

EMERSON COLLEGE

GRADUATE STUDIES

**Confronting Challenges Facing International Graduate Students: The Impact of Using
Documentary Theatre to tell Their Stories**

A Master's Project

submitted by

Lemar Archer

to the Graduate Faculty of Emerson College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre Education

Emerson College

Boston, Massachusetts

Fall 2023

Acknowledgements

During the compilation of this research project, I have had many useful suggestions, recommendations, and assistance from various individuals. I wish to say a special thank you to them all.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the research committee members for all the support and guidance. My advisor and committee chair, Dr. Bethany Nelson, for her continued guidance, support, and mentorship in assisting me to complete this research. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Dana Adell also for her invaluable feedback, contribution, and assistance. Melissa Bergstrom for your positive feedback and support.

Heartfelt gratitude to Trevis Morgan for your unwavering support, and contributions in providing useful and constructive recommendation and assistance on this research. Many thanks to my friend Waldane Walker for your continued support, encouragement, and positive assistance. I wish to thank my other friends and classmates for their support.

Special thanks to the staff at the Office of International Student Affairs for all the assistance in helping me connect with international students and the great support with my work. I am most grateful to the international students who were involved in this study. Thank you for your time, effort, and this opportunity. Without you this wouldn't be possible. I dedicate this research to you!

Last but not the least, I want to thank my wonderful parents, sisters and other family members for their support and encouragement throughout my study. You are a huge part of my success, and I am grateful for you all. Thank you all!

Abstract

Confronting Challenges Facing International Graduate Students: The Impact of Using Documentary Theatre to tell Their Stories

by

Lemar Archer
Emerson College
Fall 2023

Chair: Bethany Nelson

Substantial research has emphasized the various challenges faced by international graduate students when adjusting to pursuing academic studies in the United States. This qualitative study examines the challenges and experiences of four (4) international graduate students at a U.S. liberal arts college in the northeast. The study further examines the impact of engaging two (2) international students along with myself in the process of devising a documentary theatre performance to tell the stories from these interviews. The paper presents recommendations and suggestions that indicate the importance of U.S. colleges and universities providing needed support for international graduate students' adjustment to the U.S. Recommendations are presented to practitioners and future researchers to continue to explore the use of creative approaches such as devising and documentary theatre to present research and enact change for minority groups.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Table of Contents.....	5
Confronting Challenges Facing International Graduate Students: The Impact of Using Documentary Theatre to tell Their Stories.....	7
The Shape of the Study	8
Methodology.....	12
Review of the Literature	15
International Students in the U.S.....	15
Challenges Faced by International Students	17
Language Barrier	19
Academic Life	21
Lifestyle and Sociocultural Challenges	22
Discrimination	23
What is Documentary Theatre?.....	23
Impact of Documentary Theatre.....	26
The Role of Theatre as Arts-Based Research.....	27
Devised Theatre.....	28
Findings and Discussion	30

Q1: What are the challenges faced by international graduate students studying in a U.S. northeastern liberal arts college?.....	31
Language Barrier	31
Lack of Job Opportunities	33
Adapting to Culture, Norms, and Traditions	35
Q2: What are the impacts of using documentary theatre to tell the stories of the international graduate students' experiences?	40
Joy in Devising Documentary Theatre Performance.....	41
Positive Effects of Performance Experience on Audience	45
Potential Solutions for Students' Issues	50
Suggestions and Recommendations for Future Performance Experience.....	53
Limitations	56
Conclusions.....	57
References.....	60
Appendix A: Informed Consent Form	65
Appendix B: Interview Protocol Questions	70
Appendix C: Documentary Play Script.....	72
Appendix D: Participants Survey.....	94
Appendix E: Audience Survey.....	99

Confronting Challenges Facing International Graduate Students: The Impact of Using Documentary Theatre to tell Their Stories

In 2021 my life changed forever. I went through immeasurable changes and challenges when I left my birth country, Jamaica, to study in the United States as an international graduate student. I shared in my commencement speech in May 2022 for the Master of Arts program that:

“This massive change affected me mentally, emotionally, physically, psychologically, and financially... I have heard a lot about depression but didn’t quite understand it until I realized I was not doing okay, no motivation, loss of interest, overwhelming sadness, insomnia, and after being tested and diagnosed by my doctor that I was experiencing major depression. This was a scary time for me as I have always been okay and in control since I have known myself... This phase of my journey was the hardest and most difficult experience I have undergone thus far in my life.”

From my experience enrolled in a U.S. northeastern liberal arts college I’ve encountered firsthand the various challenges international graduate students deal with during our transition. For me, these included language barrier, language discrimination, financial difficulties, health care challenge, and lack of knowledge to access services, among others. One could say these can often prove to be a challenge for any student but imagine these problems in a land where very little is familiar. These challenges disrupted my studies and increased my overall stress level; I wondered if this was a shared experience amongst my fellow international classmates.

Consequently, I became interested in finding out the shared experiences, as well as other challenges, faced by international graduate students like me. I was also inspired and interested in how I could help in some way to make some change for future international students. Upon a random observation of a group of international graduate students at an International Graduate

Welcome Dinner, I determined that I wasn't the only one facing major acculturation problems. As I sat with a group of girls who I was meeting for the first time, I learned through conversation that these students were also facing self-esteem issues and struggling with positive or negative thoughts. I learned that this was impacting their sociocultural adjustment and ability to establish new friendships.

During the conversation one of the girls asked me if I ever felt like I was trying to fit into the U.S. culture. It was clear from her facial expression and tone that she was struggling during her time here to adjust to the culture. She mentioned that she would always see me smiling and went on to ask me how I stay motivated being here, considering that she was having a hard time doing so. Another student at the table was really concerned and mentioned being stressed and worried about life post-graduation, including job acquisition and U.S. settlement. As the evening progressed, we lamented on how the U.S. culture was very different from our home countries' cultures. This conversation sparked a deeper interest in gathering and sharing these personal experiences that affect international graduate students - hence the birth of this study.

The Shape of the Study

There is an increasing number of international students coming to the U.S. to pursue academic studies and the U.S. is reaping great rewards from it. According to the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA, 2022), international students contributed \$33.8 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2021-2022 academic year and supported more than 335,000 jobs. These totals still fall short of the amount set in the 2018-2019 academic year before the COVID-19 pandemic, when international students generated \$40.5 billion and supported more than 450,000 jobs. (NAFSA, 2022) With international students greatly supporting the U.S. economy and educational institutions, it should be the responsibility of U.S.

colleges and universities to consider the problems and support the needs of international students in their adjustment as little attention is paid to the experiences of international students once they arrive at these institutions.

In my exploration of this topic, I have come to realize that the average person, including my classmates, lecturers, staff members and other Americans in general, is not aware of the deep struggles and challenges international graduate students face. Consequently, this study examines the challenges faced by international graduate students at a U.S. liberal arts college in the northeast, and the impact of devising a documentary theatre performance with international graduate students to tell these stories.

For this study the following research questions were addressed:

Research Question 1

What are the challenges faced by international graduate students studying in a U.S. northeastern liberal arts college?

Research Question 2

What are the impacts of using documentary theatre to tell the stories of the international graduate students' experiences?

I interviewed a sample of international graduate students from different countries on their experiences at a northeastern liberal arts college pursuing different graduate program degrees. The interviews were analyzed and by using quotes and themes from the interviews, a documentary theatre piece was created and devised with international students to educate audiences about the experiences of these international graduate students. Documentary theatre, according to Odendahl-James (2017), "is performance typically built by an individual or

collective of artists from materials such as trial transcripts, written or recorded interviews, newspaper reporting, personal or iconic visual images or video footage, government documents, biographies and autobiographies, even academic papers and scientific research” (para. 1). According to Parenteau (2017), “although the definition is as contested as the term itself, documentary theatre tends to describe theatre that wholly or in part uses existing documentary material as a source for the script, typically without altering its wording” (para. 5).

My intention was to tell these stories through a documentary theatre performance by inviting targeted audience members including lecturers, students both American and international, and staff members of different offices and departments including the Office of International Student Affairs, the Office of Students’ Success and others. This performance incorporated different theatrical forms and techniques, focused on amplifying the voices of international students and in particular graduate students. It was presented through a social justice lens with calls to action that challenged and prompted audience members to find and activate solutions to make a change. It was my intention to also assess the impact of utilizing documentary theatre and devised theatre to tell these stories, affect social justice issues and bring about change. My hope was that if I could share these stories with people, bringing awareness and starting conversations around the issues, then positive changes might come about. It was imperative that individuals be aware of the impact these challenges have on international graduate students’ adjustment and the contributions they can make at their level to allay these challenges.

The significance of this research will be of great value to various stakeholders. First, it will add much needed literature to the knowledge base on the study of the experience of international graduate students, as the undergraduate experience is currently more dominant.

Through my preliminary literature review, I discovered that the conversation around the challenges, and respective methods of navigation, are extremely limited, therefore this exploration of the use of documentary theatre could be benchmark research. The exploration and use of documentary Theatre will be of importance, and an addition to the field of theatre, providing additional sources for literature on documentary and devised theatre. Also, presenting the experience of international students to the education space will further enhance its significance, as administrators of educational institutions will further understand what international graduate students face, thus increasing discourse on mitigation strategies against the highlighted struggles. Administrators will now be able to comprehend to some extent the level of distress the students face, which perhaps will lead to implementation of programs, or even the simple extension of more empathy for international students. Finally, international students themselves will find this research useful, particularly because of the shared experiences included and the way they are brought to life through devised theatre.

Methodology

The aim of this research is to examine the challenges faced by international graduate students at a U.S. liberal arts college in the northeast and the impact of using documentary theatre to tell these stories. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research method was used in gathering and applying data for this study. The study obtained results through interviews, observations, and surveys. Structured interviews were conducted with the participants to investigate their experiences on challenges faced as international graduate students. Field observations were also done to obtain information on international graduate students' experiences and struggles faced. The study utilized surveys which were administered to international graduate students participating in devising the documentary piece and as well as to audience members who witnessed and participated in the performance. This was designed to gather feedback and data on the impact of Documentary Theatre on the sharing and hearing of these stories through the theatre form.

The sample population for this study was composed of international graduate students from a U.S. northeastern liberal arts college. To better understand some of these distinctive experiences, four students from different home countries and different graduate programs were interviewed. Interviews were conducted via ZOOM. All participants completed a consent form before their interview, which explained the purpose of the study and the research goal (See Appendix A for sample of consent form).

I created an interview protocol that included questions related to the academic, cultural, and social adjustments challenges of international students. The participants were asked questions about their transition to the institution and the challenges they faced being both an international student and a graduate student on campus among other questions (See Appendix B

for interview protocol). The interviews were transcribed and coded to find themes among the students' responses. I utilized the coding method of Saldana (2009) of analyzing data and converting them from codes to themes.

Two international students and I then engaged in a process of devising a theatre performance based on the stories from the interviews, which was composed as a documentary theater play (See Appendix C for script). According to Odendahl-James (2017), documentary theatre "is performance typically built by an individual or collective of artists from materials such as trial transcripts, written or recorded interviews, newspaper reporting, personal or iconic visual images or video footage, government documents, biographies and autobiographies, even academic papers and scientific research" (para. 1). According to Parenteau (2017), "although the definition is as contested as the term itself, documentary theatre tends to describe theatre that wholly or in part uses existing documentary material as a source for the script, typically without altering its wording" (para. 5). Over the course of three weeks, the participants and I devised the performance together before presenting it to an audience.

Participants who engaged in the devising of the theatre performance were asked to complete open-ended surveys throughout the process and at the end of the performance which documented their experience and involvement in the creation and showcasing of the documentary piece (See Appendix D for surveys). These surveys were analyzed using Saldana's (2009) method of identifying common themes and patterns from coded data from the participants' experiences in the production process. I also made observations throughout the process to gather data on the impact of devising the documentary theatre performance with these international students.

Audience members (including lecturers, students both American and international, and staff members of different offices and departments) completed an anonymous mixed questionnaire in which they shared their feedback on the experience of watching and participating in the theatre experience at the end (See Appendix E for survey). The audience also engaged in small group discussions at two different moments during the performance to find possible solutions for two challenges highlighted in the performance. They also engaged in a post-performance talkback and sharing. During the post-performance talkback and sharing session audience members were invited on stage to share the solutions they had discussed in their groups. Following this, the audience members shared their feedback, questions, and recommendations. This data was analyzed to identify common themes and patterns in their experiences of participating and watching the performance.

To provide anonymity for the participants, each has been given a pseudonym. All data collected was kept confidential and stored securely using password-protected databases. Identifying information was removed from qualitative data transcripts to ensure participants' anonymity.

Review of the Literature

International Students in the U.S.

Like me, a great number of tertiary level international students study outside their home country every year, making use of the expansive education and career opportunities. According to Akanwa (2015), historically international students have sought educational opportunities in countries other than their own with the intention of getting advanced education that is capable of making them exceptional among their peers upon returning home. The U.S. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2016, as cited in Kaya, J., 2020) affirmed that “studying overseas is a high-impact practice characterized by enriching educational experiences that can be life-changing” (p. 126). This exchange between international students and host countries has positive outcomes for both parties. Kaya’s (2020) study discussed that:

both international students and host countries can benefit from the enriched learning and social environment that results from intercultural interaction. International students often become sources for variations of linguistic, cultural, and educational diversity sought by higher education institutions especially in present society (p. 126).

International students are largely valuable to U.S. educational institutions bringing awareness and appreciation to different cultures.

The United States is regarded as the top destination for international students worldwide. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2022), “over the years, the numbers of international students enrolling in the U.S. has been steadily increasing” (para. 9). Bjork et al. (2020) also mentioned that “the number of international students studying in the United States has steadily increased over the past 25 years” (p. 554). The number of international students in

the United States set an all-time high in the 2018/2019 academic year, the fourth consecutive year with more than one million international students: a total number of 1,095,299 (IIE, 2019). Based on the data, the COVID-19 global pandemic greatly impacted international students studying in the U.S. in 2020. In the 2020/2021 academic year 914,095 international students pursued studies at U.S. colleges and universities, a decrease of 15% from the previous academic year (IIE, 2021). However, the report shows a strong rebound in new international student enrollments following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the 2020/2021 academic year. According to IIE (2022), 948,519 international students from more than 200 places of origin studied at U.S. higher education institutions during the 2021/2022 academic year, a 4% increase compared to the previous academic year. This demonstrates the United States' ongoing commitment to international educational exchange.

International students continue to have a tremendous impact on the U.S. in all aspects. According to Lyken-Segosebe (2017), “during their stay in the USA, international students create an impact both economically and educationally for their host country. U.S. colleges and universities depend on international students to contribute to diversity and culture of their campus and increase enrollments” (p. 66). Bjork et al. (2020) noted that “institutions of higher education often eagerly highlight the benefits of international education, in terms of the positive contributions that students from other countries bring to the host campuses” (p. 554).

International students significantly impact the U.S. economy by contributing financially. IIE (2016) reported that:

International students contribute more than \$35 billion to the U.S. economy, through spending on tuition and living expenses, including room and board, books and supplies, transportation, health insurance, and support for accompanying family members. Their

economic impact is also made in terms of tax payments and U.S. exports in the form of U.S.-trained foreign professionals.

Along with the financial assets that international students bring to the U.S. they also bring their knowledge and skills, culture, and heritage. According to IIE (2021), “international students are central to the free flow of ideas, innovation, economic prosperity, and peaceful relations between nations.” Lyken-Segosebe 2017 found that “these economic benefits are complemented by educational benefits because international students may bring cultural diversity to a campus, a diversity of viewpoints to the classroom, and an international or comparative focus to learning” (p. 66).

Challenges Faced by International Students

Despite the educational and economic potential international students have in the United States, they encounter a myriad of challenges during their stay. The Collins Dictionary defines challenge as something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination (“Challenge,” n.d.). Al-Sharideh and Goe describe adjustment in this sense as a “transitional process that unfolds over time as students learn to cope with the exigencies of the university environment” (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998, as cited in Lyken-Segosebe, 2017, p. 67). According to Okai (2020), “students perceive a challenge when their actual experiences do not match their expectations. International students expect a study abroad education to offer them a higher quality education than what they would receive in their country of origins” (p.3).

There is no doubt that students pursuing education in colleges and universities will face adjustment problems, however international students experience unique problems beyond the typical challenges of tertiary level experience.

Many incoming college students, both domestic and international, experience psychological difficulties that may result from transitions such as leaving their hometowns, living in new environments, and encountering strangers. Moreover, international students face additional challenges such as social, cultural differences and language barriers (Mayhew et al., 2016; Pedersen et al., 2016; Cho & Yu, 2015 as cited in Katsumoto & Bowman 2021, p. 345).

Okai (2020) highlighted in her research that:

The first and foremost challenge every international student experience is the cumbersome visa application process and rigorous background security checks by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. After clearing the first hurdle, international students face a series of challenges in settling and adjusting to their new environment (p.4).

