Emirates), three transfer students from partner institutions in China, and one first-year student from Mexico who was not attributed to a third-party recruitment source. Unfortunately, the student from Mexico did not complete the PSSM Posttest Survey so I was unable to measure the impact the intervention had on their mean score. The most notable difference between third-party recruitment sources was that the partner students did not always feel accepted by faculty, compared to sponsored students.

As a result of the intervention, I inferred student participants built their knowledge of CSU. In doing so, I asserted that when students knew more about campus, they engaged more with it. To build their knowledge the students asked lots of questions about a variety of issues and the belongingness advisors were key resources in their

knowledge acquisition. The belongingness advisors were also a resource for the students regarding immigration. The belongingness advisors all had a background in immigration guidance that made it possible for students to get accurate and timely information about their immigration status. This helped insure they could continue to be members of the campus community. Lastly, the participants all completed a plan for success with their belongingness advisors. This provided each participant with a tangible roadmap through which they could complete goals that enhanced their knowledge of the university.

My analysis of the data led me to the assertion that students wanted to build more and deeper relationships with other students, as well as, with faculty/staff. I found that the belongingness advisors and other campus faculty and academic advisors encouraged the students. In doing so the students began to feel more like members of the campus. In the second advising sessions as well as in the debriefing interviews the students shared that they did foster new relationships. The analysis also showed that the belongingness advisors encouraged close communication throughout the semester and helped the students navigate some relationship challenges throughout the semester.

Participants who had peers from the same third-party sources (partners or sponsors) developed “in groups” to help them navigate the university. The student from Mexico who did not use a third-party recruitment source nor came with a large cohort of students from a similar background did not inherit such a strong or familiar support network and as such they did not reference getting help or advice “from the students that they came with.” These support systems (or lack thereof) impacted how they developed their sense of belonging and membership. This reality informed how they obtained

knowledge, as well as, how they built their relationships and furthered their support systems.

Based on how a student arrived at the university as well as with whom, their course on developing feelings of membership and belonging differed. The student who came alone shared that they pledged in Greek life, while the students who arrived with peers from the same background never even mentioned this option. The student who came alone had an American roommate, while the others who came from third parties lived with people of the same nationality. The student who came alone rarely talked about their challenges with where to meet people, while those who used third parties wanted to know where to find domestic friends. These examples are evidence of how differently a student engaged with and found their place at the institution based on their recruitment experience and how easily they could relate or rely on someone that is familiar.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Over the past five years of my professional practice at CSU I became increasingly aware of the differences of how newly enrolled international students find membership and develop their feelings of belongingness. I contended that part of the difference and problems students have with developing these feelings was because of our complex and multitudinous relationships with third party recruitment sources. Thus, my problem of practice was situated at a crossroad in an international student's enrollment journey—how they were recruited, how they felt they belonged within their first or second semester, and how we could enhance their feelings of membership and belongingness through advising sessions. To help address the problem, I developed an intervention that was focused on understanding and developing first year students' feelings of membership and belongingness.

With the number of third-party actors involved in recruiting international students to CSU, my office was well positioned to increase these students' understanding of the university and its multitude of resources that were likely to enhance their feelings of membership and belongingness. Specifically, an intervention was developed that utilized one-on-one advising sessions. The sessions allowed our newly enrolled international students, within the experimental group, to meet with belongingness advisors who were focused on retention initiatives. This study was informed by other advising methods for underrepresented populations at CSU (refer to pages 44-45 for background on these prior initiatives). Additionally, the advising sessions were informed by the experiences, as recounted in interviews, with more senior international students. The intervention was

developed to examine how these sessions influenced participants to feel more like members of the campus community as well as feel a stronger sense of belonging. The study was framed by the following research questions:

RQ1: How did a semester-long advising program, in the students first-year, enhance international students feeling of membership and belonging at CSU?

RQ1a: What components of the program were more effective and what components were less effective?

RQ2: Based on how students were recruited to CSU, how did they differ in developing feelings of belongingness and membership?

In this chapter I cover the following sections: (a) integration of the quantitative and qualitative data, (b) discussions of the results in relation to the extant literature, (c) the limitations of the study, (d) implications for practice, (e) implications for continued research, (f) the personal lessons learned as a result of the research, and (g) closing thoughts.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

This study used a mixed method design. Mixed methods allowed me to compare and analyze the findings from two different data collections methods. More importantly it allowed me to weave the data together so that the strengths and weaknesses of each approach complemented each other and created a more complete understanding of the problem (Brewer & Hunter, 2006). Complementary data, to the extent to which the data collected, allowed me to make the same conclusions consistently (Greene, 2007). I integrated quantitative and qualitative data to gain a more rich and nuanced

understanding of the results (Creswell, 2015). Across the quantitative constructs of the PSSM Survey and the qualitative themes of the semester-long advising program there were some notable areas of corroborating results. These are discussed below.

Quantitatively, participants in the experimental group, as measured by the PSSM Survey, had higher mean scores across all constructs. Narrowing in solely on constructs that were reliable, the participants responded they were more likely to participate in university activities and fit in with classmates when compared to the control group. The mean score of these students in the participation in university activities construct increased by +0.13 and the mean score in the fitting in with classmates' construct increased by +0.20. The mean increased for all of the experimental group participants from all third-party recruitment sources.

Within the *Fitting in with Classmates* construct the increased mean reflected that the participants felt their classmates respected their background and opinions more and that they felt their contributions were taken more seriously as the semester progressed. Both the sponsored and partner students had increased posttest means in this construct. However, there was a variance in responses between the sponsored students mean and the partner students (2.91 and 2.73, respectively). Qualitatively, both sponsored students shared it was easy to make friends in class if they were willing to be outgoing. For partner students, student 55 talked about making more friends in class as a reaction to feelings of isolation. Regardless of recruitment source, the advising sessions spent time focusing on how students could turn their personal interests and strengths into opportunities to meet and grow their support networks. In summary, all of the students, in

one way or another, discussed their growing networks of relationships and support systems both in and outside of the classroom.

Within the *Participation in University Activities* construct, the qualitative data demonstrated that students shared that they received information about new resources and built new relationships based on the encouragement and advice of the belongingness advisors. This included opportunities to participate in tennis via SLICE networking (student 27), Friday afternoon club (student 28), and other events. The students talked about their support systems and were encouraged to expand their support networks through attending new activities and making connections with peers. The students also shared that they gained a support system by getting to know the belongingness advisors themselves and by learning about the activities that OIP sponsored. Quantitatively, both the sponsored and partner students had increased posttest means in this construct. However, the sponsored students mean suggested they were more participative than their partner student peers (2.67 and 2.33, respectively). Altogether, students in the experimental group responded they felt more like a part of CSU and that they were included and participated in more activities as demonstrated in the posttest results.

