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Thriving among international students in the U.S. during the Trump presidency

Alexander H. Jones, Young K. Kim, Laurie A. Schreiner, Katie Koo

Abstract:

International students are critical for a flourishing U.S. higher education landscape (Younger, 2018). During the Trump presidency, however, these students faced significant cultural, economic, and social challenges (Peters & Anderson, 2021). To better understand international students' success, this study sought to identify pathways to their thriving. Thriving derives from positive psychology and views student success as an appreciative, holistic enterprise (Schreiner, 2016). We investigated whether college experiences and environments contributed to the variation in international student thriving at U.S. universities. Utilizing structural equation modeling, we specified a statistical model that explained nearly 70% of the variation in this population's thriving. Psychological Sense of Community, Institutional Integrity, student-faculty interaction, and spirituality were the most significant contributors to the variation in international student thriving. The implications of these results include a focus on culturally responsive pedagogy and redefining acculturation to include the university's responsibility to create environments where international students can thrive.

Keywords: Thriving, International Students, Psychological Sense of Community, Internationalization

Introduction

International students are vital to a flourishing U.S. higher education landscape. Recruiting and retaining international students yields educational (Younger, 2018), economic (Grawe, 2018), and national benefits for the U.S. (Education, 2020; Mitropoulos, 2020). In recent years, however, the combination of former President Trump's policies and rhetoric alongside international travel restrictions related to COVID-19 left international students facing significant

challenges in U.S. higher education (Israel & Batalova, 2021; Patel, 2018). Since 2016, international students have been subject to policies that disadvantage their access to education (Fischer, 2020a), federal surveillance (Fischer, 2020c), cultural imperialism, and xenophobia (Blumenstyk, 2019; Fischer, 2020b; Jackson, 2019). They also have endured isolation and homelessness (Fischer, 2021c), racial discrimination and bias (Dill, 2020), and mental health crises (Turnage, 2017). Since the Fall of 2016 when President Trump's political rise began in earnest, there has been a 12% decline in international student enrollments in the United States (Israel & Batalova, 2021). More recently, declines among Asian international students may derive from increased anti-Asian sentiments and violence in America (Fischer, 2021a). Former President Trump's insistence on calling COVID-19 the "China virus" catalyzed hate speech and violence on and off college campuses (Fischer, 2021b). Further, the March 2021 spa shootings in Atlanta illuminated the prevalence of discrimination against Asians and Asian-Americans, leading to university protests throughout the country (Fischer, 2021b). Although discrimination against foreigners, and Asians in particular, has been documented for centuries in the United States, in the past five years international students have experienced a plethora of lingering personal and institutional trials.

Importantly, the challenges faced by international students from 2016-2020 belie the resilience, courage, and cultural wealth they bring to a difficult environment. Lee and Rice (2007) and Vasilopoulos (2016) argue that scholars too frequently focus on the barriers or deficits that international students face, such as linguistic challenges or cultural challenges. Rather than viewing international students with a deficit mindset, scholars and researchers might consider the assets this population brings to their scholarly and professional pursuits. For example, Berger (2020) reminds administrators and institutions that international students are instrumental to fighting two pandemics: COVID-19 and racism. International students' cultural wealth and influence notwithstanding, scholars and researchers lack a thorough understanding of these students' college experiences and success (Vasilopoulos, 2016). Thus, a further examination of the college experiences of international students is crucial to understanding their success.

In this study, we examine international students' experience of thriving during the Trump presidency contextual period (2016-2020). Thriving is based in positive psychology and is a better measure of success than deficit-based frameworks because it defines student success as a student's holistic well-being rather than being affiliated with mere academic achievements (Schreiner et al., 2020). Thus, the purpose of this study is to enhance the existing literature on student success among international students by broadening the definition of success to thriving and ensuring that international students are not ignored as a subset of the literature. In a practical sense, by documenting pathways to thriving among international students, this study seeks to provide faculty and administrators important findings in optimizing the success of this important

population, which is of utmost importance given the COVID-19 and decline of international students in U.S. higher education from 2016-2020.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in an analysis of two fields: International student success and thriving. In the former domain, we highlight the need for the present study by documenting how, too often, the focus of success among this population is deficit-oriented. In the latter domain, we describe an expansive field that redefines student success, yet has not studied international students.

