



INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT STUDY

REPORT ON FINDINGS

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It's not only at the level of 'here is an individual international student who needs this support and community' but it's more about [...] what kind of campus do we want to be. And it reflects on the kind of thinking that's happening on campus and its reputation. I think that matters to me a lot.

– International PhD student, 2nd year in the Social Sciences

1. FRAMING THE ISSUE

International graduate students at UC Santa Cruz are an asset to their peers, students, and the wider campus community. They bring much needed international expertise as a highly motivated, inter-culturally competent, and diverse constituency.

As graduate students, they confront the same issues that also affect their domestic peers – the rising cost of housing and tuition, unsustainable work-life balance, health crises, a sense of lacking community, and, at times, identity-based bias. Because they face additional challenges, however, such as language and cultural barriers, non-resident tuition fees, limited eligibility for funding, restrictions on work, and other limitations associated with their visa status, they are impacted by structural issues in *particular* ways.

This study was designed to assess whether existing resources and programming at UC Santa Cruz are meeting their unique and complex needs. Based on focus group discussions conducted in February 2019, this report offers **qualitative data** on the experiences of international Ph.D. students at UC Santa Cruz. It also suggests **practical steps** that could address their particular needs at a low cost in short-term, mid-term, and long-term perspective. By addressing persisting barriers to the success and well-being of this growing constituency, our campus community could ensure that UC Santa Cruz remains a competitive destination for future international applicants.

a. Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, international Ph.D. students are defined as graduate students that were admitted to a Ph.D. program at UC Santa Cruz on a student visa. In consultation with International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS), it also includes Ph.D. students who primarily resided outside of the United States before pursuing their graduate education at UC Santa Cruz.

The needs of international graduate students enrolled in Master's programs at UC Santa Cruz should be evaluated in a separate study. Although there are significant overlaps, especially upon their initial arrival in Santa Cruz, their academic experiences vary. This is due to factors such as a shorter timeline to graduation, limited teaching opportunities, and the overall different professional purpose of a Master's degree. In order to preserve the consistency of the data, the particular needs of international Master's students could not be included in this study.

b. Research Question

What are the particular challenges faced by international PhD students at UC Santa Cruz? Are currently existing resources and programming meeting their unique and complex needs?

c. Areas of Need

This study was designed to assess the *particular* needs of international graduate students in the following areas:

- Basic Needs
- Professional Development
- Health & Well-Being
- Community

d. Enrollment Data

- *333 international PhD students currently enrolled at UC Santa Cruz*
- *270 in Physical & Biological Sciences and Engineering*
- *63 in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts*
- *No data available on international graduate student retention*

According to data provided by ISSS in January 2019, the majority of international graduate students at UC Santa Cruz are enrolled in PhD programs. Out of a total of 501 international graduate students currently enrolled at UC Santa Cruz, only one third is enrolled in Master's programs (169), including two MFA students in Social Documentation (Master of Fine Arts). The remaining two thirds are enrolled in PhD programs (333), including five DMA students (Doctor of Musical Arts).

The majority of international Ph.D. students are pursuing degrees in the Physical and Biological Sciences and Engineering (270), while the remaining fifth is pursuing degrees in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts (63). There is currently no central data base to keep track of graduation rates of international graduate students at UC Santa Cruz.

2. EXISTING RESOURCES AT UC SANTA CRUZ

a. Overview

The following **campus units** currently serve **international graduate students** at UC Santa Cruz:

DIVISION OF GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

- Overview of **Global Programming** in [AY 2016-17](#), [AY 2017-18](#), and [AY 2018-19](#)¹
- **International Education Week**
 - launched in 2016, each November
 - Primarily targets undergraduate students (see overview of programming)
 - “Life after Graduation” Immigration Workshop (ISSS)
- **Graduate Preparation Program (GPP)**
 - four-week intensive non-credit course offered prior to the Fall quarter
 - open to all current and newly admitted international graduate students.
 - focuses on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), academic skills, and cultural orientation
 - cost of \$1,000 per student
- **ACE Internationalization Lab**
 - Comprehensive review of the current state of internationalization activities at UC Santa Cruz between August 2018 and July 2020
 - Purpose: Designate priorities for internationalization at UC Santa Cruz and propose a plan for their advancement and implementation (see EVC Steering Committee Charge, November 26, 2018)
 - Linked to the Design Principles and Academic Priority Areas of the UCSC Strategic Academic Plan
 - Incorporates faculty in all departments
 - Open Town Hall in April 2019

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND SCHOLAR SERVICES (ISSS)

- International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) provides **visa and immigration advising** to F-1 and J-1 international students. It provides orientations, workshops, information, and referrals to international students and scholars at UC Santa Cruz.

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION (GSA)

- **International Graduate Student Mixer** (quarterly)
- **Solidarity + International Get Together**
 - Mingle for graduate students of color, LGBTQ and gender non-conforming graduate students, graduate students with disabilities, undocumented and international graduate students + allies

¹ Overview provided by Keri Toma, former Global Programs Manager, in October 2018.

- **International Graduate Student Committee (IGSC)**
 - Created by international graduate students in 2015 as a liaison between the GSA and ISSS (formerly the International Education Office)
 - Compiled a short [resource guide](#) for incoming international graduate students
 - [Facebook group](#) (only for *Facebook* members)
 - International Graduate Student Support Group
 - launched in January 2019
 - facilitated by Nancy Heischman, Director of [Campus Conflict Resolution Services](#)

GRADUATE STUDENT COMMONS (GSC)

- **“Writing Together” for International Graduate Students**
 - dedicated space for writing
 - organized by a group of international Ph.D. students
 - offers no individual feedback

OTHER INITIATIVES ACROSS CAMPUS

The following units and initiatives implicitly address or explicitly consider the needs of international graduate students:

- **Division of Graduate Studies**
 - Sponsored premium subscription of “Grammarly” (writing software)
 - Trial subscription with “[Defend & Publish](#)” (online coaching service for graduate-level writers)
 - Graduate Student Professional Communication Certificate Program (Fall 2018)
- **Center for Teaching and Learning (CITL)**
 - Graduate Pedagogy Fellows (GPF) program
 - Graduate Certificate Programs
 - Summer Graduate Pedagogy Mentors program
- **The Humanities Institute (THI)**
 - PhD+ Workshop Series
 - Public Humanities Graduate Teaching Fellowship
 - THI Public Fellows program
 - Graduate Student Research Funding (limited to the Humanities)
- **Division of Student Success**
 - Graduate Student Success Advisory (GSSA) Group

b. Questions for International Graduate Students

Questions that arose in consultation with **International Student & Scholar Services** and **Global Programs** of the Division of Global Engagement:

- **Are international graduate students encountering a different set of problems than other students?**
- **What kind of information do international graduate students need, and when do they need it?**
- **What is the experience of incoming international graduate students upon arrival?**
- **In which areas do international graduate students feel that they need additional support?**
- **What kind of programming do international graduate students value and want?**
- **What kind of programming will motivate international graduate students to come out for international events?**

3. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

*Why are focus groups useful?*²

- *Group dialogue tends to generate a lot of **rich information**, as participants get each other talking about different ways of experiencing or thinking about something*
- *Focus groups elicit information from people who can provide **unique insights***
- *Focus groups provide a representation of **diverse opinions and ideas***
- *Focus groups provide a relatively **low cost and efficient** way to generate a great deal of information*

a. Research Methodology

Focus group discussions are a research method for the collection of qualitative data. They are group conversations between up to ten people about “perceptions on a topic of interest in a relaxed, permissive environment that fosters the expression of different points of view, with no pressure for consensus.”³

In order to assess if existing resources and programming are meeting the needs of international Ph.D. students at UC Santa Cruz, three focus group discussions were conducted at the Graduate Student Commons in February 2019. These group conversations offered insights into the effectiveness of existing resources, students’ awareness about these resources, and strategies

² “Information Gathering Toolkit: Basic Tools for Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection,” The OMNI Institute, 14.

³ Ibid.

for creating a greater sense of support and belonging among international graduate students.

i. Outreach

How were participants recruited?

In January 2019, a call for participants was circulated through a number of channels to reach as many international Ph.D. students at UC Santa Cruz as possible. The call described the purpose and format of the study, and invited interested students to fill out a [registration form](#).

It was circulated by International Student & Scholar Services and included in the “Global Slug Connection” newsletter for three consecutive weeks. The Graduate Student Commons also added the call to their newsletter and created flyers to advertise the study on its premises. It was also promoted by the International Graduate Student Committee of the Graduate Student Association and the newly formed International Student Writing Group.

In order to reach beginning international Ph.D. students, the call was forwarded to participants in the Graduate Preparation Program (GPP). It was also shared with “Women in Science and Engineering” (UCSC WiSE), a student-led advocacy group, in order to reach underrepresented international Ph.D. students in the Physical & Biological Sciences and Engineering.

Graduate program coordinators across campus were asked to forward the call to advanced international Ph.D. students who may not be currently enrolled but still plan to graduate. This constituency is generally hard to reach because there is no central database to keep track of international graduate students who shorten their stay at UC Santa Cruz. Lastly, the call was shared through personal networks.

ii. Focus Groups

What was the composition of the focus groups?

The experiences of international Ph.D. students can vary from department to department, and even from cohort to cohort. However, there are certain similarities that allow to group and assess them by divisions. While Ph.D. students in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts tend to struggle with funding, for example, Ph.D. students in the Physical and Biological Sciences and Engineering are often funded through their dissertation advisors. While the former predominantly pursue individual research projects, the latter are generally members of multi-year research laboratories. Ph.D. students in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts are therefore more likely to experience feelings of isolation. At the same time, the academic success of Ph.D. students in the Physical and Biological Sciences and Engineering is more vulnerable to inter-personal dynamics in labs.

For the purpose of this study, participants in the focus groups were therefore **divided** between Ph.D. students in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts, and Ph.D. students in the Physical and Biological Sciences and Engineering. Furthermore, the research design

distinguished between **beginning** and **advanced** international Ph.D. students – defined by advancement to candidacy – because additional funding opportunities become available to ABD students.⁴ Since resources and programming for international students at UC Santa Cruz have changed over the past five years, controlling for **stages of progress** toward the Ph.D. also allowed to assess whether these changes have led to improvements. Do the experiences of beginning and advanced international Ph.D. students within similar fields of research, broadly construed, significantly differ depending on the year in which they entered UC Santa Cruz?

Out of 29 international Ph.D. students who responded to the call for participants, four focus groups were formed according to the criteria spelled out above. However, due to scheduling conflicts and last-minute cancellations, they were later grouped into **three focus groups**:

- **Focus Group 1**, advanced Ph.D. students in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts
- **Focus Group 2**, beginning and advanced Ph.D. students in the Physical & Biological Sciences and Engineering
- **Focus Group 3**, beginning Ph.D. students in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts

The focus group discussions were conducted at the Graduate Student Commons over the course of two days in February 2019. Due to no-shows, each group was ultimately composed of only three respondents. However, the small size of the focus groups allowed each participant to go into great depth. The nine respondents represented nine different countries on four different continents. They were enrolled in nine different departments across five divisions. Seven out of nine participants preferred the gender pronoun “she/her/hers,” while two preferred the gender pronoun “he/him/his.” No other information was collected about identity markers such as socio-economic class, age, or sexual orientation.

All group conversations were facilitated by the author of this report, herself an advanced international Ph.D. student in the Humanities. Focus Group 1 was observed by Joseline Arreaga, an undergraduate intern with the Frist Generation initiative in the Division of Student Success. Focus Groups 2 and 3 were observed by Claudia Castañeda, a graduate student researcher at the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Policy Studies (IRAPS).