It is important to note that corroboration of these data points should be interpreted with caution. This is particularly true of the quantitative data as it is limited in reliability and significance, in large part due to the low participation in the study. This was, at least in part, due to the Coronavirus pandemic that caused a major disruption to in-person campus activities.

In summary, the data is complementary in several ways. The quantitative data showed that by the end of the semester, participants in the experimental group, as

individuals, made greater gains, as measured by their increased mean scores, in fitting in with classmates and in participating in university activities when compared to the control group. This was true of all students regardless of their recruitment source; but within the third-party sourced student grouping it is worth noting that the sponsored students had higher posttest means than the partner students. Based on the qualitative data, I can think of two possible explanations for this difference: 1) the sponsored students personalities were more outgoing/extroverted and 2) they did not share as much concern around their English language abilities (or lack thereof) which likely made them more confident in connecting and participating.

While the connecting with their professors and feeling accepted by faculty constructs were not considered reliable it is worth mentioning that the posttest results for the experimental group also demonstrated positive gains. The qualitative data enhanced my understanding of these gains by providing context on how students and belongingness advisors engaged during their advising sessions. The students were able to make more connections with professors by making and executing their plans for success that included, among other things, attending office hours. They also shared they felt more accepted by faculty as they built their knowledge and relationships with campus resources and personnel in areas that included campus housing, counseling services, and academic advising.

Student participants also built new relationships with classmates. They shared that making new friends was important and they followed through on plans to change their mindsets to engage more with domestic students or attend new activities where they could meet new classmates. This was particularly true for the partner and sponsored

students as they had fewer domestic friends and stronger in-group support than the unsourced student from Mexico (student 66). The gains students made in these areas were often communicated to me in the debriefing interviews as positive developments. In particular, the participants, as a result of their increased participation, felt more like members of the campus community and that they belonged.

Discussions of the Results in Relation to the Extant Literature

In this section, the results of the study are related to the theoretical frameworks and extant literature presented in chapter two. Given the limitations of my quantitative data this section will primarily focus on connections to my qualitative data results. The subsequent discussion is presented in order of my research questions.

RQ1: How did a semester-long advising program, in the students first-year, enhance international students feeling of membership and belonging at CSU?

Both the quantitative and qualitative results of this study complement each other in providing an indication of how the semester-long advising program enhanced students feeling of membership and belonging at CSU. The sub-headings below integrate the findings of the study with the theoretical frameworks and literature that informed it.

Participation in University Activities. Quantitatively the students who participated in the semester-long advising program indicated that they participated in more university activities. Students participation in school activities is directly related to the importance that Tinto (1987), in his dropout model, placed on peer and social engagement. When students are provided with and take advantage of these activities it has been correlated with enhanced feelings of belonging. In other research, Kane et al. (2014) placed a specific emphasis on students engaging early in orientation activities and co-curriculum

programs. This type of participation was shown to enhance students' feelings of belonging. Additional studies, focused on the importance of early participation in activities also provide evidence that these are likely to enhance a student's feelings of membership and belonging at their university (Kuh et al., 2008; Stuart et al., 2009; Vinson et al., 2010). The findings in my study are consistent with the research. Though limited, in part because of COVID-19 pandemic, participants shared throughout the advising sessions that when they were able to join a campus activity or get involved with a club it helped them feel more important and valued at CSU.

Perception of Fitting in and Relationship Building. The students who participated in the semester-long advising program responded that they felt like they fit in more with their classmates because of the intervention. Fitting in with classmates and building support systems are two measures that share several characteristics that assisted my understanding of how students felt like they belonged. When students had strong associations with their peers, they were more likely to feel integrated in the campus community (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Consistent with Tinto's (1975) findings, my study found that fitting in with their classmates and building out those relationships made the students feel like they were welcomed. This gave the students the confidence, self-efficacy, to take control of their sense of belonging and led to an attitude that they were members of the campus-community (Bandura, 1997). The results of my study showed that newly enrolled students had making friendships and building supportive relationships at the top of mind. Across every interview, students talked about their realized or unrealized gains in making international or domestic friends. Of note, the friendships they were seeking were both in and outside of the classroom and they were enthusiastic to get

advice from the belongingness advisors on how and where to find and develop relationships.

Connections to Professors. While the findings in this construct should be viewed tentatively due to low reliability, students who participated in the semester-long advising program responded they felt more connected to their professors. The semester-long advising program was intentional in talking with students about opportunities to connect with professors and how to build relationships that were likely to enhance how they were accepted and how they felt like they belonged to CSU. The extant literature was clear that when students take advantage of tutoring, advising resources, and office hours they are more likely to be engaged (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Consistent with Mamiseishvili's (2012) findings, when students in my study connected with professors, they felt more like members of the campus and derived benefits that influenced their feelings of belonging.

Acceptance by Faculty Members. Given the low reliability in the quantitative data the findings in this construct should be considered with caution. The students who participated in the semester-long advising program had higher mean scores than their control group peers when asked to respond about their feelings of acceptance by campus faculty. I conjecture that students in the experimental group were influenced by their belongingness advisors to connect with professors and faculty and for the most part students followed through. On top of the connections they were making across campus, perhaps the most impactful relationships as a result of the advising sessions, were the connections they were making with the belongingness advisors themselves. Almost universally, the students reflected during their debriefing interviews that having OIP staff

that recognized and supported them enhanced their feelings of belonging and membership. This finding aligned with dropout model in that institutions should be accessible and accommodating for their students in order to develop feelings of loyalty that lead to persistence (Tinto, 1975). In the advising sessions, the belongingness advisors were able to connect the students directly to specific people (not just offices) that could help them connect more readily with relevant resources. Students expressed that this encouragement and these connections enhanced their feelings of belonging and membership.

Knowledge Building. Quantitatively, the results were limited in their ability to interpret how students constructed and enhanced their knowledge of the university throughout the semester. The results were limited because of low participation rates and the time that lapsed between test administrations. Specifically, a pretest at the beginning of the semester and a posttest near the end of the semester did not provide nuanced insight on how students changed or constructed knowledge throughout the intervention (Salkind, 2010). However, the qualitative data demonstrated that students were able to build their knowledge of the university and its associated resources through the advising sessions. Students used the advising sessions, and to a lesser extent the debriefing sessions, to ask lots of questions about CSU resources. The belongingness advisors were resourceful in answering these questions and helping the students build knowledge.

To help guide their knowledge building, the students developed and focused on fulfilling their “plan for success” which provided specific goals for them to achieve to benefit their knowledge of the campus-community (Refer to Appendix L). Historically, underrepresented students that have participated in and completed similar pro-active

advising sessions at CSU has been correlated with higher retention rates (refer to pages 44-45 for background on these prior initiatives). Retention happens when students are engaged (Baldrige et al., 1982) and well prepared both in their prior preparation (student factors) as well as through an institution meeting their needs (institutional factors) (Tinto, 1975). By building knowledge throughout the intervention, students expressed they felt more engaged, prepared, and that the institutional resources could meet their needs. Examples of this included statements in which the participants shared they did not know about a given resource which ultimately helped them learn more and complete their plan for success.

RQ1a: What components of the program were more effective and what components were less effective?

The most effective component of the advising program, based on the depth and breadth of the data, were the one-to-one advising sessions. Within these meetings students were able to not only make a connection with CSU staff, but build a relationship with their belongingness advisor. The participants built on their knowledge of the institution and received direction on expanding and or strengthening their support systems. The belongingness advisors encouraged students and helped them co-complete their “plans for success” to engage on-campus (Appendix L). Additionally, the belongingness advisors stayed connected with the students which likely impacted how they felt they belonged at CSU. These outcomes were realized by the semi-structured interview format of the advising session which allowed the student and advisor the flexibility to explore relevant concerns across a number of academic and social domains.

Throughout the semester-long intervention participants were able to receive advice from their belongingness advisors about tutoring resources, work opportunities, conflict resolution with roommates, clubs and activities, as well as numerous other topics of interest or concern. The opportunities to share and be heard resulted in the students trusting the belongingness advisors with their backgrounds and fears. As Bean & Eaton (2001) contends, strong and trusting relationships led to a feeling that the student did or can “fit in.” When a student fits in they start to feel like they are a member and that they belong (Finn, 1989; Goodenow, 1993; Tinto, 1975). To keep these students attached and engaged, all of the belongingness advisors encouraged the students to stay in touch and foster connections. They did this by exchanging personal emails as well as revisiting the students plans and concerns from prior sessions. As a result, many of the students and belongingness advisors did stay engaged and followed up on actions identified in the sessions.

The semester-long advising program was not as effective regarding the “plans for success” and the debriefing interviews. Institutionally, the plan for success has been successful in keeping students accountable for their goals. However, in this research it lacked in applicability because of the COVID-19 disruption. Specifically, many of the goals in the student’s plans were highly interpersonal. For example, one student wanted to join a club, while another wanted to join a Friday night barbeque; neither of which could be realized given the circumstance. The plans for success were also difficult to tie directly to feelings of membership and belonging. The plans centered on students taking actions or specific steps to engage, but the instrument did not measure how the actions made the students feel. By completing the plan, the students had a roadmap, but it was

difficult to pinpoint the depth and impact the goals and activities within the plan had on their feelings. I feel that I could have made better inferences about the plans impact on belonging and membership if the students would have written or debriefed their experiences shortly after taking the actions.

RQ2: Based on how students were recruited to CSU, how did they differ in developing feelings of belongingness and membership?

The pretest-posttest design allows researchers to quantitatively determine the effectiveness of a program (Frey, 2018). All participants were asked to complete the PSSM Survey at the beginning and end of the semester. Through the lens of agency theory, students who came to CSU via third-party partners may have been more likely to lack information about the university because their placement at CSU was, in part, based on the motivations of others and not entirely of their own choosing (Hulme et. al, 2013). This was not borne out in the pretest results. The participants who used a third-party had higher means. This response was surprising and challenges the hypothesis that third-party students may be less prepared than students who find CSU without the assistance of a third party. One explanation for the higher pretest mean scores among those who had a third-party recruitment source was built in support networks/in-groups. Most of the students in my study who used a third-party recruitment source came with a cohort and shared that they relied heavily on these peers to help them navigate the university whereas the one null sourced student who participated in the experiment shared she struggled, upon arrival, to know with whom she belonged or where she fit in.

Regrettably, the PSSM posttest response rate was very low ($N = 8$) and did not have

representation across all recruitment sources so changes as a result of the intervention could not be interpreted with any validity.

Qualitatively, my research was focused on making international students feel like they belong. As an underrepresented population, often coming to the US for the first time, they face unique challenges in acclimating to a new academic and social environment (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2010). These challenges exist regardless of recruitment source; thus, it remained imperative to equip all new international students with the tools and resources to meet their unique needs (Cabrera et al., 1999). My research outcomes confirm these previous findings. Irrespective of the recruitment source, all the students wanted to know more about the university and all of them wanted to feel like belonged. They of course differed in the way they approached their pursuit of feeling like they belonged, and some had more success than others. In terms of the approach, some students wanted to have more feelings of belonging by changing their mindset. They made a “choice” or “decision” to belong while others found belonging by learning; working on their plans for success or engaging with their belongingness advisors which resulted in them developing stronger feelings.

Several of the students in the intervention, particularly students from partner institutions in China struggled with their English both in and outside of the classroom. In response, the belongingness advisors recommended asking the professor to slow down, record the lectures, and/or to meet with their professors after class for further clarity. These limitations compromised the ability for these students to engage with others and they developed their own “in group” to help navigate their sense of membership (Cartmell & Bond, 2015). The “in group” was comprised of students from the same

country and the participants often referred to getting help from their “Chinese friends” or “Omani friends” to help understand or solve an issue they were facing. However, several of the participants were excited to share in the second advising sessions and the debriefing interviews that they were taking more chances and building positive relationships with non-Chinese students and staff. Regardless of recruitment source, five of the six students in the experimental group also shared that they had strong support networks amongst those from the same country. These networks helped them feel at home and created a safe and positive space that were key feelings in belonging (Christie et al., 2008; Wehlage, 1989).

The last notable difference that emerged in the qualitative data was around how students learned about the university and how that influenced the way they navigated the campus-community. All of the students in the experimental group, except for the student from Mexico, arrived with other members of a cohort (either from a dual-degree institutional partner or a government sponsor). These students often talked about these close relationships and how they were built from the recruitment process (in their home country) to their current time at CSU. Government sponsors in particular had a heavy influence on the selection of the university for these students. I cannot infer whether that influence was good or bad, but it shaped the student’s perception of the university and the value it represented to them.

All of the sponsored students in my study had strong high school GPA’s and were selected for prestigious scholarships to study in the USA. The other participants also possessed strong academic backgrounds and qualifications. In the case of first-year students, they had strong high school GPA’s and the participant from Mexico had

completed the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma. In the case of the Chinese transfer students, all of them were nominated by their home university, based on the strength of their academics, to complete the dual-degree program. Dropout model contends that students with strong academic preparation, both in curricula and in performance, are most likely to persist (Tinto, 1975; Hiss & Franks, 2014). These characteristics in combination, strong prior preparation and attending a prestigious university, correlate to a student being loyal to the university, looking for ways to find membership and belonging, and persisting.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations in this study that decrease confidence in the findings. There are numerous threats to the pretest-posttest design that need to be acknowledged. Particularly, testing effect, maturation, the duration of the intervention, and history (Frey, 2018). The participants were likely to have a greater understanding of CSU with or without the advising appointments based on the time they have been on-campus. This was bore out as there was only a marginal difference between the experimental and control groups as measured by the PSSM Posttest. Additionally, my study was impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic which caused our campus to close in March of 2020. The campus closure transitioned my research from in-person to virtual. This transition caused several participants to drop out of the study (many returned to their home countries) and limited my ability to do outreach that would have enhanced participant completion in my study.

