SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANT GRADUATE STUDENTS' PERSISTENCE

TOWARD GRADUATION: FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR ABILITY

TO COMPLETE A PROGRAM OF STUDY

by

Chenda Moore, M.Ed.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The University of Houston-Clear Lake

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Educational Leadership

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON - CLEAR LAKE

MAY, 2021

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my Aunt Laura for risking her life to save mine. She took great risks as a single, young woman who crossed the border from Cambodia to Thailand with hopes of starting a new life. From 1975-1979, she survived a concentration camp during the Khmer Rouge genocide. Aunt Laura had planned to return to Cambodia to locate other family members; however, the plan was diverted due to an opportunity to begin a new life in the United States of America.

Although everything was taken from us prior to our arrival, Aunt Laura and I arrived in America with everything given back to us. When we were forced out of our home in Cambodia, everything was taken from us except for our dignity. We were forced to wear black pajamas and worked in the fields. The Khmer Rouge leaders wanted to create an Agrarian Utopia. After our release, we were given clothes and food by charitable organizations.

In America, Aunt Laura learned a new trade, worked hard, and eventually achieved the American dream of owning a business. We have called America our home for almost 40 years. Aunt Laura is the epitome of persistence and resilience as she encouraged me to pursue academic excellence that has led to the pursuit of this doctoral degree. I have been able to earn my degree because Aunt Laura has taught me to persevere no matter the obstacles.

Acknowledgements

I would like to give my sincerest gratitude to my dissertation committee members for their endless hours of support and patience. To my husband, I thank him for his unwavering support as he watched me read, research, write, and repeat the last three years. I would like to give thanks and praise to my heavenly Father for giving me this opportunity to pursue my dream. The road seemed long, but well worth the journey.

Dr. Thomas Cothern was the most encouraging and supportive chair I could have asked for. I thank Dr. Thomas for agreeing to take me on and believing in me even when I questioned myself. I questioned my ability to continue my process many days and nights. Every time I contacted him, he remained positive and kind. Although last semester was difficult with all the "stuff" that kept getting in the way, Dr. Thomas helped me get to this point.

Dr. Renee Lastrapes was the most supportive quantitative methodologist. She was always positive as she helped me understand how to complete overwhelming tasks. The best memory I have of Dr. Lastrapes class was the first day of Quantitative Research I. She told the class not to worry; however, I worried about her class the most because I thought I was not prepared nor equipped to successfully complete mathematical calculations. Dr. Lastrapes completely eased my mind and I was able to settle in after that. I thank her for her patience as we found another way to explain how to calculate or process data. She is absolutely amazing!

Dr. Amy Orange was the sweetest and kindest qualitative methodologist. Although she had high expectations for methodology, Dr. Orange reassured me that I would do well. I considered her the quiet and reserved professor; nevertheless, she was powerful with her words and wise with her choices. I will fondly remember her soft note and tone.

Dr. Leslie Gauna was passionate about her topic of interest and was sometimes be misunderstood. She had an enigmatic presence that resonated wonder. I thank her for serving as the fourth member of my committee. I truly appreciated her support.

My husband, Rob, had to listen to me tell him no to different activities during the last three years. Although I needed to focus on school, he managed to take me away from my

computer or a research article to get me out of the house for fresh air. I always packed a few articles in case I had time to glance over them. I was comforted by the fact that the articles were in my possession, but never actually looked at them while away from the house. I thank him for believing in me and being my biggest support. I could not have completed this bucket list without your unwavering support.

To my children and grandchildren, I thank them for believing in me even when I did not have much time for family gatherings. I thank them for their understanding and their encouragement when I needed a little boost every now and then.

I want to thank my heavenly Father for His mercies and grace. Many days and nights I prayed for God to give me the words and wisdom to understand what I was reading as I attempted to summarize research articles. I grew another layer of skin and gained more brain cells through my doctoral degree process!

ABSTRACT

SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANT GRADUATE STUDENTS' PERSISTENCE

TOWARD GRADUATION: FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR ABILITY

TO COMPLETE A PROGRAM OF STUDY

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University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2021

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The demand for more knowledgeable employees has created a renewed focus in the United

States to produce more postgraduate degreed individuals. Researchers have noted that a master's

degree could become the new bachelor's degree as employers are requiring more advanced skills

and abilities (Wendler et al., 2010). While there are several researchers (Collie et al., 2017;

Deming & Dynarski, 2009; Lee et al., 2013) who have studied the persistence of undergraduate

students, few researchers (e.g., Harde & Hackett, 2015) have completed a systematic research of

graduate student supports. Graduate students have encountered numerous obstacles that have

impeded their ability to complete their degree programs, less is known about additional obstacles

immigrant students have faced when pursuing a graduate degree. Terrazas-Carrillo et al., (2017)

found that "graduate student attrition has been referred to as the hidden crisis in higher

education" (p. 61). Some of the issues that graduate students faced included lack of employer

support (Wyland et al., 2015), lack of family support (Strom & Savage, 2014), and lack of

university personnel supports (Okahana et al., 2018; O'Keeffe, 2013). The Completion and

Attrition in STEM Master's Programs: Pilot Study Findings survey (Council of Graduate

Schools, 2017) was used and adapted for the purposes of this research.

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

To compete in the global economy, educational leaders in the United States have a renewed focus on producing more college graduates. In Texas, the 60x30 TX initiative was included in the higher education strategic plan. Legislators aimed to have 60% of young adults, between the ages of 25 to 34 years old, obtain a postsecondary credential by the year 2030 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015). More jobs require education beyond a high school diploma. With the demand for more knowledge-based employees, the demand for postgraduate degrees has increased. There is growing sentiment that a master's degree may become the new bachelor's degree as employers require advanced skills and knowledge (Council of Graduate Schools and Educational Testing Service, 2010; Wendler et al., 2010). Patel (2014) indicated that graduates who completed a master's degree, on average, earned 20% more than graduates with only a bachelor's degree. Many researchers (Hardre & Hackett, 2015; Gururaj et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2008) have studied the persistence of undergraduate students, but few researchers (Cheng et al., 2019; Estrada et al., 2019; Heavy Runner-Rioux et al., 2019) have completed a systematic review of graduate students supports.

Implications for institutions of higher education (IHE) were significant in determining the most effective supports that helped graduate students persist toward earning their degree. Ashraf et al. (2018) documented that dedication, perseverance, and commitment were indicators of academic success. Tinto (1993) noted that "in the most selective institutions, the graduate and first-professional schools, our best estimate is that up to 50% of all beginning students [will] fail to complete their doctor degree programs" (p. 230). Lovitts and Nelson (2000) suggested that the national graduation rates continued

to hover in the 50% range for students who pursued a graduate degree across programs and disciplines, which corroborated Tinto's (1993) earlier findings.

The Council of Graduate Schools (2013) has tracked graduate student statistics since 1986 and found that students who pursued a master's degree composed the largest segment of the graduate market. Okahana et al. (2016) noted in a 2015 study that there was an increase in graduate enrollment with 83.6% of graduate students being enrolled in a master's or graduate certificate program. However, the number of graduate degrees conferred were not aligned with the increased enrollment (Council of Graduate Schools & Educational Testing Services, 2010). Graduate student graduation rates for IHEs have been a concern due to negative factors that affected students ability to persist toward graduation (Kattner, 2012).

This chapter will further explore factors that may affect students' persistence toward graduation and obtaining a master's degree. The remainder of this chapter will outline the problem, the purpose for the study, and the questions that will guide the research. In addition, key terms will be defined to further clarify the subject matter of this study.

<div align="center">**Research Problem**</div>

Researchers have relied heavily on models that primarily focused on the undergraduate learner (Tinto, 1993, 2006). Although Hardre and Hackett (2015) reported numerous IHEs that produced internal studies related to student comprehension of personal and program factors that motivated their determination toward graduation, there was a lack of empirical data regarding students pursuit of a master's degree. This study will contribute to research available regarding the factors that help or hinder graduate students' graduation efforts. Future graduate students may benefit from interventions, programs, and knowledge of factors universities might offer to influence students ability

to thrive. The information provided by the survey and individual interviews used in this study will provide insight regarding employer, family, and university support systems.

The persistence level of graduate students was of significant concern for IHEs (Dwyer, 2017; O'Keeffe, 2013) due to different factors that may help or hinder students' ability to persist in their graduation programs. Terrazas-Carrillo et al. (2017) ascertained that "graduate student attrition has been referred to as the hidden crisis in higher education" (p. 61). A lack of support from employers (Wyland et al., 2015), family (Strom & Savage, 2014), and university personnel (Okahana et al., 2018; O'Keeffe, 2013) may result in many graduate students failing to complete their master's degree. Also included as possible areas to consider regarding university support were faculty, peers, student services, and auxiliary programs.

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS, 2013) addressed the research gap with their pilot study, Completion and Attrition in STEM Master's Programs. Five universities participated in the study. Data were collected from science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) and Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs (Completion & Attrition, 2016). Findings included 66% of STEM students who completed their programs, whereas, 86% of MBA students persisted to graduation. Graduates attributed their success to personal motivation and non-financial family support. Researchers identified the primary factor for dropping out of school was students' conflict with an employer (Completion & Attrition, 2016).

Significance of the Study

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) speculated that jobs that required a master's degree were expected to increase by almost 17% through 2026, the largest increase of any education level. The Council of Graduate Schools (2017) explained that 83% of degrees awarded in 2016 were master's degrees. Master's education was a critical part of graduate education at IHEs (Cohen, 2012). However, there has been a lack of research

analyzing the factors that affect master's students from completing their program of study. There has been a lack of research regarding different factors that may impact master's students who do not complete their program within a certain time frame. Adequate resources should be provided to assist master's students as they overcome personal and academic obstacles that may hinder their ability to persist toward graduation (Cohen, 2012). The researcher will focus on employer, family, and university personnel support that may influence graduate students ability to complete their degree requirements. Factors that may influence graduate students ability to persist and thrive should be examined. Staff members at institutions of higher education may use data to meet the needs of future graduate students as interventions and programs are revised.

According to Lara and Nava (2018), graduate students have encountered numerous obstacles that have impeded their ability to complete degree requirements, less is known about additional obstacles immigrant students may face as they attain a graduate degree. Similar to immigrant undergraduate students, graduate students have also faced challenges with paying college tuition and meeting academic requirements. The authors documented that "high levels of isolation and mental health issues in the form of depression and anxiety" for immigrant students may negatively influence their decision to not remain in their program (p. 127). Lara and Nava (2018) also suggested that family, peers, and social justice commitments played an important role in influencing immigrant students to enter graduate programs.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-method study was to determine barriers immigrant students may encounter when completing a master's degree. The researcher examined the factors that may have impacted master's students who have graduated from a mid-sized, South-Central university in the United States between May 2014 through December 2019. The personal, professional, and educational supports

master's graduates needed to complete their degree programs may prove beneficial in assisting the university with creating programs that support retention and graduation rates. The researcher also collected demographic data from participants. The following research questions guided the study: (a) What were the perceived supports from employers, family, or university personnel described by gender?; (b) What were the perceived supports described by immigrant students in completing a master's degree?; and (c) What were the perceived barriers that influenced immigrant students and their ability to complete a master's degree?

Definitions of Key Terms

For purposes of the intended study, the following terms were utilized throughout the document.

Graduate Student

An individual pursuing a master's degree.

Immigrant

An individual who comes to another country to take up a permanent residence (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Persistence

The ability to cope with stress and hardships by continuing to adapt and complete a goal generally leading to degree attainment. The desire and action of a student to stay in school from start to finish. "Personal tendency to endure through hardships to achieve goals" (Howard & Crayne, 2018, p. 78).

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

A person normally experiences PTSD when they are exposed to an extremely stressful event or situation. The symptoms could include intrusive images or nightmares, hyper-vigilant behaviors such as sleeplessness, hostility, or acting out, and stimuli avoidance (Mohamed & Thomas, 2017).

University Supports

       May include activities and programs offered at the university (e.g., academic advising, career advising and placement, counseling support, tutoring center, and writing center). Most importantly, supports from professors and cohort or peers.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

       Chapter I provides an overview regarding the need for the study, significance of the problem, research purpose and questions, and key definitions. Chapter II offers an extensive review of literature related to the factors that may impact master's students and their ability to persist toward graduation. Chaper III includes the research methodology. Chapter IV contains the results of the research. Chapter V includes the results, implications of findings and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Former college students decide to pursue a master's degree for personal achievement or professional advancement (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2011; Ashraf et al., 2018; Glazer & Raymo, 2005). The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS, 2013) reported the primary reason for master's program enrollment was professional advancement. In addition, the love of learning may be a reason some students continue education beyond a bachelor's degree (Connolly, 2017). Furthermore, the transition to graduate school included a myriad of personal and academic challenges (Hardre & Hackett, 2015). The purpose of this mixed-method study was to examine factors that have impacted master's students who graduated from a mid-sized, South-Central university in the United States between May 2014 through December 2019. This literature review will begin with a brief overview of the history of master's education and the research that contained different factors (i.e, employer, family, and university personnel supports) that may affect graduate student enrollment. Student persistence and a theoretical framework will also be defined.

History of Master's Education

The master's degree program began in Europe in the 12th century before the degree was introduced to higher-education staff in the United States (Glazer, 1986). Harvard University was the first institution of higher education (IHE) to confer the first graduate degrees to a small group of young men who became teachers or theologians (Glazer, 1986; Spencer, 1986). The Morrill Act of 1862 was passed to encourage public funding and interest in teaching and research that may enhance graduate programs. By 1900, the Association of American Universities (AAU) was formed to provide standardization across higher education (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Many discussions and

debates ensued through the decades over the significance or meaning of master's degrees (Spencer, 1986).

Good and La Prad (2013) addressed the link between an educated population and economic prosperity was well-established. A graduate education is needed to foster critical thinking skills to solve complex problems and innovation (Wendler et al., 2010). "As a pivotal degree that bridges the baccalaureate, the doctorate and the workplace, the master's degree has the capacity to continually evolve as a highly adaptable and affordable credential" (Glazer-Raymo, 2005, p. 23). The master's degree was considered a prerequisite for leadership positions in numerous job fields (e.g., (a) business, (b) education, (c) engineering, and (d) nursing). Haworth et al. (n.d.) noted a master's degree has become the terminal degree for certain professional fields such as business.

A master's degree was difficult to discuss due to the variety of programs and the amount of time for degree completion (Glazer, 1986). A master's degree may be a by-product of a larger goal (i.e., a doctorate degree) or even a second master's degree. The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS, 2013) found the requirement of a master's thesis as another variable that made quantifying programs difficult. Completing a thesis was not a requirement across all disciplines (Glazer-Raymo, 2005). These contrasting requirements may contribute to the challenge of understanding what factors maintain the engagement level of master's students that lead to degree attainment.

Demographic Characteristics

In order to obtain accurate information regarding master's student population, subpopulations(e.g., (a) gender, (b) race, and (c) age) must be explored. Due to the increased growth in jobs that require a master's degree, universities and community employers may need partnerships that will increase the likelihood of student degree attainment and future employment. Seeking to understand the differences between population groups, demographics, and other factors may help the IHE employ effective

strategies (Council of Graduate Schools, 2013). When individuals decide to dedicate more of their personal resources to another role, like becoming a graduate student, "the likelihood of strain-based conflict with other roles" will occur (Good & La Prad, 2013, p. 236).

Gender

Okahana et al. (2016) reported in their 2015 study that women were 58.4% more likely to earn master's degrees compared to men. Women were also 66.4% more likely to earn graduate certificates than men. In this same study, men enrolled at a higher rate at research institutions. First-time domestic graduate students from the United States included 61.4% women, whereas women from other countries represented 42%. In comparison, Okahana et al. (2019) affirmed in their 2018 study that women earned 58.3% more master's degrees and women earned 64.8% more graduate certificates than men. In both the 2015 and 2018 studies, men continued at a higher rate in graduate enrollment in the areas of business, engineering, mathematics and computer sciences, and physical and earth sciences. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), women are 2% more likely to earn a master's degree than men between 2017 and 2029.

While not directly related to graduation rates, other differences between males and females included job experience and job satisfaction as individuals pursued their graduate degree. Shannon et al. (2017) noted that 74.6% women had higher job satisfaction than men (55.0%) while attending graduate school part-time and working full-time. Fernandez et al. (2019) discussed in their study that women were less likely to be offered research assistantships than men during graduate school. The authors also mentioned that having a family while in graduate school proved to be a challenge for females. Hibbler (2002) and Jones (2011) documented that women of color did not receive peer validation for their research.

Minority Students

Universities have demonstrated an interest in tracking underrepresented minorities (URM) in order to attract additional students and to determine reasons why minority students tend to drop out at a higher rate than White students (Rogers & Molina, 2006; Smallwood, 2004). In a 2015 study by Okahana et al. (2016), minority students in the United States represented only 22.5% of graduate students which included 11.7% African American or Black students and 10.0% Hispanic or Latino students. Heavy Runner-Rioux et al. (2018) studied 63 American Indian graduate students who encountered a unique challenge regarding their cultural responsibilities in addition to their school and family responsibilities. Underrepresented minority women made up 66.2%, which was a higher percentage than White or non-Hispanic women who represented 60.2% (Okahana et al., 2016).

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS, 2013) study found that African American or Black students had the highest attrition rate of all groups. Latino students had the second highest attrition rate. Both groups of students were most vulnerable of dropping out within the first six months of enrollment. The CGS determined these findings to be consistent across all universities that were included in the study. In the 2018 study of URMs, first-time graduate enrollment of American Indian/Alaska Native students increased by 8.3% and Latinx students increased by 6.8% between Fall 2017 and Fall 2018. Okahana et al. (2019) discussed the positive increase for Latinx students that was consistent for three years.

According to Zumbrunn et al. (2014), minority students (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos) have a difficult time adjusting to college. Arroyo and Gasman (2014) found that minority students who attended historically Black colleges and universities were dependent on family support. In addition, student's sense of belonging within the institution was associated with academic achievement and engagement (Buhs,

2005). Buskirk-Cohen and Plants (2019) corroborated the same finding at a small university.

Immigrant

Immigrant is defined as an individual who left their homeland voluntarily or involuntarily and moved from one country to another country. Dunn (2019) noted that immigrants and their children added more than 22 million people to the U.S. population within the last decade. One in five public school students were immigrants or children of immigrants (Dunn, 2019).

Educational attainment of immigrants can have a significant impact on social mobility (Breen, 2019; Dunn, 2019). According to Tran (2018), children of immigrants tend to outperform their native-born peers despite disadvantaged backgrounds. Strong family relationships have assisted immigrant students with educational attainment (Gong et al., 2015). Orupabo et al. (2019) described the cultural resources or supports from social environments that were provided to immigrant students no matter their familial class. Orupabo et al. (2019) indicated that parents from successful educational backgrounds, provided students with additional academic supports. Researchers (Hermansen, 2017; Orupabo et al., 2019) found that older siblings motivated and supported younger siblings in their educational endeavors. In addition, Crul et al. (2017) mentioned that second-generation immigrants have learned to overcome lack of support from family by choosing to work harder, thereby attaining their specific goals.

Immigrant students thrive on supportive relationships with faculty in addition to support from peers and other university support staff (Crul et al., 2017; Lara & Nava, 2018). However, Crul et al. (2017) found that second-generation immigrants have learned to work harder without support from family. In addition, Crul et al. (2017) affirmed that immigrant parents saw higher education achievement as a source of pride for their family which made individuals want to achieve even more. Academic success was also

determined to be a reason to postpone marriage for female immigrants, which allowed female immigrants to seek professional careers (Crul et al., 2017).

Aleixo et al. (2019) addressed the theoretical knowledge that was not enough to identify researcher identity when it comes to researching immigrant students and families. Researchers in the study were not prepared when participants intimately identified with them and possibly risk doing relational harm (Aleixo et al., 2019). One participant noted that there were families who did not identify as immigrants because they did not consider themselves as those who left their home country to start a new life. Aleixo et al. (2019) also noted researchers should be cognizant about immigrant linguistic and cultural barriers. Table 1 contains research studies regarding factors that may immigrants' academic success.