In addition to the focus group discussions, two respondents were interviewed one-on-one or over the phone.

⁴ ABD students are Ph.D. Candidates who have fulfilled all degree requirements except their dissertation thesis (“all but dissertation”).

iii. Discussion

How were the focus group discussions structured?

Each focus group discussion went over time and took approximately two hours. Participants took breaks and were offered hot food, cookies, and beverages. After the participants read and signed consent forms, they were asked to indicate on a spectrum from “very happy” to “very unhappy,” drawn as a horizontal arrow on a whiteboard, they overall felt about their experience as international Ph.D. students at UC Santa Cruz. This was to control for confirmation bias.

Two participants indicated that they were “very happy” and “very unhappy,” respectively. The remaining participants tended toward “very happy” or indicated that they fell in the middle – “happy.” This shows that participants were not drawn from a particularly “aggrieved” segment of the population of international graduate students. Although the sample size was small, and the results therefore not generalizable, they qualitatively represent the average experience of international Ph.D. students at UC Santa Cruz.

The discussions were guided by ten open-ended questions (appended) and audio recorded. On average, each question was discussed for 15-20 minutes. The group conversations were lively and engaged. All participants spoke for approximately the same amount of time, listened respectfully, and responded to each other throughout each discussion. Since we were among ourselves, as international Ph.D. students, there was a sense of trust and mutual recognition.

Each recording was transcribed in anonymized form. The resulting 150-page transcript was analyzed for shared themes and closely examined for differences across divisions. These themes were grouped by the areas of need that were to be examined in this study: basic needs, in particular housing and tuition, professional development, health & well-being, and sense of community. In addition, participants discussed their experiences with different campus units and orientations.

b. Results by Area of Need

People think they do not need any kind of support. They think, “I can do this on my own.” But they do. They are worried about their reputation.

– International Ph.D. student, 3rd year in the Social Sciences

The results of the focus group discussions are presented in composite form below. They are separated by theme and organized as “action items” in order to frame the issues that were discussed through the lens of a positive “growth” mindset.

The first line of each “action item” briefly describes a concern that was raised by multiple participants. This is followed by a section that explains how and why an issue is particularly affecting international Ph.D. students. Each entry ends with proposed steps that could be taken

to address the issue, including ideas that were offered by the participants themselves. Some of these proposed solutions would create synergies across areas of need. They are highlighted in the summary of recommendations at the end of this report.

First-person testimony by international Ph.D. students has been included, at times extensively, in order to illustrate the impact of structural barriers on the success, health, and well-being of individual students through their subjective experiences at UC Santa Cruz. Where necessary, personal accounts have been redacted or merged in order to ensure the anonymity of respondents.

i. Basic Needs

Action item: Airport transfer to Santa Cruz

Why: Lack of familiarity with available modes of transportation; no functioning phone or sim card upon arrival; large volume of luggage and exhaustion after 24hour+ international travel

You come from a country, which takes 30 hours to get here. And the last thing you want to do is not sleep and be without housing. But I had to do that.

it's like, multiple flights to get here. And then. And then, you arrive in San Jose. And then you're like, "surely there must be a bus that takes you from the airport to the train station." No! There are TWO buses, and then you take two buses, and you wait for the third bus. And then you walk 20 minute. And every time I do this, I've been traveling for over 24 hours. At that point it makes no sense for me to be here. Every time I do this I question, "why did I just leave?"

I had a short term thing in Australia before and they actually had someone from the university receive international students, you could book a form online and then they would send a cab. they sort of had a period of time where most of the students would be arriving like the first week of the quarter or so. [...] the cab would be shared by multiple people, you had to enter, like what kind of luggage you're carrying. And so, how many students could be possibly accommodated in that car, or they would wait or, you know, you would be asked to wait around for a little while because there will be another flight arriving. They would coordinate it really well. But it worked out great. I really loved that.

Proposed steps: Arrange/offer airport pick-up for international graduate students; could be self-funded, if necessary, but arranged by ISSS or departments; consider creating an online form for incoming international students to enter their arrival times and volume of luggage to coordinate pick-ups and share expenses if they arrive within in a specific window before the beginning of the quarter.

Action item: Housing support upon first arrival in the US

Why: Participants described their experiences with finding housing in Santa Cruz as “frustrating,” “terrible,” and “harrowing.” When international students arrive in the United States for the first time, they have **no rental or credit history**; arranging housing from abroad can be daunting, especially across time difference, language barriers, and cultural difference.

Trying to find housing from back home [...] was really frustrating [...] because it's a difference of 12 and a half hours. I was staying up to like 3:00 AM, making calls to the US. Um, where, you know, people were saying things like, where's your accent from? And um, you know, I'm, I'm sure that was not a conducive kind of conversation at all when you know someone's calling from a different country, speaking in a different accent and trying to find out if they can rent your house, people will obviously not respond very well to that. And um, that knowing that there are other UCs where students have guaranteed housing in the first year, I mean it was just appalling to me to think that there's a random process of selection for the graduate student housing. What about students coming from outside of the country? I mean, how are we being put at par with people who are coming probably from the same state. Um, so that was just really frustrating.

There aren't even [...] reasonable places to stay while you're looking for housing.

Even after living in Santa Cruz for several years, many international graduate students still find it very difficult to secure stable housing.

Whatever it is, it hasn't improved over three years. [...] If you don't have a place to sleep for the night, how will you do your research? [...] I felt cornered as an international. I didn't think I deserve it. That's one of the reasons why I decided that post-graduation, I'm not going to stay in the US.

Those students who found housing on campus, for example in **Graduate Student Housing**, were significantly happier with their experience.

It changed my life when I was able to move to Family Student Housing. [...] Before we were paying 2400 and now we pay 1650. [...] I didn't know that you need a credit score. And when you apply for houses, and being international, it's hard because you have none. I started building it now because I got a credit card, so I'm complying to the American system, you know? But it was very, very hard. That's why you end up with a \$2400 place. Every other place turned us away. You spend money to apply, and then they turn you away.

I didn't get in the first times I applied but I finally got in and I don't want to ever move out.

I was really fortunate because I found housing on campus. It really quickly just worked out for me. So I was really fortunate in that sense.

Some departments such as Physics require incoming Ph.D. students to pass a qualifying exam before their coursework begins in the first year. International students in these departments are

particularly disadvantaged without housing assistance upon first arrival because they do not have a place to live and study for these entry exams. The participant who raised this issue noted that there was no offer of assistance with housing whatsoever.

Proposed steps: Take steps to help incoming international students settle in prior to arrival; email incoming students a **resource guide** on “What are first things to do?” Consider creating a **database of landlords** who are willing to rent to international graduate students at a reasonable cost; prioritize international graduate students for slots in **Graduate Student Housing** for the first year to guarantee secure and safe housing in a tight housing market (before September, when waitlist upgrade kicks in); support the efforts of the GSA International Graduate Student Committee to create a coordinator position to assist incoming international graduate students with housing; create a staff position to assist with international housing needs.

Action item: Address high cost of tuition for international students

Why: Some international students are admitted to graduate programs without tuition remission. Many **do not understand** the financial burden they are asked to carry until they arrive in Santa Cruz. TA-ships, GSR-ships, and other fellowships currently available to international graduate students do not cover non-resident tuition fees. While US citizens and residents can establish residency in California, international graduate students remain “non-resident aliens” for their entire tenure at UCSC. Their visa status does not allow them to become legal residents in order to avoid non-resident tuition fees.

The first year was miserable, because I had a very bad package, which is something that I learned actually when I got here, because before I thought it wasn't that bad. And then I learned what my cohort had and I realized how bad it was. I didn't have non-resident tuition for two quarters, I only had one quarter paid of non-resident tuition, and three quarters of TA-ing, while my cohort had three quarters of non-resident tuition, one of them had three years as well. And they had also a fellowship one quarter, so they didn't have to TA. I had to TA every quarter so I never had the time, you know, to relax a second. And I had core classes and everything. And nobody helped me with money. It was, it was really hard. [...] money was terrible. [...] I didn't find help at all. And I think what would have helped me is money.

One student was expected to advance to candidacy in the first quarter of her second year. She was asked to choose her dissertation advisor over Skype while she was still abroad.

But my advisor fought for me, so that my department extended from four quarters to six quarters, and gave me two quarters of fellowship.

The perception seems to be that the concerns of international students who receive inadequate funding packages are not being taken seriously by the Graduate Division.

Proposed steps: It is important to ensure that prospective international graduate students understand the financial burden of admission without tuition remission; consider creating more fellowships or jobs for international graduate students to be able to **cover international tuition**

fees (e.g. as writing tutors for beginning international graduate students); workshops for department managers to know about these opportunities; increase awareness about the limited options and particular needs that international graduate students have when it comes to funding.

Action item: Address income gap during the summer

Why: There is generally a **lack of summer support** for Ph.D. students at UC Santa Cruz. However, international graduate students do not have a work permit and therefore cannot support themselves by working off-campus during the summer. Most do not have relatives or friends in the United States that they could rely on for support. Going home, however, is not always an option. The cost of a plane ticket might exceed the cost of staying. This places international graduate students in a **particularly untenable** situation during the summer.

To survive here through summers, not knowing if you are going to have a job, is a very specific issue for international students. I don't know if they are taking it as seriously as they should be taking it.

It's not sustainable to be in a very dire position during the summer. I don't know where I'm going to live, because I won't have a paycheck. That to me is so depressing. Every summer, it's the same thing.

I personally really wanted to stay into summer for my research. But I don't have money here. So I always go back to my country and do part time jobs during the summer.

So they assume that every summer I go back home, and they assume that my home is [country in Europe], which is not true. My home is here now. And I don't go back in the summer because I live here. [...] they assume things because they don't bother getting to know our specific situations.

Proposed steps: Encourage departments to offer funding or GSR positions to incoming international Ph.D. students at least during their first summer; encourage more campus units to apply for external grants to offer fellowships to international graduate students during the summer. These could be connected to professional development, writing, etc. CITL and THI are taking steps in the right direction but should be scaled up with international Ph.D. students in mind.

Action item: Mainstream awareness about international graduate students' needs across campus units

Why: The support of **graduate advisors** and **department managers** was identified as a crucial factor that enables international graduate students to succeed in their studies.

Because they're the ones who can just answer all of your administrative questions, which I think we particularly have a lot of it cause we're also just using a different vocabulary sometimes.

It's easy to fall out of status if you get the wrong advice and [that] creates unnecessary anxiety. So it can be a huge relief to have someone who's knowledgeable in those questions.

If department managers are not knowledgeable about the restrictions that international graduate students face due to **visa requirements**, they may not be able to provide the **administrative support** that degree granting **academic departments** *should* be able to provide. Respondents also felt that faculty should consider their particular situation more when making departmental decisions about the allocation of funding.

I want them to know that there are not many things that we can apply to as international students. I want to get more help and support from the faculty and other administrators in our department [Literature].

If you don't have funding and opportunities that are meant for you... I didn't quite appreciate how restricted those fellowship opportunities are, not just NSF [National Science Foundation], but even within the university. [...] Then you have to TA all the time, and you can't do any research.

I wish they knew that I can only work for UCSC. Because they don't know that they don't know that if they don't give me a TA-ship next year, I'm going to be so screwed. They don't know. They don't know about our work authorization. They don't know that we cannot do internships unless we start out, you know, OPT early, they don't know all that. They don't know how vital campus funding is for us. So they need to know that. [...] Also because we cannot take student loans. [...] Even if I wanted to, I couldn't get loans.