According to Lyken-Segosebe (2017),

...on arrival into the USA, international students need to find a place to live, get a social security number, and get a driver's license, and learn how to use public transportation. Married students need to find a school for their children or help their spouse find a job (p. 67).

Kaya (2020) mentions that “navigation of this new world is often the responsibility that each international student must take individually since far less attention is paid to the experiences of international students once they arrive at the host institution” (p. 125).

Several researchers have identified a number of academic and non-academic challenges for international students visiting the U.S. According to Lyken-Segosebe (2017), “international

students generally tend to experience a magnification of common student problems coming to the American campus. These problems relate to their initial transition, academic life, social life, and psychological experiences” (p. 67). Based on the recent study done by Rodríguez et al. (2019), the challenges international students face when transitioning to graduate school include language barriers, moving to a new city, and adjusting to academic expectations. Students often struggle with the norms and expectations of schoolwork, social life, and understanding different aspects of the institution and the United States. According to Watson & Barton (2020):

International students' levels of distress have increased over the past two decades due to several reasons including financial and lack of culturally appropriate support which often leads to a limited sense of belonging. International students are at an increased risk of mental health problems because of language differences and pressure to adjust to unfamiliar environments. Although students have access to university support such as face-to-face and online counseling when experiencing mental health issues, many students delay in seeking help because they feel embarrassed, afraid, and anxious (p. 102).

The challenges that international students encounter are experienced at different stages in the transitional and adjustment process. Some of the main challenges are:

Language Barrier

Based on the literature, language barrier is reported to be one of the major hurdles for international student adjustment in the United States. Rodríguez et al. (2019) stated that:

One of the most challenging elements of their transition to the institution was the language barrier in both academic and sociocultural contexts. In the academic context,

low level of English proficiency can impact assignment quality, ability to understand classroom lectures, and difficulty with oral and written exams. Socially, language barriers can prevent students from making friends and interacting with the local community (p. 51).

According to Bjork et al. (2020), international students faced “difficulty expressing themselves fluently in the host language; unfamiliarity with local idioms and limited understanding of the local culture can all undermine visiting students’ attempts to develop friendships with domestic students” (p. 556). According to Chennamsetti (2020), “the lack of confidence in language competency causes anxiety and stress for many students, thus hindering psychological and sociocultural adjustment. English deficiency is a constant stress causing factor, preventing international students from engaging socially, thus alienating them from social gatherings” (p. 250). Rodríguez et al. (2019) further noted that:

language barriers can be particularly difficult inside and outside the classroom. Even though most admissions offices check English language competency for international students, many students are not used to taking courses in English and can have difficulty adjusting to the language (p. 50).

Chennamsetti, 2020 found that “further, language deficiency hinders classroom participation, understanding assignment requirements, performance in written and oral assignments and academic achievement, leading to higher levels of stress” (p. 250). This can be more challenging for students from East Asian countries such as South Korea, China, and Taiwan. According to Khanal and Gaulee (2019), “students whose first language is not English encounter socio-linguistic complications and challenges while taking university courses” (p. 567). Rodríguez et al. (2019) reported that international students had difficulty with being able to

understand fast-talking Americans delivering important information, as well as finding apt words to express themselves in a culturally effective manner.

Academic Life

Another challenge international students faced transitioning to the U.S. was navigating the academic culture and pedagogical differences. While educational stress affects all students, international students' encounters with a new education culture and language would be more intense. Rodríguez et al. (2019), in their study, expressed that international students experienced confusion in navigating the academic culture and identified a difference between their expectations and the reality of university life and the teaching style of their host country. Lyken-Segosebe (2017) also stated that international students encounter challenges "getting used to teaching and curriculum differences and developing relationships with advisors and professors" (p.67). "Classes in the United States are different from what many students are used to in their home countries" (Khanal & Gaulee 2019, p. 567). Bjork et al. (2020) pointed out in their study that "pupils who have previously been educated in schools where lecture is the predominant form of instruction must adjust to more interactive classrooms and those who do not alter their behavior may be labeled as passive or surface learners" (p. 556). International students have to spend time adjusting themselves and becoming accustomed with these new styles of learning in order to navigate their new environment.

"Academics in Western cultures tend to regard international students as lacking the ability to analyze difficult texts and to develop logical arguments of their own" (Fox, 1994, as cited in Bjork et al., 2020, p. 556). Khanal and Gaulee (2019) mentioned in their study that "international students from Confucian cultures are sometimes stereotyped as procrastinators, uninterested, intentionally isolated, or sometimes even characterized as inactive learners who

lack critical thinking skills” (p. 567). These findings indicate that international students experience numerous challenges within the educational sphere that may impact their transition.

Lifestyle and Sociocultural Challenges

Along with the challenges affecting the educational domain, international students also have difficulties adjusting to a new culture and creating a new social life. According to the findings identified by Rodríguez et al. (2019), “one of the main difficulties international graduate students faced was the decentralization of information concerning immigration and academics prior to and during their transition to the United States” (p. 55). Watson and Barton (2020) also found that international students face “the lack of knowledge to access services. Therefore, the need to adapt to unfamiliar environments and conditions means that these students are at increased risk of developing mental health issues” (p. 102). Rodríguez et al.’s (2019) study also revealed that:

For the students who were new to the United States, American cultural norms such as taxes and tipping were confusing and challenging to get used to at first. All participants also expressed confusion and frustration about finding affordable housing, signing a lease, and navigating the healthcare system. While students did not express that any of these elements contributed to a significant interruption of their life, it was clear that little things like these added to the acculturative stress they faced overall (p. 57).

Acculturative stress according to Nickerson (2023) is the psychological distress that can come from the process of acculturation.

Rodríguez et al. (2019) also indicated that “among the many difficulties these students faced during the transition to a different culture were included the weather differences, food

differences, academic and social differences, homesickness, loneliness, pressure, language barriers, and the reluctance to seek help” (p. 53).

“When individuals transition to a new environment, they seek social support by cultivating new friendships. The absence of social support increases feelings of hopelessness and stress and causes them to feel lonelier and more homesick” (Rudd 1990; Leong, 2015, as cited in Chennamsetti 2020, p. 251). These stresses cause students to often encounter psychological strain and express feelings of isolation, rejection, loneliness and stress. Rodríguez et al. (2019) noted that “sociocultural stressors can be difficult for students to overcome and may often leave students feeling lonely and isolated” (p. 51).

Discrimination

Another challenge that international students may face is discrimination. Rodríguez et al. (2019) stated that “discrimination may manifest in the form of feelings of inferiority, direct verbal insults, discrimination when seeking employment and physical attacks such as having objects thrown at them” (p. 52). Smith and Khawaja (2011) noted that “international students from Asia, Africa, India, Latin America, and the Middle East reported significant discrimination compared to domestic students or European international students, ranging from feelings of inferiority, direct verbal insults, discrimination when seeking employment, and physical attacks (objects thrown)” (p. 704). Katsumoto and Bowman (2021) further submitted that “international students who are racial minorities may encounter various forms of discrimination due to their perceived race and nationality” (p. 346). Rodríguez et al. (2019) also noted that “experiences of discrimination can have a detrimental impact on international students and have been linked with poor psychological well-being and depression” (p. 52).

What is Documentary Theatre?

According to Odendahl-James (2017), documentary theatre “is performance typically built by an individual or collective of artists from historical and/or archival materials such as trial transcripts, written or recorded interviews, newspaper reporting, personal or iconic visual images or video footage, government documents, biographies and autobiographies, even academic papers and scientific research” (para. 1). According to Parenteau (2017) “although the definition is as contested as the term itself, documentary theatre tends to describe theatre that wholly or in part uses existing documentary material as a source for the script, typically without altering its wording” (para. 5). Documentary theatre has been around for many years now. It can be traced back to the 1930s. According to Gardner (2021):

Documentary theatre has a long and rich theatrical heritage. The Living Newspaper plays of the 1930s, which grew from the Federal Theatre Project to create employment during the Great Depression, are often cited as early examples of the form in the U.S. (p.13).

Odendahl-James (2017) stated that “if we mark the start of American documentary performance history in the early 1930s, it is easy to see the centrality of social and political crises to its content focus and aesthetic properties” (para. 3). According to Gardner (2021), “just as the last 25 years have seen a rise in reality TV, so in theatre the documentary form has become increasingly ubiquitous on our stages” (p. 13). According to Gröndahl (2017):

Although they are no new phenomenon, different forms of documentary theatre have become unprecedentedly popular in the early 2000s. Instead of a fixed genre, there seems to be a variety of different practices of using recorded speech, authentic documents, and witnesses as the primary, if not exclusive, material for the scripts (p. 72).

Documentary theatre can also take different forms and practices of creating theatre using documentary materials. According to Odendahl-James (2017), documentary theatre is “also

sometimes called docudrama, ethnodrama, verbatim theatre, tribunal theatre, theatre of witness, or theatre of fact” (para. 1). Parenteau (2017) highlighted that the “alternative labels currently in circulation for the term documentary theatre include investigative theatre, verbatim theatre, and ethnodrama” (para. 5) The study by Parenteau (2017) documented that:

Investigative theatre entered the lexicon thanks to the Civilians, a Brooklyn-based theatre company founded in 2001. Calling it an artistic practice rooted in the process of creative inquiry, where it brings artists into dynamic engagement with the subject of their work; the artists look outward in pursuit of pressing questions, often engaging with individuals and communities in order to listen, make discoveries, and challenge habitual ways of knowing. The ethos of investigative theatre extends into production, inviting audiences to be active participants in the inquiry before, during, and after the performance (para. 6).

Ethnodrama, according to Schipper (2010), “consists of analyzed and dramatized significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries, or other written artifacts. Characters in an ethnodrama are generally the research participants portrayed by actors, but the actual researchers and participants themselves may be cast members” (p. 502). According to Gröndahl (2017), verbatim “means in the exact words, word for word, because the spoken or written documents are often repeated in their original form in detail” (p. 72). Parenteau (2017) also describes verbatim theatre as the “practice of constructing a play from the speech of people interviewed about a given topic” (para, 8). However, Aune (2017) describes verbatim as the “process by which an interview or conversation transcript is processed into a stage text” (p. 245). Gröndahl (2017) stated that “Anna Deavere Smith is, undoubtedly, one of the most prominent verbatim artists having dealt, for instance, with ethnic riots and debates on American health care” (p. 72).

Impact of Documentary Theatre

According to Aune (2017), documentary theatre opens up a way to recognize and investigate the breadth of human experience by exercising and demonstrating reverence and respect by letting the interviewee express themselves through the actor. Gröndahl (2017) stated that a “documentary performance tries to simultaneously give verifiable information and heightened subjective experiences. This synthesis gives documentary theatre its strength because it can turn blunt factual knowledge into absorbing narratives that enable the spectator to identify with the emotions and attitudes of other individuals” (p. 91). Eldhose and Das (2015) state that:

Documentary theatre purports to be more ‘real’ in presenting words that are originally spoken by the people being represented. In documentary theatre the fragmented pieces of historical events or personal experiences or documents (written, audio and video) are intertwined as characters’ dialogues that finally form a philosophical understanding among the audience (p. 492).

According to Gröndahl (2017), the form activates its audience differently from traditional drama. It places the spectator in the role of a conversational partner to whom the characters confide and who thus feels personally involved in their dilemmas and linking the word to their own experiences. Aune (2017) added that “the artist makes the material available and engaging through a re-contextualizing process in which the words and expressions of the interview subject are highlighted and reflected upon in a theatrical form” (p. 256). Gröndahl (2017) also mentioned that “when the spectators live through these acts of re-contextualization, they also add their personal memories, emotions and attitudes to the process of meaning making and interpretation” (p. 75).

According to Parenteau (2017), a documentary play “can be impactful in that we know what we’re seeing in front of us is a fiction but, because it’s happening, we experience it as real, and that does make us empathize differently, since we have had those experiences. That is why it can be something that pivots your life in a different direction” (p. 25). Gröndahl (2017) noted that documentary theatre is a “radical form of illusion based on different kinds of credibility techniques, whose purpose is to make the audience believe in the authenticity of the performance” (p. 76). Gardner (2021) endorsed that “whether highlighting injustice, campaigning on social issues or amplifying unheard voices, documentary and verbatim shows turn theatre into a public forum for examining historical events” (p. 12).

The Role of Theatre as Arts-Based Research

According to Aune (2017), “understood as research, the documentary theatre methodology falls under what is considered art-based research” (p. 242). Watson and Barton (2020) suggested that “there is a growing body of evidence that points towards the importance of the role of arts-based practice in reflection and the improvement of health and wellbeing” (p. 103). Aune (2017) also presented that “an art-based research process is a dynamic system of complexity and nuances where the research leader has a variety of artistic, administrative, social and practical functions” (p. 242). Watson and Barton (2020) describe arts-based research as a “method designed to enlarge human understanding and enable an individual to secure an empathic participation in the lives of others and in the situations studied” (p. 103). Watson and Barton (2020) also highlighted the idea that:

arts-based research uses arts approaches such as dance, drama, song, poetry, and visual arts to assist people in understanding, examining and reflecting on their experiences, and uses stories, images, sounds, scenes and other sensory approaches to present research

data These methods are essential to the research process itself and central in formulating the research question, generating data, analyzing data and presenting the research results (p. 103).

Aune (2017) shares that art-based design methods “opened up the opportunity to blend ethnographic methods such as interview and observation with various experimental artistic methods and tools for systematic reflection and documentation” (p. 243). This, according to Weltsek (2021), is “seen as a means for youth to further explore their sense of self within and through community” (p.171). Barton et al. (2019) also posit that:

Arts-based activities contribute to resilience and wellbeing as they provide agency through foregrounding students’ voices and allow participants to access a less invasive and safe way to reflect on self and others. In addition, arts-based activities encourage communication that exposes ideas, emotions and feelings that previously might not have been expressed (p. 111).

Devised Theatre

Walton (2014) defines devised theatre as a “process in which the whole creative team develops a show collaboratively” (para. 1). The main aspect of devised theatre is the collaboration of everyone involved in creating the performance. According to an article by The Magnetic Theatre (2022) devised theatre involves an ensemble coming together with a shared vocabulary or point of inspiration and creates the work as an ensemble, serving as production researchers, designers, and performers. Cooper (2019) shares that this method of theatre takes the premise of artistic collaboration being the heartbeat of live performance, where when the audience experiences the art, when they watch the play, they're seeing the fruit of numerous collaborations across different disciplines. According to The Magnetic Theatre (2022) the

ensemble experiment and move and improvise to create vignettes, which eventually get strung together, either in a narrative form or as moments for the audience to assign their own meaning to. Green-Rogers (2016) stated that “Devised Theatre has become a strong tool in creating conversations within an audience” (para. 4). According to Cooper (2019):

...audiences become the final collaborators because they are the final interpreters. One hundred people watching the same show will come up with one hundred different interpretations of the play because each audience member enters the theatre with their own backstory, with their own baggage and ideals and political views and loves and fears. I think that's really beautiful (para. 15).

According to Green-Rogers (2016) Devised Theatre has become popular over the few decades where many educational and professional theatres are using the techniques of devised theatre to address social issues, create moments of revisionist history, and deconstruct dramatic or other forms of literature.

Findings and Discussion

The outcome of this research has provided insight into the challenges faced by international graduate students at a U.S. northeastern liberal arts college and the impact of devising a documentary theatre performance with international students to tell these stories. The main research questions guiding this inquiry were: What are the challenges faced by international graduate students studying in a U.S. northeastern liberal arts college? And what are the benefits and limitations of using documentary theatre to tell the stories of the international graduate students' experiences?

For this study I interviewed four international graduate students pursuing graduate study degrees in a United States at a liberal arts college. These participants were from Nepal, China, Russia, and Belgium. They were also students of different graduate programs, including Strategic Marketing Communication, Film and Media Art, Interdisciplinary Studies, and Publishing and Writing. The first student was Paul, a master's student in his final year in Interdisciplinary Studies who is originally from Nepal. The second participant was Rosey, a second-year master's student in Film and Media Art who is originally from China. The third participant was Tina, a master's student in her final year in Strategic Marketing Communication who is originally from Russia. Finally, Kim was a second-year master's student in Publishing and Writing who is originally from Belgium.

Two international students and I engaged in the process of devising a documentary theatre performance based on the stories from the interviews. These individuals included Tina, who was already a participant in the interview process and Drew, an international undergraduate final year Theatre and Performance student who is originally from China.

Just as the literature suggested and the data showed, these students all faced several challenges, and that has impacted their transition and adjustment while studying in the United States. My analysis of the data I collected from surveys, observations, and discussions from participants in the documentary performance and from the audience also provide some conclusion and insight on the impact and effects of devising the documentary theatre performance with a group of international students to tell the stories to an audience. Below, I present the data that relates to the two research questions that guided the study.

Q1: What are the challenges faced by international graduate students studying in a U.S. northeastern liberal arts college?