Table 1

Literature Related to Immigrants

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design Analysis	Outcomes
Aleixo et al. (2014)	The purpose of this study was to describe four instances in which graduate students struggled with issues of representation of themselves.	Four graduate researchers	Qualitative	The findings included theoretical knowledge was not enough to identify researchers' identity when investigating immigrant students and their families
Crul et al. (2017)	The study was comprised of educational success of low-income immigrants and the obstacles they overcame to achieve..	Professionals from Turkey from low-income immigrant parents	Qualitative	The study contained second-generation immigrants who have learned to work harder without support from family.
Dunn (2019)	Researchers examined degree completion and wages of immigrants to understand the extent to which students' educational pathway	Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS)	Project Research Design; 2796 respondents over 10 years	The findings contained information regarding educational pathways, vocational/community colleges or universities, that may make a substantial difference in degree

Gong, et al. (2015)	Researchers examined the relationship between family-related factors and academic performance for Asian and Hispanic immigrant students.	Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS); 4686 students	Survey; Quantitative	Family income and parent-child conflict were identified as predictors of immigrant students' grade point average.
Hermansen (2017)	Researchers examined the causal relationship between childhood immigrants' age at arrival and their life chances as adults.	Panel data on siblings from a Norwegian registry	Quantitative	Researchers found that childhood immigration constrained human capital and economic opportunities.
Lara & Nava (2018)	Researchers examined the decision-making process of undocumented college students who pursued graduate degrees, and how their commitment to matriculate to higher education	Undocumented graduate students	Qualitative	The authors revealed that family marginalization, guided pathways, and social activism inform student decisions to pursue graduate school.

	programs was influenced by a myriad of social, familial, financial, and institutional factors.			
Orupabo et al., (2019)	Researchers explored the impact of cultural resources on success and aspirations among second-generation immigrants in higher education.	142 second-generation immigrants pursuing master's degree	Cross-sectional survey data and interviews	The authors revealed that cultural resources or support and encouragement from the social environments were provided to immigrant students no matter their familial class.
Tran (2018)	Researchers assessed the socio-economic mobility of second-generation immigrants using the Current Population Survey (CPS).	18 ethnic groups	Survey	The authors suggested that children of immigrants tend to outperform peers.

Age

Literature regarding potential risk factors (e.g., (a) family responsibilities, (b) marriage, or (c) children) and age has been unclear (Cochran et al., 2014; Lott et al., 2009). According to a study by Cohen (2012), younger students were more likely to

persist in master's programs. Cochran et al. (2014) purported that older students have less incentive to persist in higher-education programs due to limited financial benefits associated with the degree. Lott et al. (2009) found that students between ages 25 and 29 were more likely to persist in their graduate programs than students under the age of 25. The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS, 2013) noted that data related to age were consistent across the IHEs in terms of completion, but data cannot be labeled as a contributing factor due to other roles and responsibilities that may impact students' ability to persist with their programs.

Employer Support

Findings from a study of 310 part-time MBA students consisted of support from employers that may increase student motivation as they persist in a high-education program (Prince et al., 2014). According to a study by Callendar and Little (2015), only 40% of part-time students and full-time employees reported an increase in pay rates and job promotions. In addition to possible financial returns from higher education participation, employer support may increase the likelihood of an individual completing their degree (Prince et al., 2014). Employer support may also increase the chance that the employee will remain with the employer after completing the degree (Callendar & Little, 2015).

Researchers noted that students pursue higher education for career advancement, job promotion, or higher pay (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2011; Brooks & Siepel, 2018; Glazer & Raymo, 2005). The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS, 2013) documented students who enrolled in graduate school to seek opportunities to improve skill and gain knowledge. Brooks and Siepel (2018) suggested in their study of 176 information systems students that those with full-time jobs had higher levels of satisfaction while pursuing their degree. The Brooks and Siepel (2018) study did not account for the type of employment or other factors (e.g., (a) marital status, (b) children, or (c) income level). Having a full-time job

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may be a positive factor related to increased dedication to obtaining a degree (Brooks & Siepel, 2018).

Most graduate students have full-time jobs and need the support of their employers in order to complete their degree (Adebayo et al., 2008). Employer support may come in the form of flexible work schedules, reduced workload, or financial support (Adebayo et al., 2008). Matthews et al. (2012) declared in their study of 383 full-time employees that an increase in work hours may result in an increase in work-to-family conflicts. Allowing an employee to have an appropriate number of days off each week may be the support a student needs to complete their degree (Adebayo et al., 2008; Wyland et al., 2015). Willis (2012) noted that some companies in the United Stated offered to pay a portion of students' tuition to help offset education costs. The research studies that contributed to employer support are included in Table 2.

Table 2

Literature Related to Employer Support

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design Analysis	Outcomes
Adebayo, Summola, & Udegbe (2008)	The purpose of this paper was to examine the effects of participating in two domains, work and school, on the subjective wellbeing (SWB) and work-school conflict (WSC).	Master's students in Managerial Psychology	Survey; Quantitative	The findings of this work, in an African setting, consisted of credence to research evidence of the work-strain relationship in the West. Given that fulfillment of work-school obligation is becoming globally inevitable, it follows that the well-being of nontraditional students may continue to be threatened, particularly among those who are full-time workers
Brooks and Seipel (2018)	The purpose of the study was to understand the operation of the grit construct and its relationship with key demographic factors for information systems students specifically.	Undergraduate and graduate students	Survey; Quantitative	The findings of this study indicated that individuals with full-time jobs had higher levels of grit when compared to individuals in part-time positions or those that stated they were unemployed.

Callender and Little (2014)	The purpose of this study is to examine if there were employment benefits from seeking higher education	Part-time undergraduate students	Survey; Interviews	Researchers noted that after completing their studies, most part-time graduates do not change jobs or employers, at least in the short term - and they are far less likely to report easily measurable gains.
Divan and McBurney (2016)	Researchers explored the process by which students manage their employability prospects.	Five student cohort groups	Survey; Quantitative and Qualitative	Findings contained that students who participated in university supports such as career planning were more likely to have higher employment prospects upon graduation.
Matthews, Swody, and Barnes-Farrell (2012)	Researchers examined the role of work hours in a model that incorporates involvement in both work and family experiences of work-family conflict and subjective well-being.	Full-time workers	Self-report data; structural equation modelling techniques	Results provide insight into unexpected problems that might arise when employees place overly high importance on work and work long hours.

Shannon, Pearson, Quinn, and Macintyre (2017)	The purpose of this study was to find the students' perceptions of continuing on to higher education	Part-time graduate students	Multi-phase mixed method study	Researchers discussed students who improved their job performance, self-esteem and increased motivation to learn as primary outcomes. Other benefits of significance included an increased ability to manage change and increased job satisfaction.
Wyland, Winkel, Lester, and Hanson-Rusmussen (2015)	The purpose of this study is to examine whether involvement in graduate school increase school-work facilitation.	Graduate students	Quantitative	The findings contained job satisfaction that has a significant impact on school-work facilitation. Findings included supports provided by employers and co-workers that helped students increase school-work facilitation.

Family Support

Working full-time and caring for a family may result in hardships that may impact a graduate student's ability to persist toward completing a degree (Fakunmoju et al.,

2016; Matthews et al., 2012). Similarly, familial and personal responsibilities may hinder a student's ability to focus on academic achievement or persist toward earning a degree. Kattner (2012) found that graduate students faced additional challenges compared to undergraduate students. In addition to family and employment commitments, graduate students must balance academic coursework demands (Grady et al., 2014; Kattner, 2012). The additional stress may affect the student's ability to fulfill academic requirements and family responsibilities (Fakunmoju et al., 2016).

The support of family is important, especially from the individual's spouse or significant other (Seers et al., 1983). Strom and Savage (2014) documented a positive learning outcome when a spouse or significant other supported a graduate student by giving emotional support when needed during a stressful time while in college. Strom and Savage (2014) also suggested "that the subsequent support provided by family has a significant impact on students' subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation" (p. 543). Students may need encouragement from family and friends throughout their program as students complete their degree (Fakunmoju et al., 2016).

While Lott et al. (2009) examined married students who had a higher rate of persisting in a master's program than single students, Fakunmoju et al. (2016) reported that earning a graduate degree may be viewed as a threat to some spouses. Family conflicts may decrease the chances of a graduate student's desire to remain in college and persist toward earning a master's degree (Fakunmoju et al., 2016). The additional requirements imposed by pursuing a graduate degree may exacerbate familial conflicts and job performance (Fernandez et al., 2019). Additionally, the separation or time away from family may lead to emotional problems and social challenges that often affects academic performance (Fernandez et al., 2019; Fakunmoju et al., 2016). Juggling responsibilities require a graduate student to prioritize time efficiently to be successful in

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school (Fernandez et al., 2019). Table 3 contains the research studies that contained family support.

Table 3

Literature Related to Family Support

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design Analysis	Outcomes
Fakunmoju et al. (2016)	Authors examined associations of life satisfaction and peer support with perception of meaningfulness of learning experience, as well as associations of gender, marital status, family support and perceived stress with life satisfaction	Graduate students	Quantitative; Qualitative	Researchers found that the burden and responsibility that comes from working full-time and caring for a family could be obstacles causing students additional hardships affecting their ability to persist toward earning a graduate degree.
Olbrecht et al. (2016)	Researchers leveraged detailed, individual-level student data to describe the relationships between family finances, merit-based aid, and first-year student retention.	Three student cohorts	Quantitative	Researchers found that an increase in a family's ability to contribute to educational costs improves a student's chances of retention. The researcher's data showed that institutional financial assistance also bolsters the likelihood that students return for their sophomore year

Seers et al. (1983)	A comparative examination was made of three alternative hypotheses (buffer, coping, no interaction) predicting job outcomes by job stress and social support.	Federal government agency workers	Quantitative	Support from family and friends appeared to be indistinct from co-worker support. Family and friend support was directly related to overall satisfaction
Strom & Savage (2014)	The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of how social support from family members and friends affected commitment to the goal of graduation and how commitment to the goal of graduation influenced intent to persist.	Graduate students	Qualitative; Quantitative	Researchers found a positive learning outcome when a spouse or significant other supports the graduate student. Results revealed that the subsequent support provided by family has a significant impact on students' subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation.

University Supports

The university is often viewed as a safe place where a graduate student may find assistance and support from different resources. Programs that help students navigate the new rigor of graduate level work may promote confidence and affirm the decision to return to graduate school (Adebayo et al., 2008). Kattner (2012) found that IHEs who

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cater to the specific needs of graduate students by offering flexible scheduling facilitates the retention of more students. Providing access to different university centers at non-traditional times may be a resource for graduate students (Hardre & Hackett, 2015; Kattner, 2012). Implementing programs that may positively affect degree attainment for students is critical in creating a sense of belonging to the institution and the department (Aljohani, 2016; Hardre & Hackett, 2015; O'Keeffe, 2013; Olbrecht, 2016). "A student invited into the department's academic and social community is more likely to succeed than a student left entirely to his or her own resources" (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000, p. 50). Wilkins et al. (2016) found that students who showed a commitment to the institution had a strong positive relationship with academic success.

The support of other university departments was also key to persistence for graduate students. Many graduate students have not been in college for many years, therefore, re-acclimating to reading and writing at the collegiate level may take additional time and support (Bussell et al., 2017; Lynch & Lundgrin, 2018). Support from a writing center or tutoring service may be beneficial in helping the students gain confidence with the new academic rigor. Returning to college may promote resilience with effective professors who focus on educational, social, and emotional development of students (Adebayo et al., 2008; Kattner, 2012).

In reviewing recent studies of graduate students and use of library resources, Bussell et al. (2017) documented that students most often begin researching through web-based search engines first rather than seeking out library staff support. Unfortunately, graduate students have not turned to the library as an initial source for assistance (Bussell, et al., 2017). To better serve the research needs of graduate students, libraries have offered in-class and online sessions workshops and presentations. Bussell et al. (2017) examined graduate students who preferred workshops which focused on different topics with asynchronous online options that were easily accessible when needed.

Divan and McBurney (2016) and Estrada et al. (2019) noted that students who participated in university offered activities (e.g., career planning) were more likely to have higher employment prospects upon graduation. Academic Advisors may also assist graduate students as they process the challenges they may encounter when starting graduate school (Cheng et al., 2019; Kattner, 2012; Lynch & Lungrin, 2018). Academic Advisors may also serve as the liaison between the professor and student by addressing misunderstandings, promoting relationships through collaboration, and sharing best practices (Estrada et al., 2019; Fernandez et al., 2019; Kattner, 2012).

Counseling services to support the emotional and mental health needs of students may be important during a transitional period (Adebayo et al., 2008; O'Keeffe, 2013). Previous studies have determined that graduate students often experience stress upon admission into a program (Acker & Haque, 2015). Wilson et al. (1997) found that students were more likely to remain in school when they were provided more counseling sessions. Student access to college and community resources, collaboration with professors, and provision of mentorship programs, may alleviate some of the student's burdens (Adebayo et al., 2008; Kattner, 2012; O'Keeffe, 2013). The emotional and social isolation often felt by graduate students may have a negative impact on their personal, professional, and educational life (Adebayo et al., 2008; Kattner, 2012; O'Keeffe, 2013).

Although the researcher's focus is on factors related to employer, family, and university supports, other supports may also have an impact on graduate students persistence toward degree attainment. The researcher used one university and a sample of master's students graduating between May 2014 through December 2019 while limiting the other factors which may impact degree attainment. Kattner (2012) focused on the factors related to a college students' view of the school environment, belongingness, connectedness, available resources, and perceived social support. Other possible factors that may be revealed in this study include cohort support, faculty support, and financial

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support. It is conceivable that findings may contain other factors that have more impact on this population of graduate students than the factots identified by the researcher. The literature related to university support is included in Table 4.

Table 4

Literature Related to University Supports

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design Analysis	Outcomes
Adebayo et al. (2008)	Researchers examined examine the effects of participating in two domains, work and school, on the subjective wellbeing (SWB) and work-school conflict (WSC).	Master's students in Managerial Psychology	Survey; Quantitative	Financial support, flexible work arrangements, reduced workload and decision latitude in the way nontraditional students handle their jobs, are all important support mechanisms. Support from supervisors and coworkers might also be beneficial.
Alijohani (2016)	The purpose of this study was to provide researchers, educators and policy makers with a background to the retention issue and the latest strategies and techniques that help them deal with it as well as to find the common	Study of retention models	Design/Analysis	A student student's persistence or departure is a reflection of his or her success or failure in navigating the stages towards incorporation into the community of the institution. Students need to be integrated into both

	patterns and themes of the mostly reported student attrition factors.			systems to persist in their academic institutions.
Ampaw & Jaeger (2011)	The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of student characteristics, financial aid, and labor	Bureau of Labor Statistics data; National Faculty Salary Survey; student data	Quantitative	One of the major findings was that the type of funding students receives to attend a graduate program plays an important role in whether they complete their degree.
Andrews (2017)	The purpose of this paper was a self-reflection on failing a PhD candidacy exam	Author	Qualitative	Findings consisted of graduate students may have to draw from their internal and external resources to thrive in their journey.
Buskirk-Cohen & Plants (2019)	The primary purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between socio-emotional variables and academic success at a small, teaching-	Students from a small university	Self-report data	Researchers found that a sense of belonging was connected to student academic success matches the work of previous

	focused university.			studies in this area
Collie et al. (2017)	Researchers examined adaptability of college students, the extent to which students' adaptability is associated with their behavioral engagement at university, and the extent to which both are associated with subsequent academic achievement.	Undergraduate students	Survey; Academic data	Findings included adaptability that was associated with greater positive behavioral engagement (persistence, planning, and task management) and lower negative behavioral engagement (disengagement and self-handicapping).
Council of Graduate Schools (2013b)	The purpose of this study was to factors contributing to the successful completion of a master's degree, along with a list of best practices.	Five research institutions	Quantitative	Findings contained the most frequently cited reason for enrolling in master's programs was to support professional aspirations.
Deming & Dynarski (2009)	Authors examined the causal relationship between college costs and educational attainment.	Review of different financial aid and academic records	Review of different financial aid and academic records	Researchers found that lower college financial costs can "substantially" increase graduation rates.

Dwyer (2017)	The focus of the research was on the influence of classroom-based student–faculty interactions on persistence in a commuter institution thus the social interactions of students with faculty were investigated.	Graduate students	Qualitative; Quantitative	The researcher noted that professors bridge the gap between attainment of a degree or dropping out too soon for graduate students. Building positive relationships with professors may help the graduate student adapt to the rigor of graduate studies.
Fernandez et al. (2019)	Researchers explored challenges and identify strategies for surviving and thriving during graduate school.	Graduate students	Mixed-method study	Challenges identified included juggling responsibilities, funding support, equity and institutional barriers, imposter syndrome, and finding the right job.
Gururaj et al. (2010)	The purpose of this study was to assess changes over time in the effects of	Review of studies	Meta-analysis of results of studies in 1991, 1998, and 2005	The meta-analysis included different form of aid that was

	financial aid and other factors on graduate student persistence			significant in promoting graduate student persistence and that grants, in particular, offer the greatest bang for the buck among this population. These findings present policy implications for improving graduate student retention.
Hoffman (2014)	Authors examined student-faculty relationships at four-year colleges and universities and the contexts in which their interactions occur.	Review of literature	Synthesis of literature	The researcher affirmed that due to increase in administrative and research demands, professors may be less available to students
Martin et al. (2015)	Authors explored the relationship between faculty members' bullying with graduate students' interest, instructional dissent, and degree persistence.	Graduate students	Quantitative	Researchers found that professors have a significant impact on their graduate students' professional and personal lives.

Cohort Support

Social supports found within the university, especially like-minded peers, may serve as an asset to facilitate students' persistence (Estrada et al., 2019; Fernandez et al., 2019; Hardre & Hackett, 2015; Strom & Savage, 2013). Fakunmoju et al. (2016) and Zumbrunn et al. (2014) found that developing positive relationships with peers may lead to aspirations for achieving success and contributing to a positive outlook. Gutowski et al. (2018) noted the importance of social networks and peer interactions as very important in the coping and adjustment for students. Peer support that lends itself to a sense of belonging may be used to mitigate stress to increase school engagement (Gutowski et al., 2018; Nicoletti, 2019; Strom and Savage, 2013; Wyland et al., 2015). The similarities in experiences for students within the cohort may create connections that builds positive relationships and accountability leading to persisting toward attainment of the degree (Connolly, 2017; Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2017; Wyland et al., 2015). Different forms of social supports have been well-documented for graduate students, but immigrant students especially thrive on the support received from peers (Lara & Nava, 2018).

Faculty Support

Discussions about professors and skills that students desire are often discussed amongst students enrolled in institutions for higher education. The Council of Graduate Schools and Educational Testing Center (CGS & ETC, 2012) reported that faculty are the most critical group on campus in helping students with career advice and networking opportunities. Numerous research studies have been completed about the important relationships between a student and a professor (O'Keeffe, 2013; Veal et al., 2013). Professors have been and may continue to be an integral factor in supporting students toward degree attainment (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Martin et al., 2015; O'Keeffe, 2013). "A concerned faculty adviser is the person best placed to assess an individual student's

progress and to reinforce the student's sense of self-worth" (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000, p.

50).

According to Dwyer (2017), the relationship established between professors and

students has a positive role in determining whether students will continue striving toward

their educational goals of earning a master's degree. Professors may further support

students by providing curriculum assistance, emotional safety, and a sense of belonging

(Buskirk-Cohen, 2019; Dwyer, 2017). In addition, Dwyer (2017) found that professors

bridge the gap between attainment of a degree or dropping out too soon for graduate

students. Positive relationships with professors may help graduate students adapt to

rigorous graduate studies (Dwyer, 2017; O'Keeffe, 2013, Wyland et al., 2015).

Additionally, Collie et al. (2017) found increased student engagement when professors

show an active interest and provided extra help to students. Faculty and IHE personnel

validated students by showing care and interest in personal and academic success

(Bowman & Felix, 2017; Dwyer, 2017; O'Keeffe, 2013).

Unfortunately, due to the increased administrative and research demands,

professors may be less available to students (Hoffman, 2014). An increase in part-time

faculty positions may be a reason for the possible disconnect between professors and

students (Hoffman, 2014; Percy & Beaumont, 2008). Part-time professors were mainly

present during class time; therefore, building relationships were difficult (Hoffman,

2014). Yamada et al. (2014) found that graduate students may be vulnerable in their

relationships with professors due to power differential. Martin et al. (2015) documented

in their study that 79.4% of graduate students reported some form of bullying occurred in

their departments. Students reported having less interest in their graduate education when

bullying occurred, which led to lowered expectations regarding success and less

opportunity to make a difference in their department (Martin et al., 2015). O'Keeffe

(2013) cited multiple researchers (e.g., Komarrju, 2010; Jaasma & Koper 1999; Myers

2004; Martin et al., 1999; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009) who found "a negative relationship can have an immensely negative impact upon the motivation of a student" (p. 608). In regard to student-faculty relationships, Hoffman (2014) indicated "the responsibility to support positive relationships with students lies with the instructor" (p. 18).

Financial Support

Financial hardships for graduate students may occur at any time during college graduate programs due to family concerns, personal issues, or professional responsibilities (Fernandez et al., 2019; Grady et al., 2014). Students who must work a full-time job, maintain a family, and attend school may feel more financially strained (Adebayo et al., 2008; Gururaj et al., 2010). Sixty-six percent of students pursue master's degrees part-time and are ineligible for most financial aid opportunities (Cohen, 2012). Kattner (2012) specified the additional financial burdens caused graduate students to stress and led students to question their reason for degree attainment. When these financial hardships occur, graduate students may need to determine the best path for their family rather than continuing to pursue the degree.

Deming and Dynarski (2009) found that lower college financial costs can substantially increase graduation rates. Providing financial assistance in various forms, (e.g., scholarships) may encourage continued enrollment (Burke, 2019; Deming & Dynarski, 2009; Olbrecht et al., 2016). Olbrecht (2016) noted that a student's ability to maintain enrollment will increase when the family is able to make a financial contribution. Financial support needed to pursue a graduate degree is necessary in maintaining a student's enrollment status (Adebayo et al., 2008; Pottick et al., 2015). In their meta-analysis of results from three different studies in 1991, 1998, and 2005, Gururaj et al. (2010) found that funding in the form of grants is the largest predictor of graduate school success regardless of students' backgrounds.