Due to the added pressure of having to pay non-resident tuition, many international Ph.D. students are on an **accelerated timeline** to graduation. This **funding pressure** creates **additional stress** because teaching on an ongoing basis does not allow students to focus on their own research. Faculty who understand the particular situation of their international advisees is more effective at advocating for them.

I really feel like at the level of departments, there's like no acknowledgment of international students as a group that needs support whatsoever.

Also because we are in a rush compared to other students. I need to have my QE before my third year, otherwise it will cost me. [...] My department set the timeline for seven years, but they only allow me funding for five years.

A lot of professors in our department [Physics] don't know [...] that you have to advance by the end of your second year. I've seen that happen to a friend, where his advisor told him like a month or two months before, "Oh, you need to advance before the end of this quarter." Turns out, he was not aware of it. [...] They just don't know any of the rules or changes associated with foreign students. [...] I usually know more than the professor themselves because we have to deal with it.

All respondents reported that they also perceive an *extreme* lack of **inter-cultural awareness** among their peers, students, and some staff. The success of many international graduate

students seems to depend on their ability to find a **faculty mentor** who will advocate for them at the administrative level. However, this makes international Ph.D. students more vulnerable to inter-personal conflict because they may not yet know how to successfully navigate unfamiliar social dynamics and informal hierarchies. Students problematized that their choice of an advisor should not be limited by how “open minded” and culturally competent a particular faculty member “happens” to be. This competency should be required across the university.

The feeling is that you live and die by your advisor. [...] So if the person is really mindful, culturally competent, willing to learn, trying different things, and responsive, and all of that, it might work, according to our needs, which are things that I need as well. For me right now it is about developing that relationship more than developing relationships with other people on campus.

For at least the first two quarters [I was just] hanging around, not really knowing who to even turn to because yeah, my graduate advisor wasn't, I mean we checked in, but it wasn't really the kind of, um, support that first year I think I should have received.

Something that I've noticed in classes is that professors are usually reluctant to listen to experiences that are not from the States. [...] it's like, “good for you that you have that experience, but we don't care.” That is my perception. Although we are from a department that is supposedly open-minded, the stereotypical perception is still there.

There needs to be an ability to speak to people without the assumption that we're speaking from the same knowledge base. Um, and by that I mean an experiential knowledge base. [...] just the ability to recognize that [difference] is really important.

Some suggested that faculty from international or marginalized backgrounds tend to make for better advisors for international graduate students.

So I don't know, like people from marginalized background who share some of our struggles might prove to be better advisors because they have deep knowledge of that [experience]. They don't just study it from afar. [...] We all have our blind spots. It's okay. It's just about how to talk about those presuppositions in ways that are conducive to change. Not just a feeling of “oh, this is just too uncomfortable to do,” but “oh, no, I should do more.”

Being offered support by faculty, staff, and peers without having to ask for support helps international graduate students reach out for support when they do need it.

I think it would help if the faculty and staff realized what are some additional challenges that we can have for everyday life [...] For example, I don't have a car. But nobody would think about that.

I used to really find it hard to ask for anything. Maybe it's too much to ask for, I shouldn't say it. But what I really liked was that she would mention things by herself. And I just had to say, ‘Yeah, I was kind of thinking about that.’ [...] That's probably the best part I like about my experience here – my advisor and my lab mates. They would bring things up by themselves. And I didn't have to feel as hesitant.

Proposed steps: Institutionalize networking between ISSS and departments that admit international Ph.D. students; require legal training for department managers and offer workshops to faculty and administrators to increase awareness about the legal limitations that international graduate students are facing due to visa requirements; help faculty and staff support international students better through inter-cultural competency trainings; foster a “culture of support” by encouraging **proactive outreach**; increase international **awareness** about education systems abroad in order to break harmful stereotypes about international students as “elite” students who do not need support; encourage **mentorship and advocacy** for international graduate students at all levels of the university; open up conversation about mentoring international students and consider creating a faculty and staff recognition award; prepare international students to select their advisors well by sharing handbooks about mentoring so that they can adjust their expectations and seek good mentoring; hire more **diverse faculty and staff**.

Action item: Increase awareness about ISSS among international students and consider expanding advising capacity

Why: Apart from ISSS, there seems to be no administrative unit that can provide knowledgeable support to international graduate students.

ISSS, as an office, maybe that's the only space that is, that counts as a somewhat administrative space that is supporting us, but otherwise there seems to be this complete failure of acknowledgement that we are, you know, we're different, we are from different countries, from different cultures and um, to just address that fact. I don't think it's there at all from the administration or from the departments.

However, international students seem to be hesitant to reach out to ISSS for support in times of crisis. **The resulting lack of information aggravates stress and impacts mental health in negative ways.** This fuels the vicious cycle of missing support and lack of information, leading to an overall higher risk of dropping out.

I was having some mental health issues and it was a big drain on my productivity. My advisor was very supportive but even she wasn't very well informed. And I didn't quite whom to approach. [...] I should have taken the quarter off. I would have been able to handle it much better. [...] I thought I could ask the international office but, I don't know, I guess I was really hesitant. So I didn't really know what options I had as an international student.

There was a time when I was just so distressed. And I was afraid to make any decisions really. And I didn't know who to talk to about it, except for a select few friends. [...] I didn't contact the international office. But I managed to get by.

Students worry about the legal and professional ramifications of taking a leave of absence but do not reach out to ISSS for legal advice.

My advisor told me to take a medical leave of absence or convert to part-time, but I wasn't sure if I could do that. [...] I did know an international student who actually converted to part time, but I think she could do it only because she had already

advanced. [...] So I think there is some sort of flexibility somewhere but I'm not really sure how it works. [...] If you are part-time, are you on your OPT? I have no clue.

Those who do turn to ISSS, for example for housing support, indicate that they did not perceive the advice they received to be useful. Several respondents reported that their experience at UC Santa Cruz compared negatively with previous experiences they have had elsewhere in and outside of the United States.

I got in touch with ISSS in the very first week with the [housing] problems I was having. I expected a bit more out of them. Especially since I had no contacts here. Nowhere to go to find a place. A lot of the advice that they gave, I could have googled for it. That was really disappointing. That really shocked me because when I traveled abroad before – I did my Master's in Europe – and the day I arrived there, the international office had arranged someone to pick me up, to get to my house, arranged my shopping. Then to get to here, where you have to ask, because you know, you don't have any contacts. It was shocking.

Proposed steps: Clearly designate what should be the first point of contact for international students in crisis; create resources available to international graduate students for confidential and culturally competent support; proactively reach out to incoming international graduate students with a resource guide to **clarify** that the competencies of ISSS are limited and point prospective students to the resources they will need; explain what they should expect; at the same time, ensure that the providers of these resources are aware of the particular needs of international students; consider **expanding the capacity of ISSS** or create a new protocol to provide **crisis support** to international graduate students; create **case-by-case scenarios** and upload them on the ISSS website for students who are considering to go on medical leave.

ii. Health & Well-Being

Action item: Address language barriers to access at the Student Health Center

Why: Most respondents reported extremely positive experiences with accessing health care on campus, described the Student Health Center as “extremely professional” and “attentive to my concerns and needs.”

It's definitely been one of those places, but I've never felt like, you know, people are speaking to me differently or addressing me differently because I'm an international student or I sound different or look different.

However, some international students do not feel sufficiently prepared to explain more complex medical conditions in English or understand English-language medical diagnoses.

Whenever I have a problem, I go to the health center. But I realized that my English is not enough to explain what I feel right now. I had to search the English word every time. I print it out and give it to the doctor, [...] they understand that, 'oh, you have that problem.' They tell me what I have, but I cannot understand.

Those medical words are just too difficult.

One respondent mentioned a bad experience she had had on the phone with the Student Health Center that involved her accent.

That's, that's how it felt to me. [...] "I don't have the patience really understand you if you were speaking in not an American accent." And then of course she proceeded to pronounce my name you know, really badly.

Proposed steps: Work with the Student Health Center on making medical information available in **multiple languages**, either through interpreters, professional translation software that is appropriate to medical consultations; by hiring or providing a directory to multilingual staff; or providing **print-outs in multiple languages**; confirm if the Student Health Center is holding anti-bias trainings for staff; inform incoming international students about their options if they encounter bias at the Student Health Center or elsewhere on campus.

Action item: Address information barriers to health care in the US

Why: Navigating health care can be confusing to students who have lived their entire lives in the United States, but it can pose an insurmountable challenge to international students. As newcomers to the United States, with few trusted contacts to turn to for advice, they are not only unfamiliar with **medical and administrative vocabulary** but also do not know how to advocate for themselves as patients or how to navigate privatized health care. Due to their non-immigrant status, they are not eligible for public health care. Many respondents indicated that they often delay medical treatment until they can go home over the summer. The primary reasons for this **avoidance** of necessary medical treatments seem to be anxiety about having to go off-campus and accruing **medical bills**.

I do love the health center on campus. Every time I have any issue, I go there, and they're just so, so nice. Just talking to them sometimes helps me feel better. Yes, true. Yes, I really, every time I go there, I sort of pray that it gets resolved here. [...] But the moment you have to go off campus, it just flips.

If they need more complex medical care during the academic year, however, many **do not know** where to turn for support. They face medical crises **on their own** either because they do not have relatives or friends they trust, or because they are **worried about compromising their professional contacts**.

They sent me to ER. [...] I spent five hours there just by myself. And they did some pretty dreadful tests that I didn't like. I couldn't take it anymore and asked them to let me go home, I couldn't deal with this anymore. So they did eventually let me go home. But then I was so tired and exhausted, I was just sleeping for two or three days straight. The issue didn't get resolved but I didn't know where else to go. [...] And I didn't know that ER was going to be so expensive. [...] And from that I realized that if the thing is not too bad, or if I'm fit enough to travel, I just want to go back home and get it resolved and come back. [...] Even coming from a lesser developed country, we find it shocking.

Many international graduate students do not know their options if they confront serious health issues. They hesitate to take a **leave of absence** because they cannot financially afford to leave and come back, because they worry about compromising their professional prospects, and because they hesitate or do not think to seek advice from ISSS.

I wish we had better access to certain kinds of information, for example, what happens if you want to take part-time enrollment, can you still meet legal status? Can you go on leave if you have health issues? [...] We just live under the impression that this is what we got to deal with- I am in this Ph.D. program, and I have to maintain my visa status, so however sick I get, or if I am not able to work well enough, I can't tell my advisor because she would ask me to leave. These things just add to the stress.

Compounded personal, academic, and financial stress is overall causing **health issues** for international graduate students.

because of the all kinds of stress from the QE and all kinds of financial stuff, last year was really miserable. I had to pull out several teeth. I have an ear problem. I gained like 10 kilograms. And yeah, all kinds of things. This was my worst year in terms of my health. So and I was diagnosed with a certain disease this year. I don't know how to get through this. [...] health is my main problem right now.

Proposed steps: Create a case-by-case scenario and upload it on the ISSS website as a first resource for international students who are considering to go on medical leave; designate a confidential point of contact for international students who need **support during a medical crisis** or **help with navigating health care**; collaborate with the insurance office at the Student Health Center to **create a glossary** of health care related administrative terms for international students.

