As international student enrollment rises in the United States and competition for international students intensifies around the world, it has become vital for U.S. institutions of higher education to refocus their efforts on analyzing international student needs and aiding those students’ transitions to their universities. This annotated bibliography focuses on research regarding international student retention, intended to provide recommendations and strategies. While there is a considerable amount of literature on international student adjustment, this bibliography looks at the more limited quantitative and qualitative information concerning university efforts that contribute to retention, as well as habits students employ to graduate.


This qualitative study seeks to address the knowledge gap on international student experiences, and their first-year adjustment and persistence at U.S. universities. The author specifically studies the first-year experiences of international students in their senior year at a 4-year, religiously affiliated university that has a large enrollment of international students, but a low retention rate. The author divides her findings into two main categories, providing both challenges and student solutions: 1) experiences in the classroom, and 2) experiences outside of the classroom. Most international students were found to have relatively negative reactions when asked about their first-year experiences at the university. Within the classroom, some challenges students faced were related to English proficiency, relationships with teachers, and the expectation of participating in class. Solutions that helped these students persist were the passage of time, building relationships with friends and professors, setting goals, and having formal support from various university services. Outside of the classroom, students struggled again with their language skills as well as their limited knowledge of the American culture. Solutions included joining clubs, interacting with students from different cultural backgrounds, and participating in religious activities on campus. The author concludes that because international student adjustment is a gradual process, students should have continual support beyond their first year, and recommends more opportunities for students to develop language skills, meet others from diverse backgrounds, and engage in campus activities.

This study seeks to look at the degree to which international students change in order to integrate themselves into American culture and campuses, and how this integration relates to student persistence and their ability to be successful. The author looks at a group of international students in their senior year at a private, religiously affiliated university. Three main areas of change are examined, which consist of: (1) becoming a college student; (2) attending a religious university; and (3) the students’ home culture. The author demonstrates that integration can be viewed as a positive action for international students rather than being a form of assimilation or rejection of one’s home culture. Within this group of international students, integration was found to result in academic success and personal growth in the form of persistence. According to the study, students positively viewed the degree to which they had integrated, and reported they had still maintained their cultural integrity.


In this study the author tries to address the gap in qualitative research on international student retention at community colleges. He seeks to understand why some international students continue to take classes without graduating, and what factors contribute to successful graduation. Specifically, the author wants to discover whether or not international student engagement with campus activities affects retention based on student perceptions. To carry out this study, the author interviewed ten international students at Houston Community College. Based on the interviews, it was discovered that while there were many reasons for students’ inability to graduate, language barriers were a common factor. In addition, there was a great lack of engagement with the university, and most of the international students interviewed had never attended orientation in order to get valuable information for their transition to university life. The author concludes that what is needed to improve international student retention is further assessment of student needs, encouraging student integration to campus life, and providing a diversified campus climate.


In this quantitative study the author seeks to address the limited amount of research on the cultural and emotional feelings of international students in relation to academic programs. The purpose is to analyze and understand the needs of international students, and look at the barriers affecting the decline in their admission, enrollment, and retention. Through surveys, international students were asked to discuss academic and cultural barriers from their point of view. The author intends for this research to help institutions attract and retain international students amid an increasing amount seeking degrees abroad, the decreasing rate in enrollment in the United States due to immigration changes after Sept. 11, 2001, advances in internet learning, and the prospect of the Bologna agreement. Results showed that institutions of higher education in the United States need to improve their relationships and processes regarding international students. Many report to be uncertain about the admissions process and campus safety, and continue to experience difficulty with language barriers, work, finances, and cultural issues. The author recommends workshops, classes, and forums to address some of these challenges.

Acknowledging the limited research done on academic persistence of international student athletes, this study seeks to explain the high graduation rates of those in the NCAA Division I. Specifically, it examines responses from support personnel regarding the academic persistence of these students, as well as the institutional academic support practices they believe play important roles in retention. The goal is to identify best practices and make recommendations for institutions with international student athletes. The author found that despite there being limited resources for international student athletes specifically, they still had higher graduation rates than domestic student athletes. This is attributed to how international student athletes used personnel and programs; specifically, international student athletes were found to forge early and meaningful relationships with academic support personnel, which helped them adjust to academic life. In addition, they tended to voluntarily continue support programs beyond the mandatory amount, as well as sought tutors before they began to struggle academically.