International Student Success

Many scholars have documented the needs of international students, among which financial concerns are of clear importance (Choudaha, 2020; Laws & Ammigan, 2020; Ma, 2020; McFadden et al., 2012). Further, international students face psychosocial concerns unique to their situation (Hansen et al., 2018; Koo et al., 2021; Leong, 2015). Financial, psychological, and social concerns all manifest in academic outcomes, according to Banjong (2015). Writing, in particular, is a consistent academic concern among international students (Eldaba & Isbell, 2018; Ravichandran et al., 2018; Vaughn et al., 2015). Other oft-cited academic concerns include faculty relationships (Wang & BrekaLorenz, 2018), advising expectations (Nguyen, 2013; Peters & Anderson, 2021), and academic socialization (García et al., 2019).

Despite these concerns, scholars have widely documented how international students have succeeded. One characteristic that consistently seems to predict international students' success in college is self-confidence and self-esteem (Lopez & Bui, 2014; Stankov et al., 2012; Telbis et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2018). Other individual predictors of success among international college students include English language skills (Lopez & Bui, 2014), intercultural skills (Brunsting et al., 2018), cross-cultural competence (Aldawsari et al., 2018), and motivation (Wang et al., 2018).

Not only does a student's individual confidence, linguistic capacity, cultural deftness, and academic repertoire influence achievement, but the college environment also is essential to international students' success. A campus environment that is conducive to international students' success is one that is clearly accommodating to and supportive of the particular needs of this population, specifically via faculty relationships (Aldawsari et al., 2018; Sherry et al., 2010; Tchoh & Mertan, 2018; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhou et al., 2008).

Thriving

Throughout the international student success literature, a holistic definition of success is missing. Often, academic performance or social connection function as proxies for "success." For the purposes of this study, however, we approach success through the concept of thriving, which is defined

holistically as a student's academic, interpersonal, and emotional engagement and well-being (Schreiner et al., 2020). A thriving college student is one who is engaged in the learning process, investing quality time and effort toward meaningful educational goals and applying their strengths to the challenges they encounter. They are involved in healthy, supportive relationships, are open to differences, and desire to make a difference in their community. Psychologically, these students have a positive lens through which they view the college experience, viewing mistakes and failures as temporary setbacks along the path to their success.

The research on thriving has identified significant predictors or pathways across different student populations. Across all student populations, a psychological sense of community—which entails membership, influence, shared emotional connection, and fulfillment of psychological and physical needs on campus (Glynn, 1981; McMillan & Chavis, 1986)—contributes the most variation to thriving. Students who feel they belong and matter to their institutions are significantly more likely to thrive (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Conn, 2019; McIntosh, 2012; Petridis, 2015; Romero, 2016; Schreiner, 2010; Seppelt, 2016; Vetter, 2018). Other significant pathways include spirituality (McIntosh, 2012), student-faculty interaction (Conn, 2019), certainty of major (Petridis, 2015), and campus involvement (Romero, 2016). However, research has also documented that the pathways to thriving differ significantly across race and ethnicity (Ash & Schreiner, 2016). For example, institutional integrity, defined by Braxton et al. (2004, 2014) as the degree to which an institution delivers on its implicit promises to students, is often a direct contributor to thriving among students of color (Ash & Schreiner, 2016), whereas it contributes indirectly to thriving among white students. Institutional integrity is twice as influential in predicting a sense of community among students of color as it is among white students. Despite this research on students of color, no studies have assessed the fit of the thriving model for international students, nor have there been any studies of the predictors of thriving among international students specifically. Thus, the research question that guided this study was, “To what extent do college experiences and environments contribute to the variation in thriving among international college students in the United States, controlling for relevant student characteristics?”

Methodology

Because the purpose of this study is to identify pathways to thriving among international students at U.S. colleges and universities, we used structural equation modeling (SEM) to determine the fit of the existing model of thriving for this population, as well as to explore the direct and indirect relationships among a variety of variables and the outcome of thriving. SEM has several benefits as a research methodology. This method allows for testing multiple regression equations simultaneously and addressing latent variables, or the

underlying variable that influences measured or observed variables (Byrne, 2016; Ullman & Bentler, 2012). SEM is ideal for this study because our particular question concerns the underlying concept of thriving. Specifically, in this study, we examined the relationship between several exogenous variables, including demographic variables and institution type, on endogenous variables, such as major certainty, campus involvement, student-faculty interaction, institutional integrity, spirituality, psychological sense of community, and, ultimately, thriving. Table 1 indicates the variable coding scheme for these variables.