From the transcribed and coded interviews from international students, the following themes emerged as challenges faced by international graduate students: Language Barrier, Lack of Job Opportunities and Adjusting to Culture, Norms and Traditions (including Healthcare, Interactions and Socialization and Other Adjustment Challenges).

Language Barrier

One of the main challenges international graduate students faced during their transition to the United States was language barrier. Based on the findings, I agree with Rodríguez et al. (2019) who stated that language barrier is one of the most challenging elements of students' transition, as three of the four participants expressed the challenge of speaking and understanding American English. Paul, Rosey and Kim explained that even though all three studied and learned English in their home countries, coming to the U.S. and experiencing it was extremely different from what they learned. They shared that they initially had a hard time understanding and speaking it. Paul described his difficulty speaking English because of his thick native accent stating, "I learned English all my life, but like writing English, this is completely different from

like being able to speak properly. I had a very thick accent, and no one would really understand me.” As in the study where Rodríguez et al. (2019) reported that international students had difficulty understanding fast-talking Americans, so did Rosey, who expressed that she had difficulty understanding what was being said because of how fast Americans spoke. This made her not confident in speaking with her classmates and friends. Rosey stated:

I learned English back home. But I just realized I don't understand anything they're saying. I didn't feel confident and comfortable speaking English with them, and I don't understand what they say, and then the speed of how they speak is too fast.

This lack of understanding and ability to speak American English affected these students' emotions and social interactions. Kim stated that, even though she studied English in school back home, she felt insecure when she had to speak in classes, because she thought others found her stupid when she couldn't find the 'right' words or if she didn't pronounce a word a certain way because of her accent. She stated:

When I'm reading something out loud in a workshop, I get nervous, and I trip over my words, and it must seem like I'm illiterate or something. It's embarrassing a little bit that you don't speak like everybody else, and that they can immediately see that I'm not from here.

Rosey also shared that it was awkward and uncomfortable for her because she didn't know how to interact with Americans. Her level of English language proficiency caused tremendous difficulties in the classroom and with her identity as a Chinese student. She shared:

I don't even know how to interact with American. And then it started to decline and got bad. Worse and worse. I don't understand it. And then class was hard. And I realized

that's not really language. It's being comfortable with my own identity. Um, because I felt very uncomfortable with my own self. Then there are times I remember. I don't want to tell people I'm Chinese. I try really hard to improve my accent, and then to eliminate it, and then to improve my English.

Students shared that because of their lack of confidence which causes anxiety, they had to work overtime on their accent and on learning American English. Paul shared that he worked hard to improve his accent. He added:

I would watch people, and how their tongue works very carefully. So, I would just, you know, go into the library at nights and try to practice those uh you know how to say those words, and Um! And then you know, learn how to basically get rid of my accent, to some extent.

It is important to note that these students who had a difficulty with language barrier were from countries whose first language is not English (including Asian countries) which correlates with the literature that students from these countries have a harder time and challenge with the issue of language barrier.

Lack of Job Opportunities

Another major challenge for graduate students was the lack of job opportunities to help support them financially. All the students shared that they struggle financially and that finding a job on and off-campus was stressful and not easy. This was because of the strict work restrictions and high cost of tuition for international students. Tina shared how she was stressed financially and could not get a job on campus. She stated:

Since we're not allowed to work. We don't even have options, you know, to find any extra money, so it's either, you know, survive, or go home, and that's not good. And it was not easy to find a job on campus. I guess not. All departments want to hire international students right away, because they understand that they will need to wait for us to get a social security number or whatever, and maybe not. Everybody wants to wait. So, I think these concerns, like you cannot get a work outside of campus that easily. You need a lot of permissions.

Kim also shared her frustration in not being able to find a job on campus which made her feel unwelcome in the U.S. She said:

When I just came here, I could not get a job on campus. I spent like a whole semester applying to things, and I could not get anything, and nobody even wanted to schedule an interview with me. So, I didn't have any money, living off of my savings and I was like, I hated it here. I don't have a job. I don't have money. I was like why does nobody want to give me a chance? I have experience, and I speak multiple languages, and I can write well. So that was like a thing that made me feel like not welcome here.

Students also expressed the bias they experience in trying to get a job because they are international students. Paul and Tina shared that they felt hurt when they could not secure internships, even though they were qualified for these positions. Tina shared her experience of not receiving a job because she was an international student. She stated:

Before that interview I had another one, and as soon as I said that I'm not from here, and not a native speaker. As for marketing, that was a like a huge minus, because automatically they're biased that I write worse than a native speaker like for the blogs or

social media. So that's why I decided. I will not push that forward like you know, I'm from Russia.

Paul mentions wanting the perfect job opportunity but because of the strict restrictions he cannot apply, which makes him sad. He said:

So, you know, when applying for a job, usually there's a section you know, like disclaimer. There is a section that says, will you now or in the future require sponsorship, or if you're on an F1 visa, we don't hire. Those moments occasionally, because sometimes I really wanted this, and it looks like the perfect job opportunity. But then you can't apply for it because well, you're not a U.S. citizen, or a permanent resident. But those are, you know, those are like, Yeah, it feels bad.

Because of the work restrictions placed on international students on how many hours and where they can work, this affects and increases their challenges in acquiring extra cash and gaining work experience.

Adapting to Culture, Norms, and Traditions

Another prevalent theme that students highlighted that presented a challenge for them was Adapting to Culture, Norms, and Traditions of the United States. Students referred to these as the different “systems” that they lacked knowledge and understanding of, or that were a shock to them. This was true even for three students who visited and did internships in the U.S. before moving to the U.S. to study. In this theme they described different challenges, such as Healthcare Challenge, Interactions and Socialization and Other Adjustment Challenges.

Healthcare Challenge

Three of the four students shared extensively about their lack of knowledge and information and the challenge of navigating the healthcare system in the U.S. These participants expressed how expensive health care was for them. Kim expressed her fear of having to go to the doctor while being in the U.S. because she feared it would be too expensive, so she would rather wait until she went back home. She stated:

I constantly live in fear that I'm gonna get run over by a car, and I'm gonna have to pay way too much money. For example, I have been struggling with my vision, for like a long time. I was like oh, I should really get an eye exam, but I'm like, does it cost money because if that is the case to do it? Um! But then I found out that there's like one free one with my Health Insurance every thirty-six months, and, like my program is over like twenty-four months. But then you still have to pay so much money for the glasses. But I'm not going to do it here, I'm like going to wait until I get back home.

Students shared their challenge of the lack of knowledge about health insurance, medical terms, and the process of seeking medical care. They found this to be confusing and difficult. Paul, who is from Nepal, shared that he didn't understand health insurance and other terms related to insurance, so when he had to go to the doctor, he had a hard time. He shared that, where he is from, he didn't have health insurance, but instead just went to the hospital, so it was confusing for him. He stated that:

It was funny, I knew I had health insurance. I had a leg injury from soccer, and I had to get it treated, and I go to the doctor. I was constantly asking them; I hope this gets covered by my insurance, because even a hundred dollars was a lot for me at that point. Yeah, your insurance is accepted. But I can't really say how much it's going to cost like twenty bucks or something. A couple of weeks later I get a bill in the mail for like two

hundred dollars and I was just like, why, like, I don't know. And I call the insurance people, and they're like, Oh, cause that's your co-pay. I was like what the F*ck is a copay? I don't know what a co-pay is.

Tina also said that “I think that it would help if at colleges they had a translator still, because medical terms might be tricky.”

To help with this challenge Paul shared that he had to do research on his own to find out what copay and coinsurance was. While Paul spent time learning about health insurance, Tina shared her lack of knowledge about going to see a doctor. She had difficulty understanding why it took so long for her to see a doctor and said this was hard and was different from what she was used to. She stated:

I don't know how to go to a doctor. Like, I need a dermatologist. I tried to find what's in my network with my insurance. I even found some doctors. I even called them, and they told me the next appointment is for January next year. I was like, okay, sign me up. Why do I have to wait more than six months for an appointment if I need it now? It took me a while to understand what I can do to get just an annual checkup.

Tina also stated that she had to get help from friends and staff in the Office of International Student Affairs on how to see a doctor because she didn't know that she could have gone to the school's health center or found a primary care physician.

Interactions and Socialization

Another challenge students had with adapting to culture, norms, and traditions was the difference in interactions and socialization with Americans. All four students shared their difficulty adjusting and understanding the socialization and social cultural interactions with

Americans. Students expressed that socializing and interacting with Americans was different from how they would in their home cultures. Paul said adapting to the culture of how Americans communicate with each other was a big change for him. He also shared that the culture for him was unconventional and individualistic. He stated that, "It was all a big change getting adjusted to cultural things people talk about. That's how this society functions in the sense, you know. Like it's very individualistic, very nuclear family."

Tina, Rosey and Kim also stated that they didn't always understand the intentions of Americans and were confused about friendships and how they were treated by classmates. This made it hard for them to make and maintain deep friendships. Tina said:

I think that it's hard for us to understand the motives of native speakers. Yeah, like, maybe some situations when there is misunderstanding, and we are like, the target of anger. But in fact, we are just different. Something like that, you know.

Rosey also said:

I realize more when people are nice to me, it doesn't mean like they are nice, nice to me. They're just like that for everyone. I think I remember it a few times my classmates and I talked to some of them. They were like they were super nice, and I will find them on Facebook, Message them, and I treat them like they really good friends. But then I realize no, that's kinda' creepy for them. Like they don't want to go that far or go that fast. They are nice to me just because we're classmates, and that's it. After class we're done, we are not even supposed to hang out. It is like they have a whole different life.

Kim said:

I feel like people here try to like dance around subjects a lot like they don't really say directly what they mean... I did feel a little bit lonely. I think the first three months, because I felt like the friends that I was making weren't really my type of people, and I had friends, but it wasn't like that deep.

Kim also shared that:

But people are kind of like shallow, and they say, hi! And they're like trying to make a conversation with you. But then, when it comes down to it, nobody really tries to invite you out or text you. For example, when you meet someone on the street, and they're like, hey, what's up? I stand still, and I try to like, talk to them, and have like a whole conversation. That like just a way of saying, Hi! And then they walk past you, and I was like, oh, uh bye. It seems so rude to me.

These students all expressed the challenge of individuals being indirect and isolated and described people in the city as being cold.

Other Adjustment Challenges

In general, participants faced other social adjustment challenges during their transition to the U.S. Paul expressed his academic challenge in adapting to the robust academic system here. He shared that things such as citation were a challenge for him. Rosey and Kim shared their challenge adapting to the food in the U.S. Rosey shared her culture shock as it relates to the big portions of unhealthy food and drinking of iced beverages even when it is cold. Kim shared her struggle in finding food that she loved and being able to pay for it. She said:

The worst part is going to a supermarket and trying to find things that seem like back home and what you like to eat, but not being able to find something that's equally as

good. So, I really struggled with that because it's like, it's all bagels. I'm like, where's the bread? I feel like there is good food, but you need to pay way too much money to get it.

Paul and Tina also shared their challenge in understanding employment requirements, such as acquiring a social security number before they could get a job on campus.

The participants in this study proved and demonstrated the challenges they faced when transitioning to graduate school as an international student, such as language barriers, lack of job opportunities, and adopting to culture, norms, and traditions. However, creating and devising a documentary theatre piece with international students to educate targeted audiences about these challenges showed to be impactful.

Q2: What are the impacts of using documentary theatre to tell the stories of the international graduate students' experiences?

Telling the story of international graduate students' experiences proved to have tremendous impact on both the international students who participated in devising the documentary theatre piece and on the audience members who participated and witnessed the performance. When we produced the theatre performance, we had an audience of twenty-five (25) persons, including lecturers, college staff, international and American students at the college, as well as other Americans outside the college community. During the show we incorporated a call-to-action strategy where audience members brainstormed possible solutions for the issues faced by international graduate students highlighted in the performance. (See Appendix C for play script) At the end of the show, we also had a post-performance sharing and talkback session in which the audience shared their discussions and other comments and reflections on the experience. The two international students who devised and participated in the

performance also completed open-ended surveys that documented their experience throughout the process of the creating and showcasing of the documentary piece.

From the post-performance talkback session, observations and surveys, the following themes, and findings on the impact of using documentary theatre to tell the stories of the international graduate students' experiences emerged: joy in devising documentary theatre performance; the positive effects of the performance experience on the audience, including effects of theatre devices and effects of the performance; potential solutions for students' issues including, advocacy for international students, adjusting curriculum design and teaching strategies, prioritizing job opportunities for international students, and providing college programs and outreach to support international students and; suggestions and recommendations for future performance experiences.

Joy in Devising Documentary Theatre Performance

The two international students who were involved in devising and presenting the documentary theatre performance found great satisfaction, joy, and appreciation from participating in the process. Based on observation, students became more excited and dedicated as the process went by, because of their need to tell their stories. Both Drew and Tina mentioned that they were reluctant at first to participate in the process. However, they shared that they appreciated that, after reading the script for the first time, they could relate strongly to the content and message of the play. This inspired them. Drew described in the survey that the experience was great for him because of how amusing and relatable the performance was. Drew said:

I discover that I'm not the only one that is experiencing what I've experienced since the first day in the United States with the identity that I was forced to put on, that the

limitation of choice. The unreasonable limitation of choice for the human rights that's manifested in this country.

Tina also stated:

I could deeply relate to the main message of the play. Even though at first, I was reluctant to participate because of my tight schedule, I was very happy to do this, because as I said before, every word and issue spoke to me.

In devising the piece, I developed a process where we collaborated in building and creating the scenes and moments. I allowed the participants to make suggestions as we created as well as to oversee certain sections of the play. Both participants shared that this process of devising the script together was fulfilling and made them feel included. Tina shared that expressing the issues she faced and telling her story organically from her heart gave her a sense of freedom that she enjoyed:

At first, I was concerned about many adjustments on the go, but then I realized that is a part of creation and the director's vision to let us express ourselves too and make suggestions. I discovered that I really liked the freedom of doing some part the way I feel it, because this is a play about us, international students, and when I read those lines, I felt as if I was not playing but just speaking to the audience from my heart. So, it makes a lot of sense for us to put our heart into the play with our own visions.

Along with feeling included in the process, Drew expressed that telling the story was easy for him because of how relatable it was. He said that “The experience was great! I think the rehearsal was very creatively fulfilling to be part of the devising process. I learned that everything comes very easy when the story is close and relative to myself.”

The students' involvement in the collaboration to create the piece gave them a sense of ownership over the performance and enhanced the overall staging and presentation. Tina, who was also a trained dancer, was given the opportunity to choreograph a dance section in the play and she shared that this was inspiring and gave her a sense of ownership over the play. She said:

This was my favorite rehearsal because I'm a dancer, and I was given a chance to choreograph the piece. At first, I thought all the choreography would be set and I would just learn steps and moves. But it turned out even better, because I could create myself, it really made me feel involved and included. I also started feeling more responsibility over the whole play, and especially this dance piece, because I was creating it too.

Tina stated that devising the piece also helped made the play better as the ideas from different persons enhanced the overall performance. She said:

I also liked the ideas that came from Drew. I think they made the whole play stronger and added drama to a few scenes. Plus, it inspired Lemar to add a few elements, that, in my opinion, became essential later.

The participants shared that working with their fellow castmates and participating in the process was educational as they learnt new things. Drew "...enjoyed working with Lemar and Tina. I also learned that the people I worked with are all highly achieved human beings with great humility." The participants expressed their appreciation for learning about documentary theatre and using documentary theatre. Tina expressed that:

I really appreciated the enlightening element on the reading when Lemar mentioned what is documentary theater and what epic theater is. Not being in the Theater Education program, I really appreciated the introduction into the professional stuff of theatre things.

Drew said, “I find it interesting about documentary theatre because it reminds me about how theatre was originally served for: religious reason for communicating with God. It's like we are doing a ritual for a message to the public.”

Along with finding great appreciation for the use of documentary and devised theatre, the participants' involvement in the devising process also inspired them. Drew said:

It makes me want to do more stuff like that. Because more than that's something related to what I do, theatre and performance, it was something beyond that I wish I can be part of, policy and politics. I aim to make art that is disruptive because disruption, for me, is the key to make new paths.

Tina said:

We want to be heard, and this art form is an incredible tool to communicate. As it was said in the play, Americans can help, if you communicate to them about your struggles. This is us doing our part in such a powerful way, yet entertaining way.

They expressed their joy at seeing the impact that the play had on the audience. They shared that realizing the impact of the performance was meaningful and necessary for them. Tina said:

I loved all the feedback I heard not only about the execution, but mostly about the impact we were able to make with our performance. When an international student comes up to you and says they were in tears and so emotionally attached, it means a lot for you as an actor, creator and just a person who feels the importance of the main message.

Drew said:

It felt great and necessary. It was a work I couldn't shy away from. Play speaks directly to the target audience without shyness, which is something very important when it comes to the issue of immigration and social justice in general. We can't shy away from it.