Kontaxakis, Evangelos. “Experiences that Impact the Recruitment and Retention of International (Non-Native Speaker of English) Student-Athletes in NCAA Division I Institutions.” PhD diss., Indiana State University, 2011. ProQuest (ATT 3491231).

This qualitative study seeks to contribute to the limited information on international student athletes attending U.S. universities. Specifically, it looks at the experiences that impact international student recruitment and retention by examining international students’ decisions to attend a university, and the transition from high school in their home country to the university. The goal of this research was to create a model for institutions to better recruit international student athletes, and provide methods to ensure that they persist to graduation. The author found that some of the most important factors influencing an international student athlete’s decision to choose a U.S. institution were the institution’s capability of combining education with sports, and the financial aid these institutions offered. Some factors that influenced retention were language barriers, cultural differences, homesickness, and balancing the roles of a student and athlete.


This study examines the various factors that could influence and predict the retention of international students. The study was done of 454 international students after completing their first year of undergraduate study at two public statewide 4-year universities. The model used to make this analysis was based on a combination of previous models of retention. The study looks at three categories for its analysis: pre-entry attributes, institutional experience, and on-campus integration. The author found that there was no single factor that influenced the persistence of international students from their first year of study to the second; however, attempted credit hours, spring semester’s grade point average (GPA), and on-campus employment had some positive influences on student retention and persistence.

In this study the author attempts to add to the limited research on the benefits of social support programs for international students that do not directly relate to social development. The author analyzes whether or not implementing innovative social support programs benefit recruitment and retention of international students. The study focuses on two research questions: 1) The institution’s support role in implementing innovations in enhancing recruitment and retention of international students; and 2) the role of leadership in implementing innovation to meet the needs of international students. This analysis was done based on interviews with international students and staff at two universities, one in California and the other in Hawaii. Results showed that with sufficient support from the institution and leadership, innovative social support programs have a positive impact on student retention.


This article outlines the efforts of the Global Detroit International Student Retention Program to retain international student talent within the region through a grant provided to the University Research Corridor (URC) by The New Economy Initiative of Southeast Michigan. Recognizing the contributions that the large population of international students makes within the region, the initiative seeks to attract and retain international students with marketing as well as by providing career assistance and immigration advice.


This article analyzes international students in postsecondary institutions, and the factors that influence their persistence using quantitative data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) data set. Based on theoretical frameworks, the first year of study in a postsecondary institution is crucial to an international student’s success. This study looks at the international student’s profile during their first year of college to examine the factors that influence their persistence. Positive factors include academic performance, language proficiency, plans to pursue a degree in the United States, and academic integration. Social integration was found to have a negative impact on international student persistence; however, the author cautions that this finding is indicative of the quantitative nature of this study, and begets further exploration in a qualitative study. These findings imply that collaboration between campus offices is essential to ensure international student success.


This study seeks to add to the limited information on international student retention, and contributes to research on the acculturation of international students. Specifically, the authors seek to confirm a correlation between close friendships and having a social network to the acculturation of international students. By understanding the correlation, the authors hope to provide guidance for programs aimed at improving international
student adjustment and retention. The authors compare responses to a survey on the adjustment of 182 international students to a sample of U.S. students to see if adjustment to college life is more difficult when coming from abroad. They find that the number of close friends an international student has does not affect their adjustment to campus life; however, satisfaction with a social network does have a significant effect. The authors call for further research on what leads to student satisfaction with their social network, and suggest advisers estimate the proportion of international students who may have adjustment issues, and plan for it accordingly by providing special attention to them.


In this study, the authors use both quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the relationship between international students and their academic advisers. Based on the understanding that quality advising can be very important to international student retention and success, they seek to expand on the limited knowledge of international student advising relationships. More than 360 international students were surveyed to answer questions on their experiences with their advisers. These surveys were based on the Advisory Working Alliance Inventory (AWAI), which measured three aspects of the advisory relationship: rapport, identification-individuation, and apprenticeship. Results showed that generally these international students were satisfied with their relationships with their advisers. However, a large minority was dissatisfied with their relationship; one in 4 students stated that they would have chosen to change advisers if possible. Students who stated they were dissatisfied mentioned the lack of an interpersonal quality in their relationship, as well as limited amount of professional development mentoring. Based on these results, the authors suggest it may be more difficult for international students to forge emotional bonds with their advisers if they are from different cultural groups. They state it is important for advisers to be sensitive to these cultural differences, and understand they can provide valuable social support to international students; such support can alleviate a lot of stress for the student.