Table 1: Variable Coding Descriptions

Variable	Coding
Thriving (TQ)	Second-order latent construct comprised of the five first-order constructs of Thriving: Engaged Learning, Academic Determination, Diverse Citizenship, Social Connectedness, Positive Perspective
Engaged Learning (ELI)	Four-item latent variable: (1) I feel as though I am learning things in my classes that are worthwhile to me as a person. (2) I can usually find ways of applying what I'm learning in class to something else in my life. (3) I find myself thinking about what I'm learning in class even when I'm not in class. (4) I feel energized by the ideas I am learning in most of my classes. Measured on a six-point Likert Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree.
Academic Determination (AD)	Six-item latent variable: (1) I am confident I will reach my educational goals (2) Even if assignments are not interesting to me, I find a way to keep working at them until they are done well (3) I know how to apply my strengths to achieve academic success (4) I am good at juggling all the demands of college life (5) Other people would say I'm a hard worker (6) When I'm faced with a problem in my life, I can usually think of several ways to solve it. Measured on a six-point Likert Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree.

Diverse Citizenship (DC)	Six-item latent variable: (1) I spend time making a difference in other people’s lives (2) I know I can make a difference in my community (3) It’s important for me to make a contribution to my community (4) I value interacting with people whose viewpoints are different from my own (5) It is important to become aware of the perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds. (6) My knowledge or opinions have been influenced or changed by becoming more aware of the perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds. Measured on a six-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree.
Positive Perspective (POS)	Two-item latent variable: (1) My perspective on life is that I tend to see the glass as “half full” rather than “half empty.” (2) I look for the best in situations, even when things seem hopeless. Measured on a six-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree.
Social Connectedness (SC)	Six-item latent variable: (1) Other people seem to make friends more easily than I do (reverse scored) (2) I don’t have as many friends as I wish I had (reverse scored) (3) It’s hard to make friends on this campus (reverse scored) (4) I feel like my friends really care about me (5) I feel content with the kinds of friendships I currently have (6) I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns (reverse scored). Measured on a six-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree.
Psychological Sense of Community (PSC)	Four-item latent variable: (1) Being a student here fills an important need in my life. (2) I feel proud of the college or university I have chosen to attend. (3) I feel like I belong here. (4) There is a strong sense of community on this campus. Measured on a six-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree.
Spirituality (SPIR)	Three-item latent variable: (1) My spiritual or religious beliefs provide me with a sense of strength when life is difficult. (2) My spiritual or religious beliefs are the foundation of my approach to life. (3) My spiritual or religious beliefs give meaning and purpose to my life. Measured on a

six-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree.

Institutional Integrity (II)	Three-item latent variable: (1) Overall, the actions of faculty, staff, and administrators on this campus are consistent with the mission of the institution. (2) My experiences on campus so far have met my expectations (3) this institution was accurately portrayed during the admissions process. Measured on a six-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree.
Campus Involvement (CI)	Four-item latent variable: How often do you participate in (1 = never, 6 = frequently): (1) Campus events or activities. (2) Student organizations on campus (3) Campus ethnic organizations such as the Black student organizations (4) Community Service
FacDivPer	Three item latent variable: (1) Instructors include diverse perspectives in class discussions or assignments (2) The extent to which faculty encourage students to contribute different perspectives in class. (3) Faculty sensitivity to the needs of diverse students. Measured with a 6-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.
FacInteraction	Four item latent variable: (1) Met with faculty during office hours (2) Discussed career or grad plans with faculty (3) Discussed academic issues with faculty (4) Interaction with faculty outside of class. Measured with a 6-point Likert scale, where 1 = Never to 6 = Frequently
First Choice (CHOICE)	Observed variable: When you chose to enroll in this institution, was it your first choice? Measured by Yes and No. No = 0, Yes = 1.
Highest Degree (DEGREEGOAL)	Observed variable: What is the highest degree your intend to pursue in your lifetime? Recoded into 0 = Bachelor's degree or lower, 1 = Master's degree or higher.

Intent to Graduate (GRADUATE)	Observed variable: I intend to graduate from this institution. Measured with a 6-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.
Major Certainty (MAJORSURE)	Response to one item: How sure are you of your major? (1 = very unsure, 6 = very sure).
Location of Living (ONCAMPUS)	Dichotomous variable: 0 = Not on campus, 1 = On campus
Gender (FEMALE)	Dichotomous variable: 0 = Male, 1 = Female
High School Grader (Reversed)	Response to high school grades: 1 = Mostly C's, 6 = Mostly A's
Satisfaction with Academic Advising (ADV)	Response to one item: How satisfied are you with the academic advising you have received this year? Measured with a six-point scale.
Financial Difficulty (FINDIFF)	Response to one item: Considering the financial aid you've received and the money you and your family have, how much difficulty have you had so far in paying for your school expenses? Measured on a six point scale

Instrumentation

In this study, we used a secondary dataset called the Thriving Quotient™. These data are collected throughout the academic year via Qualtrics and measured student thriving by 24-items on the Thriving Quotient™ instrument. Second-order confirmatory factor analysis unique to this population identifies thriving as a higher order construct of the following five scales: Engaged Learning, Diverse Citizenship, Academic Determination, Positive Perspective, and Social Connectedness. Engaged Learning refers to an international student's positive engagement in and ownership of their learning. When students are energized by their learning, they are engaged. Diverse Citizenship refers to students' valuing of difference in others and a propensity to make a difference in the world around them. Academic Determination refers to students being motivated, self-regulated in their learning, and working hard to achieve their academic goals. Positive Perspective refers to a student's positive perspective on life while Social Connectedness refers to students' closeness of friendships and strong relationships that may support their success. Institutions request participation in the data collection, which is free of charge.

Participants and Procedures

Utilizing the Thriving Quotient™ secondary dataset, SPSS and AMOS modelling software were implemented. Originally, the dataset yielded 1,531 students who selected, "Yes," in response to the question, "Are you an international student?" since 2009. Given the unique challenges facing international students in the Trump era, cases were limited to those between 2016 and 2020 who studied at institutions in the United States (N = 1,430 students). Utilizing SPSS, we conducted a missing value analysis with EM imputation. We transformed the data into z-scores and removed cases with a value higher than 3.29 or less than -3.29 (Mertler & Reinhart, 2017). We similarly identified multivariate outliers by calculating Mahalanobis distance and removed cases exceeding the pertinent Chi-square value, yielding a final sample size of 1,061 international students at U.S. colleges and universities (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Following the recommendations of Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), 12 variables were normalized because of their skewness, including transforming *ADI*, *DC5N*, *HEALTHSAT*, *DIVSAT*, *PSC4*, and *REENROLL* with the pertinent square-root function because of moderate skewness (between .8 and 1), and *ELII*, *FRATSOR*, *GRADUATE*, *MAJORSURE*, *SPIR1*, and *SPIR2N* with the Log10 procedure because of significant skewness (greater or less than 1 and -1, respectively).