Persistence

Cohen (2012) and Strom and Savage (2014) have noted that persistence of graduate students is difficult to measure due to their individual characteristics and commitment. Graduate students may manage multiple roles when pursuing a graduate degree as previously discussed. Graduate students may have to depend on their internal and external resources as they earn their master's degree (Adebayo et al., 2008; Andrews, 2017; Connolly, 2016; Kattner, 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Nicoletti, 2019). Internal resources may include personal beliefs and motivations and external resources may include support from family and employers (Connolly, 2016; Lee et al., 2013). Andrews (2017) affirmed in his self-reflection that "success has to be defined as something much deeper, the ability to persevere in the midst of challenge. The ability to take one more step no matter the circumstances" (p. 19).

Furthermore, Tinto (1993) declared there are three distinct differences between undergraduate and graduate students. First, graduate students focus more on satisfaction with the specific department and subject matter. Next, integrating socially into the academic community is more important for graduate students than undergraduate students. Lastly, the relationship with professors is more interactive and supportive in helping the graduate student to persist towards degree completion. Tinto (1993) stated that a student's "sense of belonging is increased or decreased through interactions with the academic and social environments of the university" (Connolly, 2017, p. 6).

Bowman and Felix (2017) defined identity centrality as "the extent to which a dimension of one's identity is important to one's self-image or definition of oneself" (p. 236). Having a high student identity centrality will motivate a student to persist in college even when they face obstacles (Bowman & Felix, 2017). Bowman and Felix (2017) documented that students with high identity centrality have a strong commitment to remaining in college and exhibit a high level of persistence to complete college. "The

strongest positive effect on persistence was intent to persist" (Cohen, 2012, p. 33).

Savage et al. (2019) ascertained that students who intended to persist had a stronger

commitment toward graduation. The research studies related to persistence are included

in Table 5.

Table 5

Literature Related to Persistence

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design Analysis	Outcomes
Cheng et al. (2019))	The purpose of the study was to measure graduate students' academic hardiness (GSAH) and academic self-efficacy (GSASE) and to examine the relationships between the two.	Two Graduate students across disciplines	Survey; Quantitative	Authors described graduate students' ability to recognize and appraise causes of their failure and to learn how to overcome academic difficulties
Estrada et al. (2019))	Researchers noted the influence of social support on persistence as they relate to science identity of doctoral students.	Graduate students	Quantitative	Researchers indicated that science identity significantly mediated the relationship between professional network support and persistence a year later for majority students. These study results provide evidence that reinforcing mentoring

		Graduate students	Quantitative	
Heavy Runner-Rioux et al. (2018)	The purpose of this study was to identify correlations between academic factors and graduate student persistence, as well as to understand how likely graduate degree completion is based on known academic factors for American Indian students.	Graduate students	Quantitative	programs and support systems will be beneficial. The respondents indicated a challenge to balance graduate school, family and cultural responsibilities, however most felt a personal responsibility to complete their graduate degrees for their communities.
Lee et al. (2013)	Examined the differences between persistent and dropout students enrolled in an online course with five factors: support from family and work, academic locus of control, academic self-efficacy, time and environment management skills, and metacognitive self-regulation skills.	Students	Quantitative	The analysis showed persistent students had higher levels of academic locus of control and metacognitive self-regulation skills than dropout students.

Theoretical Framework

The Institutional Departure Model, also known as the Model of Student Integration, developed by Tinto (1975), was probably the most cited pioneering work over the last 50 years as a source for reviewing undergraduate retention and graduation data (Aljohani, 2016; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Nicoletti, 2019). The model created by Tinto (2006) reflected the first detailed longitudinal study that was related to students and their environment. Persistence as it relates to student characteristics and experiences prior to admission and experiences during college was explained by Tinto (2006). Tinto (2006) explained that the university cannot change the student's prior personal experiences, but have a direct impact on how the student is integrated into the university. Tinto's model documented human behavior theories, Durkheim's Theory of Suicide and Cost-Benefit Analysis, and depicts a student's decision to drop out of school. According to Durkheim, suicide can be attributed to the individual's withdrawals from others or society and therefore lack social and intellectual integration into society (Aljohani, 2016).

According to a literature review of theoretical models by Burke (2019), Tinto (1975, 1993) noted that students may make the decision to persist in their academic pursuits based on two realms (i.e., academic or social). The academic realm is the individual student's level of commitment to their personal goals, such as grades or graduation. The social realm includes institutional commitment to the success of the student through social network and school pride (Burke, 2019). The inclusion of these two realms may support the student's individual commitment to their academic pursuits with support from the institution by instilling commitment with social networking and school pride.

There may be perceived value when an individual decides to pursue an advanced degree. The perceived value may include career advancement or positive financial

potential (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2011; Ashraf et al., 2018; Glazer & Raymo, 2005). Tinto's (2006) model may be applied in this study because of its practical implications and limitations. Pursuing an advanced degree involves a cost-benefit analysis which may be evaluated by understanding the factors that help a student complete their degree.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of the relevant literature examining the factors that may help or hinder a master's student's ability to graduate from their program of study. Chapter two also lays out the historical background of the master's degree and the theoretical framework that will help shape this study. Further describing the different factors that may appear from this research were also in this chapter. In chapter three, methodological aspects of this dissertation will be detailed to include the operationalization of theoretical constructs, research purpose and questions, research design, population and sample selection, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, privacy and ethical considerations, and the research design limitations of this study.

CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-method study was to determine obstacles immigrant students may face when completing a master's degree. Survey data were collected from a sample of graduates with master's degrees at a mid-sized, South-Central university in the United States from May 2014 to December 2019. Interviews were conducted to obtain student perceptions of supports from employers, family, or university personnel. Perceived barriers that may have impacted immigrant students was also obtained from the interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This chapter will present an overview of the research problem, operationalization of theoretical constructs, research purpose and questions, research design, population and sample, participant selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, validity, privacy and ethical considerations, and research design limitations of this study.

Overview of the Research Problem

Different factors (i.e., ack of support from an employer, family, or university personnel) may affect the rate of students not completing their degree. The researcher examined the factors that may help or hinder an immigrant graduate student's ability to attain a master's degree.Researchers have described models regarding undergraduate learners (Tinto, 1993, 2006). Some of the most notable models were Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model, Bean and Metzner's (1985) Student Attrition Model, and Rovai's (2003) Compositive Persistence Model. As a result, Hardre and Hackett (2015) noted that many higher education institutions (IHEs) have produced internal studies to explain the personal and program factors that motivate students to persist toward graduation. The lack of empirical data on master's students suggest additional research is

needed (Hardre & Hackett, 2015). Harde and Hackett (2015) found no empirical data from national studies for attracting or retaining students so universities must create localized studies that focus on their institutions. Empirical data may include student characterisitics and enrollment patterns. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge that researchers have documented regarding the factors that help or hinder graduate students to persist toward graduation. Universities may better serve the needs of future graduate students if faculty and students are aware ofthe factors that may have influenced a graduate's ability to persist and thrive.

Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs

This study consisted of the following constructs: employer support, family support, and university personnel supports. Specific questions from the Completion and Attrition in STEM Master's Programs: Pilot Study Findings Survey adapted from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS, 2013) was used to operationalize each construct. The survey will be described in more detail in the instrumentation section. Individual interview questions and free response questions from the survey also contained the constructs that were be operationalized.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this explanatory sequential-mixed method study was to determine obstacles immigrant students encountered as they completed a master's degree program. The researcher examined the factors that impacted master's students who graduated from a mid-sized, South-Central university in the United States between May 2014 through December 2019. University faculty members may examine the personal and educational supports of master's graduates and staff members may create programs that support retention and increase the graduation rate. Additionally, the researcher collected demographic data from participants. The following research questions guided this study: (a) What are the perceived supports or barriers from employers, family, or university

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personnel described by gender?; (b) What are the perceived supports described by immigrant students completing a master's degree?; and (c) What are the perceived barriers that influence immigrant students and their ability to complete a master's degree?

Research Design

For the purposes of this study, an explanatory sequential mixed-method design was utilized. Using both quantitative and qualitative data may enhance the researcher's evaluation of results due to the limitations of one type of data being balanced by the strengths of the other. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) defined a descriptive approach as incorporating "a detailed description of people and places to carry the narrative" (p. 275). The researcher reviewed different factors that may impact a master's degree student from graduating within a projected time period. Closed-ended and open-ended responses allowed the researcher to receive different viewpoints from participants.

Quantitative data were collected and analyzed before qualitative data were ascertained (Ivankova et al., 2006). During the first phase, the Master's Completion Survey was sent to the population of master's graduates who graduated from the university between 2014 through 2019. The second phase involved contacting participants who provided their email addresses to schedule an interview.

Qualitative data were collected from individual interviews that were semi-structured with open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow participants to express their experiences as a student. Open-ended questions were included to obtain explicit information from participants through personal engagement. The researcher analyzed responses during the interview and asked clarifying questions as appropriate. Interview questions contained the personal experiences of each participant along with their attitudes and beliefs about the support received during their studies at the university. Additional interview sessions were not necessary after the researcher reviewed the transcripts.

Population and Sample

A sample composed of 92 master's students who graduated from the university between May 2014 to December 2019 was used in this study. The Alumni Office agreed to send the survey to graduates. Graduate statistics were obtained from the Alumni Office of the university.

The university was part of a larger system comprised of five institutions located in a suburban area of a major city. Both undergraduate and graduate degrees were available from four academic colleges. Over 28% of the population consisted of graduate students. Student housing was added as an option to ease access to academic and campus resources. The university continues to grow in popularity and enrollment.

Participant Selection

Participants who completed the Master's Completion Survey provided their email address if they were interested in an individual interview. Depending on the number of participants, the researcher focused on graduates who indicated they or their family immigrated to the United States. While it is generally known that graduate students have encountered numerous obstacles that impeded their ability to finish their degree, less is known about additional barriers immigrant students may face when pursuing a graduate degree (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2017). Emails were sent to participants who provided their email addresses at the end of the survey. The researcher made every attempt to interview as many participants as possible, however, the number of individual interviews were limited due to time constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic. Lichtman (2013) described the necessary steps in qualitative data analysis. After interviews were conducted, data were coded and clustered into thematic categories. The interview questions are listed in Appendix E.

Instrumentation

The Completion and Attrition in STEM Master's Programs: Pilot Study Findings Survey (https://cgsnet.org) adapted from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) was used and adapted for the purposes of this research. The survey was renamed the Master's Completion Survey for the rest of this study. The Council of Graduate School (2013a) described the process of developing the survey as data were collected and then assigned to the research questions to ensure the data were appropriate to the study. The CGS staff also completed a pilot study using a draft survey questionnaire.

An email seeking permission to use the survey was sent and permission was obtained from the Council of Graduate Schools. Three additional questions were added by the researcher regarding graduation date, immigrant status, and if the individual would be willing to participate in an interview. The immigrant status question sought information about whether the student or student's family immigrated to the United States. The survey instrument was a self-report questionnaire that contained 43 questions. There were three qualitative free response, descriptive text questions. These questions focused on overall student experience and program characteristics that graduates mostly liked, least liked, and had a suggestion for changes to the program or institution. The Master's Completion Survey can be found in Appendix C.

The researcher did not have access to the Council of Graduate School's mapping and pilot study. A content validity matrix was created to depict the different survey questions and is located in Appendix D. Four questions from the original CGS survey were not included when the survey was created for this study. Two questions that where changed to ask about the participant's graduation date included: (a) Are you enrolled in a master's program this semester/quarter?; and (b) When were you last enrolled in this master's program? Questions that were not included in this study included: (a) What are your future plans for the next year?; and (b) Is your spouse/partner currently working?

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The original survey from the Council of Graduate Schools consisted of 44 questions. Question number eleven the original survey was altered using the same response options. The original survey question was: To what extent did the following factors contribute to your leave of absence/decision not to continue? The new survey question was: If you did not complete your program in the amount of time you expected, to what extent did the following factors contribute to extending your college experience?

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher gained approval from the university's Institutional Review Boards and Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) and the University's Alumni Office. Approval from the Alumni Office was obtained to email the Master's Completion Survey to master's students who graduated from the university between May 2015 to December 2019. In November 2020, the University Alumni Office sent an email with the survey to master's graduates who left their personal email addresses on file with the university upon graduation.

The researcher sent the survey to the Alumni Office for distribution to master's graduates in October 2020. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey is included in Appendix A. An informed consent is in Appendix B and was included in the correspondence with the survey invitation. The electronic survey collection was compiled using Qualtrics. This software allowed the participants to respond and maintain their anonymity. Maintaining anonymous status of participants was important in this human subjects research.

By completing the survey, participants agreed to voluntary participation. Confidentiality was explained in the informed consent section of the email to increase response rates. Participation was requested at the beginning of each individual interview. All participants were 18 years or older.

The researcher scheduled interviews with the participants who indicated they would like to be contacted to schedule. Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic affecting the community and society at large, participants were interviewed by phone or a virtual platform, Zoom. The researcher recorded the interviews with permission from participants. Participants did not receive benefit or compensation for their participation in this research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow the researcher to query participants for additional information not revealed in the survey (Lichtman, 2013).

Participants were asked the same open-ended interview questions; however, there were instances in which the researcher asked for clarification. The interview questions included academic supports that were most helpful to the participants as they attained their master's degree. Another question was related to missing supports that may have helped make the academic journey easier. The researcher asked the participants about any missing supports that were unknown at the time; but could have helped during their studies. The researcher also asked participants to provide words of wisdom that they wanted to share with new graduate students. On average, each interview lasted approximately 15-30 minutes, depending on the participants and their willingness to communicate and share. The interview questions are listed in Appendix E.

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Data Analysis

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After collecting data via Qualtrics, a default report was downloaded and inspected for further analysis. Recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed to determine emerging themes. Further explanation about quantitative and qualitative analysis will be discussed in the appropriate section below.

Quantitative

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to input and analyze the data for the Master's Completion Survey. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data calculating the frequencies and percentages of participant

responses. Descriptive statistics allowed the researcher to present the data in a more meaningful way (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Descriptive statistics were used in the Council of Graduate School's study.

Frequencies were used to calculate the differences by gender and immigrant status. Percentages were determined from the different responses. The survey included close-ended and open-ended or free response questions with the goal to gather data for quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Qualitative

The researcher reviewed transcriptions from the free response questions in the survey. Free responses in the survey were typed by the participants. The survey included three free response questions that allowed participants to authentically answer questions. The qualitative data analysis process involved the thematic coding of individual interviews. The coding of the individual interviews, to include researcher observation notes, helped the researcher reflect upon the findings. Central themes and patterns were analyzed using thematic analysis to interpret data. The researcher analyzed the data by coding, categorizing, and sub-categorizing themes. Throughout the process, the researcher referred back to literature to ensure the validity of data analysis.

Interviews via Zoom allowed the researcher to automatically transcribe recordings into a word processing document. The researcher transcribed and coded the recorded interviews without utilizing a software or assistance from an official transcriber. After transcribing the recordings, the researcher determined the different emerging themes. The researcher highlighted the data according to each theme. The researcher reviewed transcriptions and made corrections to errors (e.g., punctuations) where appropriate. This review process was repeated at least three times per participant to ensure accuracy of the transcriptions.

Validity - Qualitative

Creswell's (2013) means of establishing validity was used to organize and describe the data. The goal was to synthesize "the collective to arrive at a consolidated meaning" (Creswell, 2013, p. 214). Coding and categorizing the data helped the researcher develop emerging themes. In addition, member checking was used to validate individual interviews. The transcriptions from individual interviews was shared with participants to review accuracy of their thoughts. All individual interviewees validated their interview transcripts. The researcher continued to refer back to literature to ensure validity of data analysis.

Privacy and Ethical Considerations

The researcher gained approval from the institution's IRB and the University Alumni Office before proceeding with data collection. The data were secured in the researcher's computer hard drive and on a flashdrive at all times. The researcher's computer was locked with an access code. The researcher will maintain the data for five years upon completion of the study as required by IRB guidelines. All data files will be destroyed after the end of the five years. Information about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, timeframe for taking the survey, and identities of participants will remain confidential throughout the study. Implied consent for the researcher to use the survey data were determined by the completion of the survey or interviews. Participants' identities were protected by the use of pseudonyms selected by the researcher and no obvious undue risks were endured by any of the participants.

There may not be any physical, psychological injury, or social harm from participation in the survey. Confidentiality was explained in the informed consent letter and at the introduction of the survey. The researcher made an effort to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Individual participants completed the

survey voluntarily. There were no foreseeable risks from participating in the survey and or individual interview.

Research Design Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. Genaralizability was a primary external validity issue. Due to the purposeful sampling technique and limited scope of the research study, findings cannot be generalized to other universities. Students who immigrated to the United States may not want to honestly respond to the question. The use of a self-report survey instrument may result in response bias based on the individuals' perceived experiences. A confounding variable was participant interest and giving honest answers to the survey questions. The data were only as accurate as how honestly the participants responded to the questions.

Researcher Identity

The researcher's personal experiences or possible biases may potentially influence the topic of this study. It was important the researcher maintain a nonjudgmental stance. The researcher has previous experience pursuing and completing a master's degree from another university. The researcher was able to keep bias to a minimum due to different experiences and perspectives of having attended another university. The researcher was aware of their own biases that may get in the way of documenting and analyzing the responses accurately. Examining their implicit biases was essential to accurately analyzing the data to answer the research questions. However, the researcher having the prior experiences may have increased the comfort level of participants.

Conclusion

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to examine the factors that impacted a graduate student's ability to complete their program of study. This chapter provided a description of the research design, population and sample, instruments utilized, and data

collection and analysis procedures. Privacy and ethical issues, research limitations, and validity factors were also addressed. Chapter four will report the findings of this research study.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-method study was to determine obstacles immigrant students have faced when completing a master's degree. This study addressed three research questions. The first question included perceived differences between male and female students based on supports received or barriers encountered from employer, family, or university personnel. The second question contained perceived supports for immigrant students in completing their degree. The third question asked about the barriers that influenced immigrant students and their ability to complete a master's degree. Research question one and two were addressed using quantitative analysis. The third research question was addressed using qualitative data from individual interviews and free responses from the survey. Additionally, this study collected participants' demographic data..

This chapter describes the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis. for each research question in the study. The first section review the data collection process including the response rate, graduation dates and colleges, college attendance and employment types, and demographics of participants from the survey. Demographics of individual interview participants were included as well. The chapter concludes with a summary of the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Data Collection and Response Rate

The Alumni Office at the university in which the study was conducted agreed to create the email distribution list. The survey was sent to individuals who graduated from the university with a master's degree between 2014 to 2019. The email included a cover letter explaining the study along with the link to Qualtrics, a web-based survey system,

for participants to complete the online survey (see Appendix A). No additional emails were sent to potential survey participants after the initial request to participate.

The survey was sent to potential participants in November 2020. The population of the study included 5,050 master's graduates who received the Master's Completion Survey, of which 92 (1.8%) individuals participated. Low participation rates may be due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that affected different aspects of society. Of the 92 participants, 43 (47%) individuals included their email address to participate in virtual interviews. Twenty (47%) of the 43 participants responded to requests by the researcher to schedule and complete the individual interviews. After initially receiving 10 replies, one follow-up email was sent to 33 of the 43 possible interviewees to encourage participation. A total of 20 participants participated in individual interviews. Seven of the twenty interviewees had families who immigrated to the United States. Twenty-five of the 26 immigrants in this study were second-generation immigrants.

Graduation Dates and Colleges

As contained in Table 6, the greatest number of immigrants graduated in 2019 (seven graduates) with others graduating in 2014 (four graduates), 2015 (five graduates), 2016 (four graduates), 2017 (two graduates), and 2018 (two graduates). The graduating years for non-immigrants were in 2018 (15 graduates), 2015 (12 graduates), 2016 (10 graduates), 2017 (11 graduates), and 2019 (11 graduates). In addition, out of the seven immigrant students interviewed, two students graduated in 2016 and the other five graduated in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2014, or 2015. There were 59 females and 30 males who answered the question regarding gender.

Table 6

Year Graduated for All Participants

Year	N	%	Immigrant	Non-Immigrant	Female	Male
2014	11	12	4	7	7	3
2015	17	18.5	5	12	13	4
2016	14	15.2	4	10	9	4
2017	13	14.2	2	11	9	4
2018	19	20.7	4	15	10	8
2019	18	19.5	7	11	11	7

Regarding Table 7, most participants graduated from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities (44.57%). The greatest number of immigrants and non-immigrants also graduated from this same college of which 29 were females. The greatest number of males graduated from the College of Science and Engineering. In addition, 15 females graduated from the College of Education, whereas, only one male graduated from this college.