Positive Effects of Performance Experience on Audience

Based on the data collected, the performance experience had a notable effect on the audience members who participated. From the survey the following data was gathered:

Out of the 25 audience members who were present, 13 people responded to the survey that was distributed after the show. (See Appendix E) On a scale of 1-5, not inspired to very inspired, audience members were asked to rate to what extent the work inspired them to take action against the highlighted issues faced by International Graduate students. Based on the responses of the 13 members, nine people gave a rating of five (extremely inspired), three people selected a rating of four and one person selected three. Though the number of respondents is small, all indicated some degree of inspiration towards taking action as a result of their interaction with the documentary theatre piece.

Audience members were also asked to rate how the work impacted their knowledge of the challenges faced by International Graduate students in the United States. On a scale of 1-5 (no impact to strong impact) ten people selected five (strongly impacted), two selected the rating of three and one person selected a rating of two.

Of all the issues that the piece highlighted, audience members were asked to indicate the issues that were most resonant for them after watching the show. The issue of Language Barrier and Lack of Job Opportunities were tied as the issues that were most resonant, with eight audience members selecting both. Discrimination, Lack of Knowledge on Resources and

Systems and Healthcare challenges were all tied for second, as issues that were most resonant with seven persons selected all three. Adjustment to Academic Expectation was third with five people selecting it as issues that were most resonant.

The question of audience impact (and changed audience behaviors) through issues-based theatre is hotly contested and difficult to prove. However, the self-report of the audience members attending the performance indicates that *they* felt that the performance informed them about the issues facing international graduate students and inspired them to want to seek solutions.

Based on the data collected from the audience through the post-performance talkback session and survey, I broke down the effects of the performance experience into the following themes: effects of theatre devices, and effects of the performance.

Effects of Theatre Devices

The audience was engaged in a post-performance talkback and sharing following small group discussions during the performance to find possible solutions for highlighted challenges. During the post-performance talkback and sharing session audience members were invited on stage to share the solutions they had discussed in their groups. After which, the audience members shared any feedback, questions, and recommendations they had. Based on the data gathered from the open-ended surveys and post-performance talkback session, a majority of the audience found the use of the different theatre devices to be effective and impactful. These theatre devices included the use of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, the post-performance talkback and the staging and performance elements of the play. One audience member shared that “I loved the direct communication with the audience, the invitation to come on stage/remove oppressions, and the Q&A.”

Based on the data, the audience found the Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to be engaging and effective in soliciting the audience's participation in solving and processing the issues. An audience member stated in the survey that the use of forum theatre, described earlier, "WAS VERY EFFECTIVE." Another member expressed that "I thought the use of forum theatre as a device to connect with the audience made the work incredibly engaging." Another member stated that:

I loved the opportunities to discuss with fellow audience members. I also listened to and supported a peer who was having an emotional reaction to the show.

They also spoke a lot about how effective the Theatre of the Oppressed technique was at soliciting possible solutions from the audience for the problems presented. One member said, "...SO IMPACTFUL!!!! Actually, brainstorming ideas together and sharing them was brilliant!" Another audience member shared that "...I found that extremely impactful - to ask us to think and try to come up with ideas/solutions on the spot." Another member described the impact of the use of the Theatre of the Oppressed technique to "...activate the audience's thinking, exploring multiple possibilities to transform the status quo, offering opportunities to speak up."

Based on the data, the incorporation of the post-performance talkback session at the end of the performance positively influenced the audience to speak up and act, rather than just sitting and watching the performance. A member of the audience said:

It was a beautiful example of how theatre can do more than just raise awareness about an issue but also call us to action and make us grapple with finding solutions and not just seeing your struggles and just walking away.

Another audience member said that “The requests to participate were a good reminder that it is not enough to simply sit back and watch; we must take action.”

The use of the different performance elements, such as multimedia, dance, and poetry also had an impact on the audience. Based on the data collected, audience members found these to be engaging and effective in communicating the message and evoking an emotional response from them. One member shared that “The blending of recorded/digital, visual/printed text, and live elements was also engaging.” Another audience member, who stated in the survey that they were new to theatre, shared how effective the different elements were for them in heightening their emotional responses. They said:

I'm a bit of a theater newbie, but from my perspective the rich variety of modalities was extremely effective. I've never seen something that used so many different elements so seamlessly - recorded scenes, dialogue, choreography, music, the fight scene, etc. It felt cohesive and like every modality used served to heighten a particular emotion.

Another member said, ‘The piece of poetry really resonated with me’.

Effects of the Performance

The overall performance had a visible effect on the audience. Based on the surveys, audience members expressed their appreciation for the piece as well as how moving and enlightening the play was for them. Different audience members described the piece as “entertaining and thoughtful,” “moving,” “thought provoking and challenging,” “wonderfully poignant and educational,” as well as “wide-ranging and impactful.” Audience members also state that the piece educated them about the issues of international students in an effective way

that made the stories resonant and impactful in evoking different cathartic responses. One person stated that:

The use of devising and narrative playmaking was so brilliant and moving. I heard the stories on stage and from friends sitting right with me in the audience. I learned so much about the international students' experience and about the power of theatre to connect humans across barriers.

Another person, who shared that they were already aware of the issues, also expressed how impactful the piece was for them and that they would love for everyone to see this piece. They said that, "...this was incredibly powerful. Even as someone who is already quite familiar with the challenges faced by international students, seeing it portrayed in this performance was extremely impactful. I think every single person should see this." Another member also shared that "It was a beautiful reminder that 'good' theatre doesn't need to be high production value or off-book. The story had me on the edge of my seat the entire time."

Along with educating the audience about the issues, the audience members shared that the theatre piece also opened a conversation that will help them better support international students. An audience member asserted that the performance "...invited an audience member to both actively listen to the stories of international students and to engage with one another on continuing the conversation around how to better support and celebrate these students moving forward."

The theatre piece also seemed to be effective in empowering and representing international students in the audience. An audience member shared that "It gave me a chance to process the moment with a friend and was so honored to witness her moment of empowerment and representation." International students in the audience shared that they were appreciative of

the story being told because they could relate to it, and they identified how it inspired them. An Asian International student who described herself as a theater performance major asserted that she believes that the college's theatre producing organization within the Department of Performing Arts should produce a play like this. She said this play inspired her to propose more devised and documentary work for production next season- productions that any student can be a part of, as there are not a lot of opportunities for Asian students to be in plays. Another international student who was in the audience shared in the survey that the performance sent a message to them that they were not alone in the struggles they face and that, through this piece, their voice was heard. They stated that "Each line, and especially the isolation and language barriers parts, were really powerful for me because that was exactly what I experienced/am experiencing here."

Other members from the college's Office of International Student Affairs who were also present in the audience communicated the play's impact on sharing the issues of international students, in particular graduate students who need more support. They shared that the piece was poignant in sharing the stories of many international students. One member said that the play "...did such a great job of voicing for the community of international students." Another member also shared that they resonate with the play focusing on the graduate student experience, because "I do feel like the undergraduate population has a more structural institutional support."

Potential Solutions for Students' Issues

The performance experience was of great potential benefit moving forward, as it prompted the audience to provide possible solutions to the challenges faced by international graduate students. From the open-ended surveys and post-performance talkback session with the audience, the following solutions were presented: advocacy for international students, adjusting

curriculum design and teaching strategies, prioritizing job opportunities for international students, and providing college programs and outreach to support international students.

Advocacy for International Students

According to one survey response from an audience member, who identified themselves as a staff member of the college, they have many ideas for solutions, "...but it can be challenging to argue for them as a single voice." Two other audience members stated in their surveys that it would take strong advocacy by everyone to help solve these issues. One person stated that it would take "...advocating as a unit towards the demand for sustainable action on behalf of international students," while another shared that they "...highly advise for political and legislative changes." Another staff member further added that, "I think it would be good for Office of International Student Affairs or another body to collect student voices to make a strong case for a change to upper-level administrators." A student suggested that they work together to help find "...ways in which us resident students can be advocates for their international student peers."

Adjusting Curriculum Design and Teaching Strategies

Audience members also proposed that lectures and students help to make a difference and help minimize these issues by making changes in the classrooms. An audience member who identified themselves as an American graduate student recommended that educators and students "...make it more acceptable in classrooms to ask for literacy checks for people, or for any reason to ask for clarification if they don't understand something." Another American graduate student shared that in the classroom "There should be multiple access points to instructions, example, visual, and auditory as well as do more embodied exercises where there are different ways of communicating without just words." They propose that this will help students who may be

struggling with the language barrier. Another audience member suggested that educators “...have one on one conversations in the classroom, with students and lecturers to identify challenges and build bonds and build relationships outside the classroom.”

Prioritizing Job Opportunities for International Students

In an attempt to solve the issue of lack of job opportunities and financial difficulties for international students, the audience also came up with possible solutions. An audience member who identified themselves as a past student at the college and who is an American shared in the talkback session that the college should prioritize international students for on campus jobs, stating, “It is pretty obvious that there are so many different opportunities for people who are not international students to get jobs off campus”. Another audience member also suggested that it should be a part of the acceptance package that international students acquire jobs on campus. They said:

Prioritizing and expanding options for international student employment on-campus.

National students should not be the first choice if international students are also applying.

Could the college change their policy to guarantee an on-campus job for every international student? Make it part of their acceptance package?

Another American graduate student suggested that the college could help with the financial difficulty of international students by “...having more opportunities and ways to get international students to do more field work in their studies and build network in their field.” Another suggestion by an audience member was that they believe “The university can give more scholarships and provide graduate assistantships for international students. This will really help in reducing financial struggles.”

Provide College Programs and Outreach to Support International Students

Other suggestions from audience members included the college making adjustments to the orientations offered at the start of each academic year. They propose the college increase their support for international graduate students through establishing and adjusting college services and programs and faculty and staff support.

An audience member suggested that the college should present a performance like this at orientations to educate individuals about these issues and how they can help. They stated that:

This kind of piece should be a part of the orientation week for all incoming students and faculty to see, just so there is an awareness that we are not the only people. This is the kind of work that needs to be seen at the front end of college experiences.

Audience members also stated that the college needs to provide services to help with translation and support. A graduate student at the post-performance talkback shared that it would be helpful if there were workshops to help international students fill out required forms and documentations as she, as an American who lived here all of her life, finds them confusing. One person stated that, “Universities should also make greater efforts to provide on-campus translation services and workshops for the various applications/paperwork international students most commonly encounter.” Another audience member suggested that “The college could create an International Student Canvas resource course which addresses some of the healthcare questions and issues and other FAQ. We could ask International Students to contribute.”

Suggestions and Recommendations for Future Performance Experience

While the use of documentary theatre and the performance was effective and successful in telling the stories of international graduate students’ issues, there were a few recommendations

to take into consideration for possible future performance of this theatre piece. Based on the findings collected from observation, the post-performance talkback session, and surveys, participants suggested possible changes and adjustments to enhance this performance.

One member of the audience shared in their survey that pausing the show to have discussion with their fellow audience members and then resuming the show was challenging for them. They had difficulty refocusing and “getting back into the performance again mentally,” and suggested utilizing additional theatre elements to assist with this, for example, “...a lighting change.” Another recommendation from two of the audience members is that we inform invited guests beforehand that there will be audience interaction as surprising audiences might cause anxiety when they must talk to each other. One person said, “I prefer to be immersed in the experience and then process afterwards alone. Trying to find immediate solutions to a problem I am just encountering (I'm not but speaking for a general audience member) creates anxiety.” The other audience member said, “I didn't realize that there would be audience interaction until it was happening. For future audiences, I might suggest making that more clear in the introduction to the piece.”

During the post-performance talkback, session audience members shared that they would love it if we had incorporated more native language of the different characters in the piece. One audience member stated that:

I so hope that you'll include native language. Because, you have done so much work on bringing the voices for our understanding. I want to feel uncomfortable, too, in space. I want to hear your words be activated through your native language.

Audience members also recommended that we continue to explore and portray the differences in experiences between international students and the different stages and processes

of different students, which will add more depth to the piece. One person said, "I'd suggest that wrestling with the different experiences of white international students and those from Europe versus Asian and Black international students (and even Black students from Africa versus the Caribbean & Americas)." Another person stated that, "I would like to see the whole W-Curve cultural adjustment model as you know how real each of those stages are, whether people take them really quickly or whether it's a long process for folks."

Members of the audience also suggested that we integrate the use of lights and additional use of multimedia into the piece for more impact. One member stated that "...more digital visual elements/multimedia could really enhance the impact of the spoken words. Perhaps this could even help as a translation aid." Another person shared that, "I would love to see the videos displayed using the entirety of the upstage wall and the inclusion of languages outside of English, with subtitles for the audience, would be incredibly impactful as well."

Limitations

The major limitation of this research is its scope. This study has a small sample size of four (4) participants from four (4) different countries for the interviews. This does not adequately reflect the population of international graduate students at the college. All participants were also from the same college and, though we focused solely on graduate students, the sample did not represent a wide variation of nationalities and cultures. Students from different colleges and universities in the U.S. and different nationalities, for example Europe or Africa, might experience different challenges from that of the sample we interviewed for this study.

The aim was to have the same participants in the interviews participate in the devised documentary theatre process. However, because of availability, time, and resources only two students participated; one person who was interviewed participated, along with one international undergraduate student who was available and willing. These sample restrictions limit the generalizability and significance of the data, as a wider sample size and type would likely have reflected a wider range of challenges of international graduate students. Nevertheless, this small sample size provided rich data and supported the conducting of a thorough data analysis.

The results presented in this paper were posed with the aim to highlight challenges faced by international graduate students attending a U.S. northeastern liberal arts college and the impact of devising a documentary theatre performance with international graduate students to tell these stories.

Conclusions

This study sought to identify the challenges faced by 4 international graduate students at a U.S. liberal arts college in the northeast and the impact of using documentary theatre to tell these stories. Based on the findings and discussion above, this research confirms the findings of previously published research such as Katsumoto and Bowman 2021 which shows that international students face challenges such as social, cultural differences and language barriers. This study supports Watson and Barton (2020) findings that international students' levels of distress have increased over the past two decades due to several reasons including financial and lack of culturally appropriate support. However, this study provides some new and interesting insights into the challenges faced by international graduate students in addition to the impact of devising a documentary theatre performance. The challenges identified by the international graduate students in this study were: 1) language barrier, 2) lack of job opportunities, and 3) adjusting to culture, norms and traditions including, healthcare, interactions and socialization and other adjustment challenges. Because of the number of participants in this study, it is limited in its generalizability to the entire batch of graduate students and other institutions. However, the research indicates the value and importance of learning about these experiences, challenges, and the needs of international graduate students when they encounter a new learning community and culture.

This research reaffirms that international graduate students experience a range of unique challenges common to them as a group, beyond the typical challenge of tertiary level experience. This paper also indicates the importance and responsibility of U.S. colleges and universities in paying more attention to support the problems and needs of international students' adjustment to

the U.S. It is important to note and understand that each international student will have different support needs as international students experience different challenges.

Moreover, it can be concluded that devising a documentary theatre performance with international students to tell their stories had several positive impacts. These impacts include: 1) joy in devising documentary theatre performance, 2) positive effect of performance experience on audience, including effects of theatre devices and effects of the performance, 3) potential solutions for students' issues including, advocacy for international students, adjusting curriculum design and teaching strategies, prioritizing job opportunities for international student, and provide college programs and outreach to support international students, and 4) suggestions and recommendations for future performance experience.

It was clear that collaboratively devising and presenting the issues of international students through a documentary theatre performance provided a much-needed opportunity for international students to tell their stories using the art form, as it brought great satisfaction, joy and liberation to the students involved. The documentary theatre performance, with its varied use of theatrical devices and techniques, effectively amplified the voices of international students as well as influencing, educating, and challenging the targeted audience members. The use of a 'call to action' effectively prompted audience members to find and activate solutions to make a positive change. It allowed the audience members to encounter and reflect on these challenges and reflect on their capacity to affect change at their level.

In spite of the small scale of this study, the results and recommendations presented in this paper can be of great value to many. The proposed solutions to international graduate students' challenges provided in this study gives policy makers, offices of international student affairs, educators, counselors, other college administrators, and future researchers a clear understanding

of the experiences, challenges and needs of these international graduate students. These results could also assist similar institutions to provide support for international graduate students. Furthermore, this research will aid in advising future research. The use of this creative approach to research in telling stories and highlighting issues could impact future research to identify new ways to present research and enact change.

In addition, discussions and findings on devising documentary theatre plays and utilizing Theatre of the Oppressed techniques and the positive effects of using these can inform and influence other theatre practitioners and researchers in the field. I believe there should be research that continues to examine international graduate students' unique experiences and how institutions are properly supporting international graduate students with adjusting in the United States.