Based on low response rates I had a small sample size. Additionally, I used convenience sampling to obtain an experimental group, which was hardly representative

of CSU's student population. Out of the 184 eligible students, 22 completed the pretest, but only 8 completed the posttest. In the experimental group, 7 completed the first advising session, 6 completed the second advising session, however only 3 completed the debriefing interview. The small participant completion rates in the quantitative data limited the ability to infer from descriptive statistics. The transition of campus to remote learning in the middle of my intervention may have caused the continued decline of participant responses.

The outcomes in my study are also limited by the short duration in which it took place. The students did not meet their belongingness advisors until week 5 or 6 of the semester and with the COVID-19 Pandemic there were delays in rescheduling the second belongingness advising sessions as well as delays and changes to the format of the debriefing interviews. The study would have benefitted from more time to recruit and more time for students to engage with belongingness advisors to execute their "plans for success". Furthermore, I did not ask specific questions of the participants on how accomplishing goals in their plans for success related to their feelings of belongingness and membership, but the positive influence of these actions with faculty and staff is likely reflected in the increases seen in the PSSM posttest survey.

The Hawthorne Effect was also a limitation in this study. The Hawthorne Effect states that participants are likely to alter or change their behavior because they know they are being studied, not necessarily because of the intervention (McCambridge, Witton, & Elbourne, 2014). As an insider, I felt this was a particular threat during the debriefing interviews. The students knew the goals of my study were to cultivate their feelings of membership and belonging and I was cautious in my interpretation of their responses to

balance what they did throughout the semester with what they were sharing in the interview.

The debriefing interviews were not as effective as I had envisioned. Because of the COVID-19 Pandemic the participants relocated all over the world making it impossible to complete a group debriefing. A group debriefing, as originally intended for this research, would have allowed the participants to share and learn with each other and would have helped all of us identify inconsistencies in their experiences with the advising (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Furthermore, the debriefing interviews could have been more effective if done after each advising session. By the end of the semester the students struggled to recall specific issues or plans that could have allowed me to make better inferences on their experiences. By increasing the frequency of my debriefing activities, I may have also been seen as a trusted and positive relationship that could have directly impacted their feelings of membership and belonging.

Implications for Practice

This action research project was a semester-long advising program for first-year students at CSU. It sought to enhance international students' feeling of membership and belonging at CSU. The research was informed by three theoretical narratives that may help understand:

- 1) How a student comes to know about a university (agency theory),
- 2) How that knowledge (or lack thereof) may make them more likely to succeed or drop out, and
- 3) How a university can engage, measure, and cultivate a student's feeling of belongingness so that they are less likely to drop out.

Practitioners involved in international student enrollment and recruitment can benefit from this research by having a better understanding of where and if international students may lack feelings of belongingness and membership based on their recruitment source. If and when these knowledge gaps exist, the research intended to provide insights as to whether a specific type of recruited student may be more likely to dropout based on their individual or institutional needs not being met vis a vis their peers. Lastly, enrollment and recruitment professionals may be interested in the linkages between the recruitment experience, particularly how it shaped their choice to study at a given university, and how that effects their knowledge, relationships, and support networks as new students.

By selecting participants from different recruitment sources my research shed light on the relationship between recruitment source (as a mediating factor), the student feeling of belongingness and membership, and the ability for the institution to effect change in a student's feelings about them.

The results of my study may help practitioners who support and advise international students. Specifically, it can provide insight on the ways they can develop space for students to share their concerns about fitting in early in their academic careers. International Student and Scholar Service (ISSS) professionals can learn about the belongingness and membership components of my research. Specifically, their practice may benefit from the using the instruments that guided the sessions and how they helped cultivate a stronger relationship with CSU amongst participants. Practitioners within colleges of may be interested in the outcomes of the study and how they addressed and effected the ways international students engaged with their campus community.

For practitioners, I provide my insights on where, who, and how you can consider international student advising that is focused on enhancing their feelings of belonging and membership. First, I focus on creating spaces for students to share. Secondly, I discuss embedded advising services within an office of international education. Third, I contextualize why an investment into advising services such as this may have a positive impact for your institution and your students.

Creating a Space to Share. Through trips abroad and their professional backgrounds the belongingness advisors were well positioned to relate to the student's story and understand their enrollment journey and the transition to CSU. A comprehensive orientation will continue to be an integral part of welcoming new students to campus, but I believe our practice would be stronger with compulsory advising appointments and/or office hours during the first few weeks of the semester so students could have additional platforms to share and learn. In the advising sessions, all the participants learned something new and many were surprised about the sheer resources available that can enhance their feelings of membership and belonging. We could all benefit from being more proactive in constructing this type of knowledge among students.

Though the study created a space for students to share, my analysis of the advising session transcripts showed there were several missed opportunities about how the belongingness advisors and their instructions on how to use resources on-campus were explicitly tied to enhancing the student's feelings of membership and belonging. The belongingness advisors did a good job in talking with students about resources that would help them make friends or take advantage of office hours or tutoring, but I fault

myself for not doing a better job of preparing them for making the connections between the advising goals and the ties it had to belonging. The faults were both in the pre-advising training and in the instruments. As an office we would benefit from more training on how we proactively assist with students and to tell them why we are doing it. It is important they know we not only want them to persist, but rather we want to let them know we care about their wellbeing at the university. I acknowledge, that building a relationship takes time and building a community of support takes even longer. To that end, the results of this study identify that we need to do more work to explicitly address the ties between our desire for a student to be successful (persistence) and how we do that work (by building their feelings of membership and belonging).

Embedding Advising Services. I think we could do more with academic advising. Though not traditionally a role within an OIP nearly all of the students asked questions of the belongingness advisors pertaining to grades, course registration dates, credit transfer and/or methods of instruction. Some of these concerns about classroom life were related to COVID-19 adjustments, but it was clear that students could benefit from more opportunities to get their academic issues resolved as part of the advising services within the OIP.

At CSU, the Academic Advancement Center (AAC) embraces more of one-stop model (get as much knowledge and resources in one place as possible to help students). The center emphasizes having retention advisors that are both accessible and relatable to the students they serve. The advisors supplement the work of several on-campus resources, but the students they serve are either low-income, first-generation, or have documentation of a disability. Additionally, the AAC has an advisor embedded within the

Athletics Department. In the OIP we should also be working towards this model.

International students identify with the staff and resources we provide and there is a great opportunity to build out our advising services to supplement other offices.

Why Belongingness Advising? Schroeder & Kuh (2008), discussed the importance and facilitation of first-year experiences as a high impact practice. High impact practices can be described as meaningful interactions outside of the classroom that allow for and often lead to a student's academic and personal growth as measured by their engagement, GPA, and persistence (Kuh, 2012; Kinzie, 2012). I contend that CSU, as well as, international education offices throughout the country would benefit their international students' feelings of belongingness and membership by considering proactive advising sessions as a high impact practice.