Table 7

College Enrolled for All Participants

College	N	%	Immigrant	Non-Immigrant	Female	Male
College of Business	15	16.30	4	11	7	8
College of Education	16	17.39	4	12	15	1
College of Human Sciences and Humanities	41	44.57	10	31	29	9
College of Science and Engineering	19	20.65	7	12	7	12
No Response	1	0.10	1		1	

Twenty-five of the 26 participants who answered Yes to the question about immigrating to the United States were second-generation immigrants. Their parents or guardians immigrated to the United States. Table 8 contains data for individuals who participated in individual interviews. Two of the seven immigrant participants graduated from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities. Three immigrant participants graduated from the College of Business. Two of the seven immigrant participants graduated from the College of Education and College of Science and Engineering. Seven of the non-immigrant participants graduated from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities. Two non-immigrant participants graduated from the College of Business and two non-immigrants graduated from the College of Education. One non-immigrant participant graduated from the College of Science and Engineering. There were 15 females and five males who participated in the individual interviews.

Table 8

College Enrolled for Individual Interviews

College	N	%	Immigrant	Non-Immigrant	Female	Male
College of Business	5	25	3	2	4	1
College of Education	4	20	1	3	4	0
College of Human Sciences and Humanities	9	45	2	7	4	5
College of Science and Engineering	2	10	1	1	2	0

College Attendance and Employment

Overall, the greatest percentage of participants (45 or 48.9%) attended school full-time. Of the 45 participants attending full-time, 11 were immigrants and 34 were non-immigrants. There were 21 graduates who attended school part-time, six participants were immigrants and 15 were non-immigrants. There were 24 graduates who attended a mix of part-time or full-time, nine immigrants and 15 non-immigrants. The greatest number of females and males attended school full-time. Seven of the individual interviewees attended college full-time, whereas, seven attended part-time, and six attended a mix of both part-time and full-time. Furthermore, all participants who answered this question either attended graduate school part-time or full-time. There were two individuals who did not respond to this question.

Table 9

Enrollment: Full-time or Part-time

Enrollment Type	N	%	Immigrant	Non-Immigrant	Female	Male
Full-time	45	48.9	11	34	25	19
Part-time	21	22.8	6	15	16	5
Mix (Some Semesters Part-time, Some Full-Time)	24	26.1	9	15	18	6
No Response	2	0.2				

While students were enrolled in graduate school, the greatest percentage worked more than 30 hours per week, 20 immigrants and 37 non-immigrants. Ten non-immigrants who participated in the survey did not respond to this question and five total participants worked occasionally or their hours worked per week were varied. The greatest number of females and males worked more than 30 hours per week. Overall, the greatest percentage of participants (75.1%) worked 20 hours or more per week. Based on the data results from Table 9 and Table 10, the researcher noted that the greatest number of master's students attended school full-time and were employed full-time.

Table 10

Employment: Number of Hours

Employment Type	N	%	Immigrant	Non-Immigrant	Female	Male
Less than 20 hours per week	6	6.51	2	4	6	0
20-30 hours per week	12	13.05	3	9	10	1
More than 30 hours per week	57	61.96	20	37	38	19
Don't know (occasional jobs, hours vary)	5	5.43	1	4	0	5
No Response	12	13.05		10	5	5

General Demographics

Only 28.3% of participants reported that their family immigrated to the United States. One survey participant was a first-generation immigrant. As contained in Table 11, more females (64.1%) participated in the survey than males (32.6%). Participants reported that 52.7% were married and 24.2% have never been married. Of the individuals who reported information about children, 46% reported having one or more children and 54.3% did not have any children. The greatest percentage of participants were over thirty years old, 28.9% were between 30-34 years old, 31.1% were 35-50 years old, and 12.2% were older than 50 years old. The greatest percentage (61.1%) of participants indicated their racial background as White with 13 immigrants and 42 non-immigrants. Survey participants reported that 28.9% of their family immigrated to the United States. Seven of the twenty individual interviewees reported their families immigrated to the United States or second-generation immigrants. Six of the seven immigrant interviewees were females and one male.

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Table 11

Demographics of Participants

Characteristic	N	%	Immigrant	Non-Immigrant
Gender				
Female	59	64.1	14	45
Male	30	32.6	11	19
No response	3	0.3		
Marital Status				
Married or in a marriage-like relationship	48	52.7	14	34
Living together, unmarried	11	12.1	4	7
Widowed/Separated/Divorced	9	9.9	2	7
Never married	22	24.2	5	16
No response	1	1.1		
Children				
0	50	54.3	13	37
1	14	15.2	6	8
2	16	17.4	5	11
3	7	7.6	2	5
4 or more	2	2.2		2
No response	3	3.3		
Age				
Under 25	2	2.2	1	1
25-29	23	25.6	5	18
30-34	26	28.9	6	20
35-50	28	31.1	10	18
Older than 50	11	12.2	4	7
No response	2	2.2		
Racial Background				
American Indian/Alaska Native				
Asian/Pacific Islander	15	16.7	5	10
Black/African American	10	11.1	2	8
White	55	61.1	13	42
Two or more races	10	11.1	6	4
No response	2	2.2		
Immigrated to the United States				
Yes - family	26	28.9		
No	64	71.1		
No response	2	2.2		

Enrollment Reasons

As contained in Table 12, the three most important reasons for enrolling in a master's program for immigrants were to improve skills and knowledge, increase opportunities for promotion, and to learn more about something they were interested. Although the top three reasons for enrolling in a master's program for non-immigrants were the same, the percentage (65%) of immigrants who responded to improve their skills and knowledge were comparatively slightly higher than the percentage (64%) of non-immigrants. Earning a master's degree to meet requirements of current employers had the fewest participants from both groups indicating that having a master's degree may not be a requirement for their current position.

The three most important reasons for pursuing a master's degree for females were to improve skills and knowledge, to increase opportunities for promotion, advancement, and or pay, and to learn more about something in which students are particularly interested. However, the top reasons for males for pursuing a master's degree were to use as a stepping-stone for even more education, to facilitate a job or career change, and to improve skills and knowledge. The survey item with the least responses by two females and two males included: (i.e., to meet requirements of current employers). In addition, five of the twenty individual interviewees were current doctoral students. One is currently attending this same university and the other four are attending universities within the state. It is interesting to note that four of the five individual interviewees were females pursuing a doctorate degree.

Table 12

Reasons for Enrollment for All Participants

Reasons	N	%	Immigrant	Non-Immigrant	Female	Male
To improve my skills and knowledge	59	64.1	17	41	34	23
To increase opportunities for promotion, advancement, and/or pay	58	63	18	39	38	18
To meet requirements of my current employer.	4	4.3	2	2	2	2
To meet requirements of a prospective employer.	19	20.7	4	15	11	8
To learn more about something in which I am particularly interested.	40	43.5	12	27	21	17
Best option available at the time	13	14.1	3	9	3	9
To facilitate a job/career change	37	40.2	11	25	10	26
To use as a stepping-stone for even more education, (e.g. doctorate)	37	40.2	9	27	9	27

Quantitative Results

For this explanatory sequential mixed-method study, research question one was addressed using quantitative analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to run the frequencies of responses for each question related to the constructs to be measured. Survey data were obtained from 92 participants who completed the Master's Completion Survey.

Regarding research question one, frequencies were calculated, and percentages determined for the different reasons. Figure 1 represents an overall perception of all participants. Family frequently (75%) supported academic aspirations of participants and occasionally (20.7%) supported students when needed. Family responsibilities occasionally (41.3%) interfered with school or not at all (34.8%). Employers frequently

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(50.5%) supported academic aspirations of participants and occasionally (22%) supported students when needed. Participants indicated that employers occasionally (40.2%) or did not interfere with school at all (29.3%) while they were enrolled in graduate school. Overall, participants felt supported by family and employers for those who worked while attending school.

	Your job responsibilities interfered with school	Your family responsibilities interfered with school	Your employer supported your academic	You were treated unfairly at school because of your gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion	Your family fully supported your academic aspirations
■ Frequently	16.3	18.5	50.5	5.4	75
■ Occasionally	40.2	41.3	22	8.7	20.7
■ Not at all	29.3	34.8	6.6	81.5	2.2

■ Frequently   ■ Occasionally   ■ Not at all
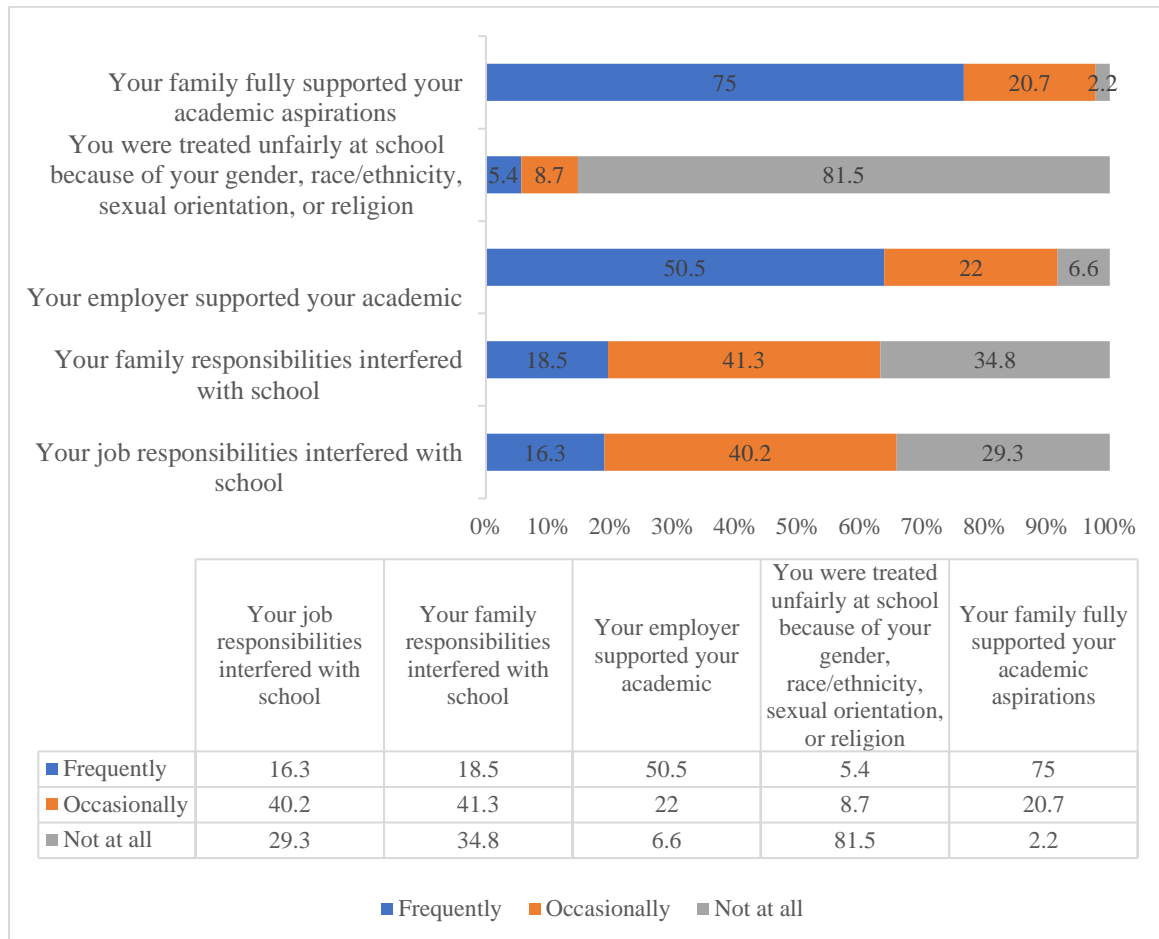
Figure 1
Perceptions of All Participants

Figure 2 depicts how participants were supported by their program or network of students while enrolled in graduate school. Participants noted that their program frequently (65.2%) or occasionally (28.3%) met their career goals. Participants frequently (42.4%) felt supported by their network of peers; however, 18.5% did not feel supported

at all by classmates. Participants felt frequently engaged (76.1%) while attending school. Participants did not feel disengaged or disinterested in school (65.2%) which supported their level of engagement. Regarding mental health or physical health concerns, participants occasionally (42.4%) or were not worried at all (41.3%). Over 48% of participants noted that they did not feel isolated from other students in the program. However, 16.3% of participants felt frequently isolated from other students in the program. This finding may be supported by free responses from the survey or individual interviews.

	Isolated from other students in the program	Disengaged/ disinterested in school	Supported by a network of students in the program	Interested and engaged in your educational program	Worried about your mental or physical health	Your program would help you meet your career goals.
Frequently	16.3	2.2	42.4	76.1	15.2	65.2
Occasionally	34.8	31.5	37	22.8	42.4	28.3
Not at all	48.9	65.2	18.5	1.1	41.3	6.5

Figure 2
Perceptions of Supports for All Participants

Supports Received

  While enrolled in the master's program, 38 (64%) of all females and 19 (63%) of all males worked full-time or more than 30 hours per week. All participants in this study worked outside of the home while they were attending graduate school. This section will explore the perceived supports from family, employer, or the university by gender.

Females

  According to female participants shown in Figure 3, family supported their academic pursuits frequently (76.3%) and occasionally (20.3%). However, 8.6% noted that their families did not support their academic pursuits at all. Employers frequently (53.4%) and occasionally (19%) supported females pursuing a graduate degree. However, 8.6% of female participants noted that employers did not support them. Female participants responded that the program frequently (64.4%) or occasionally (28.8%) supported their career goals. Over one-fourth of the participants responded that the program occasionally supported their career goals.
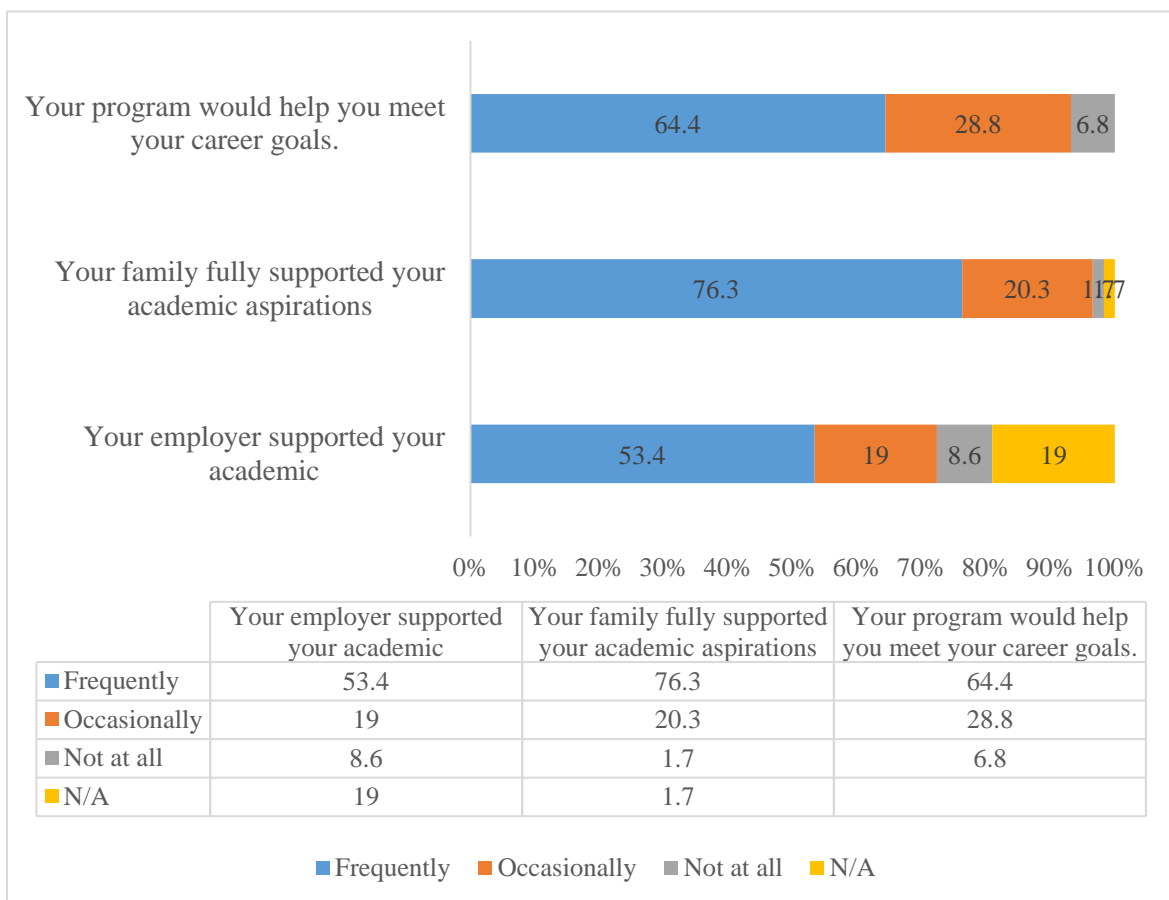
Figure 3

Figure 3
Perceptions of Supports Received for female participants.

Males. According to male participants shown in Figure 4, their family supported their academic pursuits frequently (73.3%) and occasionally (20%). However, 3.3% noted that their families did not support their academic pursuits at all. Employers frequently (46.7%) and occasionally (26.7%) supported males pursuing a graduate degree. However, 3.3% of male participants noted that employers did not support them. Employers may have been neutral (23.3%) about male participants pursuing a master's degree. Male participants responded that the program frequently (73.3%) or occasionally (20%) supported their career goals.

Your program would help you meet your career goals.   73.3   20   6.7

Your family fully supported your academic aspirations   73.3   20   3.3 3.3

Your employer supported your academic   46.7   26.7   3.3   23.3

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

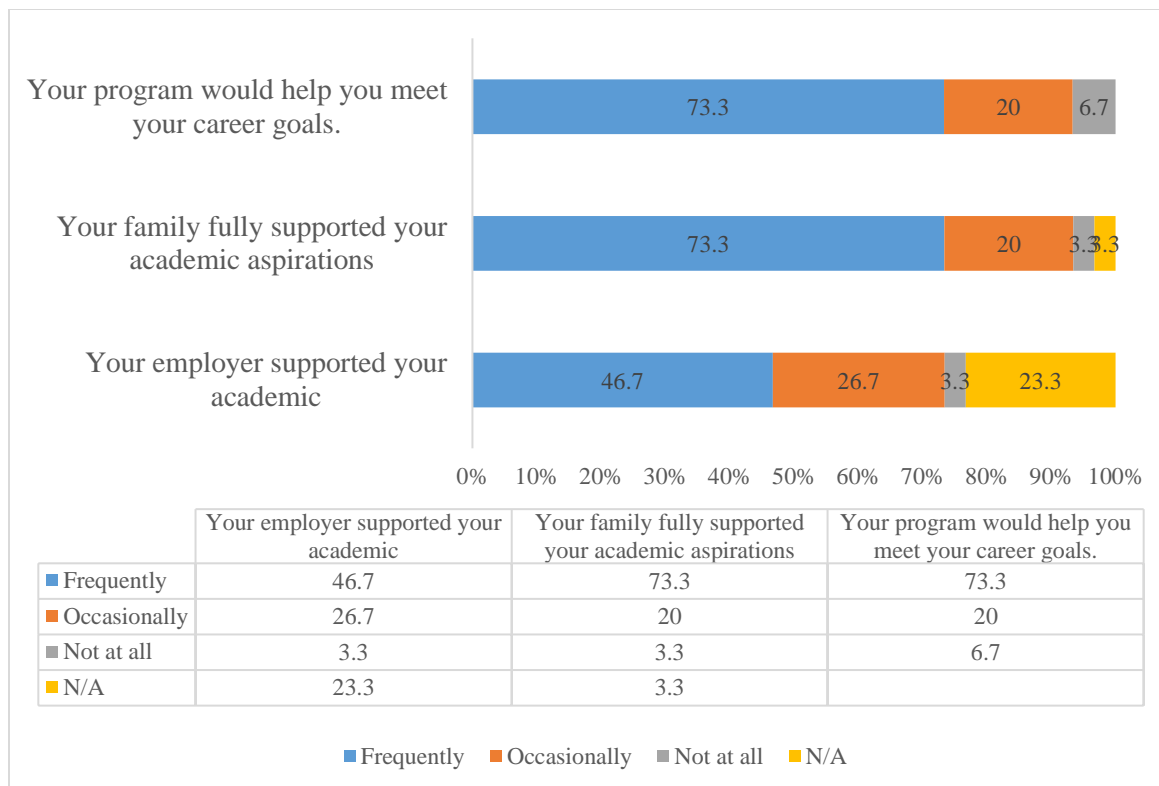|	Your employer supported your academic	Your family fully supported your academic aspirations	Your program would help you meet your career goals.
■ Frequently	46.7	73.3	73.3
■ Occasionally	26.7	20	20
■ Not at all	3.3	3.3	6.7
■ N/A	23.3	3.3	

■ Frequently   ■ Occasionally   ■ Not at all   ■ N/A

Figure 4
Perceptions of Supports Received for Male Participants

Barriers Encountered

Graduate students may encounter barriers throughout their pursuit to obtain a college degree, especially a master's degree. . As previously included in Table 10, 62% of participants worked full-time or more than 30 hours per week. Table 9 contained 49% of participants attended graduate school full-time. Table 11 contained72% of participants were over 25 years old and may also be married or in a relationship (52.7%). This section will explore the perceived barriers from family, employer, or the university as described by gender.