<p>Action item: Improve access to CAPS and promote mental health among international graduate students</p>

Why: Depression appears to be a common but little understood problem among international graduate students, particularly in the beginning of their Ph.D. programs. Many international Ph.D. students do not reach out to CAPS, either because they do not know about it, or because they doubt that they will receive **culturally competent care**.

I had really like, depression, my first year, and my second year, the second year was worse, I didn't reach out to CAPS. [...] I just wish CAPS was more willing to keep you and not refer you out. Because that's their tendency. And referring you out is, you know, it's challenging, because you have to find someone that understands your situation. I always have issues trying to find therapist outside.

I haven't really reached out to CAPS. I really feel like [...] you can't express really strong feelings in another language.

Some indicated that they did access CAPS before but would not do so again due to financial insecurity.

I'm fine now, and at some point I thought that I never would be. [...] I didn't want to bother anyone so I just walked to the Health Center. [...] I went to CAPS and I told

them how bad I felt. And they sent me to the hospital. And then one fine day, in my mail, I received this bill for \$800. [...] If I had known I would have never gone to CAPS.

Furthermore, lack of familiarity with legal protocols in the United States places international students who are non-native speakers of English at greater risk of **misunderstandings at CAPS**. One respondent shared the traumatic experience of being *held against her will* after answering a question at CAPS that triggered **involuntarily hospitalization**. She was not aware that this might happen and felt that it had not been warranted by what she said.

I was like, "Let me go home." And they said that they can't, it was against the law because, you know, you might harm yourself. So we can't let you go. You can't access your phone or your laptop. You just have to sit here and do nothing. [...] I was just pacing up and down. There are no windows, no sunlight. [...] Eventually, they did let me go home. [...] I hope no one has to go through that experience. [...] I would never go tell anyone at CAPS again or anyone who was a doctor who was required to report me [...] Oh my god, that was a dreadful experience.

Others identified Nancy Heischman as a **confidential resource** that helped them **navigate medical crisis**. However, they described having to be **extremely persistent** before being finally pointed in the right direction.

Nancy Heischman is the reason that I am still here today. She offered me a lot of advice through many issues that are very sensitive. You can't directly discuss them with your advisor. [...] People like her are really important for handling this advice. And it took me like six, seven visits to CAPS, to DRC, to get her contact. And at that time I had to TA, I had to do research, I had to do my qualifying exam. [...] I was very apprehensive that if I would take a leave of absence, what would my advisor think, how it would impact my graduation, and she assured me that nobody can do anything to me for taking a leave of absence. I should just take it. I didn't take it. And this was my fault. [...] I didn't want to look like a failure.

Proposed steps: Encourage CAPS to offer counseling or **support groups** specifically tailored to the need of international students; evaluate existing counseling for **implicit bias** against non-native speakers of English; create an **overview of confidential counselling** available at UC Santa Cruz; create an inventory of on-campus and off-campus therapists that speak **multiple languages**; address **information barriers** about the potential cost of treatment at CAPS; **prioritize community building to promote mental health**; encourage international Ph.D. students to reach out for support when in distress and create clear and accessible information about medical leave for degree seeking international students.

Action item: Address stress-related burn-out among international Ph.D. student

Why: The first year of graduate school can be a **disorienting experience** for every graduate student. However, international graduate students confront this transition in an **unfamiliar cultural environment**. They are far away from family and friends and have to establish new habits and relationships in a country many of them are visiting for the first time. Familiar foods and activities, a common coping strategy, may not be readily available to them in Santa Cruz.

International Ph.D. students, who are highly disciplined and motivated students, tend to immerse themselves in **work as a coping strategy**. This not only generates more stress, but also creates feelings of isolation. This unbalanced emphasis on work also delays social integration, which, in turn, leads to the aforementioned lack of support in moments of crisis.

I also feel like I put in way too much work and made it overly stressful for myself. [...] partly that also comes from just not knowing what I'm supposed to do in that space.

I think I isolated myself a lot in my first year. I just worked.

I'm very confident with my English. But my academic life is not built in English, I have never written a paper in English, or the amount of things that I read in English are very few compared to the things I read in Spanish. So I was terrified. And I would look every single word in the dictionary and being so thorough about reading and so terrified about not understanding and not being able to have an opinion about the paper or the reading or the book [...] Looking back, I would tell myself, you don't have to read everything meticulously.

Proposed solution: Encourage **work-life balance** during the first-year orientation and emphasize that building new relationships is important to sustaining their health and work in the future; encourage international students to take time to **build community** and offer more informal networking events; create a peer-to-peer mentoring program to match beginning and advanced international graduate students; promote self-care, exercise, and service learning among international students; if encouraged by peers, students are more likely to enroll or participate in recreational activities; explain how and when to enroll in free OPERS classes.

Action item: Do more to accommodate international students with disabilities

Why: Some international Ph.D. students have disabilities. However, many do not know about the **Disability Resource Center** (DRC) or do not perceive it as a resource that is available to them. They might also be **unfamiliar** with the framework of disability rights in the United States although they may require accommodations.

During the QE quarter, I couldn't hear well. [...] I only went to the Health Center but I was afraid of paying a lot of money, because of my citizenship. So I didn't think about reaching out beyond the health center.

Faced with financial and academic pressures to advance to candidacy early, one participant sought accommodations through the DRC. Her DRC accommodation also helped her secure housing on campus – something she had not been able to do previously.

I don't think a lot of international students know about the DRC. [...] It really helped me because I was able to get a little bit more time with my QE last year.

Another participant raised concerns about the **Graduate Preparation Program** (GPP) and problematized that there is an overemphasis on pronunciation in American English.

I want them to know that language wise, they need to be more open-minded. They want me to practice my oral performance, but they don't understand that this is one disability that I have. I feel like they need to understand that more.

One participant in the Physical & Biological Sciences described that he was pressured by his advisor to qualify in one year, instead of two years, because she was paying for his non-resident tuition fees out of her research account. In order to preserve a good working relationship, this student spend his entire first year at UC Santa Cruz preparing for his qualifying exam while teaching and taking core courses. **He successfully qualified but developed serious health issues.** He did not know where to find the support he needed to face these health issues or whether he could take a medical leave.

Proposed steps: Include information about the DRC during international student orientations and on the ISSS website; include a section on disability rights and develop a **“know your rights”** orientation that explicitly includes non-citizens as **full and valued members of the campus community**; work with the DRC to include information about citizenship status on the DRC website to encourage international students to access its resources (there is no mention of international students in the most recent DRC handbook); work with the DRC to make the Graduate Preparation Program **accessible to students with disabilities** and proactively inquire if students may need accommodations.

iii. Professional Development

Action item: Improve orientation for teaching assistants

Why: Many international graduate students are not familiar with the American education system. Participants *without* a prior degree from a U.S. institution indicated that the general orientation for teaching assistants was helpful but insufficient. Across divisions, respondents explained that the information offered during TA orientations was **too abstract to be useful** to them because it took experiential knowledge for granted that international students still lacked. What is a teaching assistant? What is section? By the time that undergraduate students arrive in the university classroom at UC Santa Cruz, what is the education that they have had up until that point? In order to effectively support all undergraduate students, it is also necessary for teaching assistants to understand that racial and socio-economic disparities are reproduced by the education system in the United States.

There was a disconnect in the sense that [...] there was this basic knowledge lacking in me at that time when I was being told [...] how to be a good TA when I didn't know how to be a TA at all. [...] Like what structure is this? What hierarchy is this? We were never told that.

Not knowing what the expectations of students are and also simply how they engage in a space of learning is, is really something that we need to be told.

There is a failure to recognize that people are coming from radically different cultures and educational systems. And so we need [...] to make a bridge before we just sort of throw all this information onto them.

I think the reason why a lot of the information that I got was confusing, it was because I didn't know where to put it. In that schema of education. [...] It is assumed that you know how the American system works. [...] they don't go over the basics [...] like, you go to elementary, and then you go to middle, yeah, and then you go to high school, and then you can go to community college or university or those basic things. I have learned these things over time, but it would have been very useful to see it then. Also how majors and minors work, where you can designate an emphasis and Ph.D. and Master's degrees and all that, it would be, it would have been very useful just to, really quick, just to show a graph or a chart or something where you see everything that would have been very helpful for me.

Furthermore, many international graduate students do not yet have a Social Security Number when they first arrive at UC Santa Cruz. In order to apply for it, they need to be employed by the university. Although some may have a fellowship, and therefore normally would not have to work as teaching assistants, they find themselves in the classroom in their very first quarter at UC Santa Cruz for purely administrative reasons. Due they initially tend to **lack the basic information they need to understand classroom dynamics**, international Ph.D. students tend to be very anxious and “over-prepared” teaching assistants. This unnecessarily aggravates the stress of transition.

My anxiety levels were like the worst of my life. I was so nervous about going into that classroom and speaking to a classroom full of English speaking students, and just speak. And I have teaching experience. But again, it's all in Spanish. I've been a teacher for a long time. [...] Nobody prepared me for that moment. So that was traumatizing.

The professor never told us what to do, or what he expected from us as TAs. And two of the other people [...] were more experienced. And thanks to that, I kind of knew where it was or what I had to do.

Some international Ph.D. students are experienced teachers and pedagogues. However, many feel that their **expertise is not approached as an asset** but perceived as a deficit. They problematized that they feel their prior experience is being erased or ignored.

it would be nice if our strengths would be recognized too, like the strengths of the system where we come from and of our previous educations in our countries would play in our favor and not just forgotten about it. You know, it's like that doesn't exist. And we're going to put that in a drawer, and we're going to assume that you're this American student that comes from American education and doesn't know how to do research, for example. [...] But it's not fair. It's our history. [...] They need to take time to get to know us, and not just assume.

sometimes it's frustrating that I hear so much about a lot of things at the level of the undergrads and how we have to be supportive of different needs in the undergrad classroom. It's like, what about me? You know? [...] I know that there's just a few of us,

but [...] to not acknowledge the importance of the perspective that we're bringing to the classroom is to want to, you know, keep the status quo and keep those conversations easier [...] just like speaking to people that you can get across to easily.

TA orientations should also address the expectations of undergraduate students in section. While many international graduate students may bring prior teaching experience, their views on pedagogy may be less horizontal and informal than students are used to in the U.S.

I come from a lecturing culture country. So, for the review sections [before mid-term and final exams], I would list out the bullet point [...] just laying out the structure of things that you need to know to prepare. But apparently, the students don't appreciate that because they want more discussion, they want more talking. [...] I don't think my beliefs align with what they expect.

It's an American thing, you just talk to them [undergrads], I don't know, in colloquial terms. I don't know how to do it. [...] as a TA, sometimes it's really hard to find that right balance between being approachable and friendly and also exercising, you know, a certain degree of authority.

Across all division, **disproportionate stress** appears to be the common denominator associated with teaching for international graduate students. Few suggested that they enjoyed working as teaching assistants. This could change with **better preparation, acknowledgement of their prior experience as an asset**, and **encouragement** to approach the classroom with less anxiety.

I have just sort of adapted my way of teaching to do what might be better for me and for the students to and I think sometimes you just need to not take things too seriously.

One participant in the **Graduate Preparation Program** suggested that the TA orientation for international graduate students who did not pass the minimum required TOEFL score had not been helpful. She did not feel that it adequately prepared her to be a teaching assistant. She pointed out that “it was not good” to be told to “apologize” for her pronunciation because it added to her anxiety. Instead of telling students to “bear with her,” which frames her accent as a “deficit,” she told undergraduate students to ask her to repeat what she said if they did not understand what she said. She explained that she did not encounter any problems so far, unlike what she had been told to expect during the GPP. She also problematized that some participants had to pay for the GPP out of pocket while some departments paid for it.

One participant was made to take a TOEFL test before being hired as a teaching assistant although she had an advanced degree from an Ivy League university on the East coast.

Proposed steps: Upload information about the basics of the education system in the United States on the ISSS website; alternatively, provide supplemental materials to help international students make sense of TA orientation for domestic students; emphasize self-care and find ways to inspire confidence, instead of instilling a “deficit” mindset; create a TA peer mentoring system to create more community around teaching; TA training offered by CITL was evaluated positively and could be scaled up as a model; in case of doubt, work with international Ph.D. students to

improve the training of international teaching assistants; consider waiving TOEFL requirements for new international teaching assistants with a degree from an Anglophone university; if the GPP has to be mandatory, it should be free; alternatively, departments should be required to pay for GPP if they admit Ph.D. students without the required TOEFL test scores.

Action item: Expand professional development for international Ph.D. students

Why: Due to legal restrictions on off-campus employment, international Ph.D. students almost entirely depend on UC Santa Cruz for their professional development and preparation for the job market. However, the pervasive lack of awareness among staff and faculty negatively correlates with their **access to opportunities**.

I applied to teach my own classes but they gave them to domestic students. It's frustrating because during my MFA in Europe, I was instructor of records in my second and third year. But since I got here, I've only been TA-ing. And it's frustrating because I will need it on the job market. [...] And again, I cannot go and do it outside like them. I cannot go to Cabrillo [community college] and teach a class. I think they have to understand that the only provider for our professional development is the university. And I don't think they get that.

Many international Ph.D. students seem to primarily rely on their advisor for professional development.

The reason I chose this school is because of my advisor. [...] I feel like she got my back. [...] I realized that is a very exceptional case. That is because of her, not because the school has that kind of support. [...] I cannot imagine my life without her. That means that the school has to have more support in different ways.

the only reason that I've got a wider perspective on what I want to do with my Ph.D. is because I have an amazing advisor. Like my Ph.D. advisor, he is just wonderful. [...] He was very helpful when I told him I don't want to be in academia. [...] I think I was very lucky to have an open minded advisor.

This exclusive reliance on their advisors leaves professional development up to chance.

it's good to have a sense of support and a sense of community from the person that you are going to meet frequently communicating with. And that really needs to be encouraged. [...] It shouldn't be something that some faculty members provide and others don't because then we have to choose between different faculty members based on that.

Not all international Ph.D. students are able to find an advisor that is a good fit for them. This could be due to social dynamics, which should be addressed, but also points to a larger structural issue. International Ph.D. students who participated in this study pointed toward a **lack of interest or engagement of faculty in international perspectives**. Especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences, international Ph.D. students wish that there was more interest in international research and more inter-cultural awareness among faculty.

Most of them are really focusing on the United States. And I think that's normal, because we are in the United States. But it would be great if there were more faculty members that have international experience or are at least open to international perspectives on the subject matter they are teaching. One thing is that they are just not interested. And the other thing is that they don't know anything about the international comparison.

Only one faculty in our department is from outside of North America. [...] I think that that kind of perpetuates the fact that there's no real engagement with the outside world.

Lots of talk about 'crossing borders' and 'building bridges' [...] but to not, you know, actively treat us as, um, as really important resources for the sort of research that is taking place here, to not actively incorporate and welcome those perspectives is a huge problem. It's a blind spot, but it's like this really glaring blind spot that is shocking.

If faculty don't have the experience of learning a second language, they don't know how to handle a classroom with non-native speakers. When I pause for just a moment, other students jump right in and interrupt me. I'm not done, you know? I just kind of let it go [...] but it accumulates and, you know, it is frustrating. [...] And you feel like your opinion is being more examined than the other opinions. [...] I would say that faculty hasn't been helpful in that matter, at all. They expect you to just have it all figured out. And you don't. Especially in your first year.

Proposed steps: Encourage faculty to engage in international scholarship and create incentives to invest in the professional development of international Ph.D. students alongside their domestic peer; **frame the international expertise of international Ph.D. students as an asset** in research and teaching; foster a “culture of support” through faculty engagement with questions of international mentorship; encourage faculty to create community among their advisees and offer culturally competent advising; **empower international students, students of color, and first generation students by hiring and supporting international faculty and faculty of color.**

Action item: Culturally competent writing support

Why: Writing support for graduate students has been identified as an unmet need at UC Santa Cruz. The emerging conversation about addressing this pressing need must include awareness about the particular needs of international graduate students. Currently, quantitative test scores such as TOEFL substitute **qualitative engagement** with the graduate-level writing of non-native speakers of English. The predominant ESL approach (English as a Second Language) does not sufficient account for implicit barriers that are rooted in *epistemic* differences rather than mere command of vocabulary and grammar. An international Ph.D. student may score in the 100th percentile of the TOEFL test but still struggle with **modes of thought and the way in which arguments are constructed** in English. Faculty advisors, however, generally tend to be overburdened with the writing needs of their advisees. The writing support they can give is limited.

As international graduate students most of us are multilingual and it's difficult to write and form structures because reasoning is very linear in English. It is more circular in

Spanish, for example, [...] we're changing the way we are thinking about things and ideas, and how to write about them. So that takes time and more time than my advisor should be happy to be giving me.

International Ph.D. students across campus have recently come together to create a “Writing Together” group that meets to write together at the Graduate Student Commons. While this student-led space is dedicated to writing, it is not funded and offers no feedback. Several international graduate students shared that they sought out support at the Writing Center but were turned away because it only serves undergraduate students.

Proposed steps: Create more writing support for graduate students in general, but include writing tutors that are fluent in at least two languages and culturally competent, i.e. that are not only aware about **genres of writing** in different disciplines but also disciplinary differences in **international perspective**. Participants pointed out that culturally competent writing tutors could be recruited through GSR-ships for advanced international or multilingual Ph.D. students. These tutors could be accredited through writing courses and be employed as teaching fellows or GSI. Furthermore, existing student-led efforts to create writing support for international graduate students should be supported, for example by generating a **stable funding** stream for the international graduate student writing group at the GSC (“that is very tied to community”).

iv. Community

<p>Action item: Create more opportunities for community building among international Ph.D. students through professional development and informal networking events</p>
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Why: While incoming international graduate students make connections during the international orientation in the beginning of their first quarter at UC Santa Cruz, these connections tend to phase out quickly. Some suggested that they were not aware about social events. Others noted that they are receiving the emails but quickly grew “weary” of going to events because people at these events appeared **disengaged** or even “visibly bored.” This created the impression that advertised events were not interesting or valuable.

When I would hear about these events where people were getting together, you get in some weird way attuned to just ignoring that stuff. [...] especially in something that is being organized as opposed to something that sounds more spontaneous. [...] I definitely had to learn that those were really valuable and important spaces for meeting people, um, and having conversations [...] you need to, you know, do less “work-work” and more work towards building community and invest your energies there.

Many international students do not attend social events that are not mandatory because they do not understand the value of “networking.” Based on their previous experiences in culturally different settings, they expect for community to “just happen” without active effort on their part. The idea of “actively building” community, in contrast, may initially appear strange. Having missed a crucial window of opportunity to meet peers in the beginning, international Ph.D. students soon **feel lonely and isolated**.

what happens is that a lot of us coming from, you know, our own countries [...] when you're coming from a space where everybody speaks the same language as you and has the same culture and everything, you don't even feel the absence of a community really. But that's something that is really required.

I came in with the expectation that community will be available and that things will [...] just happen and come easily. I did not realize that the community of grad students is [...] very small and that you have to reach out and build your community and network. It doesn't just happen.

There also appears to be a **social divide** in some departments between international Ph.D. students and international Master's students.

Initially, it was really, really hard for me to make friends, even people who were from my own country. There were a lot of international students, but most of them were in Master's programs. So they would go, "oh, ok. So you're a Ph.D. student. You're not one of us."

Since Ph.D. students in the Physical & Biological Sciences and Engineering generally conduct their research in labs, they are more likely to find community with their lab mates. Since they are navigating a culturally foreign social setting, they may still find themselves lonely and isolated later. Some stated that they initially perceived their departments as tight-knit and supportive communities but soon realized that their peers and faculty did not actually know each other.

I did feel somewhat isolated. Eventually I did make friends. But I did get a little homesick and cold from the weather. I did think that I didn't know enough people so I was sort of freaking out over my courses. I do think that a lot of support came from my lab and advisor. I think it was them that made the transition easiest for me.

Even when I needed help or assistance or had questions I used to be very hesitant to ask. I like how upfront Americans are in general about their needs or their questions. They're really relaxed about approaching people. Somehow it does not come naturally to me, I feel always a little weary of strangers. But I think I have opened up a lot.

Many domestic Ph.D. students have to commute to Santa Cruz due to a lack of affordable housing. International Ph.D. students tend toward living in Santa Cruz, at least initially, because they often do not have a driver's license or car. They depend on the campus for community but often find that only "two out of ten Ph.D. students" might be present at a time in their labs. There is a shared sense across academic divisions that **community is lacking** among graduate students and faculty **in both small and large departments**.

We don't have any social events or anything at all [in Computer Science]. We never hang out with faculty, we never have any, I don't know, a Halloween party or whatever, I keep hearing about other departments, but we never have anything, it's just so weird. [...] All we do is just sit in our labs, and don't know other people. [...] The rest of the department is pretty much clueless about what the other people are doing, what is their research?

Many international students are forced to face personal and medical crises on their own without knowing where to turn to for support. This is particularly aggravated during the holiday breaks when the Student Health Center is closed.

I was supposed to be traveling myself, but I canceled my plans because of this unfortunate thing [health issue]. And I was just up there [Graduate Student Housing] for the entire winter break. [...] I didn't know where to go and everything was closed. I was waiting for the health center to open. [...] And it was like Christmas and New Year, I was doing nothing just sitting at home and listening to audiobooks books [...] because I couldn't write, and I couldn't read. It was so awful. It was the worst winter holiday for me ever.

Proposed steps: It appears that a sense of community can significantly improve the well-being and resilience of international students. Especially in moments of crisis, it is crucial that international Ph.D. students can rely on their peers and advisors for support. However, the current programming offered for international graduate students does not appear to foster sufficient community. In order to make organized events more attractive, **professional development and networking events should be combined to incentivize graduate students to attend.** Furthermore, **community could be fostered around writing support.** For example, a funded **peer mentoring** system could generate income for continuing international Ph.D. students while offering tutoring support to incoming international Ph.D. students in related fields. Offering **regular colloquia** for international graduate students, led by **faculty fellows**, for example, could create a sense of community among international Ph.D. students around sharing research, writing, and learning about constructive ways to give feedback.

At the same time, faculty conveners of these colloquia would be exposed to international Ph.D. students and could learn about their particular needs. In order to convene a colloquium, faculty fellows should demonstrate interest in mentoring international Ph.D. students. Such a program could be one of the outcomes of the **internationalization** process at UC Santa Cruz because it would also invite faculty to explore the international dimensions of their research. These colloquia should be open to marginalized domestic Ph.D. students as well in order to foster solidarity and community at the graduate student level.

Furthermore, more **informal networking opportunities** should be created for international graduate students in particular. These social events could be open to Ph.D. and Master's students and be held **separately from social events for undergraduate students.** In case of doubt, invite international Ph.D. students to organize or give input about these events. Overall, **departments** should also be encouraged to organize more informal social events ("maybe just coffee and cookies where people have a chance to open up and just bond with one another"). If intra-departmental tensions prevent departments from organizing social events, **these conflicts should be resolved** instead of allowing them to linger unaddressed, as appears to be the norm across campus. Conflicts at the faculty level **negatively affect the morale and success of all students.** The exclusive reliance of international Ph.D. students on their faculty advisors makes many of them particularly vulnerable to unresolved tensions at the faculty level because many do not have access to a supportive community of peers.

Action item: Improve the impact and utility of the international orientation

Why: Generally, there tends to be lingering confusion among many beginning (and advanced) international Ph.D. students. Unfortunately, the international orientation does not sufficiently resolve this confusion. Several participants described the orientation as “overwhelming.” Across focus groups, and stages of progress, all respondents indicated that the international orientation offered **too much information in too little time**. They problematized that it was too “top down” and theoretical. Instead of a “lecture-style” orientation, they proposed that it should be structured around **practical** questions. For example, “What should I do if I am sick?”

I participated in all kinds of orientations. But unfortunately, I can't remember any of them.

I don't remember anything. I remember parts. The presentation about the health center was super confusing. I think that one should be way more exhaustive. Because later on I had a problem with the insurance and paying for expenses. And I wish before, during the orientation, it had been more clear.

I'm receiving too much information, which is not really making sense to me right now. It would be more useful for us now [second year] or the third year. We can process that information better because we're kind of more into things and have a better idea of what we're doing.

Furthermore, they noted that **additional information** should be included in the orientation. Several participants suggested, for example, that they had not been aware that their first paycheck or stipend would only be disbursed in November. This could potentially be communicated by departments even before incoming international Ph.D. students arrive on campus to allow them to save up funds and support themselves before they receive their first pay.

Many international Ph.D. students find living paycheck to paycheck highly distressing because most do not have relatives or close friends in the United States that they could fall back on for housing or financial support when faced with **unexpected expenses**.

You feel like you don't have a choice but to find someone to borrow from and that makes it so much harder. I think this is an issue for all graduate students and I really hope something could be done about it. [...] I did expect to be paid better. [...] Had I known I might have possibly preferred to join some other university, if I knew that it was going to be so hard.

They are **not eligible for loans** and are generally unfamiliar with the American banking system. For this reason, international students should also learn about the basics of financial literacy. Those who arrive in Santa Cruz before the orientation have to face these challenges on their own.

I don't know how to open my bank account. I don't know how to apply for the SS[N]. And I had to struggle all kinds of like, bureaucratic stuffs, which I don't know at all, and I don't have a car. So it was total disaster to figure out how to do all kinds of things before the class.

International Ph.D. students who are U.S. citizens or residents indicated that this information would have also been useful to them as well upon arrival in Santa Cruz. At the same time, international Ph.D. students with prior degrees from U.S. universities indicated that they did not learn anything new at the international orientation. Beginning international Ph.D. students also mentioned that a **police officer** spoke during their first-year orientation. This was perceived very **negatively**.

Lastly, one international Ph.D. student with a prior degree from another U.S. university was not aware that she needed to exit the United States before she could re-enter with a new F-1 visa. She had received no **re-entry advice** and arrived on a tourist visa instead.

Proposed steps: The information presented during the international orientation should include an **overview of the basic structures** of the American education, health, and financial systems. This will enable incoming international students to better understand and remember the important information they are offered. This is particularly key until the orientation materials are made **available online**. Participants suggested that the orientation itself should be organized in more interactive ways. Discussions in pairs or smaller groups could also **foster networking** as one of the desired outcomes of the orientation.

Instead of offering only one orientation in the fall, consider offering a **series of orientations** throughout the entire year. These could be organized as modules that **build on each other** and incorporate practical components. Participants could form smaller cohorts, perhaps in related academic fields, and keep a regular meeting schedule throughout the first year. The more hands-on and actively the new information is used, the better it will be remembered.

While international students with a prior degree from a U.S. institution from the general orientation should be offered an **exemption** from the first year orientation, though it should be emphasized that its purpose is also to build relationships among new graduate students, international students that are U.S. citizens or residents should be offered to be **included**.

Certain information should be made available even **prior to the orientation**, including practical information about opening a bank account and when to expect the first pay check or stipend. Water conservation and Title IX were specifically mentioned as two areas that should be explained in greater details to incoming international students.

Incoming international Ph.D. students should be advised about the cost of living in Santa Cruz *in conjunction with* **up-to-date pay scales** to adjust their expectations about their income; consider establishing an emergency fund to support international graduate students who are facing unexpected expenses.

International students with a prior degree from a U.S. university should be **proactively** advised about re-entering the U.S. on their new F-1 visa instead of a tourist visa.

Consider offering more **support with federal taxes** for international graduate students. Even though the GLACIER software now offers a tax function, it is not available to students who extend

their filing period to October. The workshop offered by the GSA is inadequate and domestic tax preparation software is designed to assist citizens and residents. Most tax accountants at HR Block and elsewhere have no experience with international student taxes.

Ideally, a **resource guide** with the information offered during orientation should be created and uploaded on the **website** of ISSS or the Division of Graduate Studies to allow international graduate students to refer back to it at a later time.

Action item: Help international graduate students navigate bias

Why: Although international students may experience **inter-personal bias** on the basis of their identities, as they are locally perceived, they often do not have the experience to navigate identity-based bias. This extends not only to the housing market and wider Santa Cruz community, but also professional interactions on campus. Many internalize such incidents as the result of a personal “fault.” One participant described seeking support from a faculty supervisor. Instead of supporting or pointing her toward the appropriate resources, she was told to develop “thicker skin.”

I think just being a woman, a woman of color, being small, you know, a small person, I think all of those contribute to it. And there's definitely been a fair amount of hostility from, you know, specific students in classes sometimes. [...] I've faced that a couple of times. I didn't really receive much support from my professor. [...] it's really quite surprising considering how involved they are in teaching and pedagogy [...] I was just told that I need to have a thick skin.

Although participants described incidents of stereotyping or identity-based bias that had affected their experiences as international Ph.D. students at UC Santa Cruz, they questioned if their assessment of the situation was “right” or minimized its impact to not appear “weak.”

My first TA assignment was in Chinese philosophy [...] I didn't apply at all. I don't know any history of China! They kind of assumed that I can speak Chinese but I had to study a lot for that class. [...] I'm almost the only Asian in my department. [...] I can realize that they kind of want me to deal with students from Asia, all kinds of different countries. Maybe I'm wrong, but I feel that.

In many classes, if I were to say anything about the past hundred years in China, almost everybody was asking for the Cultural Revolution. Even if I'm not going to write anything about that, that's not my research interest. But that's one thing that Americans know about China, about that particular time. So everybody was asking repeatedly, I just got tired of answering that. [...] One professor even asked me to include that part although it wasn't really related. [...] I just added it. I didn't care. Because in general, you see, I'm just a super happy person from when I was born, so I didn't care that much. As long as I can eat good stuff and I have friends here. [...] So if they ask something, I just don't want to argue with them.

My position is kind of difficult because I am Latina. But I am not an immigrant Latina. Like many, many families in this state. I am an international student. So it's kind of weird. It is very difficult for professors to understand that, that I am not an American

Latina. I am a Latina-Latina. Which is different. I didn't grow up here. [...] there are assumptions about what it is to be Latina, and they don't suit me.

Several respondents reported that they had faced “hostility” as TAs from individual students in undergraduate classrooms, even to the point of receiving malicious **teaching evaluations**.

To not acknowledge that and see that we are in so many ways, the recipient of, uh, you know, aggression or microaggressions or whatever, and to not be in conversation with that is a huge problem for me. [...] it dilutes just the academic experience itself.

Being kind of ambiguous causes some tension if they [undergraduate students] don't know where to place you racially. I'm sure being a woman adds to it. [...] I went to the professor and he was very supportive, but he was also international – so, um, yeah. I don't think I would have been comfortable sharing it otherwise.

Another student shared that he perceived “annoyance” from graduate peers about his accent and manner of speech.

Sometimes I type up my thoughts and read them in class. So I don't get those annoyed faces.

When in need of support, many international graduate students do not know where to turn. Fearing retaliation, they may isolate themselves instead, leading to an erosion of personal resilience.

Once you complain about this, it does not get better. There is no incentive to go to these places. Same with Title IX. Once it goes there, everything blows up. And it shouldn't be like that.

Proposed steps: Incorporate “know your rights” training in first year orientation for international students; explain what kinds of social interactions are acceptable and how sexual harassment and racism are defined in the U.S. context; emphasize that international graduate students are **equally protected** against forms of unfair bias on campus, and **clearly identify** where they can **confidentially** seek support and what recourse they have if they feel that they might be experiencing discrimination, including from faculty; if unsure how to frame the conversation, a consultant could be hired to develop a special training module; encourage a culture of constructive dialogue and professionalism among faculty and staff; increase awareness of existing resources such as Campus Conflict Resolution Services (CCRS) and address fears of retaliation by creating additional and confidential counseling that is culturally competent and legally knowledgeable about the particular situation of F-1 or J-1 holders at UC Santa Cruz.

4. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the results of the focus group discussions conducted with international Ph.D. students across all divisions at UC Santa Cruz illustrate that **areas of need are inherently connected**. They are **best approached holistically**.

The following summary of recommendations does not catalogue all of the practical steps that are proposed above. Instead, this section is designed to highlight the **most salient and cost-effective steps** that were proposed by international Ph.D. students to **address several areas of need at once**. These recommendations are organized in the following manner: steps that could be taken in the **short-term**, or immediately, in the **mid-term**, or within the next academic year, and in the **long-term**, that is, within the next 3- 5 years.

a. Short-term

- **Begin to collect data on international graduate student retention**

In order to assess how many international graduate students at UC Santa Cruz drop out and why, ISSS could begin to collect data on international graduate students who shorten their program. Optional exit interviews might provide additional information about persisting obstacles in the way of completion. Proactive outreach might improve retention.

- **Airport transfer and transitional housing upon first entry**

Offer coordinated pick-ups for incoming international students at San Jose and SFO airport. Prior to arrival, students interested in this option could fill out a form to indicate their arrival time and volume of luggage. They could then be grouped together and informed where to be for their pick up. If necessary, this could be funded by the students themselves. The main issue that was identified was not necessarily the cost, though anything over \$50 would be unreasonable, but exhaustion, lack of familiarity with the area, and potentially also a lack of a functioning cell phone or SIM card. As an alternative to taxi companies, ISSS could work with TAPS to use UCSC mini-vans for these coordinated pick-ups.

Upon arrival, it would be extremely helpful to also offer incoming international graduate students a **safe place to land** if they are still looking for housing in Santa Cruz. If nothing else, it would be extremely beneficial to offer low-cost or free hostel-style accommodation, or create a **database for students and staff who are willing to host incoming international graduate students** for at least their first week in Santa Cruz.

- **Continue to support and encourage student-led initiatives**

Student-led initiatives that serve international graduate students such as the International Graduate Student Committee of the Graduate Student Association and “Writing Together” for international graduate students at the Graduate Student Commons are vital resources for community building and engagement among international graduate students. In order to be sustainable, they should continue to receive institutional support and need ongoing funding.

- **Make the international orientation more practice-oriented and interactive**

- Participants in this study suggested that the international orientation would be more helpful if it was organized in **interactive and practical ways** (see above). Through discussions in pairs or smaller groups, the information might be remembered and retained better.
- Emphasize why it is vital for incoming international graduate students to invest time in building community and where they can find it. Address **work-life balance**, how to **prevent burn-out**, and where to seek psychological support. At that time, also address disability rights, mental health, and productivity in ways that show that there should be **no stigma** associated with seeking support or needing accommodations. Explain what to do if students face hostility or fear retaliation for seeking support. Include information about legal options if ever in need of taking a medical leave.
- In mid-term perspective, it would be worthwhile to consider offering a **series of orientations** instead of one very long orientation in the beginning of Fall Quarter. This series could be organized into **modules** that build on each other and incorporate **hands-on** components such as “attending a networking event” or “using the UCSC gym,” etc. Participants could be divided into **small cohorts**, perhaps in related academic fields, and keep a **regular meeting schedule** throughout their first year with follow up meetings in their second and third years. This would not only ensure that international graduate students are well informed, but also foster a sense of support and community.

- **Require departments to pay for GPP if participation is mandatory.** Offer fee waivers to economically disadvantaged students.

- **Create a comprehensive resource guide for international graduate students**

There is a pressing need for a comprehensive **resource guide** for international graduate students at UC Santa Cruz. It should be **easily accessible online** and contain detailed and **up-to-date information**.

- Give a succinct and complete overview of **visa** requirements
- Restrictions on **employment**
- How to find **housing** in Santa Cruz / what to expect
- Up-to-date pay scales with information about funding tiers and **cost of living**
- **Funding** opportunities for international graduate students
- Basics of **academic culture** in the U.S. (appropriate to the Ph.D. level), including answers to questions such as: What is a faculty mentor? What is a graduate advisor? What is a department manager?
- Answers to the most common questions around **teaching**, such as: Why are there sections? What is a teaching assistant? What is my role as a teaching assistant? What can I expect my undergraduate students to know before they arrive in my classroom? What do they expect from me?
- Link to the International Graduate Student Committee [website](#)
- Information about **writing support**, including the benefit of “Writing Together” at the Graduate Student Commons
- Basics of **financial literacy**, including answers to the most frequently asked questions, such as: What is a “deposit”? How do you deposit a paper check? How do you set up “direct deposit”? What is a “checking” account? What is a “credit score”? Why do I need a credit card? How do you establish “good credit”? How do you open a bank account? Etc.
- A glossary of terms related to **health care** and insurance
- What should I do when I am sick? i.e. how to visit the Student Health Center
- **What to expect at CAPS** and a list of alternative resources to promote mental health and well-being, such as OPERS
- A list of recommendations on **what you can do when you feel lonely** in Santa Cruz. This could be approached playfully and incorporate a list of strategies by advanced international Ph.D. students.
- What is “burn-out”? What is “self-care”? Why does “community” matter and how to build it, where to begin, etc. (tailored to Ph.D. and Master’s students)
- Rules and norms of **non-discrimination** in the U.S. and at UC Santa Cruz

- **Disability** rights in the U.S. and at UC Santa Cruz; DRC accommodations
- What is **Title IX**?
- How do you use **public transportation** in Santa Cruz?
- How do I **rent/buy a car**, including information about *ZipCar* ([UCSC promotion](#))
- Should I apply for a **driver's license**? Where can I learn to drive? What is the typical cost of driving?
- What are the best ways to **travel to airports** in San Jose, Oakland, or San Francisco?
- Where can I buy **groceries**?
- Why do we need to **conserve water** in California?

This list is not exhaustive. Some of these questions may be already covered in the international orientation, but creating a comprehensive resource guide would be a simple and cost effective way to support international graduate students at UC Santa Cruz with **reliable and accessible information online**.

An advanced international graduate student could be hired as a GSR to compile this resource guide. Any significant gaps and omissions could be addressed with the assistance and input of the international graduate student community through a continuously open but actively monitored **feedback form**.

Although some of this information may be already available online, it would be important to bundle and make it available in one place. The website of ISSS would be an intuitive location because incoming international students are sure to check there first. Other websites such as the homepage of the Division of Graduate Studies may be less accessible for new students who may not yet understand the administrative structure of the university.

- **Include international students who are U.S. citizens or residents in international orientations and events**

Some international students fall off the radar of ISSS because they are U.S. citizens and therefore do not require visa assistance. If they grew up outside of the United States, and were educated abroad, however, they may be as unfamiliar with the American education system as international graduate students who are F-1 and J-1 visa holders. It would therefore be beneficial to find ways to identify and include these international students in the international orientation. Perhaps this could be accomplished by asking department managers to notify ISSS if international students who are U.S. citizens or residents are admitted to Master's or Ph.D. programs.

- **Review policy on international students with a prior U.S. degree**

- International students with a prior degree from a U.S. university sometimes arrive in the United States on a tourist visa because they realize that they needed re-enter the U.S. on their new F-1 visa. It would therefore be beneficial to reach out over the summer and proactively advise them about re-entry before the beginning of the academic year.
- Ensure that **all** departments exempt international students with a prior degree from a U.S. university from the TOEFL test requirement for new teaching assistants.
- Consider exempting international students with a prior U.S. degree from parts of the international orientation.

- **Offer regular “Know Your Rights” workshops for international graduate students**

Workshops on the “rights” of international graduate students on campus could be held within the existing framework of programming by the Division of Global Engagement. These workshops should detail **“what if” scenarios**. For example, the discussed scenarios could include:

- “What if I need to go on medical leave?”
- “What if my health is preventing me from meeting deadlines?”
- “What should I do when an undergraduate student/faculty/staff member appears to behave in a hostile way toward me?”
- “What if my class mates/cohort/lab mates are bullying or harassing me?”
- “What are my rights if I am stopped or arrested by the police?”

These workshops should be designed to encourage international graduate students to **reach out for support** by informing them about **confidential resources** that are available to assist and advocate for them **right now**, such as Campus Conflict Resolution Services (CCRS), the CARE office, the Disability Resource Center, etc. These materials should also be made **available online**.

- **Create a peer mentorship program for international graduate students**

Efforts to create a mentorship program for international graduate students should be revived. What are the benefits of a peer-to-peer mentorship program?

- Connecting incoming international graduate students with an advanced peer mentor in a related academic field would foster the integration of new international

graduate students on campus and create a sense of purpose for advanced international graduate students with institutional knowledge to share.

- It would provide incoming students with a first point of contact that could help them navigate the decentralized campus, housing in Santa Cruz, health care, bureaucracy, and employment.
- It would address the lack of community felt by international graduate students in general and might positively affect personal health and well-being of peer mentors.

Previous efforts to create a mentorship program likely fizzled out because they were unfunded and modelled on mentoring programs for undergraduate students. International Ph.D. students, however, are extremely busy professionals. An informal mentorship program is not likely to succeed under the current conditions.

In order to ensure sustainability, peer mentors should be supported and recognized for their efforts. This could entail material incentives such as small grants, fellowships, or a leadership certificate to add a valuable line to their CV. It is worth investing funding and staff time in international community because robust social relationships build personal resilience. They create a safety net that promotes international Ph.D. student retention.

- Offer **more informal networking and social events** and encourage faculty and administrators to **promote community and conflict resolution within departments**.
- New international Ph.D. students often need to apply for a **Social Security Number** to receive their first-year fellowships. Currently, they are forced to take up employment as TAs or Readers. Not only is this aggravating the stress of transition, but it is also not guaranteed that all who need to be hired in order to apply for a SSN will *find* a position.

It would therefore be beneficial, if possible, to **develop a low stakes position to hire international graduate students** in this administrative situation.

b. Mid-term

- Create more fellowships and teaching positions that **cover non-resident tuition for international graduate students**
- Promote faculty mentorship and **foster a culture of support** across campus
- Offer more **inter-cultural competency trainings** for faculty and staff
- Consider **requiring** faculty and staff to attend **workshops** on the particular needs of international graduate students and how best to support them

- **Launch a PR campaign to promote global perspectives at UC Santa Cruz** (target population: domestic undergraduate students)
- **Create community through professional development**

Building community – it can sometimes feel like a waste of time. So it’s about balancing this. Encourage community around writing and publishing, which is what I also need to do for my advisor. We are in a write and publish business, and that is what we need to do.

It appears that a robust sense of community can make a significant difference to the well-being and personal resilience of international Ph.D. students. Especially in moments of crisis, it is crucial to be able to rely on peers for support. However, participants in this study have identified a decided lack of community at the graduate level. Since few international Ph.D. students can afford to take time away from their work to attend social events, **professional development and networking events could be combined in order to incentivize graduate students to attend.** By making international events relevant to the professional concerns and needs of international graduate students, they would become more likely to draw engagement and build community.

This could be accomplished in the following ways:

- **Research colloquium for international Ph.D. students**

There appears to be a strong correlation between the willingness of dissertation advisors to advocate for their international Ph.D. students, and their success and well-being. Many participants in this study indicated that they were “lucky” to have a supportive advisor, while they knew others who had not been so “fortunate.” In order to not leave the success of international Ph.D. students up to “chance,” a research colloquium could be convened to promote faculty mentorship and professional development.

A research colloquium would foster **community around writing support.** Research colloquia could consist of small groups with a regular meeting schedule that share writing, for example, draft articles or dissertation chapters, on a rotating basis, and offer each other high-quality feedback. This forum should be facilitated by a **faculty convener** in a particular academic field, broadly construed, in order to attract international Ph.D. students as participants. At the same time, the faculty convener would learn about the particular situation and pedagogical needs of international Ph.D. students. She or he could demonstrate leadership in international mentorship and explore the international dimensions of her or his own research. The focus of research colloquia for international Ph.D. students should be on **high-quality feedback** and potentially also peer-reviewed publications.

A regular research colloquium would **combine community building with professional development and promote international faculty mentorship** across campus.

In order to invite faculty to convene research colloquia for international Ph.D. students, a call for faculty fellows could be circulated as part of a special program implemented by the **Division of Graduate Studies** across all academic divisions. If this is not feasible, a small pilot could be launched through **CITL**. Faculty conveners could be offered material incentives such as an international teaching & mentorship award or course release, depending on what would be possible and appropriate.

This format might be best suited to the academic needs of international Ph.D. students in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts, but would also enormously benefit international Ph.D. students in the Physical & Biological Sciences & Engineering who need community and writing support as much if not more.

Research colloquia would promote academic success through community, which would also promote work-life balance and mental health. Through the participation of faculty conveners – perhaps on the model of the [Faculty Fellow](#) program at CITL – faculty across campus could be encouraged to foster informal networking and professional community among international and domestic graduate students. As one participant in this study put it, “that’s something that only faculty can do.”

- **International Writing Tutor Fellowship Program**

ESL (English as a second language) approaches are not always sufficient to prepare incoming international Ph.D. students for success in U.S. academia. In addition to vocabulary and grammar, which most will have mastered prior to arrival, **experiential** knowledge is required to succeed as a researcher in U.S. academia. In order to **harness the international expertise that is already present on our campus**, a cohort of advanced international or multilingual Ph.D. students could be hired to serve as **writing tutors** for other international graduate students who seek writing support that incorporates the *inter-cultural* aspects of scholarly writing in English.

A fellowship program for international writing tutors would not only create **community around writing support** – generating much needed community through writing support, and writing support through community – would also address **basic needs** by hiring continuing international Ph.D. students as writing tutors.

These positions should be year-long and come with non-resident tuition remission. They could be administratively docked to the Writing Program or designed as a **GSR-ship during the summer** in order to address the need of continuing international Ph.D. students for income during the summer. This would also address the pressing issue of housing instability during the Summer Quarter.

For these reasons, a program for international writing tutors – on the model of the [Summer Graduate Pedagogy Mentors](#) program at CITL – would address multiple areas of need of international graduate students that are not adequately addressed by the purchase of writing software such as “Grammarly.” While writing software and online tutoring are steps

in the right direction, they perpetuate the isolation that erodes the personal resilience of international graduate students. Furthermore, privately owned companies collect and own student's data. Investing funding in graduate students – our very own asset here at UC Santa Cruz – is a more far-sighted investment in sustainability and academic excellence.

- **Create a Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program for International Teaching Assistants**

Across divisions, respondents shared that the information that was provided during TA orientations was **too abstract** to be useful because it took experiential knowledge for granted that international Ph.D. students without a prior degree from a U.S. institution still lacked.

In this area of need, **continuing and advanced Ph.D. students can, again, serve as a bridge** between the general TA orientations and TA trainings at the department level, and new international teaching assistants without prior experience with the American education system. New international TAs could be paired with a continuing or advanced international TA as “TA mentors.” They could visit and observe each other's sections, offer each other feedback on facilitation, and share advise on classroom dynamics. This program is more likely to succeed if it was formalized and offered material incentives.

Continuing and advanced Ph.D. students with TA experience could be entered into a database that could be used to match new TAs on an individual as-needed basis. TA mentors should be materially rewarded by offering either a certificate or a small stipend.

c. Long-term

- **Address housing instability among international graduate students**

Housing instability was identified as an **urgent problem** for all students at UCSC. However, its impact is aggravated for incoming international students. What are ways for the campus community to address this structural issue?

- In the short- and mid-term, consider prioritizing new international graduate students at **Graduate Student Housing** in their first year at UC Santa Cruz

- In the mid-term, work with the **Community Rentals Office** (CRO) to create and grow and database of landlords that are willing to rent to international graduate students at a reasonable cost (even if these students do not yet have a credit score or rental history in the U.S.). Consider creating an **additional staff position** entirely dedicated to assisting international students with housing.
- In the long-term, one participant in this study proposed a pioneering approach: supporting **cooperative housing** for international graduate students in the downtown rental market. A housing co-op is a form of community-oriented housing for a group of

up to eight housemates who live in individual rooms while sharing amenities. A housing co-op is different from a dorm because housemates cook for each other on a rotating basis. The lease should require housemates to cook for the house two or three times a month. One or several international housing co-ops would address **housing instability** while also building **community** and thereby promoting **health and well-being**. It would be a win-win situation all around.

A participant proposed the following method:

- Offer material incentives to **landlords** to rent to international graduate students at a reasonable cost. This could be accomplished through a housing subsidy paid directly to landlords.

If the campus were to offer some kind of stipend for landlords in Santa Cruz that will be open to form these international co-ops for PhD students here, that would be really helpful. For landlords, as incentives. Just a stipend for the landlord, from the university. [...] But it would have to be the whole house only for international grads. And needs to be a cooperative. [...] Co-op spaces are more community oriented.

If a housing stipend was to be paid directly to graduate students, it should be paid to **all** graduate students. This possibility should be seriously considered. This study suggests that international graduate students are more directly impacted by housing instability because they do not have rental or credit history, are not familiar with housing in the United States in general, and have yet to learn how to navigate culturally specific interpersonal dynamics with American landlords and housemates.

By incentivizing landlords to rent their houses to international Ph.D. and Master's students at a reasonable price, the impact of housing instability on international Ph.D. students could be addressed in a way that is relatively equitable and potentially also more cost effective. Alternatively, landlords could be offered immaterial rewards such as an award as a "global champion," invites to an exclusive university event, etc. A little creativity can go a long way.

- **Crisis contact for international graduate students**

International graduate students facing personal, financial, health, or mental health crises are often **hesitant** to ask for support from advisors and peers. They do not necessarily perceive ISSS as a resource that serves their needs either. Due to a lack of **confidential, culturally competent, and legally knowledgeable** counseling, and information barriers to existing resources, a licensed practitioner should be designated as a first point of contact for international graduate students who need confidential counseling and advice. This can make the difference between burn-out and well-being.

Participants in this study positively evaluated Campus Conflict Resolution Services (CCRS) on campus, although they expressed **hesitation** about aggravating inter-personal conflict by seeking support. ISSS could work with CCRS to **expand resources and counseling** available to international graduate students.

Including this information in the online resource guide, as detailed above, would help international students to identify and take advantage of the resources that are available to them at UC Santa Cruz.

c. Conclusion

It appears that a better sense of community could significantly improve the well-being and resilience of international graduate students at UC Santa Cruz. Especially in moments of crisis, it would be crucial for international Ph.D. students to be able to rely on their peers and advisors for support. However, the current programming offered to international graduate students does not appear to foster sufficient community. In order to make organized events more attractive, **professional development and networking events should be combined to incentivize graduate students to attend**. Furthermore, **community could be fostered around funded teaching and writing support**. For example, a funded **peer mentoring** system could generate income for continuing international Ph.D. students while offering tutoring support to incoming international Ph.D. students in related fields. Offering **regular colloquia** for international graduate students, led by **faculty fellows**, furthermore, could create a sense of community among international Ph.D. students while offering feedback on research and writing.

At the same time, faculty conveners of these colloquia would be exposed to international Ph.D. students and could learn about their particular needs. In order to convene a colloquium, faculty fellows should have to apply and demonstrate interest in mentoring international Ph.D. students. These colloquia should be open to marginalized domestic Ph.D. students as well in order to foster solidarity and community at the graduate student level. Since international mentoring programs invite faculty to explore the international dimensions of their research, they could be launched as part of the ongoing **internationalization** process at UC Santa Cruz.

Informal networking opportunities are as important as professional development for international graduate students. In order to inspire more participation, social events organized by Global Programs for Ph.D. and Master's students should be held **separately** and have a **different format** than social events for undergraduate students. They should be relevant to the concerns of Ph.D. and Master's students. In case of doubt, international Ph.D. students could be invited to organize or give input on these events. **Departments** should also be encouraged to organize more informal social events ("maybe just coffee and cookies where people have a chance to open up and just bond with one another").

If intra-departmental tensions prevent departments from organizing social events, **these conflicts should be resolved**. They should not be allowed to linger unaddressed. Conflict at the

faculty level **negatively affects the morale and success of all students**. This appears to be a **very common** experience across departments. Because many international Ph.D. students do not have access to a supportive community of peers, and almost exclusively rely on their dissertation advisors for support, they are particularly vulnerable to unresolved tensions at the faculty level.

Without a strong sense of community and administrative support, an academic career in the United States may become unsustainable or even untenable for international Ph.D. students. The stress of transition to graduate school in a culturally foreign setting appears to place them at a higher risk of burn-out and health crises. Although some of the factors that create disadvantage for international students, such as restrictions on employment and limited eligibility for funding, are beyond the control of the campus community, **creative ways to foster a culture of support and equity should be explored** in order to bolster the international reputation of UC Santa Cruz as an international research campus. Addressing the lack of community among graduate students in general, and international Ph.D. students in particular, would help to **shift the narrative** and **harness the untapped potential** of international graduate students as **global ambassadors** for UC Santa Cruz.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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7. APPENDIX

Research materials developed for this study:

- a. Discussion Guide
- b. Discussion Questions
- c. Consent Form

a. Discussion Guide

Role of Assistant: Make hand-written notes that reflect the content of the discussion, note observations of non-verbal behavior, facial expressions, hand movements, group dynamics (to later analyze group interactions). Keep track of time.

Purpose: Structure the discussion; provide outline to assistant; instruct note taker

[Participants arrive 10 minutes early to settle in and get food/drinks, create name tags]

12:00pm, Introduction

- **brief introduction of facilitators (incl. preferred pronouns)** (3 mins)

- **introduction of study** (5 mins)

The purpose of this study is to find out more about the needs of international graduate students at UC Santa Cruz. We are holding focus group discussions to develop recommendations for senior administrators across divisions about the kind of support we need as international PhD students. Thank you for making the time to join us today.

- hand out consent form, allow time to read (we will do a quick round of introductions after we collect the forms) (5 mins)

- **Participant introductions** (10 mins): Please tell us your name, preferred pronouns, and one thing that stood out to you when you first came to Santa Cruz (could be either positively or negatively)

- **Exercise** (7 mins): Ask participants to get up and walk over to mark how “happy” or “dissatisfied” they are with their overall experience at UCSC so far (purpose: get a general sense of the mood in the group, indication of potential motivation for participating in the study)

On Flipchart: Already written: Title of study; indicate focus group, date & time of meeting

Instructions: - Draw a spectrum from “very happy” on the left to “dissatisfied” on the right

- Ask participants to draw one or multiple arrows (if multiple, please note the specific aspect of your experience you are rating)

Transition to Group Discussion at 12:30pm

We'll cover a number of areas through ten discussion questions. We'll take 6-8 minutes with each.

b. Discussion Questions

- 1) **Think back to your first week on campus. What was your experience when you arrived at UCSC? Did you attend orientation(s)? If so, which ones were particularly useful or not so useful to you?**
- 2) **Looking back, what would you have liked to have known when you started? If you could, what would you tell you former self?**
- 3) **What have been your greatest challenges so far? (Did you find the support you needed? If so, please try to be as specific as possible about what made the difference to you in that situation.)**
- 4) **Do you have any areas of concern that you wish faculty and staff were trained on to better support you?**
- 5) **What strategies have you used to navigate your health and well-being at UCSC?**
- 6) **What has been your experience with housing so far?**
- 7) **Do you feel like you might have encountered bias during your studies at UC Santa Cruz? If so, did you seek support? If not, what kind of support would have been helpful? You don't have to share if you don't feel comfortable.**
- 8) **What was your experience with teaching at UC Santa Cruz so far?**

9) **How confident are you that you will be able to realize your career plans? How do you perceive your professional network at UC Santa Cruz?**

10) **Of all the things we discussed, what, to you, is the most pressing? Have we missed anything?**

c. Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Focus Group Study to Assess the Needs of International PhD Students at UC Santa Cruz, AY 2018-19

I consent to take part in a focus group interview about my experiences as an international PhD student at UC Santa Cruz. I understand that the study examines ways to improve the services and resources available for international graduate students at UC Santa Cruz. I also consent to be audio recorded during this focus group discussion.

Speakers will be identified with made-up names. Your name will not be identified. The list of participants or any of their personally identifiable information will not be shared with the university in any form. The information that you provide during the discussion will be grouped with answers from other participants so that you cannot be identified. All participants are asked not to share information discussed during their group, but we cannot guarantee that all respondents will respect this request.

My participation is voluntary. I understand that I am free to leave the group at any time. If I decide not to participate at any time during the discussion, my decision will in no way affect the services that I receive or performance as a student at UC Santa Cruz. The group interview will take approximately 90 minutes. I understand that my participation is voluntary and not monetarily compensated.

The purpose of this study is to find out more about the needs of international graduate students at UC Santa Cruz. Focus group discussions with international graduate students are one component of the study. I will audio record the interviews and plan to transcribe the interviews. The results of the study will be compiled in a final report that will be shared with the provosts, vice provosts, and staff of divisions across campus. The report may also circulate beyond UCSC.

The purpose of the group discussion and the nature of the questions have been explained to me.

Signature: Signing this document means that you understand the information given to you in this form and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study described above. Please confirm by placing checkmarks (below).

___ I agree to participate in this focus group or individual interview.

___ I agree to have my portion of this discussion audio recorded.

___ I give my permission for my data to be retained and used in future studies described above.

Please Print Your Name

Date

Please Sign Your Name