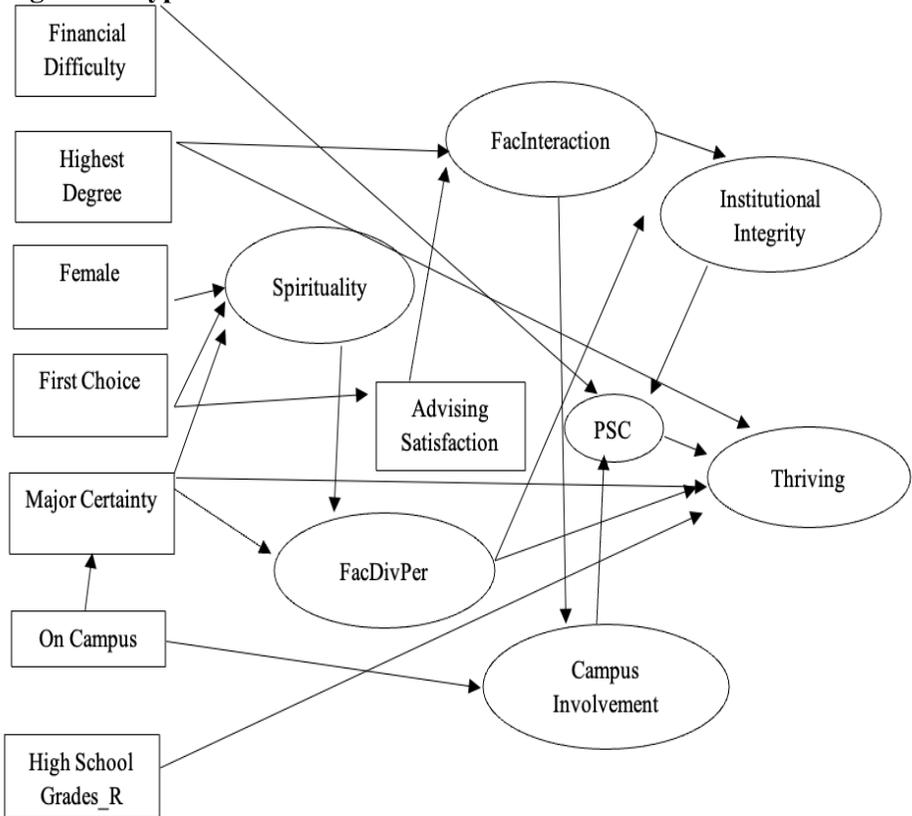
The final sample utilized in this study was a diverse group of international students from a variety of institutions. The sample was predominantly female (57.21%). The majority of students derived from families making less than \$60,000 income annually (62.48%). Further, the majority lived on campus (57.21%) and were students between the ages of 18 and 23 (82.28%).

More than a third were first-generation college students (34.48%). These students also studied primarily at private institutions (65.41%).

Data Analysis Procedures

Once the dataset was screened and cleaned, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on thriving to identify whether the current model for thriving fits this unique population. This second-order factor of thriving was utilized throughout the study. In addition, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis on other latent variables in the Thriving Quotient™, including psychological sense of community, institutional integrity, spirituality, faculty satisfaction, and campus involvement.

Figure 1: Hypothesized Model



In addition to confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling was used to measure the goodness of fit of the hypothesized model. A hypothesized model (Figure 1) was developed based on the literature and was used as a starting point for specifications. Early models included a variety of common demographic variables (e.g. Income, Age, Institution Type, Race), but these did not have significant relationships with variables in the study and so

were removed. Model fit was evaluated using the Comparative Fit Index and the Root Mean Square of Error Approximation. The former measures the fit between the hypothesized model and a null model that assumes independence among the variables and is best indicated by a number greater than 0.95 (Ullman & Bentler, 2012). The latter compares a hypothesized model’s fit against a fully saturated model that assumes a perfect fit and is best indicated by a number less than 0.06. The model was then specified until it reached an adequate fit of the data.

Results

Thriving was supported as a second-order factor in the hypothesized model, with first-order factors of Academic Determination, Social Connectedness, Diverse Citizenship, Engaged Learning, and Positive Perspective. After model respecification utilizing modification indices, the measurement model of thriving indicated a good fit to the sample data ($\chi^2_{(234)} = 1,113.622$ ($p < .001$), CFI = .902, and RMSEA = .060 with 90% confidence interval between .057 and .064). Further, the final structural model yielded a strong fit to this sample: $\chi^2_{(410)} = 1,578.807$ ($p < .001$), CFI = .901, and RMSEA = .053 with a 90% confidence interval between .050 and .055. The structural model explained 66% of the variation in thriving. Table 2 highlights the direct, indirect, and total effects of each variable on thriving.

Table 2: Standardized Effects on Thriving

Variable	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Total</i>
Exogenous Variables			
Degree goal	.008	.117	.125
Female	.008	.000	.008
First choice	.002	.000	.002
HS Grades	.000	-.059	-.059
FinDiff	-.021	.000	-.021
OnCampus	-.003	.000	-.003
Mediating Endogenous Variables			
FacDivPer	.210	.145	.355
FacInteraction	.095	.183	.278
Integrity	.412	.000	.412
PSC	.000	.558	.558
AdvSat	.118	.000	.118
MajorSure	.096	.077	.173
SPIR	.188	.212	.400
CampusInvolve	.061	.000	.061

a critical component of the thriving conceptual model, but further research could be done to explore what parts of an international student's cultural heritage specifically lead to their thriving.