Females. As noted in in Figure 5, family responsibilities interfered with school frequently (20%) and occasionally (40.7%), with 32.2% not at all for female participants. In addition, job responsibilities frequently (16.9%) or occasionally (39%) interfered while enrolled in the master's program for female participants. However, 32.2% of participants

responded that their job responsibilities did not interfere with school at all, with 11.9%
indicating not applicable.

There may not be time to socialize or collaborate while working and attending
school. Female participants noted they were frequently (16.9%) or occasionally (47.5%)
worried about their mental or physical health; however, 35.6% were not at all worried.
Isolation from other students may be a factor for female students, 15.3% reported they
were frequently isolated and 39% were occasionally isolated. However, 45.8% of females
responded that they did not feel isolated from other students while in the program.

	Your job responsibilities interfered with school	Your family responsibilities interfered with school	Isolated from other students in the program	Worried about your mental or physical health
■ Frequently	16.9	22	15.3	16.9
■ Occasionally	39	40.7	39	47.5
■ Not at all	32.2	32.2	45.8	35.6
■ N/A	11.9	5.1		

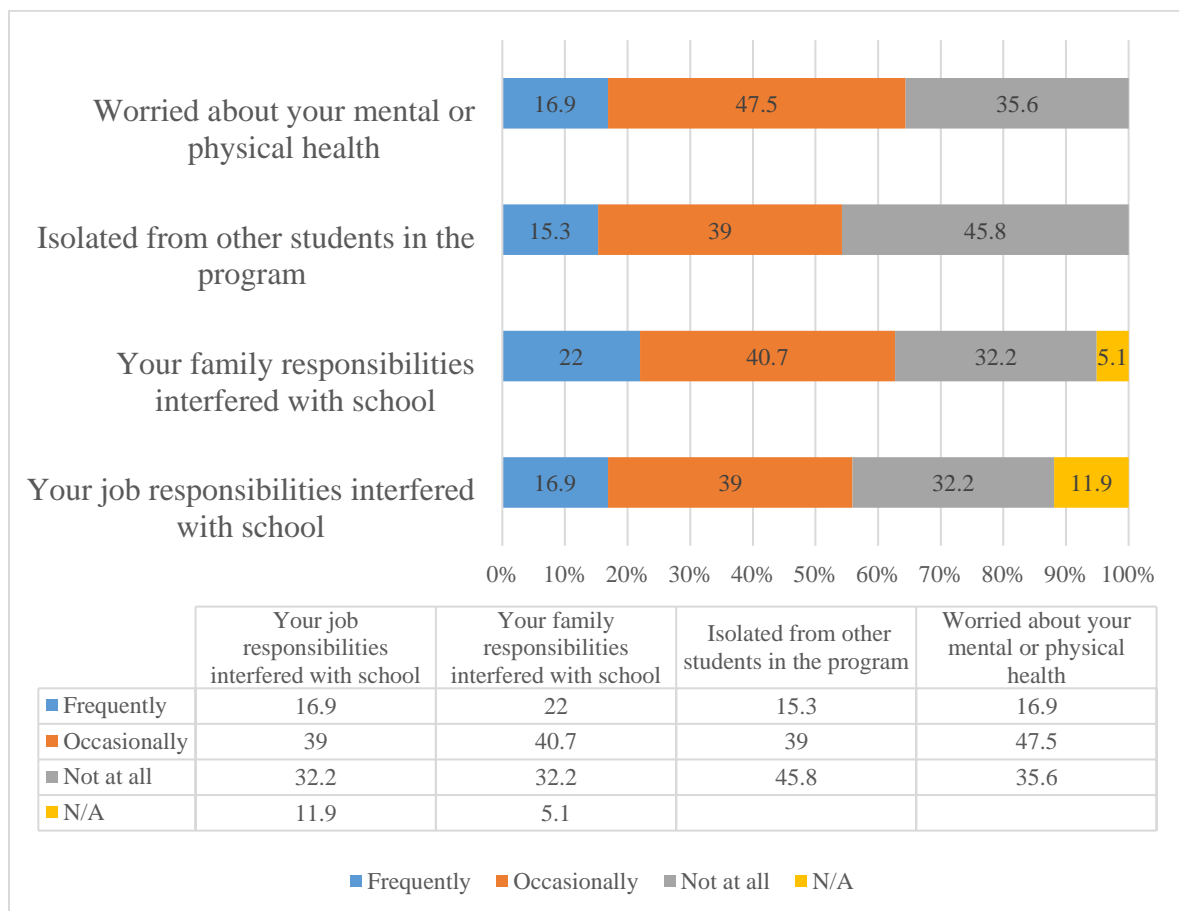■ Frequently   ■ Occasionally   ■ Not at all   ■ N/A

Figure 5
Perceptions of Barriers for Female Participants

Males. According to male participants in Figure 6, family responsibilities
interfered with school frequently (13.3%) and occasionally (40%), with 40% not at all.

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Job responsibilities frequently (16.7%) or occasionally (36.7%) interfered while enrolled in the master's program. However, 26.6% of male participants responded that their job responsibilities did not interfere with school at all, with 20% indicating not applicable.

Male participants noted that they were frequently (13.3%) or occasionally (30%) worried about their mental or physical health, however, 53.3% were not at all worried. Isolation from other students is not a major concern (53.3%) for male participants. Male students noted that 16.7% were frequently isolated and 30% were occasionally isolated form other students while enrolled in the program.

	Your job responsibilities interfered with school	Your family responsibilities interfered with school	Isolated from other students in the program	Worried about your mental or physical health
■ Frequently	16.7	13.3	16.7	13.3
■ Occasionally	36.7	40	30	30
■ Not at all	26.7	40	53.3	53.3
■ N/A	20	6.7		

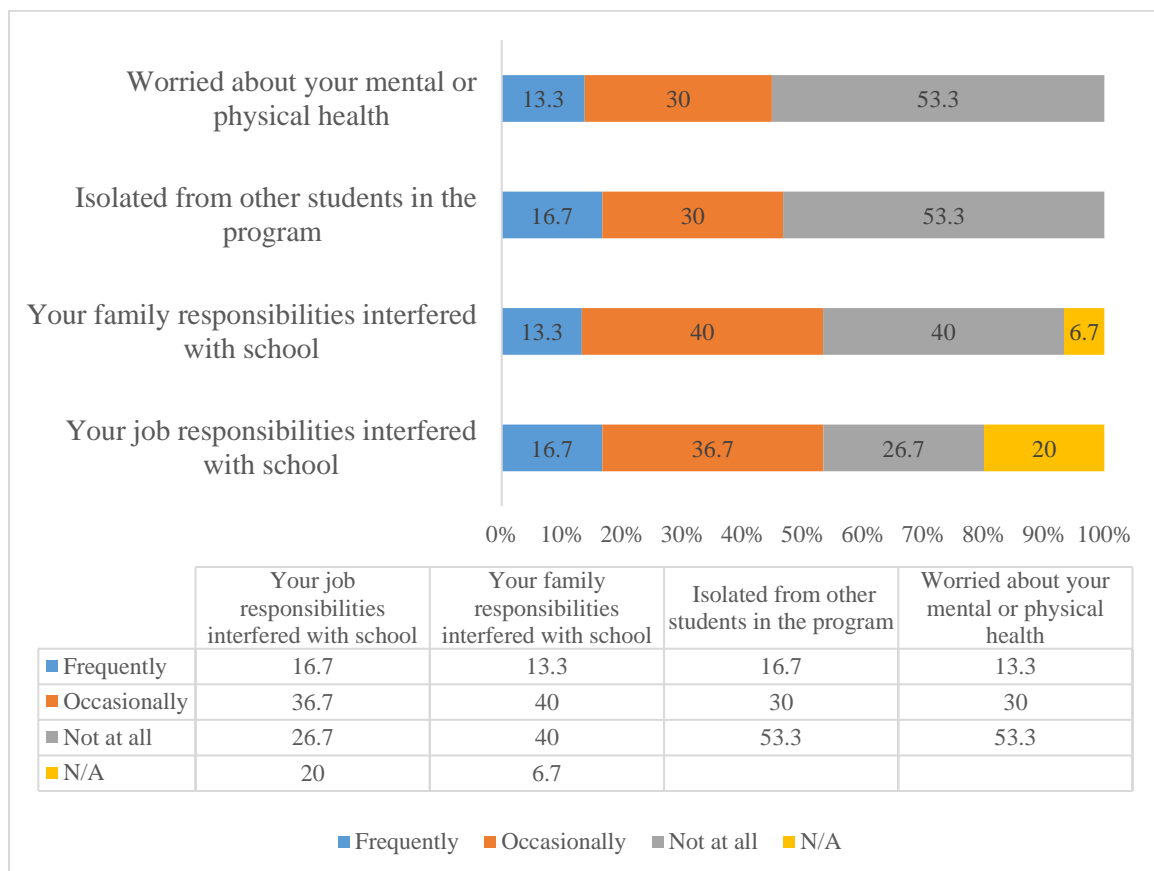■ Frequently ■ Occasionally ■ Not at all ■ N/A

Figure 6
Perceptions of Barriers for Male Participants

According to survey participants as described by gender, isolation from other students in the program was not a barrier to their success. Males (53.3% not at all) did not

feel as isolated from other students as females (45.8% not at all). Female participants reported they were slightly more negatively affected (15.3% frequently or 39% occasionally) than males (16.7% frequently or 30% occasionally) when it comes to feeling isolated from other students while in the program. Participants reported that job responsibilities interfered with school at a slightly higher percentage for females (16.9% frequently or 39% occasionally) than males (16.7% frequently or 36.7% occasionally). Family responsibilities interfered with school at a slightly higher percentage for females (16.9% frequently or 39% occasionally) than males (16.7% frequently or 36.7% occasionally). Females (16.9% frequently or 47.5% occasionally) had more concerns about their mental or physical health than males (13.3% frequently or 30% occasionally).

Overall, both female and male students felt frequently supported by their employer, family, and program of study. Both genders occasionally felt that job responsibilities and family interfered with attending school. However, females reported a higher percentage of interference from their job and family responsibilities more frequently or occasionally than males.

<center>**Research Question Two - Quantitative**</center>

Concerning the second research question, frequencies were calculated, and percentages were determined for the different reasons. A deeper explanation of the supports received for immigrant students will be explained. Comparing the perceptions of immigrant and non-immigrant participants may reveal some differences in their perceived experiences.

Supports Received

While enrolled in the master's program, 20 (76.9%) immigrants and 37 (or 57.8%) non-immigrants worked full-time or more than 30 hours per week. All immigrant participants worked outside of the home while they were attending graduate school. This section will explore the perceived supports received from an employer, family, or the

university of immigrant and non-immigrant participants. Including supports from non-immigrant participants may reveal some differences or similarities.

Immigrants. According to immigrant participants in Figure 7, family supported their academic pursuits frequently (69.2%) and occasionally (19.2%). However, 7.7% noted that their families did not support their academic pursuits at all. Employers frequently (53.8%) and occasionally (30.8%) supported immigrants pursuing a master's degree. However, 15.4% of immigrant participants noted that employers did not support them. Immigrant participants responded that the program frequently (61.5%) or occasionally (34.6%) supported their career goals.
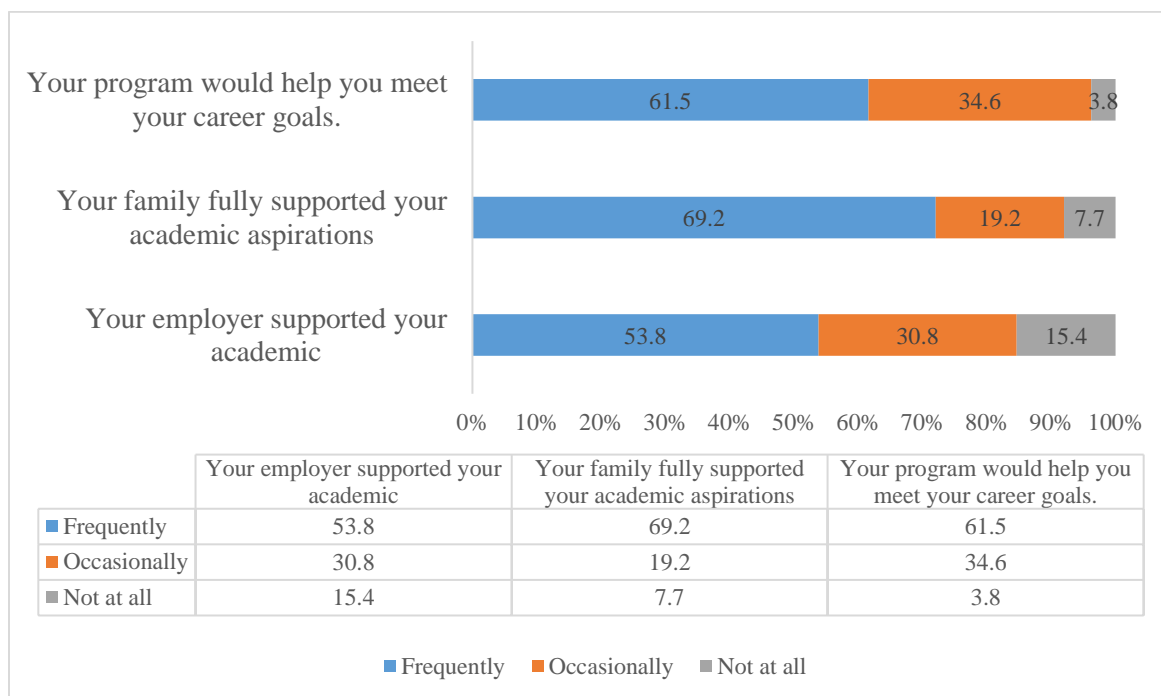
	Your employer supported your academic	Your family fully supported your academic aspirations	Your program would help you meet your career goals.
■ Frequently	53.8	69.2	61.5
■ Occasionally	30.8	19.2	34.6
■ Not at all	15.4	7.7	3.8

■ Frequently ■ Occasionally ■ Not at all

Figure 7
Perceptions of Supports Received for Immigrant Participants

Non-immigrants. According to non-immigrant participants in Figure 5b, family supported their academic pursuits frequently (78.1%) and occasionally (20.3%). However, only 1.6% noted that their families did not support their academic pursuits at all. Employers frequently (50.8%) and occasionally (17.5%) supported non-immigrants

pursuing a master's degree. However, 9.5% of non-immigrant participants noted that employers did not support them. Participants also noted that 22.2% responded not applicable when thinking about supports received from employers. Non-immigrant participants responded that the program frequently (68.8%) or occasionally (23.4%) supported their career goals. The program (68.8%) supported career goals of the non-immigrant group at a higher percentage than employers (50.8%) supported their academic pursuits.
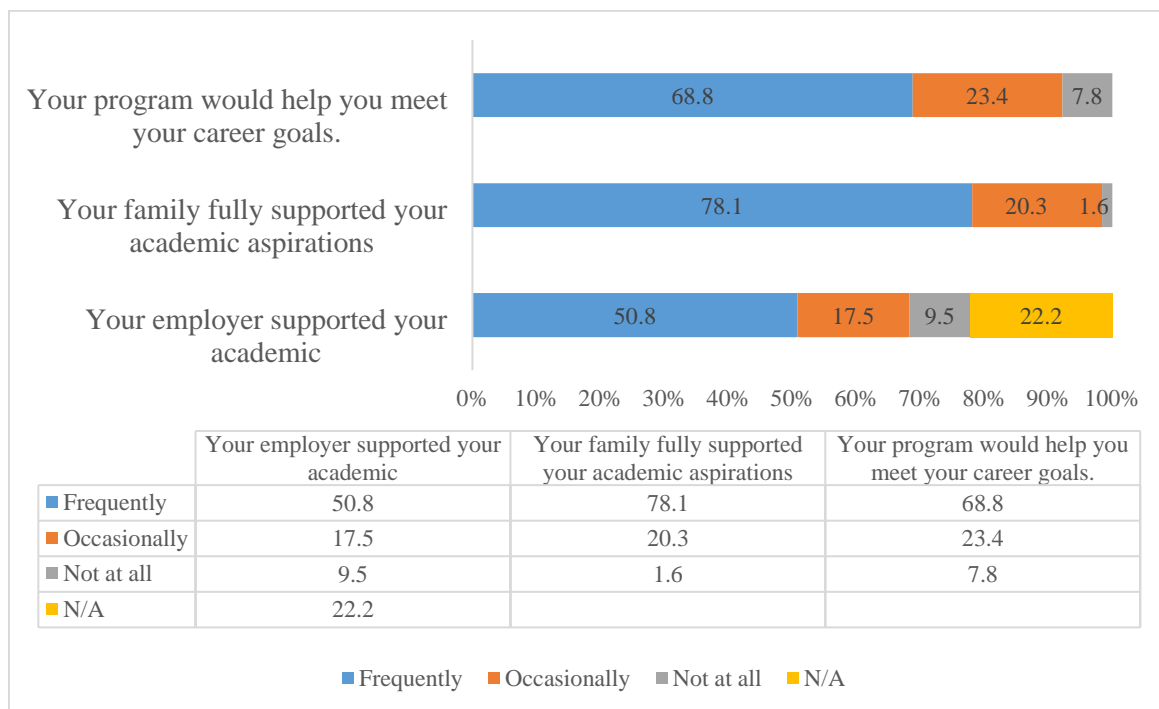
	Your employer supported your academic	Your family fully supported your academic aspirations	Your program would help you meet your career goals.
■ Frequently	50.8	78.1	68.8
■ Occasionally	17.5	20.3	23.4
■ Not at all	9.5	1.6	7.8
■ N/A	22.2		

■ Frequently ■ Occasionally ■ Not at all ■ N/A

Figure 8

Perceptions of Supports for Non-Immigrant Participants

Barriers Encountered

Barriers may occur any time while pursuing a college degree, especially a master's degree for individuals who are working and attending school. As previously demonstrated in Table 10, 62% of participants worked full-time or more than 30 hours per week, 22% were immigrants and 41% were non-immigrants. Table 9 showed that 49% of participants attended graduate school full-time, 12% were immigrants and 37%

non-immigrants. Table 11 showed that 72% of participants were over 25 years old and may also be married or in a relationship (52.7%), 15% were immigrants and 37% were non-immigrants. This section will explore the perceived barriers encountered from an employer, family, or the university by immigrant and non-immigrant participants. Including barriers from non-immigrant participants may reveal some differences or similarities.

Immigrants. According to immigrant participants in Figure 6a, family responsibilities interfered with school frequently (15.4%) and occasionally (38.5%) with 46.2% not at all. Job responsibilities frequently (15.4%) or occasionally (46.2%) interfered while enrolled in the master's program. However, 34.6% of participants responded that their job responsibilities did not interfere with school at all with 3.8% indicating not applicable.

Immigrant participants noted that they were frequently (11.5%) or occasionally (46.2%) worried about their mental or physical health, however, 38.5% were not at all worried. The researcher may conclude that due to the stress of attending graduate school, working part-time or full-time, and possibly having a family may be contributing factors occasionally. Isolation from other students was not a factor at all (46.2%) for immigrant participants, 15.4% noted they were frequently isolated and 38.5% were occasionally isolated.
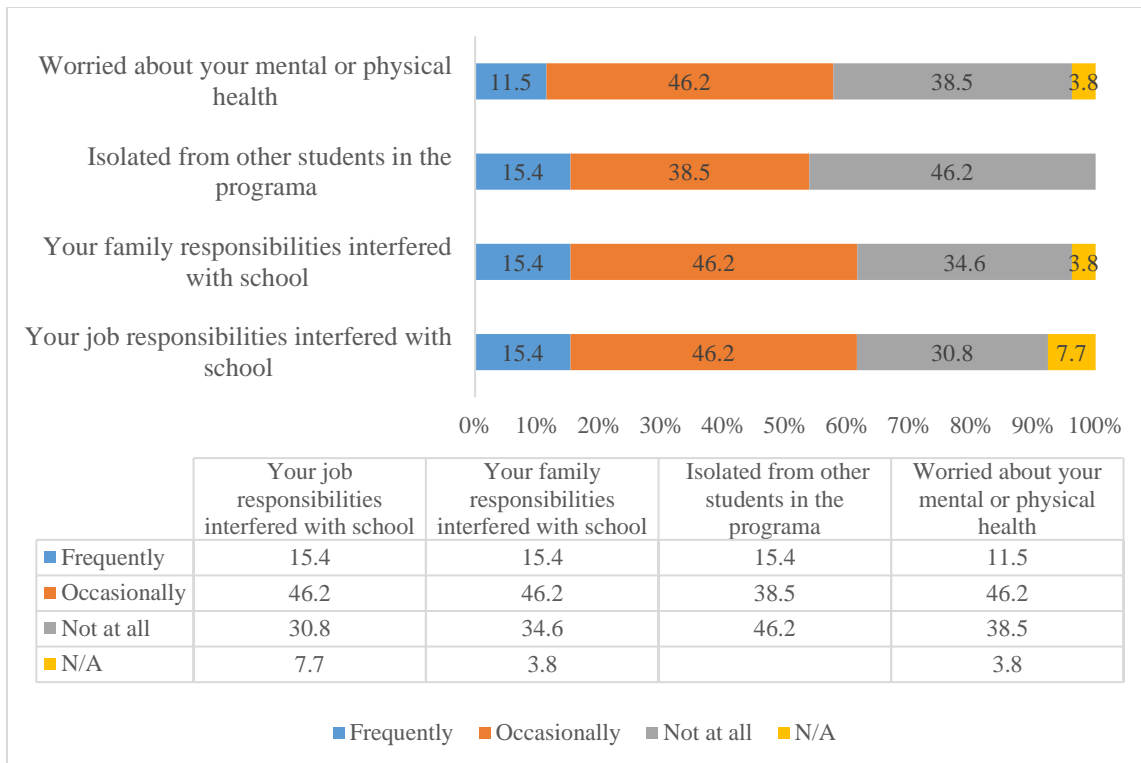
	Worried about your mental or physical health			
Frequently	11.5			
Occasionally	46.2			
Not at all	38.5			
N/A	3.8			

	Your job responsibilities interfered with school	Your family responsibilities interfered with school	Isolated from other students in the programa	Worried about your mental or physical health
Frequently	15.4	15.4	15.4	11.5
Occasionally	46.2	46.2	38.5	46.2
Not at all	30.8	34.6	46.2	38.5
N/A	7.7	3.8		3.8

Figure 9

Perceptions of Barriers for Immigrant Participants

Non-immigrants. According to non-immigrant participants in Figure 10, family responsibilities interfered with school frequently (20.3%) and occasionally (37.5%) with 35.9% not at all. Job responsibilities frequently (17.2%) or occasionally (35.9%) interfered while enrolled in the master's program. However, 29.7% of participants responded that their job responsibilities did not interfere with school at all with 17.2% indicating not applicable.