References

- Akanwa, E. (2015). International students in western developed countries: history, challenges, and prospects. *Journal of International Students*, 5(3), 271-284.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1060054>
- Aune, V. (2017). Our lady's folk: creating authoritative aesthetic communication in documentary theatre. *Applied Theatre Research*, 5(3), 239-253 <https://research-ebSCO-com.proxy.emerson.edu/c/vvyzha/viewer/pdf/s6iv7aspy5>
- Bjork, C., Abrams, A., & Hutchinson, L. (2020). "Don't change yourselves": international students' concepts of belonging at a liberal arts college. *Journal of International Students*, 10(3), 553-570. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1265761>
- Chennamsetti, P. (2020). Challenges faced by Indian international students in us higher education. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 9(2), 249-263
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1294412>
- Collins Dictionary. (n.d.). Challenge. Collins Dictionaries.com. Retrieved August 8, 2023, from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/challenge>
- Cooper, A. (2019, November 9). So what is devised theatre anyway (and why do I love it so much)?. *Andrew G. Cooper*. <https://www.andrewgcooper.com/post/2019/11/10/so-what-is-devised-theatre-anyway-and-why-do-i-love-it-so-much>
- Eckersley, M. (2015). Documentary and verbatim theatre a matter of style: documentary and verbatim theatre. *Theatre Styles Blogs*.
<https://theatrestyles.blogspot.com/2015/01/verbatim-theatre.html>
- Eldhose, A., & Das, N. (2015). Theatre for re-education: experimenting with documentary

form in Kerala. *Research in Drama Education*, 20(4), 490-500

<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.emerson.edu/10.1080/13569783.2015.1076333>

Gardner, L. (2021). *Truth to power: how documentary theatre brings real events to life*. The

Stage. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2582861245/fulltextPDF/E68850759D3B4519>

[PQ/1?accountid=10735](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2582861245/fulltextPDF/E68850759D3B4519/PQ/1?accountid=10735)

Green-Rogers, M. (2016). What is devised theatre? *The Theatre Time*.

<https://thetheatretimes.com/what-is-devised-theatre/>

Gröndahl, L. (2017). Speaking about reality: verbatim techniques in contemporary finnish

documentary theatre. *Nordic Theatre Studies*, 28 (2), 71-96 [https://research-ebSCO-](https://research-ebSCO-com.proxy.emerson.edu/c/vvyzha/viewer/pdf/ko3ris533b)

[com.proxy.emerson.edu/c/vvyzha/viewer/pdf/ko3ris533b](https://research-ebSCO-com.proxy.emerson.edu/c/vvyzha/viewer/pdf/ko3ris533b)

Institute of International Education. (2021). *U.S. colleges and universities remain top choice for*

international students. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://www.iie.org/news/us->

[institutions-top-choice-for-intl-students/](https://www.iie.org/news/us-institutions-top-choice-for-intl-students/)

Institute of International Education. (2016). *International student enrollment trends, 1948/49-*

2015/16. Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved February

23, 2023, from <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>

Institute of International Education. (2022). *U.S. colleges and universities see strong rebounds in*

international student enrollments. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from

<https://www.iie.org/news/us-sees-strong-international-student-enrollment-rebounds/>

John Walton, J. (2014). Devised theatre: ten tips for a truly creative collaboration. *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/2014/dec/16/devised->

[theatre-ten-tips-collaboration](https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/2014/dec/16/devised-theatre-ten-tips-collaboration)

Katsumoto, S., & Bowman, N. (2021). Changes in psychological well-being among international

- students in the us: the role of interactions with peers, faculty, and staff. *Journal of College Student Development*, 62(3), 345-350
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2547567835?accountid=10735>
- Kaya, J. (2020), Inside the international student world: challenges, opportunities, and imagined communities. *Journal of International Students*, 10(1), 124-144
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1248150>
- Khanal, K., & Gaulee, U. (2019). Challenges of international students from pre-departure to post-study: a literature review. *Journal of International Students*, 9(2), 560-581
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1222429>
- Lyken-Segosebe, D. (2017). Acculturative stress and disengagement: learning from the adjustment challenges faced by east Asian international graduate students. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(6), 66-77 <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1163136>
- NAFSA. (2022, November 14). *New NAFSA Data Reveal International Student Economic Contributions to the U.S. Still Below Pre-Pandemic Levels*. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://www.nafsa.org/about/about-nafsa/new-nafsa-data-reveal-international-student-economic-contributions-us-still-below>
- Nickerson, C (2023). *What is acculturation and why it happens*. simplysociology.com
<https://simplysociology.com/acculturation-definition.html>
- Odendahl-James, J. (2017). *A History of U.S. Documentary Theatre in Three Stages*. American Theatre. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/08/22/a-history-of-u-s-documentary-theatre-in-three-stages/>
- Okai, L. (2020). *International students' adjustment challenges in the United States: a case study*

of west Virginia university. Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports.

<https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/etd/7974>

Parenteau, A. (2017). *How do you solve a problem like documentary theatre?* American

Theatre. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/08/22/how-do-you-solve-a-problem-like-documentary-theatre/>

Parenteau, A. (2017). *Real talk: some of documentary theatre's leading lights discuss the art of the interview--and the deeply personal playmaking that comes after.* American Theatre, 34(7) 24-27

Rodríguez, C., Chavez C., & Klauber, C. (2019). International Graduate Student Challenges and Support. *International Research and Review*, 8(2), 49-

64. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1227500>

Saldana, J. (2016). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (3rd ed.) Sage

Saldana, J. (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Sage

Schipper, K., Abma, T., Zadelhoff, E., Griendt, J., Nierse, C., & Widdershoven, G. (2010) What

Does It Mean to Be a Patient Research Partner? An Ethnodrama, *Qualitative Inquiry*,

16(6), 501-510. <https://cris.maastrichtuniversity.nl/en/publications/eb843a47-92c9-40e1-83c8-d1b6a18c1c1a>

Smith, R., & Khawaja, N (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international

students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35 (6), 699– 713 [https://www-](https://www-sciencedirect-com.proxy.emerson.edu/science/article/pii/S0147176711000782?via%3Dihub)

[sciencedirect-](https://www-sciencedirect-com.proxy.emerson.edu/science/article/pii/S0147176711000782?via%3Dihub)

The Magnetic Theatre. (2022). *What is Devised Theatre?*

<https://themagnetictheatre.org/blog/devisedtheatre>

Watson, M., & Barton, G (2020). Using arts-based methods and reflection to support postgraduate international students' wellbeing and employability through challenging times. *Journal of International Student*, 10(2), 101-118

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1301050>

Weltsek, G, (2021). Devising in the Pandemic: Trauma and a dramatic redesign of a youth theatre tour. *International Journal of Designs for Learning*, 12(1), 171-180

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1293136>

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form



Concise Summary

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the issues faced by nonimmigrant undergraduate and graduate students at Emerson College.

If you choose to join this research study, you will participate in a 15–45-minute interview with Lemar Archer a Jamaican graduate student at Emerson College in Theatre Education and Applied Theatre, as part of his work in the course, Qualitative Research Methods in Theatre Education and Applied Theatre, taught by faculty member Dana Edell. The interview will be video, and audio recorded over zoom. The main risks of this study are a possible feeling of discomfort if any questions illicit feelings of discomfort or vulnerability.

Potential benefits of this study include feeling an elevated sense of agency and empowerment, developing further curiosity about the experiences of nonimmigrant students. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part in this study, we thank you for your time.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please continue to read below.



Informed Consent

Study Title: An investigation of the issues faced by undergraduate and graduate nonimmigrant students in the United States.

Principal Investigator: Lemar Archer

Faculty Advisor: Dana Edell

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Purpose and Background

The aim of this research is to do a deep dive to investigate the challenges of immigrant students in a college setting. The United States of America is dubbed the “land of the free,” where opportunities are endless and where a vast number of immigrants seek freedom, opportunity and settlement. However, immigrant students constantly face major issues while trying to integrate into the education system and perform in school. Potential struggles faced by immigrant students in the United States include language barrier, discrimination and racism, poverty, legal status and family separation and bullying. Through observations, informal interviews with students, personal experience and preliminary research, the researcher hopes to discover how these issues impact nonimmigrant students today.

The study involves a 15-to-60-minute zoom interview to take place between October 20, 2022, and January 5, 2023.

Procedures

If you choose to participate in this study, you can expect the following:

An interview will be arranged via zoom at your convenience that will be at least 15 minutes in length, and no longer than 45 minutes. Interviews will take place between October 20, 2022, and January 5, 2023.

Data will be collected through a video and audio-recorded zoom interview; Lemar will conduct interviews from a private location and recommend that participants find a private location to sit for the interview. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. These records will be maintained

Emerson

COLLEGE

on the investigator's private laptop computer, which is password protected. They will never be transmitted by email or kept in a sharable folder. Pseudonyms will be used for names. A list that connects assigned pseudonyms to the names of the participants will be destroyed once data has been collected and analyzed. Written records will be destroyed after 3 years. The data will be seen only by the investigator and co-investigator.

Risks

The main risks of this study are a possible feeling of discomfort if any questions illicit feelings of vulnerability. This is a minimal risk as participants can choose not to answer any question or end the interview at any moment. Participants are encouraged to share any discomfort that may arise during the process.

Zoom video and audio recordings will be stored on the private and password protected laptop of the Investigator with minimal risk. Zoom does not monitor your meetings or its contents. Zoom complies with all applicable privacy laws, rules, and regulations in the jurisdictions in which it operates, including the GDPR and the CCPA. There is minimal risk to a breach of security concerning anyone besides the investigators accessing these recordings. Please initial below to consent to being recorded.

_____ I consent to be audio recorded via Zoom during this interview

For this research project, we are requesting demographic information. Due to the make-up of students and faculty, the combined answers to these questions may make an individual person identifiable. We will make every effort to protect participants' confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may skip them. Should you feel discomfort due to participation in this research you should contact your health care provider.

Benefits

Potential benefits of this study include feeling an elevated sense of agency and empowerment from being in a space where your stories are heard and respected.

Extent of Confidentiality

Data collected as part of this study includes interview video and audio recordings, interview transcripts, any demographic or contact information you choose to share, and the investigator's notes from observations during the interview.

All data will be stored on a personal computer with a password protected hard drive accessible only to the study's investigator. No personally identifiable information will be stored on the cloud or a third-party platform. In the case of a zoom interview, audio recordings will be downloaded to the computer and not kept in the cloud. Audio recordings of interviews may be uploaded to the third-party platform (Descript) for transcription. To protect your identity in case

Emerson

COLLEGE

of a breach of this platform, personally identifiable information will be redacted from the audio file prior to uploading to the platform.

Your name will not be associated with your tapes or transcriptions and your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Only principal investigator Lemar Archer will know the link between your name and your interview responses. Your participation in the interview portion of this research study will be kept strictly confidential. Some findings used in written reports or publications which result from this evaluation project will be reported in aggregate form with no identifying information. If any direct quotes or paraphrasing of interview transcripts or anecdotes from the theater-making workshop are included in reports of publication, they will be attributed to an alias to protect your confidentiality. You will have the option to choose your own alias, or to request use of your first name only when reporting any data associated with your interview or participation in the theater-making workshop. Audio recordings and personally identifiable information shall never be published or reported outside of the study. Your contact information will only be known to Lemar Archer and will only be used for the purposes of contacting you to schedule a follow-up interview and to provide you with information about the optional theater-making workshop.

We will make every effort to protect participants' confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions, you may choose not to answer them.

After three years, personally identifying information shall be removed from the interview transcripts and destroyed. Audio recordings will also be destroyed after three years. Transcripts (minus personally identifying information) shall be retained indefinitely and may be used by principal investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you. A copy of this signed consent form will be retained for as long as any data gathered during this study, but it will not be associated directly with your data in our records.

Compensation

Subjects will not receive compensation for their participation in this research study.

Participation is Voluntary

Participation in this study is voluntary and may be terminated at any point by you without consequences of any kind. During the interview, you have the right to end the interview at any point or to skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You have the right to refuse a follow-up interview. You may leave at any point, or sit out of any activities that you do not wish to participate in.

Questions

Emerson

COLLEGE

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you should first talk with the principal investigator at lemar_archer@emerson.edu and/or faculty advisor Dana Edell at dana_edell@emerson.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Emerson College Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the Chair of the IRB by e-mailing human_subjects@emerson.edu.

Documentation of Consent (for consent requiring signature)

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Printed Name of Study Participant

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Consent (for electronic consent, such as an online survey)

I have read this information and have decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. I understand that I may save or print this page to obtain a hard copy now, or request a hard copy from the Principal Investigator.

- I consent to take part in this research study
 I do not consent to take part in this research study

Appendix B: Interview Protocol Questions

The following questions will be administered to immigrant and nonimmigrant students in a structured interview to gather information on the challenges faced by international graduate students in the United States:

1. Tell me a little about yourself and where you grew up.
2. What are you currently studying in the US?
3. How was it like living where you grew up?
4. What was it like when you first arrived here in the US?
5. Why did you choose to come to the US instead of somewhere else?
6. What most surprised you when you got here?
7. What have been your biggest challenges as a foreign student here?
8. Can you think of times when you felt welcomed as a foreign student? What about when you have felt unwelcomed?
9. Who or what was most helpful with getting you settled and giving you strength?
10. If someone you knew was planning on coming to this US, what would you tell them to expect?
11. What advice would you give them?
12. What do you wish more people knew about foreigners, or others that are new to the country?
13. What are the 2 or 3 most important things that people could do to make the process of coming to a new country better?

14. What would you like people in the audience of a production about nonimmigrant students to know?
15. Anything else you would want me to know?

Appendix C: Documentary Play Script

ACCULTURATION

American Dream: International Students' Nightmare

A Documentary Play

By: Lemar O. Archer

Voiceover 1 of statistics of the number of international students to the US each year

On the screen a video is played titled “Na Uncle Sam” by Ukairo

Prologue – The Homeland, Where It All Begins

The following words are projected in the screen: “The struggles of international students don’t start when we get to the US. It starts from our home countries.”

On screen we see a video of students reenacting moments in the line at the US embassy. The following dialogue will be performed in this video:

Student 1: *To get into the US the process is very complex.*

Student 2: *Stressful!*

Student 3: *And expensive!*

Student 1: *Before you even pay your tuition fee you already pay a quarter or more of that tuition amount on paperwork and procedures to get to the US.*

Student 3: *From the required WES credential evaluation process which is horribly expensive!*

Student 2: *That’s my parents’ 2–3-month salary back home. Not to mention the US visa application process*

Student 3: *Trust me like I joke about this. But even if you want to be the Prime Minister of my country. You don't have to do that much paperwork, because the amount of paperwork you have to do to come to the US.*

Student 2: *It's horrendous.*

Student 1: *It’s just stressful.*

Student 2: *You have to get to the Embassy at like 5 am in the morning, because if you get there later than that, you will do your interview very late! And stay outside in the sun!*

Student 1: *And then we usually have issues with getting dates. It is not easy to get a date.*

Student 3: *But that is not even the issue.*

Student 2: *The SEVIS fee is \$350 USD. And the Visa fee is \$160 USD. But when you convert it to some of our home country currency that’s a lot of money.*

Student 1: *That's like close to 300 and something 1,000 naira in Nigerian currency. When you calculate everything, you already paid close to 500,000. Naira.*

Student 3: *After paying so much you would expect that Okay, when I get to the Embassy, they should at least look through your documents and put you through.*

Student 1: *But even when you have a partial or fully funded scholarship. You have to show them proof of bank statements covering your tuition.*

Student 2: *You have to explain to them.*

Student 3: *You have to convince them.*

Student 1: *You have to show them that you can afford or finance yourself when you reach the US.*

Student 2: *If you don't portray that, then they are not going to grant you the visa.*

Student 3: *They will reject you.*

Student 2: *And if they deny you 3 times you have to pay your visa fee three times over.*

Student 1: *And most people will tell you oh this is my third attempt.*

Student 3: *It is my second attempt.*

Student 2: *It is my fourth attempt.*

Student 1: *You will see people who say it was my sixth attempt, my seventh attempt!*

Student 3: *You have to keep paying. You have to keep paying.*

Student 2: *And of course, we see a lot of people crying at the Embassy asking what else they want? That they have tried their best.*

Student 1: *Even if you paid your tuition and you want to start school in the next 2 weeks, maybe you will lose your teaching assistant position and the full scholarship expires if you don't start.*

Student 3: *They don't care!*

All: *They don't care*

Student 1: *Getting your visa approved is like a miracle for some people.*

Student 2: *So just imagine what an individual has to go through, applying like 2, 3 times.*

Student 3: *Finally getting your visa approved.*

Students 1: *Then you get to the all-mighty United States of America, and you can't get a good job even on campus.*

All: *The frustration continues...*

Part One – The Arrival

“Honeymoon Stage” is projected on the screen. International students are entering the stage one after the other with their suitcases. They have arrived. They enter with great excitement. When they are not talking, they are unpacking and setting up their respective tables on stage.