Significance

This study offers the first documentation of pathways to thriving for international students. In the wider student success literature, international students are too often ignored or marginalized (Lopez & Bui, 2014). Studies that do examine international students specifically tend to take a deficit approach, focusing on their challenges and inadvertently placing the responsibility for any lack of success on the student rather than examining the college experience (Tchoh & Mertan, 2018). Moreover, a narrow definition of success is often applied to international students, emphasizing academic or social components, rather than taking a more holistic view that incorporates academic, interpersonal, and psychological elements of success. Yet even in the literature on student thriving that does expand the definition of success more holistically, the experiences of international students have not been studied specifically. This study attempted to address these gaps in the higher education literature by examining the pathways to thriving among international students as a means to facilitate their holistic development.

Implications: A Blueprint for International Student Thriving

The major implication of this study is that scholars and practitioners now have a blueprint to improve international students' thriving. In each section below, we outline specific recommendations for enhancing thriving among international students.

Enhance Psychological Sense of Community

Psychological Sense of Community (PSC) emerged as the strongest predictor of thriving in this sample. PSC refers to a student's sense that they not only belong at the institution, but are a full and contributing member of the college (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Schreiner, 2013). When international students sense that they belong and are a contributing member to their institution, then they are more likely to thrive.

What do "belonging" and "contributing to an institution" mean for international students specifically, especially during a tumultuous moment in history when these students were marginalized? According to community psychologists, there are three aspects of this phenomenon: purpose, ownership, and shared emotional connection. The first aspect of psychological sense of community concerns a student's and institution's *purpose*. Leveraging the research of McMillan and Chavis (1986), Schreiner (2013) argued that students who consider themselves partners to the university's goals are more likely to succeed. When the goals of both parties are misaligned, students may have difficulty in achieving PSC. For international students, U.S. university goals may

be parochial and restricted to a domestic agenda, whereas the purpose of education for students from different nations may be more globally minded. Universities could have played a greater role in ensuring that international students saw themselves in the university's purpose despite xenophobic rhetoric that excluded international students during 2016-2020. To facilitate a partnership between international students and U.S. universities—and therefore a psychological sense of community—institutions must recognize that their purpose must be broadened. University leaders might, for example, consider auditing the university mission, strategic priorities, fundraising objectives, and other focal points to ensure they are globally and culturally relevant, especially when national leaders bemoan diversity and utilize hegemonic rhetoric.

PSC also refers to a sense of ownership on campus. When any student has a sense that they own the space on campus, they are more likely to thrive; for international students especially, this sense of ownership is critical. International students who thrive are those who help *create the space for others in the campus community to belong*. This description of thriving and a sense of community is even more stark in light of the challenges international students faced during the Trump presidency; federal surveillance, for example, inscribes notions of otherness and foreignness, making it difficult for international students to have a sense of ownership. When international students are no longer guests or visitors on campus, but true owners of the campus experience, PSC and thriving will occur. Their literal foreignness need not limit their capacity to create the space for them to own the campus experience and help others belong.

The tenets of PSC also dictate that students have a shared emotional connection with the wider institution. This phenomenon occurs with positive interactions across campus (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Interactions with faculty and with peers can be significant causes of miscommunication and negative interactions because of cultural misunderstandings (Banjong, 2015; Eldaba & Isbell, 2018; Koo et al., 2021; Ravichandran et al., 2018; Vaughn et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2015). Developing intercultural communication is pivotal for U.S. universities to advance PSC for international students. When national leaders champion a particular culture at the expense of marginalized cultures, it is likely difficult for foreign citizens studying in a new context to share a sense of connection. University leaders who hope to facilitate such a sense of community might consider whether every level of the organization—trustees, cabinet officials, faculty, staff, especially frontline service staff—receives training on cross-cultural interaction training, especially regarding cultural populations that are most predominant on campus.