Non-immigrant participants noted that they were frequently (17.2%) or occasionally (40.6%) worried about their mental or physical health, however, 42.2% were not at all worried. Participants responded that isolation from other students was not a factor at all (50%) for non-immigrant participants, 15.6% noted they were frequently isolated and 34.4% were occasionally isolated.
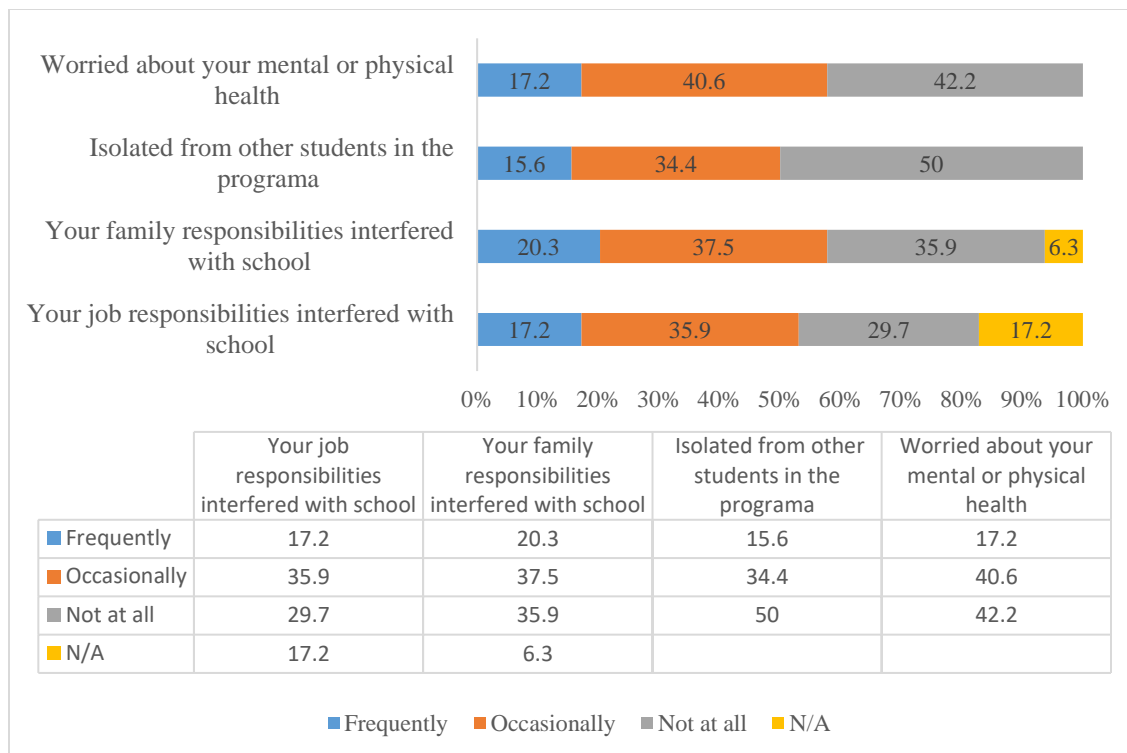
Figure 10

Perceptions of Barriers for Non-Immigrants Participants

In comparing these two groups, family was not a barrier while attending graduate school for immigrant (34.6%) or non-immigrant (35.9%) participants. Job responsibilities did not interfere while attending school at a similar percentage for both groups, immigrant (30.8%) and non-immigrant (29.7%) participants. Isolation from other students was not a concern for both groups, immigrant (46.2%) and non-immigrant (50%) participants. Both groups were not frequently worried about their mental or physical health, immigrant (84.7% occasionally and not at all) and non-immigrant (82.8% occasionally and not at all).

Research Question Three - Qualitative

The third research question was answered using individual interview responses and free responses from the survey. Related themes from the qualitative analysis will be discussed. Quotes from the free responses and individual interviews will provide insight

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into the unique experiences of the participants and how those experiences affect their ability to complete a master's degree.

After interviews were conducted, data from the interviews were coded and clustered into thematic categories, from which key themes were determined. The thematic categories related to this research question include perceptions of barriers encountered or supports received from: (a) employers, (b) family, and (c) university personnel. The key themes explore the perceptions of the immigrant participants which may be in alignment with perceptions of non-immigrant participants. Each thematic category developed from the analysis of the free responses in the survey and individual interview data are presented using common themes revealed. Verbatim excerpts from written free responses and individual interviews support in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the participants. In addition to the key themes, characteristics of interviewees will also be discussed.

Characteristics of Interviewees

Twenty individual interviews were completed by the researcher. There were 15 females and five males who participated in the individual interviews. Fourteen of the 20 interviewees were married. Three of the 20 interviewees were under 30 years old, 15 participants were over 30 years old but under 50, and two participants were 50 years old or older. In terms of race, three participants were Asian, five Black, two were multi-racial, and 10 participants were White.

Seven of the 20 interview participants were second-generation immigrants. Their parents or guardians immigrated to the United States. There were six female immigrants and one male immigrant. In terms of race, three immigrants noted they were Asian, one Black, two White, and one multi-racial. Six of the seven immigrant interviewees were over 30 years old. Five interviewees were working on a doctorate degree, two were immigrant participants.

Participant Perceptions of Barriers or Supports from Employers

The perceptions of participants and their view of how employers supported them can become a barrier or support while pursuing a master's degree and working part-time or full-time. Job responsibilities were important to the participants in this study. It was important for participants to receive support from their employers master's degree program. Barriers and supports from employers were discussed in this section.

Barriers. Barriers to achieving a master's degree for working students may include employers not allowing the appropriate leeway to take off work to complete assignments or reduce work hours to focus on schoolwork. Six of the seven immigrant participants noted that attending school and working full-time was difficult at times. Twelve of the 13 non-immigrant participants noted that working while attending graduate school caused some interferences with their employer and the ability to complete schoolwork on time. One individual was self-employed and flexibility was available regarding school.

Participant "Anna," an immigrant who graduated in 2018 from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities commented about individuals who may work the night shift. Ana stated:

> For full-time employees, I would have said it would be better if maybe they offered it [class] both times of the day. You know, in the daytime and in the afternoon or evening time, that would definitely be convenient for people who maybe work the night shift versus the day shift.

Participant "Sarah," an immigrant who graduated in 2017 from the College of Science and Engineering, revealed her occupation as a high school teacher. Sarah mentioned that teaching during the school day and then attending a late course at night was wearing on her physical and mental health. She mentioned that if the university offered classes at 5:00 pm or 5:30 pm, "so I'm done by 8:00, which is a decent time."

Sarah was "just a little [frustrated] trying to work into my schedule because of the limited offerings" during the time and day she preferred the courses to be offered. To earn the degree and work around her work schedule, Sarah was approved to substitute some independent study and senior level classes to fulfill her degree requirements.

Participant "Carla," a non-immigrant who graduated in 2019 from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities and worked full-time, noted that working full-time did not allow her the time on campus to participate in different university activities or connect with other college students outside of class time. Carla said this about her experience as a student,

I was working full-time while doing the program so I kind of felt that pain in the sense of like we weren't on campus during the day and we weren't able to participate in things, maybe like other people would, who have more free time during the day. It was definitely kind of a challenge finding these [resources] things, so we [classmates] were able to find a lot of commonality struggling to overcome these challenges.

Although Carla wanted the connection with peers on campus during the day while she was working, she had the support of her employers to pursue the master's degree.

Participant "Katherine," who was a non-immigrant who graduated in 2017 from the College of Sciences and Engineering, noted that her employer was "fine with me doing it , but I didn't get any leniency on being able to leave" her job early to participate in university activities. Katherine mentioned that she wished she had the time to participate in daytime activities that the university offered to enhance her learning experiences.

Participants who responded to free response questions did not freely note that their employer was a barrier to their academic success. An immigrant participant noted in the free response question that what they liked the least was that "working hours in my

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[their] job, while accomplishing the program" was a barrier due to lack of employer support. Immigrant and non-immigrant students found similarities in the barriers they encountered as it relates to employers.

Supports. According to the participants, employers could support employees who are attending college by being flexible with work schedules, allowing time off to meet graduate school deadlines, or offering financial compensation toward tuition. The interviewees did not indicate having issues with employers in terms of being able to attend the late afternoon, evening, or virtual classes. Some of the interviewees took some of their classes online so they had additional flexibility to negotiate with their employers on work schedules.

Carla mentioned that "working full-time while trying to do this was really hard and tricky and I was very blessed to be in a position where my boss was very open to all of us with our educational goals we had and making shifts and schedules and things like that."

Participant "John," was a non-immigrant who graduated in 2014 from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities. John chose a master's degree in Humanities because his employer required that he have a master's degree to advance within the organization, but a specific major was not a requirement. He chose to study American Literature because it was a personal interest. John noted "I was offered a job with the stipulation that I had to begin a master's degree as part of it, and so I chose something that interested me." He also mentioned that other master's students in the same program were looking to pursue a doctorate degree while he did not have the same interests. John felt supported by his employer by giving him the appropriate time off to attend school and getting some of his schoolwork completed during the workday when the office was not too busy.

Participants noted that working and attending graduate school was tough even with employer support. Employers expected the job to get done even if they supported

the individual in pursuing a graduate degree by making schedule adjustments or flexibility with taking days off. Work was the priority before school because the job was required to support their family and educational pursuits.

Participant Perceptions of Barriers or Supports from Family

The perceptions of participants and their view of how family members were able to support their academic pursuits played a role in successfully completing the degree. When attending graduate school, having the support of family members such as a spouse or parents could help the student complete schoolwork in a timely manner and decrease worry or concern. For participants who have children, the biggest barrier is ensuring that their children are taken care of by trusted individuals. As reported by participants, family was not frequently a barrier to attending graduate school. None of the interviewees mentioned their family was not supportive of their educational pursuits.

Barriers. Familial responsibilities may hinder a student's ability to focus on academic achievement or persist toward earning a degree. The additional responsibility of caring for children and a family may hinder a master's student from achieving their academic pursuits (Fakunmoju et al., 2016; Matthews et al., 2012). Participant "Jorgie," a non-immigrant who graduated in 2014 from the College of Education, had two children who needed to be taken care of while she was taking evening classes because she did not have the support of family because they were not nearby. Jorgie was thankful for an evening daycare that was able to watch her children until 11:00 pm and the center was close to the university.

Participant "Lisa," an immigrant who graduated in 2015 from the College of Business, mentioned that having children while also working on a master's degree extended her graduation date because she had to take semesters off to take care of her children. She noted that returning to graduate school was very difficult. Lisa mentioned that having two children and even with support from her family, she had to place her

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children in daycare while she worked. Lisa said, she "felt like [school] stacked up against me and there was a lot of crying on my part every single day of 'I couldn't do it,' but you know, I ended up doing it."

Participant "John," an immigrant who graduated in 2014 from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities, mentioned that he was a part-time student and worked full-time. John mentioned that he had two kids and "I was only going to do six hours a semester and I had no problem getting the six hours I needed when I needed it." John mentioned that even though he had the support of his wife and mother when it came to caring for his children, he wanted to make sure he spent time with them so he would not lose out on being present at most of the activities they were involved in.

In this study, participants mainly noted childcare as the main concern and other family obligations were not noted. Participants did not indicate other family obligations as barriers. The support of family members was important in mitigating barriers that may occur while attending graduate school.

Supports. Familial support was very important for participants who worked full-time while attending school especially if they also have children. Having the support of loved ones was key to persisting through school. The participants in this study noted the importance of support from parents and significant others.

Participant "Anna," an immigrant who graduated in 2018 from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities, mentioned that "definitely familial support, like from my family, my mom" was most helpful when asked about supports she received while pursuing her master's degree. Anna also noted:

My mom is an immigrant. I don't know that I would have gotten to where I am without my family. They did so much, both financially and just that support. 'Cause I think a lot of people, if they don't have family members that understand

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how difficult college can be, they don't understand. You know how much energy and time it takes to put in.

Anna attributes her academic success to supports she received from her family. Anna mentioned that her family would provide encouragement by telling her to keep pushing through even though there were challenging times. Family members would encourage Anna by telling her "you can make it to the end; you're almost there, kind of stuff." Anna paid for her master's degree with financial support from her family and student loans. She mentioned that she would have owed more student loans without financial support from her family.

Participant "Lisa," an immigrant who graduated in 2015 from the College of Business, noted that extended family helped care for her children while she worked full-time and attended school. Lisa stated:

My in-laws are retired, have been retired for a long time, so they've been my daycare, for a really long, ever since my daughter was born. But that's where my kids have been going to and that's a big relief because you know, even if I would have had to put them somewhere in a daycare and there's a lot of good daycares out there, but it's not the same as your family taking care of them because it's not the same as you know, grandparents' love. Another thing that was a really big help too was my husband because he understood. That this was a goal that I was reaching towards. He understood that I needed to take time and study. He understood that, you know, I needed to get sleep, or I needed to stay up late, and he needed to take care of the kids so that I could focus on, on finishing my school and then just other family would help by offering to take care of the kids or you know my mom would make us food all the time. It was just, it takes a whole village. It really does. All I was doing was trying to finish my, my master's.

Participant "Cory," a non-immigrant who graduated in 2019 from the College of Business, stated that "definitely have the family support is a key, you know, in being successful, especially in a graduate program." Cory noted that his wife and mother were great supports while he attended graduate school.

> She [wife] works as well. I was working and taking classes. She was able to really help with the kids, taking care of them. Giving me the time I needed to study to where I wasn't having to study at like one or two in the morning. And then my mom, same thing, if my wife couldn't do it, she would take care of the kids.

> Most participants in this research noted that family was more of a support rather than a barrier to completing graduate school. Having children, attending graduate school, and working could be viewed as a barrier when family support was not available. Participants with children noted that having the support of a spouse or parents to care for their children made attending graduate school less stressful.

Participant Perceptions of Barriers or Supports from University Personnel

The perceptions of participants and their experiences as a master's student at the university may be unique for the individual based on barriers encountered or supports received from academic or other support services. Academic support may include: (a) relationships with professors or faculty, (b) utilizing support from academic advisors, and (c) engaging in tutoring or the writing center services. Other support services may include: (a) the career center, (b) the financial aid office, or (c) the library. The perceptions of the individual depend on the time they have dedicated to pursuing or receiving support from the university.

Barriers. Unexpected circumstances may interfere with an individual's ability to continue their planned path, especially pursuing a graduate degree. The different barriers may differ based on each individual's life experiences. This section will discuss the different barriers students may have encountered while attending school.

Participant "Nila," an immigrant who graduated in 2014 from the College of Business, mentioned that she assumed the university did not have a lot of resources to offer to students because it was a smaller university than others in the area. Nila attended orientation prior to enrolling in the program and she did not remember mention of support services available to students.

One barrier that was mentioned multiple times (i.e., "There was not enough funding [options] for graduate students") was related to a lack of financial assistance for master's students. As demonstrated in Table 11, all individuals who responded to the question about employment worked part-time, full-time, or a mixture while attending school. Participant "Anna," an immigrant who graduated in 2018 from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities, noted that her family provided some financial support. Anna mentioned that in addition to the financial support from her family, she had to take out a student loan to pay for her master's degree so she could attend school full-time.

Participant "Lisa," an immigrant who graduated in 2015 from the College of Business, mentioned that she participated in a virtual program. Lisa noted that she was not aware of the resources the university had to offer to support students. She stated, "I wasn't aware of all the resources that they had to offer". Lisa also needed more interaction with her classmates but due to the virtual program, she believed that she missed out on building relationships with peers. Lisa recommended that future students should contact professors and academic advisors for additional support. Unfortunately, Lisa found out about the different resources available to students toward the end of her program from other classmates. She was able to use the Career Services Office to help her with a practice interview. Lisa mentioned that the office videotaped the interview and gave feedback regarding recommendations for improvement. Lisa wanted to tell future graduate students "to make sure that you're aware of all the resources that are available to you."

Participant "Sarah," an immigrant student who graduated in 2017 from the College of Science and Engineering, described her experience with a professor as very difficult:

> The professor wasn't helpful at all. You asked him questions, he made you feel like an idiot. I think there was eight of us in there and we're all struggling. So, one girl, the way, how she was able to work out some of the homework problems was, I think she was able to buy copies of the book online, umm, 'cause the book wasn't available. It was out of print, so she got somebody in another country. She was from another country, so she got someone to get the book and snap pictures.

Although Sarah had a poor experience with a professor for this class, the professors were helpful and flexible when working with her work schedule and class times.

Some of the comments written in response to the free response question regarding what individuals liked the least related to class schedules (e.g., classes were only offered online or individuals felt forced to become a hybrid or an online student). Most of the required classes were offered in the long semesters and the time interfered with work schedules. One participant noted that due to the online nature of the program, they "did not have the interaction with faculty and fellow classmates" they would have preferred.

Participant "Dana," a non-immigrant who graduated in 2017 from the College of Business, mentioned that she wished she had known about the Wellness Center. Dana mentioned that she would have leveraged the services if she had known about the center. She would have used the support to help her establish "a sense of balance to support my coursework and my job as well." In this study, participants noted that their lack of knowledge regarding availability of resources as a student was a barrier, but they were able to overcome their obstacle by seeking support from classmates.

Supports. Supports received from faculty or professors were an important component of the participant's experience while attending the university. Participant

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"Yancey," a non-immigrant who graduated in 2019 from the College of Education, mentioned there were not enough students to fill the courses she needed to graduate in the summer due to her small cohort. However, the professors advocated for her cohort, so they were able to take the required courses and graduated in the summer rather than return in the fall semester. Yancey said, "the professors were amazing and understanding. They always encouraged me and believed in me which helped a lot once I was in my practicum and internship classes."

A positive relationship with professors was a significant contributing factor in students decision to stay enrolled at an institution of higher education. For example, Darla, a non-immigrant interview participant, described a professor as an essential factor regarding staying enrolled and completing their degree: "Dr. H would talk me through things I didn't understand. I went straight to Dr. H for everything. 'Cause she still checks in on me, like every six months."

Participant "Katherine," who was a non-immigrant who graduated in 2017 from the College of Sciences and Engineering, noted that professors "were all pretty beneficial and very supportive of the work life balance." Many participants who described their dedication to reaching their academic goals were due to supportive professors.

Most immigrant participants described their positive experiences with faculty. Seven immigrant participants wrote comments about their positive experiences with faculty which consisted of the quality of teaching and student support. An example included: (e.g., "I love learning and Dr. S. was a great professor. She made the topic very interesting and challenging.")

Participant "Tina," an immigrant who graduated in 2019 from the College of Business, described her experiences with professors as engaging:

> I did use a lot of the professors' office hours, especially towards the end of my
> master's program with regards to, with regards to the capstone project. I utilized

and leveraged the office hours of the professor a lot. Some of my on-site classes too, I would stay behind on office hour days and leveraged that.

Tina also noted the "one-on-one coaching on some of the gaps that they [professors] saw in my projects or in my homework, or in my presentations. The one-on-one support with questions that they answered, that was the most beneficial." Tina also wanted to encourage future students to "actually network with the professors because the professors kinda set the stage for expectations versus reality." In addition, Tina added the importance of attending information sessions provided by the university and leverage the resources available at the campus.