In my intervention, students shared that they were grateful for the platform(s) to learn from advising personnel about the opportunities and resources on our campus that were likely to help them grow both academically and personally. Specifically, the advising sessions demonstrated that two one-hour advising sessions had a positive impact on students' feelings of belonging and membership. I contend that given all the work the university has done to enroll these students, two hours of advising is a minimal investment for increasing feelings that are likely to enhance persistence. Of course, I do not know if and how these sessions will affect persistence in the future, but the literature and our institutional experiences with other underrepresented populations suggest that if students feel like members and that they belong they are likely to retain.

Opportunities for Future Research

The nature of action research is to build on knowledge in a cyclical and reflective manner (Mertler, 2014). I identified a number of opportunities for future research to engage and integrate more stakeholders and components that may further influence students' feelings of membership and belonging. The opportunities are: (a) expanding the number of belongingness advisors and participants, (b) engaging third party recruitment sources in the intervention, (c) embedding peer mentors in the intervention, and (d) integrate belongingness advising into a course curriculum.

Expanding the number of belongingness advisors and participants. My research was limited by both duration and participation. The prevention of dropout and understanding who is likely to persist requires early outreach to students in their first semester/year at university. However, seeing the overall outcomes and effects of one's work in these areas requires a multi-semester study. Future research could focus on more frequent and longitudinal advising sessions that continually keep students planning for goals that relate to belonging and membership.

Future research could also focus on expanding participants. I had five belongingness advisors ready to support the study, but with only six students in the experimental group there was not a need to employ all of them. Participant outreach needed to happen earlier in the research process and would benefit from being more representative of the university population. Future research could expand across all types of recruitment sources or narrow specifically on group. This approach could lead to more precise insights on how a specific population establishes or enhances their feelings of belonging and membership.

Engaging third party recruitment sources in the research. Future research could focus on examining and engaging more in-depth with a selection of third-party recruitment sources. Throughout the last year, I was able to have conversations with some of our government sponsors about the research I was doing and all of them were enthusiastic about (a) their students participating and (b) seeing what my results were. This enthusiasm presents an opportunity for future studies to partner more closely with third parties on what and how future engagements regarding belongingness could look like.

Third parties are important stakeholders in the persistence equation. From the point of recruitment through graduation they help students navigate “best fit”, finances, major selection, and degree plans amongst other issues. Engaging them to promote the importance of advising and belonging at a university is of benefit to all parties. Students want to know more about their future university and reaching out to third parties to find ways to discuss how students find membership and belonging pre-arrival presents another opportunity for future research.

Embed peer mentors in the intervention. Using more senior international students to inform my research was a benefit to both the belongingness advisors and myself. Future research could go even farther by embedding peer mentors into the belongingness advising sessions and/or by adding intentional time and spaces for new students to talk to the more senior students. My research was successful in getting several of the students to open up about their backgrounds and concerns but talking and learning from peers could lead to more powerful outcomes. Future research may be richer by pairing peers that speak the same language or share similar backgrounds.

Integrate belongingness advising into a course curriculum. As an action researcher, I benefited greatly from analyzing and reflecting on our OIP practices throughout this study. I believe we can continue be more involved with our students and the knowledge we possess will enhance their feelings of membership and belonging. However, advising at the OIP is not compulsory. Future research could benefit from being placed inside of a course at the university. For example, a practitioner within a first-year seminar course, focused on international students, could build on this study by integrating students to engage with belongingness and/or membership advisors more intrusively and more frequently. The extant literature is clear that deep and positive connections enhance students' feelings of belongingness and membership so creating more of these opportunities may lead to richer results.

Personal Lessons Learned

I was drawn to this program because of its emphasis on studying and seeking solutions for problems within your local context. This emphasis provided me the opportunity to grow both as a scholar and a practitioner. Throughout the journey, two prominent personal lessons learned stand out. First, my research brought me closer to students. Two, building a strong coalition is key to success.

When I entered this program, I wanted to take on the world. With the guidance of faculty at ASU and peer mentors I narrowed my focus to belongingness and membership interventions that were focused on current students. My baseline of knowledge in belongingness work was non-existent, but with some direction it was clear there were ties between enrollment (which I was very familiar with) and feelings of belongingness as it relates to persistence. Exploring these connections helped me understand the impact of

recruitment and how we can be more thoughtful in preparing ourselves and our students for life at CSU.

I felt my research outcomes were compelling, but unfortunately the low response rate troubles me to this day. I felt that I began to uncover some of the outcomes I sought in that the participants all had different and unique experiences for us to learn from; this was most evident in the qualitative data. It was enjoyable to see and read what these students did and did not know about the university and how the belongingness advisors assisted them in the process. I felt like they all grew in some way as part of the process and that was very rewarding. It was especially enjoyable for me to follow up in the debriefing interviews given the fact that in my role I would otherwise not interact with these students.

Building a strong coalition takes time. I know that I have several colleagues that will support my enrollment initiatives, but if I do not lay out a clear plan it is tough to execute. According to Strengthsfinder (Rath, 2007), my two biggest strengths are strategy and futuristic. This indicates that I struggle to articulate how small wins and thoughtfulness around day-to-day processes add up to meet the overall objective. I prefer to go from the start line to the finish line and let others work out the details...this does not work when writing a dissertation. I needed to reflect more about the recruitment of student participants, engage third parties more thoughtfully in the design, and I needed to give the facilitators more training so that all of the interviews were more consistent. My troubles in building a coalition were compounded by everyone being so busy at the beginning of the semester and by my taking of a recruitment trip to India in mid-January of 2020 (a week before the first week of the Spring semester). Simply put, I needed to do a better

job of grooming and overinforming everyone involved in my study instead of assuming they would be zealous to jump on board.

Conclusion

The headwinds in international enrollment are formidable. At no point in my career have there been greater challenges in national and international politics, health and safety, and collaborating with third parties. Prospective and current international students are increasingly concerned about their visa status in the U.S., the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how/if their recruitment sources can help them navigate the enrollment process (finding the right fit, access to standardized exams, meeting admission criteria, financing their education, etc.). Harm is harm, and it is increasingly difficult to justify why a student should study in the U.S. vis-à-vis other destinations. However, there is still a demand to study in the U.S. Given this reality, higher education must now, more than ever, consider new and innovative programs that are focused on international students, their feelings of belongingness and their ultimate success.

When I began this program in 2017 my aim was to focus solely on problems within my scope of work – enrollment. I wanted the research to be influential in how we train and equip our third-party partners to enhance their advising resources regarding CSU being the “right fit”. I was able to integrate my concern for the practices of some third parties throughout my study, but it was very rewarding to go deeper than the recruitment experience. The students in this study taught me a lot about what is happening inside of CSU and where and how we can be better regardless of who and what influences them to enroll here. Because of the belongingness advisors these students

were able learn and develop tools that I feel will make them more likely to belong and persist at CSU.

At the time of this writing all six of the students who completed the belongingness advising sessions remain registered and in good academic standing at CSU. In a typical year these results would be great, but given the COVID-19 pandemic I am blown away by the resilience of these students for not making sacrifices on their academic goals. Of these six students, five of them remain on-track for on-time graduation. Ultimately, this study will not be able to conclude how the belongingness advising effects their persistence and degree completion, but I intend to keep encouraging these students every step of the way. Given the positive, albeit early indicators of these students' performance, I feel that this intervention can and should be built upon and I look forward to advancing this work with and for future students.

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APPENDIX A

CYCLE 0 RESEARCH FINDINGS: GPA RANGES BY SOURCE

N	Average of CSU GPA	Max of CSU GPA	Min of CSU GPA	
338	2.99	4	0.81	
Used INTO Agent	Average of CSU GPA	Max of CSU GPA	Min of CSU GPA	N
Yes	2.73	3.87	1.81	67
Used INTL Partner	Average of CSU GPA	Max of CSU GPA	Min of CSU GPA	N
Yes	3.36	4	0.81	80
Used OIP Agent	Average of CSU GPA	Max of CSU GPA	Min of CSU GPA	N
Yes	2.86	3.08	2.58	5
Non-Third-Party w/ INTO Enrollment	Average of CSU GPA	Max of CSU GPA	Min of CSU GPA	N
Yes	2.86	3.80	1.81	75
Non-Third-Party w/o INTO Enrollment	Average of CSU GPA	Max of CSU GPA	Min of CSU GPA	N
Yes	2.98	4	1.14	111
Non-Third-Party w/ or w/o INTO Enrollment	Average of CSU GPA	Max of CSU GPA	Min of CSU GPA	N
Yes	2.93	4	1.14	186

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE USED IN CYCLE 1

How did you learn about CSU? Did anyone help recruit you? Did you have a main point of contact (i.e. agent, admissions counselor, and/or sponsor)?

What was your first-year like? Could we have done anything to make it better?

Do you think that you were admitted into the best program for you? Why or why not?

Do you feel CSU is effectively preparing you for your career?

What is your current CSU GPA? Do you feel like it is reflective of your abilities?

Do you think you will graduate on time? What could be done to help you?

157 APPENDIX C
PSSM INSTRUMENT

Table 1
The Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) Scale

1. I feel like a real part of (name of school).
 2. People here notice when I'm good at something.
 3. It is hard for people like me to be accepted here. (*reversed*)
 4. Other students in this school take my opinions seriously.
 5. Most teachers at (name of school) are interested in me.
 6. Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong here. (*reversed*)
 7. There's at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem.
 8. People at this school are friendly to me.
 9. Teachers here are not interested in people like me. (*reversed*)
 10. I am included in lots of activities at (name of school).
 11. I am treated with as much respect as other students.
 12. I feel very different from most other students here. (*reversed*)
 13. I can really be myself at this school.
 14. The teachers here respect me.
 15. People here know I can do good work.
 16. I wish I were in a different school. (*reversed*)
 17. I feel proud of belonging to (name of school).
 18. Other students here like me the way I am.
-

PSSM Scale as published by:

Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological feeling of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools, 30*, 79-90.

APPENDIX D

FEELING OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP SCALE (PRETEST-POSTTEST
INSTRUMENT)

Dear Student,

My name is Stene Verhulst and I am a doctoral student in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University (ASU). I am working under the direction of Dr. Josephine Marsh, a faculty member in MLFTC. We are conducting a research study to examine the impact belongingness advising sessions on first-semester CSU international students' feelings of membership and belongingness. The purpose of this study is to understand, over the course of your first semester, how you may or may not develop feelings of membership and belongingness.

We are asking for your help, which will involve your participation in an online pre/post survey concerning your feelings of school membership. We anticipate this survey to take no more than 10 minutes in total. We ask that you complete the survey at two different points, once at the beginning of the semester and once at the end, of the Spring 2020 semester. In the survey you will answer prompts about your experiences at CSU with faculty, staff, your fellow students and activities.

This study has a control and experimental group. In the control group students only take the surveys mentioned above. In the experimental group, participants are asked to complete the pre/post survey, two 1:1 advising sessions, and a group interview. During the advising sessions you will learn about campus and community resources from an advisor in the Office of International Programs and complete an individualized plan to succeed at CSU.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty whatsoever. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

The benefit to participation is the opportunity for you to reflect on and think more about your experiences at CSU and how they may or may not change over the course of your first semester here. Survey responses will also inform future iterations of the study and benefit future generations on how we can enhance the CSU experience. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your responses will be confidential. After completing the survey, you will be assigned a participant ID that is unrelated to any personal or institutional records. This ID will be used in the advising sessions and group interviews. Results from this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

I consent, begin the study

I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Background Information

Please provide the last four numbers of your CSU ID:

For each of the following statements, select whether you feel like this is "Never," "Sometimes," or "Always" true for you.

I feel like a real part of CSU.

Never

Sometimes

Always

People at CSU notice when I'm good at something.

Never

Sometimes

Always

It is hard for people like me to be accepted at CSU.

Never

Sometimes

Always

Other students at CSU take my opinions seriously.

Never

Sometimes

Always

Most instructors at CSU are interested in me.

Never

Sometimes

Always

Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong at CSU.

Never

Sometimes

Always

There's at least one instructor or staff member at CSU I can talk to if I have a problem.

Never

Sometimes

Always

People at CSU are friendly to me.

Never

Sometimes

Always

Instructors at CSU are not interested in people like me.

Never

Sometimes

Always

I am included in lots of activities at CSU.

Never

Sometimes

Always

I am treated with as much respect as other students.

Never

Sometimes

Always

I feel very different from most other students at CSU.

Never

Sometimes

Always

I can really be myself at CSU.

Never

Sometimes

Always

The instructors at CSU respect me.

Never

Sometimes

Always

People at CSU know I can do good work.

Never

Sometimes

Always

I wish I were at a different school.

Never

Sometimes

Always

I feel proud of belonging to CSU.

Never

Sometimes

Always

Other students here at CSU like the way I am.

Never

Sometimes

Always

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

APPENDIX E

MEETING CHECKLIST FOR FIRST 1:1 BELONGINGNESS ADVISING SESSION

FIRST 4 WEEKS – STAFF *The 1st Four Weeks of each semester are critical for a student's success in college. Based on research and practice the following pages outline the learning outcome for students and suggest practices to integrate into your work with students.*

<p>Build Relationships and Create a Sense of Belonging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn as many of your students' names as possible and practice pronunciation. Think about your environment for student interaction. Find a way to create a connection immediately welcoming a student to your space. Find a way to express to students that you want all of them to succeed. Commit to this as a regular practice. Share something about yourself, your identities and your passion for your work at CSU. Anticipate student learning – make sure to explain jargon, acronyms, and details. Take time to walk a student around campus if they are lost Ask open-ended questions and build rapport before focusing on any transactional agenda items for your interaction 	
<p>Set Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the context or "big picture" of both academic and involvement on campus. Why is it important they attend class? Why is it important to complete readings before class? Why is important to go to floor meetings and events on campus? Briefly describe the resources available to support them. Let students know what they need to do to be successful in any course. Introduce new time management and study strategies. For example, have them make out their semester assignments on a semester long calendar. Refer them to TILT Tutoring for more on study strategies. Get students talking – to each other, to you, and to themselves about their classes. This helps them explain something out loud (an active learning strategy) and allows you to understand their experience and anticipate needs for support. Model what you expect from students. Write down expectations and review them with students. (Start and finish meetings on schedule, be prepared, be responsive, be truthful, respectful, inclusive and available, etc.) Model quality. Model respect. 	
<p>Promote Active, Engaged Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently engage students in at least one active learning strategy (like think-pair-share, concept mapping, clickers, jigsaws, magic moment or service learning). Have students set a goal at the beginning of semester. Give students a choice of 3, for example: 1) <i>I will stay focused, no multi-tasking</i> 2) <i>I will write down/highlight any concept that I will need to revisit after class to better understand</i>, 3) <i>I will write down any questions I have, ask the questions or find answers later</i>. Find ways to follow up with their process beyond meeting with them. Teach students to use WOOP or SMART goals. Teach students how to engage with faculty. Encourage them to attend office hours, practice conversations, write down their questions, process through challenges and refer if needed. Offer reflection questions at the end of your interaction with a student. For example, asking: <i>What is at least one new thing you learned from our conversation today? How will our conversation help support you over the next few weeks? What is your plan of action for the resources we discussed today?</i> This helps the student engage in the learning process and also helps you understand what they retained. 	
<p>Integrate Student Support into Learning Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an exercise that connects students to the campus learning labs/tutoring centers. For example, <i>create a resources questionnaire they could complete while waiting, invite in speakers from important areas on campus to meetings, support informational interviews for students, call colleagues for a direct connection for a student</i>. Refer students to student resources like TILT, Campus Life, Cultural/Resource Centers, Library, Health Network, Residence Life, Case Management, and Career Services and Student Employment. Refer students to accessible online-tools to help deepen learning including csu.MyMajors.com and Ram Career Ready 	
<p>Support Students in Knowing Where They Stand Academically, Mentally and Socially</p> <p>Academically</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage them to try one new study strategy they have not used prior to CSU. Teach them to calculate their GPA and impact of assignments on course grades. Teach them about resources like CANVAS and RamWEB that will support their courses. Ask them "big questions" about life purpose and values, and how these can connect with career and academic goals <p>Socially</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage them to meet 1-3 new people they did not know prior to CSU. Encourage participation in First 50 Days events. Check out events at http://otp.colostate.edu/first-50-days.aspx Encourage participation in Cultural and Resource Center events. <p>Mentally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage them to use YOU@CSU Reality Check self-assessments and support completion of Goal Setting function. Refer them to the CSU Health Network to support their health and well-being (as needed). Learn about service and skill- building opportunities at health.colostate.edu. Talk about challenges and failure as an opportunity for learning and growth, using authentic self-disclosure as appropriate 	

APPENDIX F

1ST BELONGINGNESS APPOINTMENT MEETING GUIDE

Participant ID Number: _____

- 1st of Semester Meeting Deadline
 - Forty days after semester start
- If students have not completed their 1st of semester appointment they may be considered inactive and may not be able to continue participation in intervention.
- Should be 60 minutes in duration
- Feel free to go through the Admission database to read the previous comments about your students so you know a little more about the student and his/her needs. If you'd like to review applications of students let Stene know and he can get those to you.
- Please use the sixty minutes wisely so you can cover all of these areas.
- Take notes in the third column or on additional pages.
- Audio record these sessions. Remind students of their rights as a voluntary participant.

Area	Suggested Advising Points	Notes
<p style="text-align: center;">Student Information & Expectations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Student Success Plan information sheet with student • Review participant expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check anticipated graduation date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p style="text-align: center;">Financial Aid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the students financial aid award and student bill in their RamWeb portal. • Identify if the student has any questions or concerns about their financial aid package or student bill. • Call or refer the student to Office of Financial Aid if you are unable to address their question/concern. • Determine if the student is meeting requirements to continue receiving scholarships • Determine if the student has any general financial concerns or needs for financial education. • Share with them any important upcoming financial aid dates/deadlines. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ December 1, 2019: CSU Scholarship Application Open – The CSUSA is an online scholarship application for many of the scholarships at CSU. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p style="text-align: center;">Academic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print/Review unofficial transcript with student • Print/Review current semester class schedule with the student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete a syllabi review with the student, if appropriate • Identify any academic concerns/areas of interest the student has for the semester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Progression towards major completion ○ Selecting a minor ○ Courses they are Repeating/Deleting ● Discuss what classes the student is most looking forward to, which ones they are more concerned about ● Discuss goal grades for the semester ● Discuss time management and other study skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If applicable, assist the student in developing a weekly study schedule for the semester ○ Identify if there are any study skills areas the student would like to work towards improving this semester ● Complete Student Plan for Success with the student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make a copy for the student & keep the original in the student's folder 	
Tutoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify what tutoring requests/needs the student has ● Sign them up for appropriate tutoring ● Do over tutoring with the student ● Review TILT Tutoring Schedule, NACC Eagle Feather Tutoring Schedule, Academic Village Engineering Tutoring Schedule, Tutoring.Colostate.edu website 	●
Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Check to see if the student has joined the OIP Social Media communities ● If not, invite the student to join OIP Social Media communities and remind them of the value of being part of our social network 	●
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Connect them with appropriate OIP and student organizations on-campus ● Ensure the student is in good legal standing and immigration expectations are being met 	●
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Housing Interest/Concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the student's living situation a good one? ○ Do they have any questions/concerns related to housing? ● Employment Interest/Concerns ● Career Interest/Preparation ● Graduate School Interest/Preparation ● Study Abroad Interest/Preparation ● Other concerns or areas of interest the student may have 	●

Schedule Next Appointments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schedule the second appointment in Weeks 11-12 of the semester with the student• Ensure they are available for the debrief interview at the end of the semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•
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APPENDIX G

FIRST BELONGINGNESS APPOINTMENT PLAN FOR SUCCESS WORKSHEET

OIP Student Plan for Success
(First Meeting)

Participant ID Number: _____ **Retention Specialist:** _____

Strengths I'm Coming Into the Semester With

- _____

- _____

Areas I need support in or am concerned with this Semester

- _____

- _____

Semester Goals
Academic:

- _____

- _____

Non-Academic (Involvement, Career/Job, Health, Social, Financial, etc.)