In this study, the authors look at factors that influence an international graduate student’s decision to attend a particular graduate school. Both international graduate students and alumni were asked to complete surveys in order to collect this data, which was then analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Recognizing the increase in competition for international students between different countries, the authors hope that understanding how students make their decisions will help institutions better recruit and retain them. The authors find that influences vary between subgroups such as nationality, gender, age, and status. Results indicate that for current students, funding for studies is one of the top concerns; for alumni, it is acceptance when considering a university. Safety and security is another concern for some students, as well as the helpfulness of faculty. Based on student responses, some recommendations for the recruitment and retention of international students are providing more funding for international students to attend their schools, increasing on-campus housing for students to feel safer when attending school, and encouraging faculty to be more mindful of cultural differences as well as provide cultural events.

Recognizing the steady increase in enrollment of international students as well as the high attrition rate, the authors of this study seek to identify common behaviors among international students that are counterproductive to academic success and social integration. In addition, they hope to understand the motivation behind these behaviors, as well as suggest strategies for faculty to ease the learning process for international students. The study was done through surveys, interviews, and focus groups at two universities. Based on faculty answers, the authors found that some of the most consistent behaviors detrimental to class success were that international students: (1) did not participate in class; (2) usually did not ask for clarification; and (3) only studied and sat with other international students. Some of the top transitional difficulties students reported were in developing a social network and language barriers. The authors suggest several strategies designed to improve academic performance and encourage social integration within the classroom. These strategies include having faculty hold initial meetings with the international student when the course begins, as well as using small groups often.


This study focuses on the persistence of English as a Second Language (ESL) students in undergraduate engineering programs. The author uses retention data and GPAs to examine retention and success, and compares retention rates of ESL students to those of native speakers. She hopes the findings will help improve strategies to recruit and retain ESL students in engineering programs in the United States, as well as address the shortage of engineers in the workforce by encouraging more diversity. The study was carried out by quantitatively analyzing survey results from undergraduate ESL engineering students at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Results revealed that ESL students had a higher retention rate as well as higher GPAs than native speakers. Based on these findings, the author suggests that universities which are struggling with retention in their engineering programs increase the recruitment of ESL students. She also recommends more programs and clubs to ease the transition of ESL students into engineering programs.

This is a quantitative study on international student choice and retention in universities in the United States. International students from two public universities were surveyed to find out what factors influenced their decisions to choose a particular school, as well as what influenced their retention. The author hopes these findings will help recruiters, international student advisers, and faculty better recruit and retain international students. Results showed that “preparation for the future,” “academic reputation/quality of the school,” and “strength of the academic program” were top reasons for international students to pick a particular school. Top factors influencing retention were “personal motivation,” “good grades,” and “good knowledge of the English language.” Since the results indicate that English language skills affect student retention, the author recommends more intensive English classes, workshops, and tutors for international students. Similarly, because academic reputation and quality seem to influence student choice of schools, the author suggests recruiters increasingly promote the various academic programs the school offers. In addition, because students considered grades to be an indicator of retention, the author recommends faculty and international student advisers cater their classes to international students and promote resources—such as tutoring opportunities—to help students improve their academic skills.


The author strives in this study to address the gap in research on international student persistence, which has become increasingly significant as international student enrollment grows at universities. With this in mind, the author quantitatively examines the correlational relationship between six factors: age, gender, country of citizenship, English proficiency, grade point average, and selected degree program. The study was done on two cohorts of full-time international students starting their freshman year at one 4-year public university. The author found that GPA and retention were statistically significant. This suggests that international students with higher GPAs are more likely to continue with their studies at a university, as opposed to students with lower GPAs. The author calls for further research on whether the theories of retention for domestic students can be applied to international students, and calls for continued research on international students across U.S. institutions.