Student 1: 7,760 miles from Nepal

Student 2: 6,993 miles from China

Student 3: 5,379 miles from Russia

Student 2: 4,697 miles from Belgium

Student 1: 1,960 miles from Jamaica

Student 3: Thousands of miles from all over the world

All: *(Draping self with the US flag)* To land here in the great United States of America!!

Student 2: It felt fancy coming to the US.

Student 1: I always dreamt of the big city life, socializing, meeting, and going out with friends!

Student 3: I think I had too high of an expectation. I think everything would be so good!

Student 1: And everyone would be nice. And we were gonna go partying.

Student 2: I think it was going to be like the typical Hollywood movies!

Student 1: It was very exciting!

Student 3: *Pause* At first.

Student 2: But the US was the best option!

Student 3: In my country, for students like me, the options are to either go into computer science. You do engineering. You either become a doctor or you go to the US. That's like the best option

you can come up with. You're on the track to being successful, you know. That's like the conventional way of determining who is successful or not.

Student 1: I chose it because I want to be a journalist, and I've always been adventurous, and I want to go out! Coming from a small city, a small town, and then because I think we know, like we're not the best, so we always want to see what's the best, and then the US is considered as the best.

Student 3: For me, you understand that you don't have many options in jobs, because the only good money you can make is in IT, or if you're a dentist, but that's not for me. I mean the industries, there is not a big option, you know, to choose from. Before I didn't know a thing about the US. I wanted to study in Sweden, but then I realized, after working in international business, that the US, that's the center of business. And as far as I'm going to study marketing, I think that the best education is here in the US. That's why, I decided to look only for programs in the US. Because it's simply the best

Student 2: The field back home is very small, so I know I'm not getting the job that I want. I feel like people there, they don't want you to follow your dreams too much, because then you're doing something that's out of the norm. Everyone needs to like stay in that little box of having a nine to five, having kids and a house, and everyone follows that. But I really didn't want to do that. So, I did my bachelors in journalism and basically the whole field it's kind of like owned by two companies. And if you don't get a job with those two companies you won't get a job in journalism at all. The chances of getting into that are very, very tiny. But yeah, the publishing industry in the US was the biggest!

All: The US was the best option!

We hear "The Best" by Tina Turner

Video of International students stating their names and the country they are from.

Part Two – Language Barrier

"Culture Shock" is projected on the screen. Student 2 enters continuing from the video to introduce themselves and tell where they are from. He enters wearing a beanie and scarf. The scarf is covering his mouth. He slowly unveils it.

Student 2: I am ___ and I am from ___. It was very exciting, but also very unexpected. I have learned English all my life. But American English is totally different. The spelling is different and not to mention the accent. I realized I didn't understand anything they're saying because of the accent. And then the speed of how they talk, it is too fast, and I would have to watch people, and how their tongue works very carefully. And so, I didn't feel comfortable, and confident speaking. Because I had a very thick accent, and no one would really understand me. I get nervous about it,

or I don't know. I just feel like sometimes it's like embarrassing a little bit, that you don't speak like everybody else, and they can immediately see that you are different. Once I start talking, they know that I'm not from here. I also think something that makes me insecure a lot, is that I often think people think I'm stupid because like if I can't find the right word, or like I don't pronounce something their way, or like, have an American accent, and it's like I must seem like I'm illiterate or something. Especially when someone like brings up your accent or the way you pronounce something, and like kind of mocking you. Or when a classmate makes a mistake and refers to your English as unintelligible because they don't understand your culture.

Voiceover 2 of statistics of the number of international students to the US each year

Part Three – Missing Home, The Pain of Leaving

Students are seen entering the stage with backpacks on. They are sad. They move to their respective space on stage and relax. The song "I Miss Home" is played.

Student 1: I really miss home.

Student 3: I've been dreaming about home very, very often lately.

Student 2: My hometown is called Eternal Spring City

Student 1: I'm from the land of wood and water.

Student 2: We only have one season. It's spring. It's like always growing all the time. The weather is always nice.

Student 1: A tropical island that is warm all year round.

Student 3: It has a rich, rich culture.

Student 2: I love my home city because it's very beautiful, you know. Every time you walk in the city center you enjoy looking at those architectures.

Student 3: Oh yes, the architecture, I miss the architecture because my hometown is a historical town. So, all the architecture is very old and ancient and when I think about that. I feel like that's a part of my identity. Feels like a part of me is missing. *They sigh.*

Student 1: Life wasn't bad back home if I'm being honest.

Student 3: Before this I had five years of experience. I already worked in IT Sales.

Student 1: I worked 5 years as a teacher.

Student 3: And before that my first education was in intercultural communication, which I think is also helpful, because I not only studied languages there, but also, you know, try to understand the differences between the cultures and I like that topic.

Student 2: I had a relatively stable life, you know, childhood, very, very simple upbringing. My parents, they're not rich like, by any means. Although, I did have sort of like privilege, because we have a caste system back home. So that's why I had certain privileges that came with it. I went to a private school that was amazing. I also have a little brother, who is also very smart. He goes to NYU Abu Dhabi right now.

Student 3: It's hard, so hard to be far away from your family, when you're so close-knit. Just try to understand the baggage we're carrying being here. The pain. The things we're losing. The people and the things we have to leave behind for coming here. The sacrifices I was willing to make to actualize my dream that was burning inside of me. Only because we want better. We want opportunities. I know students who resigned from their tenured job, gave up their apartment, spent all their savings, gave away most of the things just to come here. I'm very close to my family, and we have such a strong bond. But right now, I'm forced to live here, far away from them to study in the U.S. Where I am from, we don't live separately for a long time, because family is all we can rely on. We always decide to stay near each other, if not the same apartment, at least the same neighborhood. It's my first time living abroad, and it's the hardest part. I get homesick often. I cry. Not once, I cry regularly. And especially, when it rains. It's so hard!

Part Four – Relationships and Interactions

Phone rings. Students answer and talk to their family or friends over video call. Pictures are shown on screen of family members.

Student 1: Hey guys!

Student 2: Hey Cousin

Student 3: Hey mom! Hey dad!

Student 2: I'm okay, first three months!

Student 1: Yeah, I'm eating!

Student 3: And drinking iced coffee!

Student 2: Hey, this is kind of funny. Americans drink cold water all the time. Even in the winter they drink water with ice. Even when outside it's like snowing they just drink cold water and they add ice, and they eat a lot of cold food, and they eat Pizza all the time. Whenever you go to the

parties there's always pizza and everything is such big portions. When you go to like McDonalds, and when you ask for coke. It's like this big, back home it's like very tiny.

Student 3: The worst part is going to a supermarket and trying to find things that are similar to things back home and what you like to eat. But not able to find things that are equally as good. So that's like a real struggle because it's like all bagels. I'm like, where's the good bread? *Pause* Everything is so different.

Student 1: It is all a big change.

Student 3: I feel a little bit lonely.

Student 2: I don't know, I feel like everyone is in their own world.

Student 1: Like it's very individualistic.

Student 2: Tight knit

Student 3: Selfish

Student 1: I am just confused.

Student 2: Everyone just seems to be so fake. I feel like they don't really care about other people or what they are doing.

Student 1: They see you and ask hey, how are you? Or what's up? And I'm ready to talk and have a whole conversation, but they don't really want to know, that's just how they greet you! They continue walking and I'm like. Oh uh, Bye!

Student 3: It seems so rude to me. I am confused why some people would be nice to me, but not kind, you know.

Student 2: I realize more when people are nice to me, it doesn't mean like they are nice, nice to me. They are just like that to everyone.

Student 1: A few times I talked to some of my classmates, and they were super nice, and you know I will find them on Facebook, message them, and I treat them like you know they are really good friends. But then I realize no, that's kinda creepy for them. Like they don't want to go that far. They are nice to me just because we're classmates, and that's it. After class we're done, we are not even supposed to hang out. It's like they have a whole different life.

Student 3: I mean, there's a lot of cultural differences. Like in health care!

All: Oh my God! Health care!

Everyone else freezes except for Student 1

Part Five – Health System

Student 1: I never had health insurance; where I am from, we just go to the hospital. So, when I came here, I constantly lived in fear that I'm gonna get run over by a car, and I'm gonna have to pay way too much money. I now know I have health insurance that is covered in my tuition. I have been struggling with my vision, for like a long time. I don't see very well. I thought I should really get an eye examined, but I'm like, does it cost money because if that is the case to do it, I don't know about that. But then I found out that there's like a free one with the Health Insurance every thirty-six months, but like my program is over in like twenty-four months. But it was okay. I'm going to wait until I get back home. Yeah, it took me a while to understand what I could do to get just an annual checkup. I didn't know how to go to a doctor. After a while I got it, that I could just go to the Wellness Center or just find a primary physician for myself. I needed a dermatologist, so I had to find a doctor. I found a doctor. I called them and they told me the next appointment is for January next year. I was like, Okay, sign me up. *(Pause)* I mean, why do I have to like to wait more than six months for an appointment if I need it now. So that's different. That's hard. But I had a leg injury from playing soccer a couple months into the semester right. So, I had to get it treated urgently. I went to the doctor, and I was, you know, constantly asking them, "hey? Like, I hope this gets covered by my insurance." Because even a hundred dollars was a lot for me at that point. And so, I go to the doctor. And they tell me "Oh, yeah, it's fine. Yeah, your insurance is accepted, but I can't really say how much it's going to cost, maybe like twenty dollars." So okay, I went there, got my leg checked, they gave me a bunch of exercises. It's fine. um after that, a couple of weeks later I got a bill in the mail for like two hundred dollars. And I was just like, why? like, I don't know! And so, I call the insurance people, and they're like. "Oh, cause that's your co-pay." I was like copay? What the fuck is a copay? I don't know what a co-pay is. And then I had to do, you know, all this research by myself and then, apparently, now I know what the copay is, and what a co-insurance is. But why? I think that it would help if at colleges they would have a translator or someone to help, because medical terms and healthcare in itself can be tricky. Because that's like a basic human thing. Anyways I'll talk to you later, I still have to try and find a job.

They all hung up. They get dressed for a job interview. We hear "Get A Job" by The Silhouettes

Part Six – Jobs, JABS! Job?

"Initial Adjustment" is projected on the screen. Student 1 and Student 3 narrate the story using signs to help, while Student 2 plays the role of an international student in distress.

Student 1: Over 1 million international students' study in the US each year.

Student 3: Higher education is one of America's top service exports generating 42 billion in revenues each year.

Student 1: International students contributed 33.8 billion to the US economy between 2020-2021. Before the pandemic it was up to 44.7 billion each year.

Student 3: For every three international students one US job is created.

Student 1: International students supported 335,423 jobs in the US between 2020 and 2021, Before the pandemic it was up 460,000 each year.

Student 3: International students pay way more to attend school than local students.

Student 1: About 62% of all international students receive the majority of their funds from sources outside of the United States, including personal and family sources as well as home country governments or universities.

Students 3: The US remains the leading destination for international students. There are over 20 countries where you can work while studying, including Canada, Australia, Ireland, Spain, Germany, UK, France, and Sweden.

Student 2: But here in the US you cannot. Since we're not allowed to work. We don't even have many options, you know, to find any extra money, so it's either, you know, survive somehow, or go home, and that's not good.

Student 1: At least, we can work on campus. The United States only authorizes international students to work on campus.

Student 2: By now I am running out of savings at this point.

Student 3: I'm financially stressed.

Student 1: I'm also suffering.

Student 2: So, I was like living off my last savings, and I was like I hate it here. I don't have a job. I don't have any money.

Student 3 plays the role of an advisor.

Student 3: Yeah absolutely, you can work on campus. Just follow these steps, *(Takes out a rolled paper, opens it and it rolls out into a long list to the floor)*

Student 2: *(Reading the list)* Onboarding,

Student 1: Form I-9

Student 3: W-4 form.

Student 2: Form this

Student 1: Form that

Student 3: Student-employment-f-1-certification

Student 1: Social Security Number application

Student 2: So yeah, I didn't realize I needed to get a social security number in order to work, and that could only happen once I had a job on campus. A work. I had a lot of help from people, it was not too complicated, but it was very tedious.

Student 1: When I just came here, I could not get a job on campus. I thought this would at least be easy!

Student 3: But it was not easy to find a job on campus. I guess not all departments want to hire international students right away, because they understand that they will need to wait for us to get a social security number or whatever, and maybe not everybody wants to wait.

Student 2: I spent like a whole semester applying to things, and I could not get anything, and nobody even wanted to schedule an interview with me, and I was like, why is this? I was like why nobody wants to give me a chance? I have like experience, and I speak multiple languages, and I can write well. That was like a thing that made me feel like not welcome here.

Student 3: It was definitely one of those things that you wouldn't have the experience of if you were born in the US.

Student 2: And so, I applied for not 1, not 2, not 3 not even 4. I applied for several jobs, until.

Student 3 plays the role of an on-campus job interviewer.

Student 3: Thank you so much for your interest in working for us on campus. So, first question. Why do you want to work with us?

Student 2: *(To the audience)* Well, I really just wanted to respond saying I am running out of savings! I'm financially stressed! I'm suffering! I hate it here. I don't have a job. I don't have any money! But I smiled and responded politely. And so, I got my first job on campus.

Student 2: At the interview they didn't ask me about me being an international student, even though I didn't hide that. But when I got the job, she didn't expect that it would take that long for me to get a social security number. Yeah, but she was fine with that. I have a great supervisor. But still I think if they had, like, you know, the same candidate, but native then they would've given it to them.

Student 1: And so, I got accepted, my employer wrote a letter for me and allowed me to go to the Social Security Office. That process is for another play. Then I finally got myself a social security number like a week after that, and then I could finally work.

Student 2: But then, I needed more experience off campus and more money to survive. But there are strict legal restrictions on even doing internships.

Student 3 plays the role of an off-campus job interviewer.

Student 3: Thank you so much for your interest in working off campus. So, first question. Tell me a little about yourself.

Student 2: Well, I am originally from Chi-

Student 3: Wait, you are an international student!

Student 2: Here we go!

Student 1 recites the poem.

Student 1: Now let me tell you about the CPT and OPT options
 Good luck to you if you find one
 Ah mean you will, but the process comes with frustration
 Little consideration if you're from a different nation
 Because if you are not from here, not a native speaker
 Big minus. Automatic bias. They'll give you no feature
 They automatically think you write worse, talk worser
 So, its best I don't start by telling them I'm from Russia
 We're international yes, but my English is impeccable
 So why when applying for a job there's a disclaimer, that's terrible
 "Will you now or in the future require sponsorship for employment H1B visa status?"
 Check this box, so we know that we don't hire you to work with us
 I'm qualified! but US citizen, or permanent residents only
 It feels bad, it's hurtful you keep breaking our hearts slowly

There is a fight with students 2 as the students in distress and student 3 as the oppressor. This symbolizes the fight with restrictions to work in the US. Students two loses. Student 2 crawls offstage defeated.

Transitions into a dance to 'Na Uncle Sam' By Ukairo

Part Seven – American (Dream) Nightmare

“Mental Isolation” is projected on the screen. The dance takes the characters through the journey of their pain and anguish which is further communicated through the Spoken Word Poem ‘American (Dream) Nightmare’

All: Lonely, stressed, sad, angry
 Things are now going crazy
 Oh my God, can you save me!
 It is scary
 It is not easy
 It's complicated, please believe me
 And I just feel very, very, very lonely
 Awkward
 I really struggled daily
 It's horrendous
 It's complicated for you as an international grad student, trust!
 You have less of a connection with the campus, and I'm just trying to adjust.
 I couldn't meet friends or that's more for undergraduates than us?
 This is kind of ridiculous
 It was all a big change, everything here surprises me
 It was all very unexpected, bounded in the land of the free
 And then it started to decline. I just remember it got hard
 No motivation, loss of interest, Insomnia, Depression
 I don't know. I didn't understand it. I just felt very out of place
 I don't even know how to act. Suddenly like everything was a mistake
 I became so uncomfortable, my confidence got low
 Feel like a part of me was missing I wanted to go home
 And then we start to suffer a lot from imposter syndrome
 I don't belong, don't deserve, don't know if I should be here though
 Deep down, like I know I'm working really hard, yes!
 But another part of me is like, oh no, I'm not doing as much, I'm doing less
 I start feeling guilty, stressed, depressed
 You are taking a fifteen-minute break?
 Don't you see you are like wasting time
 Time here is kind of limited
 Time here means productivity
 Time here must be managed every time
 You don't deserve to be here because you're not working ninety percent of the time!
 So, get up
 Spend the time doing some research
 Get up
 Spend the time on some jobs

Get up
 Spend the time working on some writing
 Doing this!
 Doing that!
 You know what, give up, quit now, and go home honey
 You're only just wasting your parents' money.
 This massive change affected me mentally, emotionally, physically, psychologically, and financially
 It feels like nobody can help you with that difficulty
 It's really like you're on your own, though there's of course faculty
 And offices that can help you,
 But they're not right there when you need them to
 And by the time you send an email and contact them
 What's the point when it's already a distant problem
 When a hate crime is in effect
 And this guy just looks at you and he goes, "Is he from a different country? Where is your yard?"
 I don't answer, and so with no regard, excuse my language, he asks "is he a retard?"
 All that stuff that you have to deal with
 Judgments and the systems
 Xenophobia and racism
 When you feel like they don't respect you
 Like people don't accept you
 But instead, they feel bad for you. And then you start feeling bad for yourself, too,
 You want to go in a corner and cry
 Or die
 But I'm just so afraid, though in the home of the brave
 It is scary
 It's complicated, please believe me
 Oh say, can you see It's not that easy
 When you have now become a minority.

Part Eight – Successes

"Acceptance and Integration" is projected on the screen. The students start a game of UNU as they speak.

Student 1: Though it is hard transitioning and settling in the US, if you asked us who was most helpful in this process, we would boldly tell you Americans.

Student 2: Americans

Student 3: Americans

Student 2: Some have been very helpful.

Student 3: They are mostly helpful if you communicate.

Student 1: I have this group of friends. We've stayed together since my arrival when we went on an orientation trip together. We still get brunch every Sunday, and stuff like that. I know all of their parents and for winter break and stuff like that I go to their home to stay. I can't deny their involvement in helping me get settled and everything. They are all Americans.

Student 2: When I wanted to practice my English, and just curious about the culture, I volunteered in a church. I met this incredible woman. She is in her mid-seventies. She was one of the volunteers. We became close friends. It became a ritual, we would meet every week, and for hours, she would take me to a new restaurant, and she would take me to new places, either a new hike or a new park or a new museum. And then I tell people I tell everyone she's my grandmother. We have a beautiful friendship. She's American.

Student 3: I think there are a lot of people who contributed along the way. One of them was a woman we met at Waltham. She is a real estate agent. We were trying really hard to find accommodation quickly, because we had to stay in a hotel which was very expensive. We liked this house but there was another person who already rented the house, he was faster. But we still needed a place to stay after our hotel booking was up, and we just asked that woman if she knew any place we could stay, and she talked to that person who rented the house that we liked. She asked him if we could stay there because it's a very big house and he was waiting for his girlfriend to come in a few weeks. She didn't have to do that for us. But she did and he actually offered and allowed us to stay there. He helped us a lot and we stayed there for seven days, maybe, until we found our apartment in Boston. She was American.

Student 1: Some Americans are helpful.

Student 2: The world in general is very negative.

Student 3: And the US is hard.

Student 1: But I still think a lot of people here are very nice, and they're even nicer than a lot of people back home.

Student 3: I got support from professors and classmates and staff.

Student 2: I didn't have any professor who wouldn't be nice to me.

Student 3: I felt like from the first email from both Admissions office and the director of my program that I was welcomed.

Student 1: The people that I work for and work with are incredible, and my boss is so much fun, and she always tries to like to help me or introduce me to people, and I feel like she doesn't do it out of obligation or anything but just because she wants to help people.

On screen we see a video of different international students' events while they speak.

Student 3: But yeah, I feel like one of the like best moments was definitely some of the events with Office of International Student Affairs (OISA) and International Graduate Student Organization (IGSO)

Student 1: Like the picnic thing

Student 2: That was a good connection.

Student 1: International students got to know each other.

Student 2: It was nice to meet other people, and everybody wanted to meet new people.

Student 3: That was a pretty nice time to break the ice with other students.

Student 2: OISA, you know, they're really helpful.

Student 1: Everybody smiling just helpful.

Student 3: That just confirmed for me that this might be the place I belong.

Student 1: I felt the most welcome when we slowly started celebrating Diwali. And now we have a giant celebration. These are the moments that were the best moments. When I could celebrate things from my culture. And it was crazy to think that everyone was joining in my celebration.

Student 3: Or when I got to share a poem from my country in my native language.

Student 1: It was exhilarating. And it was exciting because I was able to do something very close to me.

Student 3: I feel so, included.

Student 1: And so even though the challenges we face are hard, we have built communities here, we have forged friendships and relationships that we cannot deny. We have greater employment, career, and training opportunities because of the high standard in education.

Student 2: But there is still a lot that can be done.

Part Nine – The Charge

All: So, we have a message, and we hope you listen up!

Student 1: To Americans, listen up!

The instrumental for "We Are the World" plays under the following dialogue.

Student 3: We wish you can be more curious.

Student 2: Talk to us, Listen to us.

All: Listen up!

Student 3: Don't let what you have heard about us, cloud your perspective of us.

Student 2: And don't be judgmental.

Student 1: Be curious.

All: Listen up!

Student 2: Offer more help, because we are new and sometimes we don't even know where to start.

Student 1: But don't be a savior, you know a lot of times we feel and experience that people think we come here because we were in some adversity or like we couldn't eat food or something like that.

Student 3: And they try to be the upper hand.

Student 2: Superior

Student 1: And then not treat you as an equal, almost, you know like inferior.

Student 3: It happens in school.

Student 1: It happens in the workplace.

Student 3: And we know sometimes it's not intentional.

Student 2: But just be conscious of that fact that you're not pulling someone out of deep waters

Student 3: We can do stuff

Student 2: We are bad asses

All: Listen up!

Student 2: I wish people knew that foreigners coming to this country to study means they are some of the top people in their country

Student 3: So, treat us better

Student 1: We are smart

Student 2: We are hard working

Student 3: And that doesn't mean we are coming here to steal your job

All: Listen up

Student 1: We are just humans

Student 2: We have our own traditions

Student 3: We have our own perspectives on things that might be different from yours, so understand that that we wouldn't know certain things

Student 2: So, help us

All: Listen up!

Student 3: Administrations, organizations, boards, and offices

Student 1: We are vulnerable, powerless non-immigrants who can make no change on the overwhelming strict legal restrictions on us. We depend your advocacy and on your political influence to make our voices be heard

Student 2: Listen up! We need greater guidance in all aspects

Student 3: It would help to assign us each a friendly mentor, someone who can help us with all the quick questions. Because we have a lot of questions when we come here, from health care to transportation, and if somebody can just quickly answer those questions, it wouldn't be so rough. It would help with us having less anxiety.

Student 2: Have more SIMPLE convenient websites. With special resources for everybody who's coming here non-immigrant or immigrant doesn't matter in their language. So, if you need resources, this is the website to go to. With all the information you need if you are new to the country. Sections with information on health care, food, culture, the academic system, finances, and accommodation

Student 1: It is an overwhelming experience for international students when we get here. There is so much happening. Trying to figure out this new life while not being connected to the campus and receiving a million emails in one day. We don't understand all the acronyms and offices for resources. It all gets lost. Sometimes it's long after an issue, we learnt that oh there's an office for that or some resource available. So please find other ways for us to know about the resources. Reach out to us!

Student 2: And we know right now you might be sitting there saying "oh but there are so many resources" So do you see our point?

Student 1: Educators, listen up! consider our needs in the design of the curriculum and classroom activities

Student 2: When you have international students in your classroom don't talk about America for one hour. Find a way to include us. Include our culture.

Student 3: At the same time, be more patient with us and learn about the differences in communication styles, word choice and nonverbal expressions.

All: Listen up!

Student 1: Future International students listen up

Student 3: The American college experience is not like what you watch on TV. It is nothing like that. It is very different.

Student 2: Expect that the food here is not like back home. So, you may need to learn how to cook.

Student 1: But If I'm being honest with you. It is scary

Student 2: But don't be afraid

Student 3: Don't be discouraged

Student 2: Take the leap

Student 1: Because it may be scary. It may be hard

Student 3: But there's also a lot of good things that come out of hardship

Student 1: A diamond is always formed under pressure

Student 3: So, don't let the bad things define your experience

Student 2: No journey is easy

Student 1: And you do need to get a little push so that you can fly

Student 2: You can only have global experience here

Student 3: Have friends from all over the world

Student 1: So, take the leap

Student 2: Explore

Student 3: Try to make connections early

Student 1: Find a community you belong to

Student 2: Do not be afraid of getting to know people

Student 3: Try to communicate with your friends, peers, and professors

Student 1: At some point you may not fit in or feel included so, do things that make you happy

Student 3: Keep in touch with your family frequently

Student 2: Video calls

Student 1: Even though you are far away, it will help you to feel less homesick.

Student 2: You have to be strong

Student 1: Speak up for yourself

Student 3: Or people won't hear you

Student 2: You will have to fight for yourself

Student 3: Advocate for yourself

Student 1: Let your voice be heard

Students 3: Have conversation with your friends about your culture

Student 1: Once you start to express yourself, they will be curious

All: Listen up

Student 2: The world is a mess right now

Student 3: And there is no perfect country

Student 2: There's no perfect home

Student 1: But you can make it home

Student 2: Be comfortable with yourself, knowing that you are different

Student 3: And being different is cool

Student 1: As Andrea, our director of International Student Affairs said international students are badassess

All: You are a badass! We are badass!

Students 1: So now that you've seen our wounds, how can you help us heal them?

Student 2: With unwelcoming immigration policies, the system works against us

Students 3: It strips us

Students 2: It beats us

Student 3: It robs us.

Students 1: Millions we give with no promise of even a visa, job, or security

Student 2: Without us the system fear losing revenues, but with it, we fear losing our cool

Students 3: Being stressed, worried and uneasy

All: So how can you help to heal them now that you have seen our wounds?

Characters join in closing song

What will we do?

When we're away from home

Strangers in your home and you won't help us through

International doesn't make us supernatural

We need your help

We need your intervention

Appendix D: Participants Survey

Lemar MFA Thesis Project

ACCULTUATION

American Dream: International Students' Nightmare

Journal Reflection

A part of this research is your reflection on the experience throughout this production process. This will help me to gather data on the impact of your involvement in telling your story and experience through performance. When you have time please reflect and respond to the prompt, sharing as much as you can on that experience, including your feelings, your discoveries, lessons, what you would change, what was found interesting or not, etc.

1. April 13 and 14, 2023: Reflect on your experience of reading the script for the first time (How was what that? what was interesting to you? What did you learn?)

2 responses

The first reading was great, and in the middle of the play I could deeply relate to the main message of the performance. I would really love to see this performance to go beyond just Emerson walls and help others understand what international students have to go through. I really appreciated the enlightening element on the reading when Lemar mentioned what is documentary theater and what epic theater is. Being not in the Theater Education program, I really appreciated the introduction into the professional stuff of things.

The process of the reading the script was a great joy for me because how amusing and relative that was. The text direct speaks to the target audience without shyness which is something very important when it comes to the issue of immigration and social justice in general. We can't shy away from it. I discover that I'm not the only one. I am not the only one that experiencing what I've experienced since the first day in the United States with the identity that was forced being put on, that the limitation of choice. The unreasonable limitation of choice for the human rights that's manifested in this country.

2. April 18, 2023: Reflect on your first rehearsal of blocking scenes 1, 3 and 4. (How was that experience like devising the work? What did you learn about yourself/ about the people you are working with? What did you find interested? What did you like/didn't like? What did you discover? What would you change? etc.)

3 responses

It brought so much more clarity and confidence in the play. I finally could see how the script would go alive, and it was nice to see and be part of this revival. Waiting for what' up next.

I liked how after blocking a few scenes, the whole play started making more sense. At first, I was concerned about many adjustments on the go, but then I realized that is a part of creation and the director's vision to let us express ourselves too and make suggestions. I discovered that I really liked the freedom of doing some part the way I feel it, because this is a play about us, international students, and when I read those lines, I felt as if I was not playing but just speaking

to the audience from my heart. So it makes a lot of sense for us to put our heart into the play with our own visions. I also liked the ideas that came from Blu. I think they made the whole play stronger, and added drama to a few scenes. Plus, it inspired Lemar to add a few elements, that, in my opinion, became essential later.

The experience was great! I can't exactly remember which day was it so I will be speaking on general! I think the rehearsal was very creatively fulfilling to be part of the devising process. I learned that everything comes very easy when the story it's close and relative to myself. I enjoyed working with you and Kate, not that I learned from you guys this is something that always struggle with, I have a hard time to understanding stuff through texting people, that's why I always prefer phone calls. I also learned that the people I worked with are all highly-achieved human being with great humbleness. I find it interesting about documentary theatre because it reminds me about how theatre was original served for: religious reason for communicating with God. It's like we are doing a ritual for a message to the public. There isn't anything we could change if we can such as time, schedule and more technical support, however, I do not blame and happy with what we had.

3. April 20, 2023, Dance Rehearsal:

3 responses

I really liked the dance rehearsal because it was full of inspiration for me too. The song choice is great, and the dance has a clear message in the performance

This was my favorite rehearsal, because I'm a dancer, and I was given a chance to choreograph the piece. I truly found myself feeling the main message and letting it our through movements.

The song choice is amazing, it already speaks volumes about how we, international students, feel. I would not change anything at this point. Just at first I thought all the choreo would be set and I would just learn steps and moves. But it turned out even better, because I could create myself, it really made me feel involved and included. I also started feeling more responsibility over the whole play, and especially this dance piece, because I was creating it too.

I wasn't there!

Please share your final reflection. How are you feeling now that you have told your story? Take some time to reflect on everything please.

2 responses

I feel amazing! I loved all the feedback I heard not only about the execution, but mostly about the impact we were able to make with our performance. When an international student comes up to you and says they were in tears and so emotionally attached, it means a lot for you as an actor, creator and just a person who feels the importance of the main message. Even though at first I was reluctant to participate because of my tight schedule, I was very happy to do this, because as I said before, every word, issue spoke to me. I'm happy that Lemar took the courage and artistic vision to express what we're struggling with and have to go through in this performance. I hope it will not end here and now. I hope it will go way beyond Emerson walls, and I will get a chance to choreograph for a bigger audience. We want to be heard, and this art form is an incredible tool to communicate. As it was said in the play, Americans can help, if you communicate to them about your struggles. This is us doing our part in such a powerful way, yet entertaining way.

It felt great and necessary. It was a work I couldn't shy away from, because if I did, which almost happened, I knew I would regret it. It makes me want to do more stuff like that. Because more than that's something related to what I do, theatre and performance, it was something beyond that I wish I can be part of, policy and politic. I aim to make art that's disruptive because disruption, for me, is the key to make new path. We are the people and generation who are making the path. A great definition for path is that, there wasn't one until a lot of people have walked pass through it. Sadly there isn't one yet. It's all dark and mysterious, and honestly, that's what makes it worthy and exciting, that we are path makers with great disruptive art-minded people. Pls pls if you make more work of this, contact me, and have me to be part of it.

Appendix E: Audience Survey

MFA THESIS PROJECT SURVEY

This form presents as an audience review for the work ACCULTRATION American Dream: International Students' Nightmare.

If you have engaged in this theatrical exposition, we kindly invite you to critically reflect on your experience. Please share your thoughts and analysis to expand the dramaturgical and experiential universe of this thesis project.

Please describe this theatrical experience in a complete sentence.

12 responses

Acculturation uplifts the voices of international students through human connection on a shared fucked up experience dealing with the challenges life in America imposes onto them.

A moving theatre piece about the challenges of being an international students with a call to action

THOUGHT PROVOKING AND CHALLENGING

Acculturation was an emotional unmasking of the true, complex, and unseen experience of graduate students who come to the United States to pursue higher education.

I really appreciate that you put our authentic thoughts into the exact words. As an international student, I've got a strong message that I never be alone. Each lines, and especially the the

isolation and language barrier's parts, was really powerful for me because that was exactly what I experienced/am experiencing here. Thank you so much for making our voice heard.

Entertaining and thoughtful.

A wide-ranging and impactful exploration of international student concerns and experiences.

Very emotional piece that is well conducted to the maximum potential of a device piece.

It was a wonderfully poignant and educational experience filled with theatricality and grace.

It was moving for everyone in the audience!