- _____

Campus Resources to Help Me Reach My Goals (TILT, Tutoring, etc.)

- _____

- _____

**Other Resources to Help Me Reach My Goals (Student Services Offices,
Tutoring Programs, Mentors, etc.)**

1. _____

2. _____

APPENDIX H

2ND BELONGINGNESS APPOINTMENT MEETING GUIDELINES

Participant ID Number: _____

2nd Appointment

- Any time in Weeks 11-12 of the semester
 - Should be 60 minutes in duration
 - Please use the sixty minutes wisely so you can cover all of these areas.
 - Take notes in the third column or on additional pages.
 - Audio record these sessions. Remind students of their rights as a voluntary participant.

Area	Suggested Advising Points	Notes
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Review academic progress, challenges, and concerns in current coursework● Review current grades in Canvas● Utilize GPA predictor to see what the students anticipated semester and cumulative GPA will be at the end of the semester● Talk about finals preparation, create finals study plan● Check-in on any academic goals the student may have set for the semester, make changes to steps to achieve goals if needed● Determine if there are any course the student feels they may need to retake in the future● If applicable, provide guidance on students transitioning from the Collaborative for Student Achievement’s Outreach & Support Office to a College.● Review “Student plan for success”	●

Fall Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify if student has any registration holds and work with them to create a plan to resolve holds (AiresWeb or RamWeb) • Help student identify registration access date/time (AiresWeb or RamWeb) • Remind student to schedule meeting with their major advisor well in advance of their registration date/time • Review Degree Progress Report and /or graduation plan to brainstorm courses the student may want to take in Summer and/or Fall semester. • Use “Wish List” schedule builder with student to start preparing for registration 	•
Financial Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General check-in to see if the student has any financial questions or concerns at this point in the semester • Remind them to consider submitting the CSUSA (CSU Scholarship Application) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CSUSA is open, Closes on 3/1 ○ Available through RamWeb 	•
Tutoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify what tutoring requests/needs the student has • Discuss the effectiveness of the tutoring this semester • Complete Tutoring Request Form <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If necessary, review TILT Tutoring Schedule, NACC Eagle Feather Tutoring Schedule, Academic Village Engineering Tutoring Schedule, Tutoring.Colostate.edu website 	•
Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check to see if the student has joined the OIP Social Media communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If not, invite the student to join OIP Social Media communities and remind them of the value of being part of our social network 	•
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect them with appropriate OIP and student organizations on-campus • Ensure the student is in good legal standing and immigration expectations are being met 	
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Interest/Concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the student’s living situation a good one? ○ Do they have any questions/concerns related to housing? • Employment Interest/Concerns • Career Interest/Preparation 	•

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graduate School Interest/Preparation• Study Abroad Interest/Preparation• Involvement• Other concerns or areas of interest the student may have	
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APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW/DEBRIEFING ON BELONGINGNESS ADVISING SESSIONS

Participant ID Number: _____

- April 30 or May 1: Week 14 of Spring 2020 semester (check student availability)
 - 90 minutes in duration
 - Take notes
 - Audio record the session. Remind students of their rights as a voluntary participant.

Guiding Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences with the advising session.

2. What new opinions or feelings about CSU do you have as a result of your participation?

3. In what ways did you follow through on your belongingness advisors advising?

4. What could be done differently in the advising sessions?

5. Tell me about something you wish you would have known before arriving at CSU?

6. What activity(s) if any enhanced your feeling of membership or belongingness?

APPENDIX J
SENIOR LEVEL INTERNATIONAL STUDENT BELONGINGNESS
MEETING GUIDE

- Any time in Weeks 5-6 of the semester
- Facilitated by Stene Verhulst
- Should be 60 minutes in duration
- Audio record these sessions. Remind students of their rights as a voluntary participant.
 1. What is your passport country, your year of study at CSU, and your academic program?
 2. A definition of belonging is when you feel important to someone or something else (Scholssberg, 1989). Can you tell me if and when you have felt important at CSU?
 3. In terms of academic resources, such as tutoring, office hours, live and learn communities, etc, at CSU what and how have you used these resources during your time here?
 4. Socially, how have you engaged with the campus community while at CSU?
 - a. What has been the most beneficial?
 5. School membership has been defined as a student's perception that the school is there for them and that they matter (Wehlage, 1989; Degelsmith, 2000). In what ways have you found this to be the case at CSU?
 6. What advice would you give to new international students about how they can develop their feelings of belongingness and membership at CSU?
 - a. Academically?
 - b. Socially?

APPENDIX K
CONSTRUCTS FOR PSSM SURVEY

Participation in University Activities	Fitting in with Classmates	Connection to Professors	Acceptance by Faculty
•Q1, Q6, Q10, Q12, Q16, Q17	•Q3, Q4, Q8, Q13, Q18	•Q5, Q7, Q9, Q14	•Q2, Q11, Q13

Construct Modeling for PSSM adapted from Model 1d in:
 Ye, F., & Wallace, T. L. (2014). Psychological sense of school membership scale: method effects associated with negatively worded items. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 32(3), 202–215.

APPENDIX L
COMPLETED PLAN FOR SUCCESS

OIP Student Plan for Success

(First Meeting)

Participant ID Number: _____ Retention Specialist: _____

Strengths I'm Coming Into the Semester With

- Easygoing and understand others' emotions
- Giving and helpful
- Hard working

Areas I need support in or am concerned with this Semester

- Math 101 and CO 130
- Connecting with American student
- English language and understanding American thinking

Semester Goals

Academic:

- Go to professor office for math 101 before march
- Go to all professors office hours before March 13

Non-Academic (Involvement, Career/Job, Health, Social, Financial, etc.)

- Go to slice advising - Long student Center Room 210
- Go to Chinese friends event on March 10 4-5 pm Eddy 108

Campus Resources to Help Me Reach My Goals (TILT, Tutoring, etc.)

- Ramlink organization search
- ISSS Events website
- CSU Writing TILT Tutoring (Great Hall)
2nd floor The Institute for Learning and Teaching (TILT)

APPENDIX M
ASU IRB APPROVAL

EXEMPTION GRANTED

[Josephine Marsh](#)
[Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe](#)
 480/727-4453
josephine.marsh@asu.edu

Dear [Josephine Marsh](#):

On 1/24/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	The International Student Recruitment Experience and the Effects of Institutional Outreach in Supporting Their Feelings of Belongingness at Colorado State University
Investigator:	Josephine Marsh
IRB ID:	STUDY00011312
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st year Student Consent Forms.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • CSU IRB.pdf, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Dissertation Instruments.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • IRB Support Letter - Verhulst PDF.pdf, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Protocol for Verhulst Dissertation, Category: IRB Protocol; • Recruitment Methods 12_01_2020.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Senior International Students Consent.pdf, Category: Consent Form;

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The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 on 1/24/2020.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Stene Verhulst
Stene Verhulst