Participant "Georgia," an immigrant who graduated in 2016 from the College of Education, described her experiences as a member of a cohort group:

We were very close to the professors themselves [umm] that for me was very, very helpful because I knew that if I had any academic questions or if I was struggling in any way, that they were very easy to reach out to. And therefore, I didn't necessarily use an advisor, but the professors themselves were advisors because they, they were so invested in, in our future and our success."

In addition, Georgia noted that a professor "followed us from class to class and made sure that we stayed on track and made sure that we knew what classes to take next. And he was also our advisor when we were in our internship period."

Jorgie also mentioned that the university supported her academic goals by approving some of the courses she needed to graduate during her last summer session rather than making her take them in the fall semester. She was able to graduate early and save money for childcare in the evening because of this support. Jorgie mentioned:

While my kids were at summer camp during the day, I could take the classes I needed to while they were away and it would save me the daycare expenses in the

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evening because of course, daycare charged an extra surplus for the evening

hours. So, I can graduate ahead of time, saved expenses in the long run.

Jorgie was an educator and was on summer break. The summer classes were during the

daytime which allowed her to attend classes while her children were participating in

summer camp.

Dana noted that one of the reasons she enrolled at the university was the blended

approach with course offerings. Having this approach available helped her to be able to

work full-time while attending school. "That made it easier for me that I didn't have to do

the commute every day. I could work online on classes that I needed versus in person."

In terms of barriers or supports from university personnel for master's students, it

was a matter of knowing about resources available. Since most master's students in this

study also worked, they attended classes in the late afternoon, evening, or virtually.

Accessing campus resources were not necessarily sought after by the students unless they

felt they needed additional supports. Professors were the main support or advocate for

master's students.

Persistence

When entering college, especially beginning a graduate program, students have

the intention to persist toward finishing the degree and these intentions are formed by the

personal dispositions of the individual (Tinto, 1977). During the interviews, immigrant

and non-immigrant students shared their personal desires to complete their master's

degree even after experiencing external challenges. External challenges could result from

lack of perceived supports from employers, family, or university personnel. Students in

this study were motivated to persevere by several factors. Sarah, an immigrant student,

noted that during her master's degree, "even though I was discouraged a lot, I pushed

through so you're not going to find supports outside you." Dana, a non-immigrant

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student, mentioned that seeking out information was one way to stay the course in graduate school because "information may not come to you, you have to go seek [it] out."

Participant "Larry," a non-immigrant who graduated in 2019 from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities, returned to college after he retired from the military. Larry was over 50 years old when he decided to pursue a master's degree. He noted:

Change with the times no matter how old you are or the position you have in [an] organization or life. You've got to be flexible and willing to learn new stuff because if you don't, you're gonna become a dinosaur and get kicked to the side. You're going to fail eventually, so I think that's a hard lesson.

Participant "Katherine," a non-immigrant, mentioned that pursuing and earning a master's degree was worth the additional effort and time. She provided encouragement to future students, "it's worth it and don't lose faith." Individuals in this study persisted and achieved their goal of earning a master's degree.

Participant "Georgia," an immigrant who graduated in 2016 from the College of Education, noted that "there's more responsibility outside of class and so you really have to be dedicated to finishing your assignments and wanting the degree." As Tinto (1993) identified, graduate students tend to focus more on satisfaction with the specific department and subject matter, integrating themselves socially into the academic community, and building positive relationships with professors.

Summary of Findings

This mixed-method study incorporated quantitative data collected from a sample of master's graduates during a five-year timeframe, 2014 through 2019. Responses were compared to determine differences in supports received and barriers encountered between gender and immigrant and non-immigrant participants. The first and second research questions addressed the barriers encountered and supports received as described by gender and immigrant or non-immigrant students. The frequency results contained

participants who felt frequently supported by employers, family, and university personnel no matter gender or immigration status.

The participants in this study noted that having a community of supports from all areas of their lives increased master's degree attainment. For all survey participants, job responsibilities interfered with school frequently (16.3%) or occasionally (40.2%) while employer support were frequently (50.5%) or occasionally (22%) received. The interferences included in the survey free response question consisted of travel time to school, classes that were only available on campus in which the participant had to change work hours, and certain classes that were only offered during the daytime. Interviewees discussed positive support from employers for class attendance but support to participate in university activities required taking personal days from work.

Family responsibilities interfered with school slightly more frequently than job responsibilities according to survey participants. Participants responded that family responsibilities frequently (18.5%) and occasionally (41.3%) interfered with school. However, family supported the participant's endeavor with graduate school at a higher rate, frequently (75%) and occasionally (20.7%). Interviewees found the need for family support to be important while attending school, especially participants who had children.

In regard to disengagement, when master's students took their classes, disengagement from other students was somewhat (18.5%) received by survey participants. However, the flexibility of taking classes online or in the evening allowed participants to remain employed. According to most interviewees, professors or faculty were a major support for achieving their degree. Survey participants were frequently (76.1%) interested or engaged in their educational program and would frequently (65.2%) meet their career goals after earning the degree. Overall, participants had a good experience while attending the university.

In summary, participants desired to participate in more activities offered by their university. They were encouraged to maintain enrollment in the program by professors and faculty who cared about their success. However, all participants knew they would need internal and external supports to achieve academic success and pursue their next academic or career goals.

CHAPTER V:

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V includes the conclusions of the study. findings and researcher conclusions. The chapter will provide a summary of the research findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and concluding comments.

Summary

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-method study was to determine obstacles immigrant students may face when completing a master's degree. This study included quantitative data that were analyzed from a sample of master's graduates, responses between gender and graduates who were second-generation immigrants or non-immigrants were examined during the study. Factors that may have impacted master's students who graduated from a mid-sized, South-Central university in the United States between May 2014 through December 2019, were outlined. The master's students' perceptions were assessed by administering a survey and individual interviews. The study contained demographics of participants and their perceptions of their experiences. The perceptions of participants contained in the survey and interview responses helped to answer the following research questions: (a) What are the perceived supports or barriers from employers, family, or university personnel described by gender?; (b) What are the perceived supports described by immigrant students completing a master's degree?; and (c) What are the perceived barriers that influence immigrant students and their ability to complete a master's degree?

Researchers have documented that individuals have pursued a master's degree for different reasons (e.g., personal achievement or professional advancement). (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2011; Ashraf et al., 2018; Glazer & Raymo, 2005). However, the Council of

Graduate Schools (2013) determined the main reason for pursuing a master's degree was professional advancement. Individuals who pursue a master's degree were also employed so adding the additional burden of graduate school may present a myriad of professional, personal, or academic challenges (Adebayo et al., 2008; Hardre & Hackett, 2015). Individuals who seek to dedicate more of their personal resources to another role, like becoming a graduate student, "the likelihood of strain-based conflict with other roles" may occur (Matthews et al., 2012, p. 236; as cited in Good & La Prad, 2013). The researcher sought to find barriers encountered or supports received by gender and immigrant or non-immigrant students.

Researchers have determined that there has been a call for increasing college graduates at all levels and with that greater scrutiny on what universities were doing to engage and graduate students. Institutions of higher education (IHE) have looked to retention models to guide their strategies, however, most models have focused on undergraduate students (GradEdge, 2013; Gururaj et al., 2010; Hardre & Hackett, 2015; Perry et al., 2008). Tinto's (1975) Model of Social Integration has been widely cited and has contended that persistence is related to student characteristics and experiences prior to admission, combined with factors from experiences while in college. Tinto (1982) acknowledged that his 1975 model failed to account for unique factors related to nontraditional or commuter students. Tinto (1982) contended that a student's decisions to persist are "significantly affected by the degree of their intellectual and social integration into the life of the institution" (p. 697). According to the Council of Graduate Schools (2013), there has not been a model or empirical data that accurately describes the factors that contribute to master's student completion. To support this effort, in 2010, the Council of Graduate Schools conducted their first pilot study that was designed to study the factors that contributed to successful master's degree completion.

The Completion and Attrition in STEM Master's Program, examined the high demand for STEM and MBA programs at five major U.S. universities to determine reasons why students enroll in a master's program, described completion and attrition rates, factors that contributed to completion and attrition, and highlighted institutional and program factors that attract, retain, support, and graduate master's students (Council of Graduate Schools, 2013). Online surveys were distributed to graduating and first year students, and students who dropped or stopped from their program. The findings contained 66% of STEM students who graduated. Women and younger students graduated at a higher rate. Outside employment was cited as the most likely factor to impact the students' ability to finish their degree. According to this pilot study, the students' own motivation and non-financial family support were the most important factors in helping their success. Institutional and program factors were not mentioned as contributing to the students' success, however, program-level resources such as advisors or program structures supported their degree completion.

Having a full-time job may be a positive factor in increased dedication to obtaining a degree (Brooks & Siepel, 2018). According to Adebayo et al. (2008), most graduate students have full-time jobs and need the support of their employers in order complete their degree. Employer support may include flexible work schedules, reduced workload, or financial support (Adebayo et al., 2008; Wyland et al., 2015). In addition, flexibility with work schedules from employers helped participants attend classes at the designated times. However, Matthews et al. (2012) found that lack of support from employers can be detrimental to the student because higher importance is placed on the job rather than school. Work-to-family conflicts may increase when work hours are increased, especially while also attending school (Matthews et al., 2012). Some companies offer to pay a portion of the tuition to help offset education costs (Willis, 2012; as cited in Wyland et al., 2015).

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The support from family members is an integral component for graduate students who are also employed (Fakunmoju et al., 2016; Matthews et al., 2012). In addition to family and employment commitments, graduate students must balance academic coursework demands (Grady et al., 2014; Kattner, 2012). Strom and Savage (2014) found a positive learning outcome when a spouse or significant other supports the graduate student, especially emotional support during stressful times. In some cases, Fakunmoju et al. (2016) reported that earning a graduate degree may be viewed as a threat to some spouses leading to conflicts that could become barriers for the student. Also, the additional effort imposed by pursuing a graduate degree may exacerbate familial conflicts and job performance (Fernandez et al., 2019; Fakunmoju et al., 2016).

University programs that help students navigate the new academic rigor of graduate level work may promote confidence and affirm the decision to return to school (Adebayo et al., 2008). Access to different university programs during non-traditional school hours may be a resource to help graduate students become successful (Hardre & Hackett, 2015; Kattner, 2012). Wilkins et al. (2016) discussed students who showed a commitment to the institution and had a strong positive relationship with academic success. Programs that created a sense of belonging and encourage students to participate in university offered programs may positively affect degree attainment (Aljohani, 2016; Hardre & Hackett, 2015; O'Keeffe, 2013; Olbrecht, 2016).

Research Question One

With regard to research question one, the perceived supports received from employers, family, or university personnel as described by gender was addressed. In reviewing supports received, barriers encountered were also identified. Participants found supports from all three areas in varying frequencies from both groups. In a 2015 study, Okahana et al. (2016) found that women earned more master's degrees (58.4%) and graduate certificates (66.4%) than men. To further support their study, Okahana et al.

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(2019) completed a 2018 study and found that women continued to earn more master's degrees (58.3%) and graduate certificates (64.8%) than men. However, in both studies by Okahana et al. (2015, 2018), men enrolled at a higher rate at research institutions than women. The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) predicts that two percent more women will earn more master's degrees than men between 2017 and 2029.

Prince et al. (2014) determined that employer support may increase an individual's ability to complete a college degree and possibly an increase in pay. Researchers found that students pursue higher education for career advancement, job promotion, or higher pay (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2011; Brooks & Siepel, 2018; Glazer & Raymo, 2005). The Council of Graduate Schools (2013) indicated that the frequently cited reason for enrolling in a master's program was to support professional aspirations. However, Callendar and Little (2015) noted only 40% of individuals who worked either part-time or full-time reported an increase in pay or job promotion after completing their degree. In addition, employer support may increase the chance that the employee would remain with the employer after completing the degree (Callendar & Little, 2015).

A master's degree may be a by-product of a larger goal, a steppingstone toward a doctorate degree (Glazer, 1986). Glazer-Raymo (2005) noted that the master's degree is pivotal in helping individuals achieve their next goal in the workplace or in higher education such as a doctorate degree. In this study, males responded that their program of study would help meet their career goals by almost 10 percentage points more than females. Four of the five interviewees in this study responded that they were currently seeking a doctorate degree and were females. According to Billion (2019), the top three reasons for enrolling in a master's program included: (a) increase opportunities for promotion, advancement, or pay; (b) improve skills and knowledge; and (c) facilitate a career change and meet the needs of a future employer.

In this study, employers were supportive of female participants pursuing a master's degree with 54.1% noted that job responsibilities did not interfere with school or not applicable. However, 8.6% of female participants noted that employers did not support them. Job responsibilities interfered with school at a slightly higher percentage for females (16.9% frequently or 39% occasionally) than males (16.7% frequently or 36.7% occasionally). Females (53.4%) perceived their employers supported their academic pursuits more frequently than male (46.7%) participants. However, 8.6% of females compared to 3.3% of males responded that their employers did not support their academic pursuits at all, even though 26.7% of males responded that employers only supported them occasionally. Employers were supportive of male participants pursuing a master's degree in that 46.6% indicated that job responsibilities did not interfere with school at all. Shannon et al. (2017) found more women had higher job satisfaction than men while attending graduate school part-time and working full-time.

Due to the stress of attending graduate school, working part-time or full-time, and having a family may be contributing factors to mental or physical health concerns for female students. Fernandez et al. (2019) found that having a family while in graduate school proved to be a challenge for women. In this study, the support of family, females (76.3%) and males (73.3%), had a positive impact on individuals continuing or persisting toward graduation. Family responsibilities interfered with school at a slightly higher percentage for females (16.9% frequently or 39% occasionally) than males (16.7% frequently or 36.7% occasionally). Family support was also key in decreasing barriers for male graduate students to focus on academic pursuits according to male interviewees. Billion (2019) ascertained similar findings in their research related to family support received for master's students while attending school.

Females were slightly more negatively affected (15.3% frequently or 39% occasionally) than males (16.7% frequently or 30% occasionally) when it comes to

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feeling isolated or limited socialization with classmates. However, males (53.3% not at all) did not feel as isolated from other students as females (45.8% not at all). Researchers found that a student's sense of belonging within the institution has been associated with academic achievement and engagement (Buskirk-Cohen & Plants, 2019; Buhs, 2005; as cited in Zumbrunn et al., 2014). In a study by Billion (2019), 88.9% of students who dropped or stopped out felt isolated from other students either frequently or occasionally, whereas, students who graduated only felt 57.1% isolated occasionally or frequently.

In this study, both female and male graduates felt frequently supported by their employer, family, and university personnel. The main difference between the genders was that females reported higher percentage of interference from their job and family responsibilities more frequently or occasionally than males while pursuing the degree.

Research Question Two

Research question two addressed the perceived supports received from employers, family, or university personnel as described by immigrant participants. In reviewing supports received, barriers encountered were also identified for immigrant participants. Participants found supports from all three factors in varying frequencies. According to Tran (2018), children of immigrants tend to outperform their native-born peers despite disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, Crul et al. (2017) found that immigrant parents view higher education achievement as a source of pride for the family which in turn makes the individuals want to achieve.

Aleixo et al. (2019) found that some immigrants may not identify themselves as immigrants because of their disconnect from the definition of starting a new life in another country, especially second-generation immigrants who were born in the United States. In this study, all 26 immigrant participants worked outside the home while attending school. Immigrant participants frequently (53.8%) were supported by their employers and job responsibilities interfered with school occasionally (46.2%) or not at

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all (30.8%). These findings were similar for non-immigrant participants, employers frequently supported (50.8%) and job responsibilities interfered with school occasionally (35.9%) or not at all (29.7%).

Strong relationships with family help immigrant students achieve educational attainment (Gong et al., 2015). In this study, family frequently (69.2%) supported while only 7.7% immigrant participants responded with not at all. According to immigrant participants in Figure 9, family responsibilities interfered with school frequently (15.4%) and occasionally (46.2%) with 34.6% not at all. Orupabo et al. (2019) found that cultural resources or support and encouragement from the social environments were provided to immigrant students. In addition, Crul et al. (2017) found that second-generation immigrants learned to overcome lack of support from family by choosing to work harder thereby achieving their goals.

Immigrant students thrive on supportive relationships with faculty in addition to support from peers and other university support staff (Crul et al., 2017; Lara & Nava, 2018). In this study, immigrant participants felt that their educational program frequently (61.5%) supported their career goals. Professors or faculty were key to ensuring success as noted from immigrant interviewees and free responses from the survey. Immigrant participants noted the professors acted as an advocate, advisor, and coach which helped them become successful in the program. The experiences of second-generation immigrants were like non-immigrant participants.

Research Question Three

Research question three addressed the perceived barriers that influenced immigrant students and their ability to complete a master's degree. This question was answered from the free response questions from the survey and individual interviews. All participants spoke the English language clearly and were able to answer all questions

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asked. Language was not a barrier during the interviews. All immigrant participants were second-generation and born and raised in the United States.

Supports received from family were mostly positive for all interviewees. As contained in Table 6, 46% of survey participants reported they had one or more children and 72.2% were over thirty years of age. In addition, 64.8% of participants were married or in a cohabitee relationship. For participants with children, the support of family members or a spouse was mentioned as contributing factors to their academic success. A positive learning outcome was determined when a significant other or spouse supported the graduate student (Seers et al., 1983; Strom & Savage, 2014). In addition, Olbrecht et al. (2016) found that students who receive financial supports from family improved their chances of remaining in school.

Divan and McBurney (2016) found that students who participated in university supports (e.g., career planning) were more likely to have higher employment prospects upon graduation. Individual interviewees noted that they were not aware of the university resources available to them because they worked during the day and attended school in the evening or online. Awareness of university supports was also low among interview participants and some noted they would have used the resources to find employment related to their degree, 40.2% of all participants responded they were seeking the degree to facilitate a job or career change in this study. Callendar and Little (2014) found that students who attended school part-time and work full-time did not change jobs or employers.

Buskirk-Cohen and Plants (2019) documented that socio-emotional variables (e.g., a sense of belonging) were connected to a student's academic success. Crul et al. (2017) noted most of the immigrant participants in their study had strong social skills and attributed to "their need to adapt to different social environments and diverse groups of people on their way up the educational ladder and the labor [sic] market" (p. 325).

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In addition to socio-emotional variables, feelings of isolation were also reported. Lara and Nava (2018) found that "high levels of isolation and mental health issues in the form of depression and anxiety" occurred for immigrant students (p. 127). Crul et al. (2017) found that second-generation immigrants learned to work harder even with lack of support from family.

In this study, 48.9% of participants reported they did not feel isolated from their peers at all. From the free responses in the survey, an immigrant participant expressed that "professors were very invested in my success and my cohort members became my friends". Another immigrant participant wrote that communication was good with faculty. The small class sizes and same professors teaching in the program were also positive for immigrant participants. Similarly, non-immigrant participants wrote similar comments about their professors or faculty.

Tinto (1982) commented that the more effort institutions used to support students, the more students will be retained. "Institutions also need to structure and regularize student-faculty interactions so that the less aggressive students will also come into contact with other students and faculty" (Tinto, 1982, p. 697). The Council of Graduate Schools (2013) concluded that "establishing a strong sense of community matters" (p. 91).

Implications

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed method study was to determine barriers immigrant students may encounter when completing their degree. The Council of Graduate Schools (2013) encouraged institutions of higher education (IHE) to seek to understand the differences between population groups, demographics, and other factors that may help employ staff the most effective strategies that will support college students. Good and La Prad (2013) noted that the link between an educated population and

economic prosperity was well-established. A graduate education is required to foster critical thinking skills to solve complex problems and innovation (Wendler et al., 2010).

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) found that jobs requiring a master's degree are expected to grow by almost 17% through 2026, the fastest growth of any education level. Haworth et al. (n.d.) noted a master's degree has become the terminal degree for certain professions such as the business field. The master's degree is also known to be a prerequisite for leadership positions in many fields such as business, education, engineering, and nursing.

Cohen (2012) found that a master's education is a critical part of graduate education at IHEs. The Council of Graduate Schools (2017) found that 83% of degrees awarded in 2016 were master's degrees. Although there were different factors that may influence master's students from completing their program within a certain time frame, there has been a lack of research analyzing those factors. Investing the appropriate resources may help master's students overcome personal and academic obstacles that may hinder their ability to persist toward graduation (Cohen, 2012).

The researcher may conclude that employers were supportive of immigrant participants pursuing a master's degree frequently, 53.8%. However, immigrants felt that job responsibilities interfered with school 46.2% occasionally and 15.4% frequently. One conclusion the researcher may draw may be that the individuals were enrolled in a program not related to their career, therefore, employers may not have supported them as much as participants would have wanted.

The researcher may conclude that family frequently fully supported (69.2%) immigrant participants, 76.3% of female participants, and 73.3% of male participants. The family played a role in decreasing barriers allowing participants to focus on academic pursuits. Interview participants noted their family supported them with providing childcare, supporting their need to study, and offering financial support.

Similar to immigrant undergraduate students, graduate students also encountered challenges in paying for college and meeting academic requirements which are much greater in intensity (Lara & Nava, 2018). In this study, some of the participants noted that there were very little scholarship opportunities for master's level students which became a financial hardship for them. Ampaw and Jaeger (2011) found in their study that the type of funding students received to attend graduate school influenced their decision to enroll and persist toward graduation. In this study, over 87% of participants were employed part-time or full-time while attending graduate school. The other 13% did not respond to this question. The researcher may conclude that financial support may be a barrier.