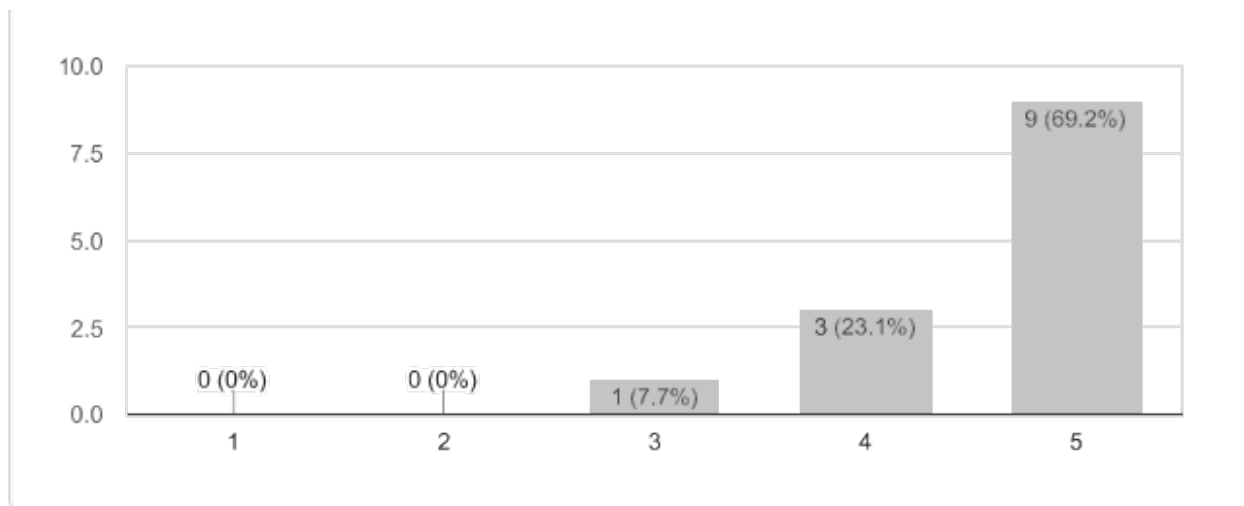
This piece of theatre invited an audience member to both actively listen to the stories of international students AND to engage with one another on continuing the conversation around how to better support and celebrate these students moving forward.

This experience was a riveting journey that took me from students' home countries and plans to come study in the US all the way through their time spent in the US. The challenges, heartbreak, and joy along the way were poignantly represented by a variety of means including words, sound, music, dance, shape, props, and audience participation.

To what extent did this work inspire you to take action against the highlighted issues faced by International Graduate students.

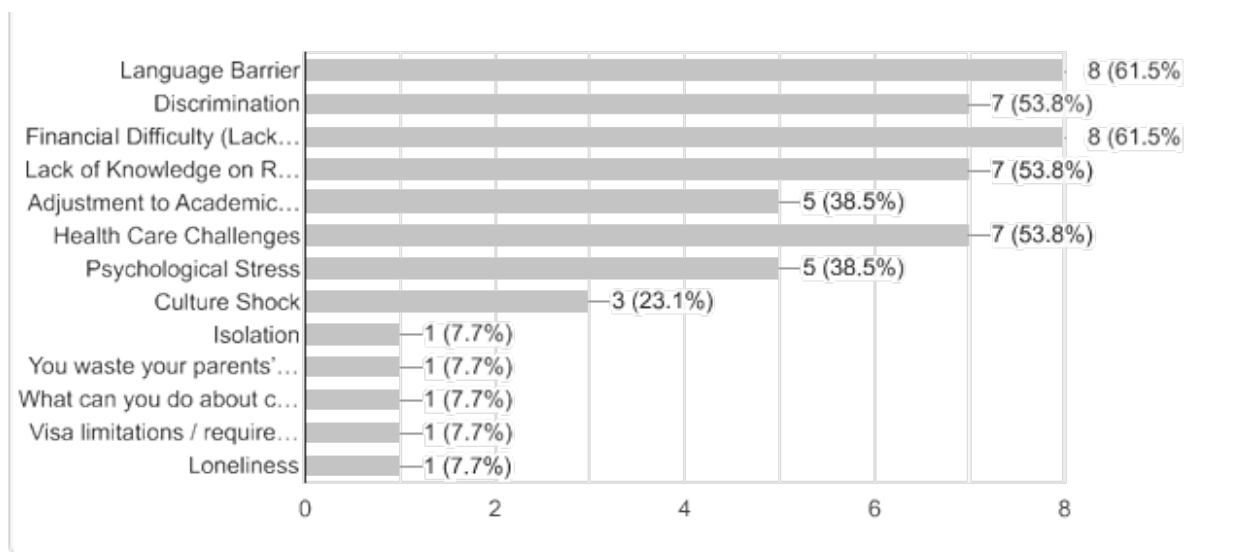
Rate 1 to 5

13 responses



Please indicate the issue/s of International Graduate students as highlighted in this work that was/were most resonant for you.

13 responses



Are there any suggested solutions to any of these issues that you would like to expand on?

10 responses

Advocating as a unit towards the demand for sustainable action on behalf of international students.

THE UNIVERSITY CAN GIVE MORE SCHOLARSHIPS AND PROVIDE GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS. THIS WILL REALLY HELP IN REDUCING FINANCIAL STRUGGLES.

Prioritizing and expanding options for international student employment on-campus—National students should not be the first choice if international students are also applying. Universities should also make greater efforts to provide on-campus translation services and workshops for the various applications/paperwork international students most commonly encounter.

Notes-sharing is definitely helpful for me to follow and review each class.

Also, if we have a native English speaker buddy who is in the same major and we can study together outside of class, that would be a great way to build a relationship.

The College could create an International Student Canvas resource course which addresses some of the health care questions and issues and other FAQ. We could ask International Students to contribute.

I have many ideas for solutions, but it can be challenging to argue for them as a single voice. I think it would be good for OISA or another body to collect student voices to make a strong case for change to upper level administrators.

Highly advice for political and legislative changes.

Might not be an option, but could the college change their policy to GUARANTEE an on-campus job for every international student? Make it part of their acceptance package?

ways in which us resident students can be advocates for their international student peers.

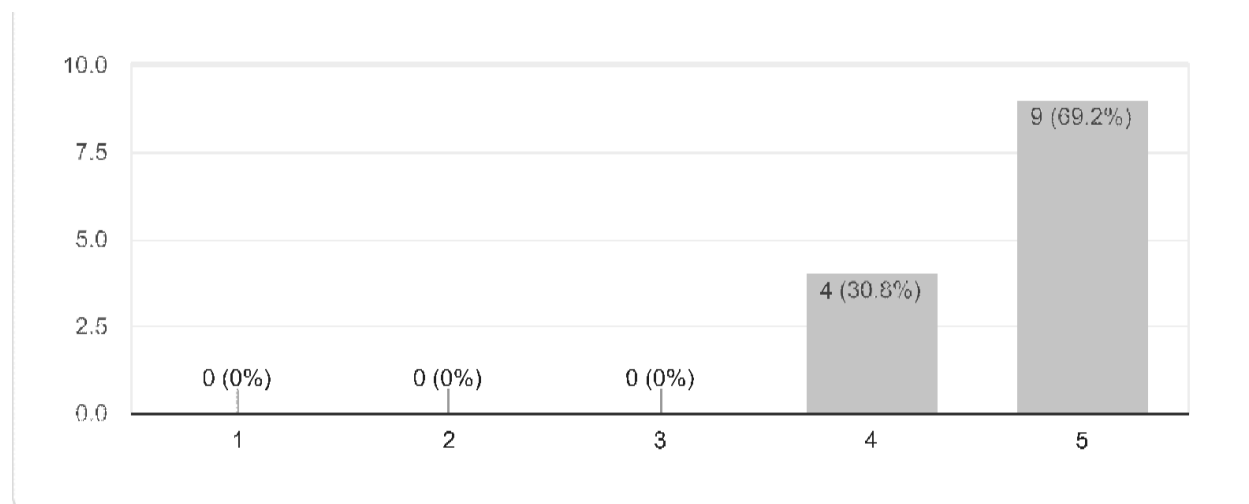
The play feels like a call to action to start a conversation with international students to learn what they need, and how we can best support their success and personal well-being during their time at Emerson (and other institutions).

Considering the theatrical elements and how the collected stories of international graduate students were presented in this work.

How satisfied are you with the presentation of this theatrical experience?

Rate from 1 to 5

13 responses



What are your views on the impact of the forum theatre devices that were employed in this work?

E.g. Breaking the fourth wall, Engaging the audience to support a resolution.

12 responses

I thought the use of forum theatre as a device to connect with the audience made the work incredibly engaging.

SO IMPACTFUL!!!! Actually brainstorming ideas together and sharing them was brilliant!

IT WAS VERY EFFECTIVE

I loved the direct communication with the audience, the invitation to come on stage/remove oppressions, and the Q&A. I may have missed it in the invitations (because I was so excited!), but I didn't realize that there would be audience interaction until it was happening. For future audiences, I might suggest making that more clear in the introduction to the piece.

Activate the audience's thinking, Exploring multiple possibilities to transform the status quo, Offering opportunities to speak up

Love the fourth wall breaking. Speaking just for myself, not a fan of forcing audience members to talk to one another. I prefer to be immersed in the experience and then process afterwards alone. Trying to find immediate solutions to a problem I am just encountering (I'm not but speaking for a general audience member) creates anxiety and resentment and risks becoming performative in itself. But that's just my opinion.

I am not very familiar with theater at all, so I am not sure. I guess I will say that I sometimes did not know where to look or if I was looking in the correct place because of the setup of the TV, sound and sometimes picture / video from it, and the performers coming from different places. The piece on poetry really resonated with me.

I found that extremely impactful - to ask us to think and try to come up with ideas/solutions on the spot. My only problem was that it was a bit hard to get back into the performance again mentally. Perhaps in a full production, this could be facilitated with a lighting change?

I loved the opportunities to discuss with fellow audience members. I also listened to and supported peer a peer who was having an emotional reaction to the show. I was glad for the dialogue/small group discussion time because it gave her a chance to process the moment with a friend and also was so honored to witness her moment of empowerment and representation. The blending of recorded/digital, visual/printed text, and live elements was also engaging.

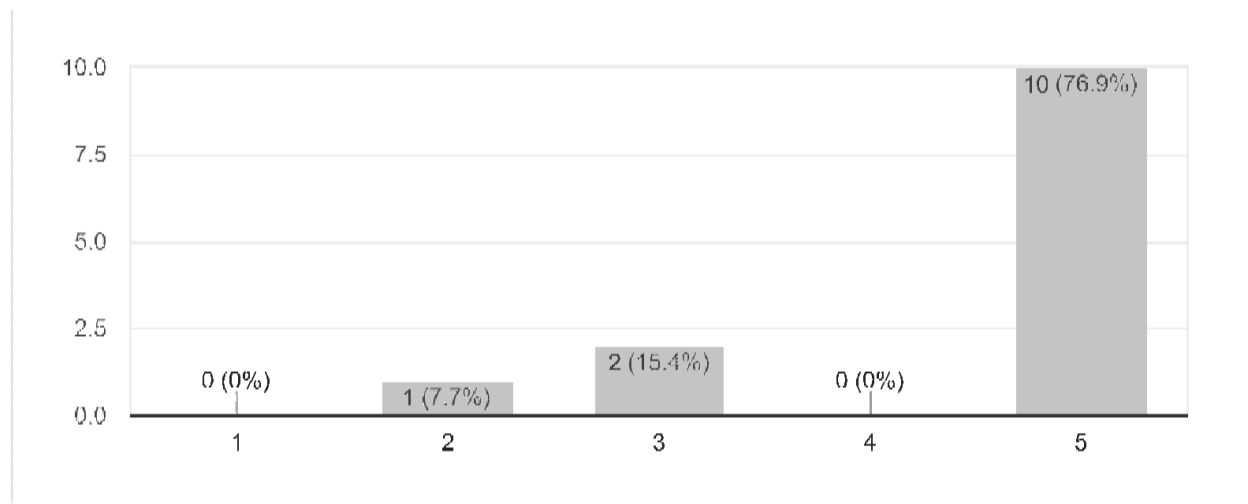
I really enjoyed it! The requests to participate were a good reminder that it is not enough to simply sit back and watch; we must take action.

I'm a bit of a theater newbie, but from my perspective the rich variety of modalities was extremely effective. I've never seen something that used so many different elements so seamlessly - recorded scenes, dialogue, choreography, music, the fight scene, etc. It felt cohesive and like every modality used served to heighten a particular emotion.

Please rate how this work impacted your knowledge of the challenges faced by International Graduate students in the United States

Rate 1 - 5

13 responses



In your critical reflection, are there any theatrical elements or devices that could be employed to radically enhance the work?

If YES, please share below.

7 responses

I think projections and lights while they are not necessary, would be incredibly impactful! There are such incredible visual artists from the Emerson community who could get involved!

As the work continues to progress, I would love to see the videos displayed using the entirety of the upstage wall. The inclusion of languages outside of english, with or without subtitles for the audience, would be incredibly impactful as well.

I think the media could be more integrated into the piece, as well as more movement! The stage combat and the dance were beautifully done

MORE DANCE!!! Include first/primary languages; if possible, a bigger screen for the media elements (perhaps behind the actors as a backdrop to the action?)

Not familiar enough with theater to answer this question

I would really love to see some use of native language.

More digital visual elements/multimedia could really enhance the impact of the spoken words.

Perhaps this could even help as a translation aid.

Please share at least (5) five feelings /emotions experienced throughout the work.

13 responses

Compassion, appreciation, curiosity, eagerness, sadness

Joy, Anguish, Anger, Excitement, Connected

anger, shame, love, frustration, eagerness

SADNESS , LAUGHTER, HOME SICKNESS, ANGER, INQUISITIVENESS

Frustration, heart ache, joy, confusion, sympathy, awakened

Relieved, empathized, still embarrassed, still struggling, still wrestling, unified, hope, empowered, and more

Pleasure, amusement, irritation, boredom, resentment.

Empathy; concern; frustration; pride; inspired

Relatability, Passion, Frustration, Hopefulness, Love.

Frustration, empathy, sadness, bewilderment, and pain

Happiness, frustration, regret, inspiration, sadness

Shock, confusion, admiration, compassion, anger.

sorrow, loneliness, compassion, heartbreak, humor, dismay

Are there any questions you would like to ask the director/performers?

3 responses

What does it feel like to present such personal experiences of this topics nature to an American audience? (AND) What are your goals for the audience to walk away with?

What was the most rewarding part of this process?

I'm curious about the process of creating this work, especially the playwriting.

Please share any other comments or observations that you may have:

11 responses

I appreciated how you recognized the weight and impact of the different scenes and Allowed that to sit with us!

LOVE YOU LEMAR! CONGRATULATIONS!!!

i can't wait to see where this goes. it was a beautiful reminder that "good" theatre doesn't need to be high production value or off-book. the story had me on the edge of my seat the entire time
Thank you for so bravely and masterfully putting these extremely vulnerable and complicated issues on display. More people need to experience this play and these stories. Thank you for making me think and see and listen. Congratulations to you all, and especially Lemar!

Thank you so much for sharing such a beautiful and powerful piece! Congratulations!!!

I thought it was wonderful. I also think it would be enhanced by being less dogmatic, that art which reveals and questions is always more engaging than art that preaches and finger-points. And art that examines itself as much as its object (meaning, I'd be interested in some self-examination of how people coming to the U.S. believe the American mythology so completely, despite plenty of evidence to the contrary. I thought about the Black Americans who fled to France between WW1 and WW2. Some of them went expecting France to be Perfect/The Greatest but others, like James Baldwin, went with their eyes open, only expecting it to be less terrible than here at home.) The most compelling part was the part on homesickness, because it was vulnerable and honest. Likewise the culture shock portion. I also think it would be enhanced by acknowledging some of the many nuances. Example, the line about "that wouldn't happen to a

citizen" when discussing employment discrimination diminished the otherwise excellent section on that important issue because, um, yes, of course employment discrimination happens ALL THE TIME to citizens, especially BIPOC folks. For different reasons, but the idea that if one is American you can just easily find a job and especially a good one is really just ... wrong. And when you say something that wrong it casts a shadow on everything else you are saying. It completely ignores the reality of the American social and racial hierarchy. To have it stated by a white Russian actor struck me as especially ironic. And that's the other thing -- there is not one international student experience. While all IS faces the internal issues (homesickness, etc) they don't face the external ones (discrimination based on accent, acculturation issues) in the same way or to the same degree. I'd suggest that wrestling with these differences, especially the different experiences of white international students and those from Europe versus Asian and Black international students (and even Black students from Africa versus the Caribbean & Americas) would add depth.

As someone who is not very familiar with theater (and assuming this should be for a wide range of audience members), I think it would be helpful and impactful to provide a bit more context for the play. First, I am not familiar with "devised" theater, and I don't know if know what that means would have helped me understand the performance better. Second, you explained that the content came from a number of interviews, but it was unclear to me if any performer was saying the exact words of interviewees or if all of the lines in the performance were amalgamations of students' interview responses. I care a great deal about this topic and I think this was a fantastic and engaging way to inform people about the issues and concerns faced by these students.

Thank you. Immense gratitude for doing this.

I truly thought it was wonderful. I think you should DEFINITELY keep workshopping this script and try to move to a full production. Really, the only aspect I found to be not-so-impactful was the printed words on the clothing. Let the words they are SAYING speak for themselves. The actors performances can convey those same thoughts and feelings. :)

I LOVED IT. The use of devising and narrative playmaking was so brilliant and moving. I heard the stories on stage and from friends sitting right with me in the audience. I learned so much about the international students' experience and about the power of theatre to connect humans across barriers. Bravo Lemar and company!!

This was incredibly powerful. Even as someone who is already quite familiar with the challenges faced by international students, seeing it portrayed in this performance was extremely impactful.

I think every single person should see this.