Ensure Institutional Integrity

Although its effects were indirect via Psychological Sense of Community (PSC), Institutional Integrity had the second largest total effect on international student thriving. Understanding how perceptions of Institutional Integrity contribute to PSC elucidates specific actions college leaders can take to facilitate

belonging on campus and therefore thriving. Institutional integrity involves meeting students' expectations, as well as aligning their actual experiences with what was portrayed during the admissions process. Perceptions of institutional integrity are enhanced when the actions of faculty and staff appear to be congruent with the mission of the institution, as well (Braxton et al., 2014). Among international students, institutional integrity may be more meaningful given aforementioned cultural and linguistic challenges. Because perceptions of institutional promises are mediated by cultural assumptions and values, international students may misinterpret what an institution portrays in its application or admissions materials. Enrollment officers need to be specific about what the institution's current cultural heterogeneity is versus what is merely aspirational. For example, expressing hospitality meanwhile international students hear xenophobic and racist language in the predominant culture might seem inconsistent. Indeed, notions of transparency, clarity, and clear expectations are critical to any student's understanding of institutional integrity, but especially an international student's need for building trust across cultures in a vulnerable environment.

Tas (2004) seminally noted that an international student's lack of success could be understood by college environments that are rigid, untrustworthy, hierarchical, exclusivist, homogenous, and insensitive. Here, the relationship between Institutional Integrity and Psychological Sense of Community is apparent: When international students sense untrustworthiness or a lack of integrity, they deem the institutional culture as one that is contrary to their cultural heritage, which prohibits their belonging. Institutions, then, must try to sensitively build a bridge between cultures so that international students can place more trust in the college environment. To do so, scholars have generally recommended unique support structures for the particular needs of this population (Aldawsari et al., 2018; Sherry et al., 2010; Tchoh & Mertan, 2018; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhou et al., 2008).

Develop Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in the Classroom

According to Ash and Schreiner (2016), *positive* faculty relationships can *positively* influence thriving among students of color. However, *negative* faculty relationships can *negatively* influence thriving. Thus, student-faculty interaction, when positive, is critical for the success of students of color. In the present study, the same can be said of international students: When international students have better quantity and quality of interactions, they are more likely to perceive the institution has integrity, and therefore have a greater sense of community and thrive. Faculty are, then, one of the first dominoes to advance international student thriving. Wu et al. (2015) suggests faculty can recognize that their interactions with international students are vital to their thriving. Yet it is these same interactions that can prohibit their thriving, for cultural differences (e.g., hierarchy, respect, or the role of asking questions in the classroom) add another layer that faculty must learn to acknowledge and respond to.

Over the past two decades, research on culturally responsive pedagogy consistently concludes that inclusive forms of pedagogy are necessary to enhance student success among culturally diverse populations (Quaye & Harper, 2007). To advance thriving and psychological sense of community, the milieu of the campus must be culturally inclusive even as the wider national landscape can seem xenophobic, and faculty are critical toward that end. Indeed, faculty are the greatest shapers of a student's learning experience at college and provide safe harbor despite wider cultural power asymmetries (Millis, 2014).

To be sure, it is not isolated faculty and student interactions that lead to success among students of color (Nelson Laird et al., 2008). Rather, it is the broader and deeper cultural shifts that are needed to ensure that international students belong, which is the key predictor of thriving and success (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Developing trust and learning to invite diverse students into an equitable cultural environment are inclusive skills that need sharpening; most faculty are not actively trained in these skills (Quaye & Chang, 2012). Thus, faculty need training on how to develop the kinds of student-faculty relationships that create a campus culture where students feel validated, included, and belong, especially during a season in which racial bias and xenophobic seem dominant. Dee and Daly (2012) suggest specifically that faculty development programs ought to foster faculty intercultural awareness in terms of their individual identity, inclusive pedagogical practices, interactions with students, and the wider cultural environment. Thus, institutional leaders can invest in helping faculty become more culturally responsive to create a cascading effect that leads to thriving.

Conclusion

In this study, we researched the relationship between various college experiences and environments and international student thriving during the Trump presidency. Our results indicated that a psychological sense of community had the greatest effect on thriving among international students. Student-faculty interactions and institutional integrity were also strong predictors of thriving. The key findings of this study provide scholars and practitioners important recommendations for improving thriving among international students. Developing a globally-purposed community, intercultural trust, and a culturally responsive environment are requisites for enabling international students to thrive during a season of xenophobia and violence toward international students.

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Author Bios

Alexander H. Jones is Vice President of Institutional Advancement at Roberts Wesleyan University; Young K. Kim is a Professor in the Department of Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University; Laurie A. Schreiner is a Professor in the Department of Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University; Katie Koo is an Assistant Professor in the Mary Frances Early College of Education at the University of Georgia