As contained in the results of this study, all support from employers, family, and university personnel increased the participants' ability to persist toward degree completion. Fakunmoju et al. (2016) found similar findings in their study regarding the burden and responsibility that comes from working full-time and caring for a family may be obstacles causing graduate students to possibly not persist toward graduation. In this study, family barriers were related to caring for children. None of the participants indicated having to care for elderly parents.

It is known that graduate students encounter many obstacles that may impede their ability to finish their degree, especially those who have to work in addition to attending school. Similar to non-immigrant participants, second-generation immigrants encountered similar barriers and received similar supports. However, Lara and Nava (2018) suggested that family, peers, and social justice commitments have an important role in influencing immigrant students to enter graduate programs. Orupabo et al. (2019) found that social supports from parents, siblings, other extended family members and friends had subsequent impact on overcoming challenges and experiences while pursuing higher education for immigrant students. Immigrant students felt supported and encouraged when they received guidance from people in their social environments who

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guided them through higher education (Orupabo et al., 2019). Similar to the study done by Orupabo et al. (2019), this study found that social supports from peers have an important role in encouraging second-generation immigrant graduate students to keep persisting in their educational journey.

Access to external resources will help a graduate student thrive in their educational journey (Andrews, 2017). External resources may include support from family and employers (Connolly, 2016; Lee et al., 2013). Andrews (2017) found in his self-reflection that "success has to be defined as something much deeper, the ability to persevere in the midst of challenge. The ability to take one more step no matter the circumstances" (p. 19).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study contributed to the current body of research by determining obstacles second-generation immigrant graduate students may face when completing a master's degree. This study was limited in generalizability as it only included data from one university and the number of participants was low due to the coronavirus pandemic, (COVID-19). A future study could expand this research by including immigrant master's students from other universities and their college pathways. College pathways may include immigrant students initial college experience at a community college or an university.

A sample of first-generation immigrants should be included as participants in this study. Researchers may determine differences may be found in the responses compared to second-generation immigrants. The participants for this study were second-generation immigrants or non-immigrants. Future research could focus on the race and or ethnicity of immigrant students to determine if there are differences between the success rates of students who immigrated from different countries. In addition, future researchers should also study the perceptions of professors and department personnel to gain insight

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regarding student-university relationships and the factors that support persistence (Billion, 2019).

Conclusion

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed method study was to determine obstacles immigrant students may face when completing their degree. The Council of Graduate Schools (2013) have observed the challenge of defining a master's degree due to the wide range of programs and their requirements. The factors that cause graduate students to persist have not been well-understood along with understanding students themselves. The Council of Graduate School's pilot study offered a framework related to the types of questions universities may use to help determine student perceptions about personal and program factors that contribute to their persistence toward completing the master's degree.

The participants from this study represented four different colleges although the majority of participants were from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities. There were slightly different requirements within the master's programs at the university including undergraduate grade point average, credit hours needed for graduation, and thesis requirements. Glazer-Raymo (2005) found in their research study that completing a thesis was not a requirement across all disciplines. The Council of Graduate Schools (2013) confirmed the requirement of a master's thesis was another variable that makes quantifying programs difficult.

Low student enrollment within each program made the creation of a cohort framework difficult. Most participants were not a member of a cohort. Several participants suggested adopting the cohort model for program improvement. A cohort model hamay allow a participant time to enhoy the comradre of supports received from fellow classmates.

The flexibility of online courses may have made other commitments such as family and employment more manageable. Learning platforms may have caused frustration for some students even though the flexibility was desired (Bussell et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2013).

Concerning gender, there were more females than males who participated in this study. Females felt a slightly higher percentage (76.3%) of supports from family more frequently than males (73.3%), and females 5(3.4%) felt more frequently supported by employers compared to males (46.7%). However, males (73.4%) felt more frequently supported by their program compared to females (64.4%). Interesting to note was that females (22%) had a higher percentage of interferences than males (13.3%) with family responsibilities. Interferences from job responsibilities were similar for females(16.9%) and males (16.7%). In looking at the literature, prediction of persistence has been mixed when it comes to looking at gender. The Council of Graduade Schools (2013) reported the existence of gender differences in graduation rates for STEM and MBA programs. This study found that more males graduated with a master's degree from the College of Business and College of Engineering and Science. However, more females graduated from the College of Education and College of Human Sciences and Humanities. Of the 38 graduates from the College of Human Sciences and Humanities, 29 were females. Fifteen of the 16 graduates from the College of Education were females. Ampaw and Jaeger (2011) found higher completion rates for women when a greater percent in the cohort were also women.

This study was successful in obtaining perceptions of master's graduates, both immigrants and non-immigrants. However, major differences in barriers encountered or supports received were not found among the two groups. The lack of differences may be due to the fact that immigrant participants were second-generation and grew up in the United States.

Life events that negatively influence an individual's participation in graduate school may occur any time and may prove to be the tipping point for some students. Participants credited their own level of motivation and family supports as key to successful completion of their program. Crul et al. (2017) found in their study of second-generation immigrants that they learned to overcome low support from external factors at a young age by choosing to work harder. The Council of Graduate Schools (2013) found that individual motivation and family support were leading factors in successful degree completion.

This study found that participants who had a supportive relationship with professors or faculty had a positive academic experience and graduated with the master's degree. Professors who take the time to build relationships with students may be able to support students by providing resources or be a source of encouragement to help persist.

A discussion about why individuals enroll in graduate school should be recognized. Participants were focused on their future with a higher percentage focusing on future employers rather than fulfilling the requirements of current employers as one of the reasons for enrollment. Awareness of the reasons for enrollment may help the university for a variety of reasons. First, offering relevant courses that applies to an individual's career interest may increase their chance of staying enrolled. Second, when professors assign projects, if appropriate, allow students to focus the assignment on a topic that is related to their career goals. Third, encourage students to use university resources so they may become familiar with available information. Some of the interview participants noted that they were not aware of university resources that were available to them as a student.

Findings from this study support the research regarding the factors that help graduate students to persist toward obtaining a master's degree. Participants from the interviews indicated they frequently felt supported by their employers, family, and

university personnel with some barriers they worked through to achieve their goals of

earning a master's degree. Barriers were not a deterrent for this group of participants.

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APPENDIX A:

SURVEY COVER LETTER

Dear Alum,

Greetings! You are being solicited to complete the Completion and Attrition in Master's Programs: Factors Affecting Degree Completion Survey (LINK) because you graduated from the University of Houston at Clear Lake (UHCL) within the last five years. The purpose of this survey is to determine the factors that help or hinder your ability to graduate with your degree from UHCL. The data obtained from this study will help UHCL better develop programs that support the personal and educational needs of future graduate students.

Please try to answer all questions, including the open-ended questions. Completing the survey is voluntary. This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and your responses will be kept completely confidential. No obvious undue risks will be endured, and you may stop your participation at any time. In addition, you will also not benefit directly from your participation in the study.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and your willingness to participate in this study is implied if you proceed with completing the survey. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me by email.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey to support future UHCL graduate students!

Sincerely,

Chenda Moore, M.Ed.
Doctoral Student
Moorec1335@uhcl.edu

This is the link to the survey if the link in the body of the letter does not work:
https://uhcl.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6EHXWPhG0CsL19r?fbclid=IwAR1xjYg7l Mk3v0MnopaJh6hvPEAeTfSfrrqR-cGeFr5XhmYe7fbvrUJnpBo

APPENDIX B:

INFORMED CONSENT: ADULT RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

You are being asked to participate in the research project described below. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate, or you may decide to stop your participation at any time. Should you refuse to participate in the study or should you withdraw your consent and stop participation in the study, your decision will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. You are being asked to read the information below carefully and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

Title: Second-Generation Immigrant Graduate Student's Persistence Toward Graduation:Factors Affecting Their Ability to Complete a Program of Study

Student Investigator(s): Chenda T. Moore, COE, Doctoral Candidate

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Renee Lastrapes

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed method study is to determine the factors that help or hinder a graduate student's ability to complete their program of study. The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed method study is to determine the factors that help or hinder a graduate student's ability to complete their program of study. factors that help or hinder a graduate student's ability to complete their program of study. The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed method study is to determine the

Procedures: You will participate in an interview lasting 15-30 minutes. The interview will be conducted by phone or Zoom. I will record the interview. You will participate in an interview lasting 15-30 minutes. The interview will be conducted by phone or Zoom. I will record the interview. You will participate in an interview lasting 15-30 minutes. The interview will be conducted by phone or Zoom. I will r

Expected Duration: The research will begin October 2020 and last through March 2021.The research will begin October 2020 and last through March 2021.The research will begin October 2020 and last through March 2021.

Risks of Participation:

There should not be any physical, psychological injury, or social harm from participation in the survey. All surveys are completed by individual participants voluntarily and anonymously. There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study.

Benefits to the Subject

There is no direct benefit received from your participation in this study, but your participation will help the investigator(s) to better understand how to support future graduate students with their personal and educational needs. The university will have more research information to equip and support future graduate students.

Confidentiality of Records

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. The data collected from the study will be used for educational and publication purposes, however, you will not be identified by name. For federal audit purposes, the participant's documentation for this research project will be maintained and safeguarded by the Faculty Sponsor for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. After that time, the participant's documentation may be destroyed.

Compensation

There is no financial compensation to be offered for participation in the study.

Investigator's Right to Withdraw Participant

The investigator has the right to withdraw you from this study at any time.

Contact Information for Questions or Problems

If you have additional questions during the course of this study about the research or any related problem, you may contact the Student Researcher, <u>Chenda Moore</u> by telephone at ████████████ or by email at <u>moorec1335@uhcl.edu</u> The Faculty Sponsor, <u>Dr. Renée E. Lastrapes</u> may be contacted by telephone at ████████████ or email at <u>lastrapes@uhcl.edu</u>

Signatures

Your signature below acknowledges your voluntary participation in this research project. Such participation does not release the investigator(s), institution(s), sponsor(s) or granting agency(ies) from their professional and ethical responsibility to you. By signing the form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, and explanation of risks or benefits have been explained to you. You have been allowed to ask questions and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You have been told who to contact if you have additional questions. You have read this consent form and voluntarily agree to participate as a subject in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting the Principle Investigator or Student Researcher/Faculty Sponsor. You will be given a copy of the consent form you have signed.

Subject's printed name:

_____

Signature of Subject:

_____

Date:

_____

Using language that is understandable and appropriate, I have discussed this project and the items listed above with the subject.

Printed name and title: <u>Chenda Moore, Doctoral Candidate</u>

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: ___September 20, 2020___

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE (UHCL) COMMITTEE FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS HAS REVIEWED AND APPROVED THIS PROJECT. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UHCL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (281.283.3015). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT UHCL ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

(FEDERALWIDE ASSURANCE #FWA00004068

MASTER'S COMPLETION SURVEY

1. When did you graduate from the university? Please indicate the month and year (MM/YYYY).

2. In what program were you enrolled? Please select the college in which you were enrolled.
    o College of Business
    o College of Education
    o College of Human Sciences and Humanities
    o College of Science and Engineering

3. When did you first enrolled in this program? Please indicate the month and year (MM/YYYY).

4. In total, how many semesters were you enrolled in the program?

5. While enrolled, were you attending the program primarily full-time or part-time?
    o Full-time
    o Part-time
    o Mix (some semesters part-time, some full-time)

6. What were the THREE main reasons you enrolled in your master's program?
   (Check up to three responses.)
    o To improve my skills and knowledge
    o To increase opportunities for promotion, advancement, and/or pay
    o To meet requirements of my current employer
    o To meet requirements of a prospective employer
    o To learn more about something in which I am particularly interested
    o Best option available at the time
    o To facilitate a job/career change
    o To use as a stepping stone for even more education (e.g., Ph.D.)
    o Other *(please specify):*

7. When you were enrolled in the program, how often did you feel that: (Frequently, Occasionally, Not at all, N/A)
    o Your job responsibilities interfered with school
    o Your family responsibilities interfered with school
    o Your employer supported your academic aspirations
    o You were treated unfairly at school because of your gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion

o   Your family fully supported your academic aspirations

8. When you were enrolled in the program, how often did you feel: (Frequently, Occasionally, Not at all, N/A)
    o   Isolated from other students in the program
    o   Disengaged/disinterested in school
    o   Supported by a network of students in the program
    o   Interested and engaged in your educational program
    o   Worried about your mental or physical health
    o   That your program would help you meet your career goals

9. If you did not complete your program in the amount of time you expected, to what extent did the following factors contribute to extending your college experience? (Options: To a large extent; To a moderate extent; To a small extent; Not at all)
    o   Lack of adequate financial support
    o   Lack of support from faculty
    o   Pressure of outside employment (long hours, conflicts with employer, job-related travel)
    o   Difficulty of coursework or other program requirements
    o   Program structure
    o   Health-related issues (illness of self or family member)
    o   Lack of family support
    o   Family constraints (addition to the family, difficulties arranging child care)
    o   Distance of school from work or home
    o   Lack of peer support
    o   Lack of institutional or program supports
    o   Being a part-time student

10. Did you visit the campus before enrolling in the program?
    o   Yes, I visited the campus before enrolling in the master's program (Go to the next question)
    o   No, but I attended this institution as an undergraduate (Go to the next question)
    o   No, skip the next question

11. To what extent did this influence your decision to enroll in the program?
    o   Not at all
    o   To a small extent
    o   To a moderate extent
    o   To a great extent

12. While you were enrolled in your program, were you working for pay at or outside the university (excluding assistantships, fellowships, or traineeships)?
    o   Yes, for the university (Go to the next question)
    o   Yes, for a non-university employer (Go to the next question)
    o   Yes, self-employed (Go to the next question)

o No, not working for pay (Skip the next question)

13. On average, for how many hours per week were you working for pay during a semester?
    o Less than 20 hours per week
    o 20-30 hours per week
    o More than 30 hours per week
    o Don't know (occasional jobs, hours vary)

The next few questions ask about how you financed your education (including tuition, fees, books, living expenses, and health insurance.)

14. Indicate the LARGEST source of financial support for your master's program. (Choose only one.)
    o Assistantship, fellowship, scholarship, grant, traineeship
    o Paid internship, clinical residency
    o Loans (any source)
    o Personal earnings or savings
    o Family earnings or savings
    o Employer reimbursement/assistance
    o Support from a foreign government
    o Other (please specify):

15. Indicate the SECOND LARGEST source of financial support for your master's program. (Choose only one.)
    o Assistantship, fellowship, scholarship, grant, traineeship
    o Paid internship, clinical residency
    o Loans (any source)
    o Personal earnings or savings
    o Family earnings or savings
    o Employer reimbursement/assistance
    o Support from a foreign government
    o Other (please specify):

16. Approximately how much money have you PERSONALLY borrowed in student loans for your UNDERGRADUATE education?
    o None
    o $1 - $5,000
    o $5,001 - $20,000
    o $20,001 - $50,000
    o $50,000 and above

17. Approximately how much money have you PERSONALLY borrowed in student loans for your GRADUATE education?
    o None

- o $1 - $5,000
- o $5,001 - $20,000
- o $20,001 - $50,000
- o $50,000 and above

18. Were you guaranteed financial support at a time you were admitted to the program?
    - o Yes, for more than one year
    - o Yes, for the first year only
    - o No

19. To what extent was financing your education a challenge?
    - o To a great extent
    - o To a moderate extent
    - o To a small extent
    - o Not at all

20. Did you have an advisor?
    - o Yes
    - o No
    - o Don't know

21. How frequently did you meet with your advisor(s) to formally discuss your academic progress?
    - o More than once a month
    - o Monthly
    - o Once a semester
    - o Once a year
    - o Never

22. To what extent was the feedback provided by your advisor useful?
    - o To a great extent
    - o To a moderate extent
    - o To a small extent
    - o Not at all

23. How helpful was your advisor in supporting your career goals?
    - o Very helpful
    - o Helpful
    - o Of little help
    - o Not helpful at all
    - o Don't know

24. How satisfied were you with the quality of advising?
    - o Very satisfied

- o Satisfied
- o Dissatisfied
- o Very dissatisfied

25. Which of the following would have improved the advising experience? (Check all that apply.)
    - o More time
    - o Better quality time
    - o More/better career/professional guidance
    - o More/better research guidance
    - o More interest and encouragement
    - o More structured feedback
    - o Other (please explain):

26. Did your program or department hold an orientation when you enrolled in this master's program?
    - o Yes, and I attended the orientation
    - o Yes, but I did not attend
    - o No
    - o Don't Know

27. Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about your program. (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, N/A)
    - o Requirements of my program were presented in clear, written form
    - o The faculty were helpful and interested in students
    - o Academic milestones and timelines were clearly outlined
    - o Courses were available when I needed them
    - o The program was well-structured in terms of sequence of courses
    - o Overall, the courses provided useful information
    - o Some courses or components of the program were a waste of time
    - o The faculty were generally supportive and available
    - o Requirements and expectations for assistantships were clearly articulated (for example, in terms of time required, time off, workload, sick time, etc.)

28. Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of teaching in the courses you have taken?
    - o Very satisfied
    - o Satisfied
    - o Dissatisfied
    - o Very dissatisfied

29. Does your program or institution offer the following? If so, did you participate in or use any of the following? (Check one column for each offering. Options: Not offered or don't know; Yes, offered but I did not use/participate in; Yes, offered and I used/participate in)

- Social events for students and faculty
- Speaker series
- Job placement services
- Career counseling
- Ombudsman, grievance procedures, conflict resolution
- Student associations

30. When you were enrolled, did you receive any formal or informal instruction, practice, or professional development in any of the following? (Check "Yes" or "No" for each.
    - Oral communication and presentation skills
    - Writing clearly for different audiences
    - Research methods
    - Working in collaborative groups
    - Conducting independent research/scholarship
    - Project management (e.g., budgeting, staffing, allocation of resources, etc.)
    - Research/professional ethics
    - Teaching skills/methods
    - Preparation for job interviews
    - Preparation for non-academic careers

31. Have you experienced any of the following during the past two years? (Check all that apply.)
    - Marriage or marriage-like relationship
    - Birth/adoption of child(ren)
    - Death of immediate family member or friend
    - Divorce/separation
    - Assumed primary responsibility for a person with illness or other disabling condition
    - Major illness (mental or physical) or other disabling condition
    - Retirement
    - Loss of job
    - None of these

32. What aspects of the program did you like MOST? [free response]

33. What did you like LEAST about your program? [free response]

34. What changes to the program or institution may help students complete the degree in a timely manner? [free response]

35. What is your marital status? (Check only one.)
    - Married or in a marriage-like relationship

- o Living together, unmarried
- o Widowed/Separated/Divorced
- o Never married
- o Prefer not to answer

36. Are you?
    - o Male
    - o Female

37. Not including yourself or your spouse/partner, how many dependents do you have?
    - o 0
    - o 1
    - o 2
    - o 3
    - o 4 or more

38. What is your age? Are you…
    - o Under 25
    - o 25-29
    - o 30-34
    - o 35-50
    - o Older than 50

39. What is your citizenship status?
    - o U.S. Citizen
    - o Non-U.S. Citizen with permanent U.S. resident visa (green card)
    - o Non-U.S. Citizen with temporary visa
    - o Prefer not to answer

40. Are you Hispanic or Latino/Latina
    - o Yes
    - o No

41. What is your racial background?
    - o American Indian/Alaska Native
    - o Asian/Pacific Islander
    - o Black/African American
    - o White
    - o Two or more races

42. Did you or your family immigrate to the United States?
    - o Yes – family
    - o Yes - self
    - o No

43. Would you be willing to participate in an individual interview?
- o   Yes, please include an email address:
- o   No

<center>THANK YOU</center>
<center>Thank you very much for participating in this survey. I appreciate your time and input.</center>
<center>***END OF SURVEY***</center>

APPENDIX D:

CONTENT VALIDITY MATRIX

SURVEY OF FACTORS AFFECTING DEGREE COMPLETION

Research Question	Survey Question(s)
What were the perceived supports from employers, family, or university personnel described by gender?	7-12, 20-28
What were the perceived supports described by immigrant students in completing a master's degree?	7-12, 20-28, 42
What were the perceived barriers that influenced immigrant students and their ability to complete a master's degree?	32-34, 42 Interview Questions

APPENDIX E:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Thank you for taking the survey and agreeing to this interview. Discuss confidentiality.
2. When did you graduate from UHCL with your master's degree?
3. What academic supports were most helpful to you in completing your master's degree?
4. Were there specific offices, advisors, faculty, or other areas that were most helpful to you?
    a. If yes, whom?
    b. What types of supports did they provide that were most helpful to you?
5. Did you know what supports were available to you?
    a. How did you find out about the supports?
    b. If there were supports you did not have access to, what were the barriers that prevented your participation?
    c. What supports do you think were missing that you wish you had access to?
6. What changes to the program or institution may help you complete the degree in a timely manner or within the amount of time you had planned?
7. What advice or wisdom would you give to a new graduate student?
8. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview?