US-based International Graduate Students and Faculty Members' Perceptions of Mentoring in Writing Studies

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About Us

As researchers, we hold unique positionalities in relation to the study's focus. Specifically, Lisa is a white American tenured associate professor at North Dakota State University, a mid-sized very-high-research (R1) university in the American Upper Midwest. Her department has a master's program in English and a doctoral program in rhetoric and writing studies. Lisa has been a writing program administrator at two different universities for 10 of the last 14 years and has worked intensively with international graduate students (IGSs) in that position as well as being an advisor and teacher for many of them. Since 2021, the majority of incoming graduate students in Lisa's current program have been international, hailing from Southeast Asia, North and West Africa, and Europe. For four years prior to her current position, Lisa was an assistant professor at the American University of Beirut, where Ghada was an undergraduate and graduate student. Ghada met Lisa when she took an advanced undergraduate writing class from Lisa and then worked as Lisa's research assistant. Today, Ghada is an international graduate student (IGS) and doctoral candidate completing her PhD in rhetoric and composition at Purdue University, a land-grant R1 university in the American Midwest. We share a commitment to bridging gaps between the backgrounds and experiences of IGSs studying in the U.S. and the central expectations and assumptions of rhetoric and writing studies as a field. This gap may not be immediately obvious to graduate students or faculty.

Institutional Description

As described above, we are both working from US-based institutions of higher education that value the production of research (meaning that most faculty have research appointments with lower teaching loads). Because they are either graduate faculty or graduate students, all of the participants in our study are also positioned within similar research-intensive institutions. Although we are located within the US, most of us (researchers and participants) are able to make sense of the American institutions where we are located from the "outside," since the majority of us hail from countries outside the US or have significant transnational work or life experience. The majority of us are also multilingual; our 28 participants reported speaking 42 languages (some overlapping). These

specific positionalities allow us as researchers to write from insider-outsider perspectives about the discipline of rhetoric and writing studies (RWS), which has historically produced much of its research in and about US contexts of writing.

Glossary

- Rhetoric and writing studies, or writing studies (RWS): Used as an inclusive term for a disciplinary area that might alternately be referred to as rhetoric, composition, writing program administration, professional & technical communication, etc.
- International graduate student (IGS): Used to refer to graduate students who have international status in the US, i.e. non-US citizens.

Key Theorists

Existing scholarship on mentoring:
Much of the literature in RWS on mentoring focuses on professionalization (i.e. writing/research collaborations, teacher training, administrative opportunities, job market, etc.). This suggests that successful mentoring relationships are built around formal activities. Some of the existing scholarship focuses on affect and embodiment, but we discovered in our review of the literature that this focus (attuned to linguistic, ethnic, racial, national, and cultural backgrounds) is written most often by authors who hold historically marginalized identities in the US. We found that the graduate students and faculty in our study stressed a "whole person" approach toward mentoring, with faculty emphasizing both professionalization and personal support somewhat equally and students emphasizing the value of individual support more. We identified two additional gaps in the review of the literature on mentoring: First, very little mentoring scholarship focuses on the international graduate student population. And second, much of the existing scholarship on mentoring relies on individual narratives and anecdotes, rather than empirical data collection and analysis. Our study offers a broader view of existing mentoring approaches and attendant challenges by presenting data collected from 28 interviews, with a specific focus on the international graduate student population.

Decolonial theory:
A decolonial framework calls attention to non-Western epistemologies, placing value on historically marginalized ways of thinking and doing. Within higher education, this framework illuminates how colonial legacies have historically shaped the production and maintenance of knowledge in academic institutions and disciplines, and offers decolonial alternatives. A decolonial stance is particularly helpful for the discipline of RWS, and for this study, because Anglo-American and monolingual ideologies have historically been centered within the field's research and teaching. Taking a decolonial stance toward mentoring, as we aim to in this article, means rethinking traditional approaches that value formal and systemic practices; considering how those from outside US borders

may experience traditional approaches; and validating and learning from historically marginalized perspectives about alternative practices. Decolonizing mentoring has the potential to more successfully support a new generation of scholars, including international graduate students and other historically minoritized students, as they enter RWS. This can in turn support new orientations toward writing research and pedagogy.

Transnational and translingual frames:
Our investigation requires us to employ transnational and translingual frames because the population we are studying, international graduate students, cross national, cultural, and linguistic borders as they enter the historically Americentric field of RWS and navigate their graduate programs. Like others who take transnational and translingual views, we are interested in how international graduate students might be understood as bringing resources to the field through this border crossing.

Project's Current Stage and Questions to Consider

At this stage of our project, we have completed all data collection, interview transcriptions, coding, and analysis. We have already written about this study in an article currently under review, but with a different analytical focus. The current draft includes the following sections:
- **Overview of project:** A brief introduction to the study and the gaps in existing literature that the study seeks to address
- **Methodology and methods:** A description of the methodology and methods employed for data collection and analysis, as well as an introduction to our participants
- **Results**: A fully developed description of our findings in relation to the research questions
- **Analysis:** Bullet points for the key points we anticipate making in relation to the research questions and theoretical frames
- **Discussion:** Bullet points for the key takeaways that we are seeing at this point

As you read our draft, we would find it most beneficial if you considered the following questions:
1. What gaps or opportunities for development have we missed?
2. What specific perspectives or examples could strengthen or align with our argument?
3. What perspectives (if any) resonated with your own experience or expectations?
4. What additional perspectives might be worth considering in relation to what we have presented so far?
5. Given that we conducted the interviews prior to the 2024 US presidential election, how might you envision mentoring has changed since that time?

Overview of Project

The purpose of this research is to understand the specific needs and challenges faced by international students entering and succeeding in US-based graduate programs in rhetoric and writing studies (RWS). The project seeks to understand how international graduate students (IGSs) encounter the discipline of RWS and how faculty mentors support them. This project explores the conditions that allow for or inhibit international graduate students' learning about, transitioning into, and contributing to the field, and to understand the role that faculty mentors play in supporting international graduate students' success in the field.
(draw from and update below)

In recent years, scholars in RWS have increasingly turned their attention to graduate student mentorship (Anderson and Romano; Eble and Gaillet; Gruwell and Lesh) and job market realities (Dadas, "Interview"; Dadas, "Reaching"; Ives and Spitzer; Moeggenberg; Sano-Franchini), including for those who are historically underrepresented or marginalized (Chen et al.; Casanave and Li; Garcia et al.; Gueglielmo and Figueredo; Walwema and Carmichael). At the same time, the discipline has produced scholarship and position statements promoting linguistic and racial justice and inclusion, much of which aligns well with the field's transnational and translingual turn. All of these areas of scholarship underline the discipline's commitment to social justice, ethical approaches toward supporting the next generation of writing scholars and teachers, and its purported interest in expanding the scope of the field beyond US and monolingual boundaries.

Simultaneously, critics have rightly questioned the discipline's ability to follow through on such commitments when so many holding positions within the field's centers of power are not racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse (Kynard; Wan). It is clear that disciplinary change–not only in theory but also in practice–is slow and requires a concerted effort by graduate faculty and other disciplinary leaders to more actively invite, foster, and support underrepresented perspectives and recognize underlying assumptions about the discipline's location and scope that have long shaped our research and practices. These assumptions–that the teaching of writing is primarily monolingual and based in the US–have limited our ability to fully support diverse groups of students because the structures of support continue to be shaped by those who hold and protect their own power in the field.

IGSs represent an important group that the field should commit to attracting, supporting, and retaining. These students' racial, cultural, and linguistic identities and experiences are varied. IGSs' presence in our programs can enrich, challenge, and change the field's knowledge base, assumptions, and practices. However, because their numbers are small in most graduate writing studies programs[1], IGSs' needs may be overlooked, their contributions undervalued, or they may simply be misunderstood due to

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[1] IIE Open Doors reported the number of IGSs enrolled in US universities hitting an all-time high in late 2024, at approximately 500,000 students or approximately 15% of all graduate enrollees (National Student Clearinghouse). This suggests that higher numbers of IGSs are enrolling across all US graduate programs, including RWS programs (in late 2025, it is hard to predict what impacts the current federal administration will have on IGS enrollment at US universities). Because RWS is a discipline primarily based in the US, the overall number of IGSs enrolled in these programs is likely smaller than in other disciplines.

linguistic and cultural differences. What's more, in the context of an American political environment in which immigrants and higher education appear to be under attack, IGSs undoubtedly need extra support.

In order to support diverse graduate students such as IGSs, we must first know what we don't know. Therefore, we conducted interviews with 14 IGSs and 14 graduate faculty in writing studies (broadly defined[2]) around the country about IGSs' experiences of support and how faculty perceive IGSs' mentoring needs. Our goal in conducting these interviews was to understand both population's shared and differing understandings of mentoring needs for IGSs in RWS graduate programs.

We consider our results through a decolonial frame, which centers IGSs' experiences of entering RWS and receiving mentorship. Our results reveal that effective support is contingent on faculty members' awareness of and preparedness to value their different backgrounds and experiences. IGSs' experiences of mentoring are highly embodied and variable, but demand care that responds to their needs and unique challenges. We argue that IGSs' perspectives and presence in US-based programs is an asset that RWS as a field needs to foster, particularly in our highly volatile political climate.

Methodology and Methods

This study is a phenomenological interview-based study of IGSs enrolled in writing studies graduate programs and faculty who teach in writing studies graduate programs, and it focuses on the following research questions: (1) What role is played by mentors in supporting IGSs entering the discipline? (2) How do IGSs describe the support they need and receive within writing studies graduate programs in the US? (3) How do mentors describe the support they provide and perceive IGSs to need?

In Spring 2024, we investigated these questions through semistructured, hour-long interviews with 14 IGSs and 14 graduate faculty positioned within different RWS programs in all regions of the mainland United States. It is important to note that data collection for this study took place prior to the 2024 US presidential election. We assume that some of the interviewees' responses to our questions would be different today due to the changes currently unfolding in higher education, many of which hold profound implications for IGSs.

The study was reviewed and approved as exempt by each co-author's respective IRBs. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. In order to alleviate any perceptions of power differences, Ghada conducted all interviews with graduate student participants, who were asked about their experiences entering, transitioning, and/or contributing to the field of writing studies, including their mentorship experiences. Lisa conducted all interviews with faculty participants, who were asked about their

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[2] During the introduction to the interview, we defined writing studies broadly for our participants "as an inclusive term for disciplinary areas that might alternately be referred to as rhetoric, composition, writing, program administration, professional and technical communication, second language writing, etc."

mentorship experiences and roles in supporting IGSs, particularly as these were related to students' success in the field of writing studies.

We analyzed the interviews using the principles of grounded theory, which takes a recursive approach to coding and analysis by centering the voices of participants. After we completed the interviews, we separately reviewed all recordings and transcripts, writing memos and noting key themes that arose from the data. We then returned to the recordings and conducted open coding based on what we noticed as we listened a second time. After this second review, we collaboratively generated codes and segmented the data using topical shifts. We ran three interrater reliability tests on representative portions of our data, with code refinement in between, until we reached 80% agreement. Then, we proceeded to code all transcripts.

After we finished coding, we found ourselves drawn to IGSs' descriptions of the support they received from their programs and faculty mentors, in comparison to faculty members' descriptions of support they perceived IGSs to need. Additionally, we found ourselves interested in IGSs' descriptions of what they valued most in faculty mentors' attitudes, compared to how faculty mentors described their orientation toward IGSs during the interviews. Our analysis focused, therefore, on the key themes that emerged for both populations in relation to the support IGSs need or receive within their programs, and faculty perceptions of how best to support IGSs through mentoring. The rest of this draft presents IGSs' descriptions of what is most important for them in terms of mentoring support and faculty members' perceptions of the same, followed by several specific examples of IGSs' experiences of individualized and supportive mentorship compared to rigid or less differentiated mentoring practices.

Participants

We recruited graduate faculty and students from 56 active RWS PhD programs (not including our own). To find international graduate students, recruitment emails were sent to RWS program directors and we requested that they share the email with IGSs within their programs. To be eligible to participate, graduate students must have at the time or within the last 2 years been an IGS in an RWS graduate program. To recruit faculty, we contacted at least one graduate faculty member per program directly via email. When a graduate faculty member from an institution scheduled an interview, no other graduate faculty from that institution were contacted. To be eligible to participate in the interview, faculty members had to have held a mentoring role (i.e. teaching and/or advising) for at least one IGS at the PhD level. Depending on how one counts active doctoral programs in RWS, the results discussed here provide a representative sample (15-25%) of all programs around the US.

The table below presents demographic information for all student participants based on a pre-interview survey. Note that, in order to protect participant identities, we did not provide any information about participants' reported nationalities or specific languages spoken. Additionally, the majority of participants did not report their gender identity, so we did not include it here:

Student Participants (n = 14)	
Home Region	East Asia = 1 Latin America & Caribbean = 4 Middle East/North Africa = 2 South and Southeast Asia = 5 Sub-Saharan Africa = 2 Western Europe = 1
Institutional location within the US	Northeast = 1 Southeast = 5 Midwest = 3 Southwest = 3 West = 2
Program Status	Year 2 MA (plan to continue to PhD program) = 2 Years 1-2 PhD (in coursework) = 9 Years 3+ PhD (post-coursework) = 2 Post-PhD (within 1 year) = 1
Gender (self-identified)	F = 10 M = 4
Racial/ethnic identity (self-identified)	Asian = 2 South/Southeast Asian = 4 African = 1 White/Caucasian = 2 White + Latine = 2 Arab = 1 Black = 2
Language(s) spoken other than English	25 (1 participant reported themselves as not multilingual)

Extracted from a pre-interview survey, the table below presents demographic information for all faculty participants:

Faculty Participants (n = 14)	
Institutional location within the US	Northeast = 1 Southeast = 3 Midwest = 3 Southwest = 5 West = 2
Academic rank	Tenure-track assistant = 4 Tenured associate = 4 Tenured full = 4 Non-tenure-track full = 2
Administrative roles	Y = 8 N = 6
Years at current institution	0-5 years = 4 6-10 years = 4 11+ years = 6
Gender (self-identified)	F = 5 M = 9
Racial/ethnic identity (self-identified)	White/Caucasian = 7 Asian/East Asian, Chinese = 1 Japanese = 1 Asian = 1 Asian/Asian American/South Asian = 1 Half Arab, half European = 1

Faculty Participants (n = 14)	
	Black = 1 African American = 1
Nationality (self-identified)	US/Canada = 11 Other (including previous or dual nationality) = 3
Other demographic information (self-identified)	Queer = 1 Neurodivergent = 1 Military veteran = 1 Multiply marginalized; disabled with multiple "invisible" disabilities; parent = 1 Bisexual = 1
Language(s) spoken other than English	Not multilingual = 5 Other languages = 17 (9 participants)

Results: What Constitutes Care in Mentoring?

Students

Student participants expressed their need for developing personal connections with their mentors. In fact, participants wanted their faculty mentors to prioritize learning about their students as "humans" first, instead of merely reducing them to a homogenous group due to their international status. Some participants noted that their faculty mentors assumed they were already familiar with their international students' mentoring needs while others shared their frustration with faculty mentors who were not cognizant enough to realize that this population's lives, concerns, and circumstances were different. For example, Ellora emphasized that mentors need to be proactive and take initiative to support and care for their international students because the latter's timelines may look different than that of their domestic counterparts; in fact, they are not operating within similar conditions nor possess the same foundational knowledge pertaining to their discipline's conventions. Ellora explained that international students might not even know

what they need to ask their mentors, a reality that is aggravated when trying to communicate in English as a second language. Others, like Oshane and Ava, believed that directness is a pivotal aspect in fostering a strong and caring student-mentor bond, emotionally supporting students, and easing their anxieties about their academic performance and overall progress. Oshane said he wants a mentor "to show [him] the ropes", including giving direction on "where to work hard and where to work smartly".

Fostering personal connections also manifested in participants' desire for flexible mentorship. Several participants shared that their ideal mentor is someone who accommodates their students' different interests and thinking, employing open-mindedness and understanding. Gamila, for instance, was grateful for her faculty mentors because "they are always trying to adapt to match our needs." Bidemi compared his mentorship experience in the US with that in his home country: "Here, student rights are respected. Students are seen as humans. Their voices are respected, acknowledged." In Nigeria, however, he found mentoring relationships were hierarchical, similar to a "master-servant" approach, where a mentor's advice is to be followed without questioning. Additionally, Bidemi noted his comfort in approaching his faculty mentors in his US program, which he was not able to do in Nigeria. Similarly, Tara believed that a caring mentor will listen to understand the "sense of betweenness" that international students feel, which contributes to making students feel visible without judgment or assumptions. Ava, too, pointed out how she feels at home in her program, with mentors who refrained from imposing a hierarchical or rigid mentorship and showed genuine interest in learning more about her experiences, her culture, and scholarly interests. In a nutshell, her mentors saw her as more than a student in their program—they empowered her. To Ellora, flexibility meant that willingness to receive feedback, "and then incorporating it in their mentorship."

Additionally, several participants found that personal connections grow best when they are respected and when their presence is seen as an investment. Carla argued that faculty mentors need to genuinely care about the work their international students are doing by recognizing their value. Carla advised other IGSs to seek these faculty members out: But I think, how to identify people who listen to your work, people who listen to your questions, who recognize your work and recognize your talent. And they seek you out. My experience has been- If you build, they will come. If you show your work, they will come. But I don't know if that's true for everybody. It's just what has been happening to me. Like Carla, Bonnie explained how her mentors show care when they genuinely cheer her on and invest in her future as a scholar in the field: "But the mentors I have in the department are not so focused on Bonnie, the student, almost the doctor in the program, but more Bonnie, the person as a potential scholar now and in the future." Bee, along similar lines, shared that effective guidance happens when a mentor puts trust in her "to make the best decision" and "letting [her] take the initiative to do it." Overall, personal connections grow when there is intentional effort, on the part of mentors, to make international students feel seen and heard for who they are and where they come from, as well as respecting their choices and letting them explore their options and encouraging them to find their ways.

Awareness of positionality and lived experiences is another component of care-based mentoring. Participants remarked that most of their faculty, mostly North American, couldn't relate to their personal lives, leading to disconnect, misunderstanding, and an inability to provide informed and structured mentorship tailored towards IGSs within the field of writing studies. Carla, Ellora, and Oshane voiced some frustration with faculty mentors and wanted them to be more empathetic about their circumstances. Oshane

clarified that "no matter how excellent or how well published you [the mentor] are, if you cannot relate to my own personal issues as a student first, or as a person first, then there's not much that you can connect with me on," adding that none of his faculty were "born or studied outside of America." Carla said that her faculty mentors don't always understand or relate to the fact that she can't do certain things in the US due to her international status—at times, her mentors failed to "remember the details of how different [her] situation is." Ellora went through similar experiences, vocalizing that faculty mentors need to "empathize" with their students and recognize that they come from different cultures, speak different languages, and think differently.

Participants also highlighted the importance of caring mentors being reflexive and holding back assumptions. Bonnie wanted her mentors to take a "stance of openness" because it is critical for faculty mentors not to assume and to be very willing to ask questions and connect with their students. Lucy brought up a similar point: "But the first thing that comes to my mind… is for mentors and advisors to be aware that we are humans…. We are an embodied person who is going through grad school and a PhD program with everything happening at the same time with this body, this mind … a lived experience in a material reality." Few participants noted finding solace in international faculty who understood them. For instance, Anju connected with certain international faculty members who were cognizant of her positionality as an IGS and found they had common experiences in acclimating to US culture and getting used to understanding and speaking English as an additional language: "They understand. They are, you can say, the non-natives. They understand our sentiment… [Anju's mentor] is from Jordan, I think. She told me that, oh, yeah, I think you still will struggle for one year. So, I've understood. And with that, I mean, at least it gives us solace that it's not only I'm experiencing, so others are also experiencing."

Some participants also highlighted the importance of faculty members to take initiative and learn about international graduate students' backgrounds, because students will rarely speak up for themselves, especially at the beginning when they are transitioning into the program. For example, Bee explained that "it would actually be helpful if professors can just try to educate themselves a little about international students and how they can support them. And how departments can support and… the limits that they have, be realistic about it." She extensively suggested ways that mentors (and their departments) can show care for their international population:

[J]ust more events organized by the department, maybe sessions to support international students, take their questions, ask how they are finding the program. I wish I got some of that when I came, because I really struggled in my first few weeks. And I didn't think about it–like oh, these people did not care about me–but it would have just been helpful to have that support and understanding that you're coming from a different country, a different culture, and you're settling in here.

Beyond personal connections and awareness of lived experiences, there is overwhelming evidence of the need for faculty mentors to emotionally support their mentees through genuine curiosity and inquisitiveness. Participants wanted their mentors to ask about their needs, aspirations, and concerns, without judgment, and empower them in ways that build their confidence as future scholars in the field. In addition, participants wanted their faculty mentors to be proactive in learning about their experiences and put effort into asking direct questions about what they don't know, especially about their background, education, and language. Doing so,

as Oshane remarked, would help him and fellow international graduate students "be very up front about what we carry to the table, what we bring to the seminars…. and it would also allow us to talk more and participate more, and also help to shift our mindset from looking at what we have as a disadvantage and see it as an advantage." Ava also defined effective mentoring as faculty taking initiative; she retold her positive experience with faculty mentors in her program who were "always willing to learn" and took the time to ask questions and do their research about her culture to understand better. She raised a pivotal point about care in mentoring international graduate students: "If you truly care about me, you would take the time to learn about who I am and where I come from." In a similar manner, Ellora argued that care in mentorship looks like knowing and understanding her circumstances—as an international student—better. In other words, it was important for international graduate students to feel that they matter, which would in turn empower them to see their presence and knowledge as an asset, as well as diminish their feelings of invisibility.

According to participants, faculty, in terms of their orientation, should be willing to listen, in order to understand. Tara advised mentors to lend a "sympathetic ear" while Carla advised mentors to: "Listen to us more. We know what we are doing. Listen to us a little more in terms of us having different perspectives. It is what we are here for. Just because we are different, it's easy to dismiss what we are saying in the discussions and assume we just don't understand. I think Americans are very centered in themselves, and I understand why, but we are here to give you a different perspective, so listen to that." Carla's advice hints at the fact that mentors should not only expect their international graduate students to listen and learn from them; they should invite them to share and teach about their global perspectives, some of which is unbeknownst to faculty mentors.

Faculty

Some of the faculty participants stressed the importance of inquiring about and be(come)ing aware of global knowledge and experience, particularly as it intersects with IGSs' experience in the United States. John argued that faculty members should take it upon themselves to develop awareness of and experience with different cultures and languages in order to better support IGSs. Fredrick also placed responsibility on faculty for learning more about other cultures, and he added that faculty can provide meaningful support to IGSs if they learn more about the immigration processes required of international students. Evan and Fredrick expressed particular sensitivity to IGSs' emotional and financial precarity compared to domestic students.

Faculty discussed how linguistic and cultural differences could impact successful communication with and connection to IGSs and provided advice for faculty to work through these differences. Deborah and DG both noted how cultural differences could impede communication, requiring keen awareness on the part of faculty for the potential for misunderstanding. Deborah urged faculty to recognize the extra burden carried by students when they "are speaking and having to communicate in a language that's difficult to understand, or not their native language" and to be "mindful … that… they might need an extra draft or … an explicit redirection on something but they're perfectly capable of it." "Certainly," she stressed, "it's not an issue of ability." John described navigating these

realities by "design[ing] [his]... writing pedagogy and … mentoring courses [based on] the principle of universal design. Design it for the most extreme diverse student population, [and then] you can teach well in any situation."

      As Evan put it, faculty "can't just assume that because somebody nods and [says they are] doing fine," it is true. He advised faculty to inquire more deeply about IGSs' well being, because "coming from a lot of particular cultural contexts in which the hierarchical … relationships about respect, about … the idea of what would or would not be embarrassing to admit can be a real struggle." He said that, while "I'm sure I've tripped over my tongue at times… I would rather do that than… not ask," and faculty need to get "past the fear of" making mistakes when working with IGSs. Like Evan, Andrew emphasized the importance of listening to IGSs before jumping to conclusions or providing advice, stating that faculty need to first "understand … [IGSs'] cultural logic, understand how they make sense of the world, how they negotiate things. Just the same things you do with any student, … only… more so, or be extra sensitive to those issues."

      Instead of framing cultural and linguistic differences as inevitable barriers that IGSs must overcome when entering their graduate programs, some faculty notably highlighted these differences as resources. Peter noted that faculty might "make… snap judgments about … a person's background… based on how they appear, whether their head is covered or not, their accent." But, he insisted,

> Those sorts of things can often mask really profound levels of competence and experience.… One [graduate student] I worked with and am very close friends with from years ago, who's from [a country in the Middle East] … was a professor at [a university there]…. He relocated his family, you know, to discover that his credential wasn't worth anything at a lot of universities here, so he had to … go back and redo it…. But if all you see is an international student who is, you know, in need, then you're going to overlook those sorts of things.

      For Nadia and Fredrick, IGSs' cultural differences offer programs opportunities to rethink traditional practices and benchmarks. Nadia encouraged faculty to be "patient and willing to take pleasure and work through the differences in communication, cultural styles, and cultural ways." She argued that these differences did not need to be seen as "something that's going to prevent the students from meeting our benchmarks, but [that they can be seen] as an opportunity for us to even know what discourses we should be having differently around benchmarks." Fredrick, too, insisted that "when we use the same yardstick to measure domestic and international students and train them to be good graduate students, we are missing something because they come with different baggage." Devi understood IGSs bringing resources to their programs based on her own background as a first-generation student, suggesting that for both IGSs and first-generation students, "there's a lot of things we bring with us. Our strengths … allow us to see and move and be in different ways."

      Speaking from her experience as a former IGS, Grace recommended that faculty should support students' interests but resist the assumption that all IGSs will want to work on issues directly related to their national or cultural identity. For her, it is important that faculty "respect whatever IGSs choose to do, rather than tokenizing them" based on their status as an IGS. At the same time,

graduate faculty should balance this approach with "recognizing that [IGSs] have important cultural values that they can bring in that they don't have to acclimate to the dominant American culture."

Just as faculty emphasized the importance of listening and asking questions to better understand the IGS experience, many of the faculty participants mentioned the importance of holding regular meetings with students in order to develop positive relationships and ensure students stay on track within the program. David stressed that building a relationship between mentor and mentee takes "the right measure of contact and a reasonably high level of trust," which is "built mutually through a lot of interaction and conversation and co-curiosity." Building a positive mentoring relationship usually occurs, for James, with more time spent at the beginning, "figuring out who they are or who they wanna be…. what motivates them and what they're bringing into the program, and establishing… the scope of their interest, and what … areas that they're interested in." Devi added that much of her contact with graduate students occurred informally because her door is always open. She stated that "I'm going to get to know that student and do what I can because I think that's part of my job as a mentor, isn't it? But also …. it is in my bones … I don't know how to be another way. I don't really want to be."

Some faculty went further in their efforts to make meaningful connections with IGSs through meetings. For example, Terry described helping students rethink how they define "success" by asking "what is it you want to do" repeatedly across conversations. If a student gravitates toward teaching and mentions it in multiple meetings, Terry asks, "okay, can we pause here and really suss it out? If teaching is what makes you happy and professionally satisfied, there are a lot of good jobs." Evan takes steps at the beginning of every year to deliberately "mak[e] [new IGSs] know they're welcome" by initiating meetings:

> I don't just say, well, drop by my office sometime, because they're not going to do that necessarily. I say, let's set up a time to meet…. And they may never want to meet with me again–that's fine, you know, but … it's just an opportunity to have, to sit down and …. it allows me the opportunity to just talk to them more, also, about…. What do they like to do? What's their family like? What are they understanding so far? What aren't they?

The strategies described by Terry, Evan, and others, underline the importance of goal-setting within graduate student mentoring, but they also marry that important practice with the understanding that IGSs' goals cannot be understood in isolation; rather, their goals are inextricably tied to who they are as whole people.

Attention to the whole person was a recurring theme throughout the interviews with faculty, and it emerged particularly when faculty described how they approach formal mentoring relationships with IGSs. Faculty participants repeatedly mentioned the challenges and rewards of developing personal and emotional connections with their mentees while balancing this with the more formal responsibility of providing necessary professionalization resources and feedback to move students toward success. Many faculty articulated the importance of "center[ing]" the relationship "around the student," as Grace put it. Timothy, too, underlined the importance of "transparency…. [mentees] need to be open about what they need from me … and I'm open about what I can provide and can't provide as the mentor."

On the one hand, many faculty described their efforts to balance professional support with the "emotional labor," as Fredrick put it, that mentoring IGSs necessarily requires. For Fredrick, "mentoring is more than just focusing on the dissertation or the process. It's also focusing on the emotional labor and acknowledging that your students are human beings. You need to be that flexible for them, to be there, to chat … about a lot of things, just to get them to be where they are." Devi also mentioned that she also had tissue boxes in multiple places in her office for students who visit. While she noted that she worked to create professional boundaries, she also said "that kind of boundary setting can be hard because it's like you also recognize that person as more." Evan remarked that he "want[ed] to… appreciate that [IGSs] may be feeling lonely and stressed, and the excitement that they first had when they got here wears off. So … there is an empathetic and compassionate component to [mentoring] as well."

At the same time, faculty understood themselves as key professional supports for IGSs. They described practical strategies they used at the outset of mentoring relationships. For example, Nadia talked about how useful anthologies had proved for IGSs as introductions to disciplinary conversations, explaining that "then they can engage in discussions with people in other programs in terms of how we want them to define the field." In general, we found that the faculty participants had a clear sense of what IGSs needed for foundational knowledge in the field, and they understood they should explicitly introduce students to it. Timothy stated that "if [the IGS is] new, I give them a very broad stroke picture of here's what writing studies is, how it came about, and how we see it in the United States, and the sort of North America tradition in general." And Evan described

> giving [IGSs] some definitions. Here's what we mean by rhetoric, largely speaking; here's what we mean by composition and literacy, and here's how that's different than linguistics and applied linguistics or education per se. And here's the kind of things we study; here are the kind of things that people have done for dissertation projects. But then also, here the journals; here's … CompPile… and so, you know, just some basic things to sort of orient them to the field.

Building on these initial efforts to help IGSs map the field, faculty also described leveraging their own expertise to support their mentees later in their programs. Terry characterized the responsibility she felt to draw on her professional experience as an "ethical[]" one, stating: "What I feel ethically I'm supposed to do is… I'm going to try to give you what I think will help you, even if some of it is a little heavy handed because … you didn't directly ask for it at that moment…. Or it's stuff that you might not want to hear because you have this ideal of what way the academy and your professional career should play out. And I'm going to [say], so, with 20 years worth of experience watching this…" Similarly, Nadia depicted her approach to mentoring as providing a "model for certain professionalization activities, but also … for certain professional behaviors."

Along these lines, we noticed that many of the faculty participants described using carefully considered communication practices during their mentoring of IGSs. For example, Deborah, who is an expert in cross-cultural communication, expressed a high awareness of potential problems when communicating with IGSs and specifically mentioned reducing her use of English-language idioms, which do not translate easily across cultures. She also firmly rejected debates surrounding implicit versus explicit feedback related to error, remarking that "with international students, I just become so much more like, here's how you say it. I don't do this stuff of like oh, just point out an error. I'm like, okay, here's what I think you're trying to say, or here's a way, here's the expression, or

here's the word that I think you're missing, and just give them the answer." Nadia also reported providing directive feedback for IGSs, noting that "international students ask for [direct feedback] more. Moreover, they want not just the markup, but they want me to suggest corrections."

Beyond providing directive feedback in response to IGSs' written work, faculty also described providing explicit guidance about the program, coursework, and even how to work with them as advisors. John, for example, detailed an online resource he had developed for his advisees that:

has pretty much everything…. part of it is the user's manual for [John], so they know how I communicate, what the expectations are, and what opportunities I can provide, and how to make appointments. And also there is a procedural manual aspect of it: How do we schedule exams… How much time to give faculty members before getting feedback? …. And there is a section on writing for publication, there is a section on job search, and there's a section on what conferences to attend and how to attend them…. It's like an entire manual.

Along similar lines, Peter explained that "I think part of my job as a mentor is probably … trying to be more explicit about the implicit expectations of doctoral work in the United States." Devi, DG, and Terry, too, all described providing explicit guidance to IGSs by working with them to set long-term goals from the beginning of the program and revisiting those over time.

Two faculty participants explained that direct communication with IGSs could help provide additional emotional support by connecting them to a larger community. Specifically, Evan discussed his observation that IGSs might not attend departmental social events, remarking that "it has been helpful to go and say, this is something that you're welcome at. And also it would really be useful for you to go, productive for you to go. You know … this would be a good thing to do." DG was the only faculty participant who mentioned the importance of extracurricular support for IGSs and how mentors could play a role in encouraging those connections. He argued that "when you're an advisor to international students, more than just the classroom thing, you've got to think about their well being, their care. And that's why it's important, like, I said, the resources. Are there other students at your institution from that country? … Make sure they're part of that same group, or whatever because they can help lessen the burden there."

Learning from Mentoring Successes and Failures

In general, student participants reported positive experiences with their faculty mentors and programs. Interestingly, some participants even discussed how they advocated for their needs during the application process, asking questions about each program and meeting with professors to share their needs, which is an unusual attitude; other students, however, did not describe doing that or state that they knew they could approach programs of interest that way. In Lucy and Ava's cases, both chose their programs based on deep research into potential faculty and programmatic resources to gauge whether they would receive the support they wanted. Forced to think of her circumstances as an IGS, Lucy indicated that she made sure to learn as much as she could about her program because she wanted to "come with a very clear set of expectations, like what would be expected of [her] as a student, as a graduate,"

as "coming here meant such [a] big life change for [her] and [her] husband". She met with all her professors over Zoom, including the advisor, because she wanted to better understand what would be expected of her and how she would spend her time as an IGS, including "work-life balance expectations."

Comparably, Ava's program was explicit in what they could provide for her because she took the initiative to ask questions about what they expected from her and what she expected from them in return. She recounted her thought process about choosing her program: "So, you accepted me, and here is who I am, here is what I want to do, and here's what I expect from you, because … this should be mutually beneficial, right? It shouldn't be just from me doing research and teaching for you. What will I gain from you?" She advised fellow international graduate students to "speak up for [their] rights and just make sure that you'll be supported in [the] program." She also noted that while other programs she applied to or got accepted to were unwilling to negotiate the admissions offer, she felt confident in choosing her program because they were willing to adjust her offer by providing her with a research assistantship for one year instead of teaching, because she was less interested in the latter. In both situations, Lucy and Ava wouldn't have chosen their programs if it didn't match their needs or provided them with the kind of care they wanted.

Other participants acknowledged the efforts of their mentors when they needed to better understand their discipline and receive support in their coursework and research. Bonnie recounted how her mentors acted as mediators when she struggled with courses or paperwork, which she found to be "so helpful and refreshing in academia." Her mentors gave her grace and intervened when she needed their guidance, emphasizing how "wonderful [it was] to have someone say, I don't understand, but if you tell me, I'll let you know if I can help you or not." Bidemi had a similar experience with one of his professors, who gave him an anthology to help him connect his background in literature to rhetoric:

> While I was seeing that confusion, I went to see my advisor, and I was like, we had this in class today, and I was wondering who… She gave me, I think she just stood up, looked at her shelf and picked three big books, and gave [them to] me, [saying,] Bidemi, go and read these. So, I read them. I couldn't finish them because I had the rest of what I was doing. I just scanned through the content page and looked at the topics that I felt I related to and what I am inquisitive about, and I read them. So I go, oh, okay, this is what… okay. And from those books, I was able to distinguish between literary analysis and rhetorical analysis. I'm used to literary analysis. All the publications I have… they accepted the ones that I started doing after I got into this program. All the publications I have out there are done from the perspective of literary analysis…. So I was able to distinguish between oh, what is the rhetorical approach to interpretations? And then what is the literary approach to interpretations? Okay, I got that.

Although the majority of our student participants described having productive relationships with their mentors and generally positive experiences within their programs, some stories exemplify the negative consequences of mentoring that does not take into account the specific needs of IGSs. These stories illuminate the difference between equal and equitable mentoring approaches, with the former "equal" approach focused on providing all students with the same opportunities and resources, and the latter "equitable" approach focused on providing differentiated opportunities and resources depending on individual student needs. As these examples

illustrate, IGSs can experience a lack of agency and a lack of belonging when mentoring approaches are relatively fixed (equal) rather than dynamic (equitable).

Some students described a tension between what they needed financially and professionally, and what their programs offered. These problems were exacerbated by a lack of understanding about (on the faculty side) IGS realities and (on the student side) program processes, which resulted in IGSs experiencing a troubling lack of agency. Bonnie, for example, spoke highly of the summer opportunities she had been given by the department, but she also noted that many faculty seemed to lack an understanding of how few work opportunities IGSs can access due to government restrictions. When one of her mentors told her she needed "to go out and look for opportunity," Bonnie found herself having to explain the regulations that prevented her from exploring beyond the university, illuminating her mentor's ignorance of IGS realities. While Bonnie considered herself "lucky [to get] quite a few things … a lot of my colleagues who are international did not." This observation led her to "wonder[] if there is a sense of potential[] annoyance" or resentment on the part of faculty if they feel pressure to provide opportunities to IGSs specifically because of their statuses. Although Bonnie did not think faculty resented her specifically, the comments she made about how other IGSs were treated suggests that a general lack of understanding of IGSs' specific needs can produce underlying tensions within a program that will eventually erode trust between IGSs and faculty.

In addition, IGSs who fail to receive extra contextual information about program policies and expectations can become unnecessarily frustrated, as Alton's experience within his program shows. Alton was one of a few student participants who reported having a family. His case was particularly unique because his wife was also an IGS in a different field and university, and she lived with their children in a different state. Before applying to his program, Alton had observed his wife negotiate several different PhD program offers with success, so he expected to be able to do the same when he received an offer for his current program. Although as researchers, both of us co-authors understand that negotiating PhD offers in the humanities is rarely possible, when Ghada interviewed him a year after he began the program, Alton still did not understand why he had been unsuccessful in negotiating his offer. Additionally, Alton found himself suffering financially and professionally because first, his graduate stipend was too low to support his "travel between two states," during which "sometimes I have car troubles, sometimes I run out of cash and almost get stranded between the states." In turn, Alton's need to travel led to professional problems: "Sometimes my kids are sick and I have to stay, and then I have to do my teaching… online." But when he chose to switch some of his class meetings online, the program responded negatively, asking "why are you not present … you have to follow the contract." While a program director might make the argument that Alton did not follow a process in this situation, he did not seem to be aware that there was any process to follow, and he expressed dismay that there was no flexibility to accommodate his particular situation.

Additionally, faced with "financial pressure" and the reality that he was "very much behind on … rent of the university housing," Alton tried to secure summer funding for his research. When he approached a professor about co-authoring a research project with him but was rejected, he later learned "that it's not a nice thing to do–I should have just explicitly expressed my interest in just getting funding." In our view, Alton's compounding financial and professional stress was the result, on the one hand, of his

misunderstanding of the program's processes and expectations, but also on the other hand, of the program's inflexibility in relation to his unique needs. It seemed that no faculty member had taken the time to help him advocate for teaching flexibility in light of his family situation, or to explain how to secure financial support during the summer months. Instead, he was questioned and criticized by program faculty for missteps that could have been resolved with more robust attention to his needs.

While, as noted above, some students such as Bidemi reported receiving extra resources from professors to help orient themselves to the field as it related to their own backgrounds and experiences–producing a sense of belonging to the discipline and to the program–other students reported the opposite. Gamila, for example, named many resources that she wished she had access to through her program. Her wish list included explicit teaching about research methods and writing in academic genres; technological training and support; and a comprehensive reading list of key texts in the discipline. She stated, "if they had, like a specific list that is already, like, shared with all the students since the beginning of the program about the most impactful research or works in the field, that would make it absolutely more easier for us." Raj was satisfied with his program's faculty and their efforts to support him, but he still "wish[ed] that they knew where to reach into my [South Asian background] … [and give a] sense of what other scholars I could talk about or talk with for my [national] rhetorics. I don't really know if there's any other [same-nationality] scholar in the … writing studies world. So, I don't really want to blame them at all for that. But I wish they kind of know more about those resources." He added wistfully, "I guess that's kind of my work to figure out someday." Gamila's and Raj's comments indicate that they felt their backgrounds and experiences were outside of their programs', mentors', and even the discipline's purview. While they did not explicitly express a lack of belonging, they lacked the individualized support that could bridge the field's knowledge base with their own experiences and identities.

Analysis (Key Points)

(To our readers: At this point, we are noticing the following key themes. We would love your feedback on other connections or insights that we have missed, based on the results)

(1) What role is played by mentors in supporting IGSs entering the discipline?
  - Mentors play a key role in supporting IGSs in terms of familiarizing them with what the field of RWS is and what they need to do in order to succeed within their programs and as professionals in the field.

(2) How do IGSs describe the support they need and receive within writing studies graduate programs in the US?
  - IGSs wanted mentors to be proactive and take initiative in learning about their specific circumstances. IGSs also want mentors to be reflective and not approach them with judgment and assumptions.
  - IGSs also wanted mentors to be curious and care about who they are as people, where they come from, and what they can bring to the table.

- IGSs wanted mentors to respect their choices, encourage exploration, and empower them to bring in their knowledge and understanding of the discipline to coursework and research endeavors.
- IGSs valued clear and direct communication and when faculty invested their time to answer their questions and provide resources.

(3) How do mentors describe the support they provide and perceive IGSs to need?
- Faculty mentors described wanting to balance support for professional goals as well as providing emotional support when needed.
- Some faculty mentors emphasized the importance of not assuming anything about IGSs' backgrounds or identities, and instead to ask questions to learn about them.
- Faculty mentors described providing direct feedback to IGSs because of the potential for cross-cultural miscommunication.
- Faculty mentors expressed a high level of personal care for IGSs and wanted to see them succeed.

Discussion (Conclusion)

(To our readers: We would love feedback about additional implications or takeaways from your points of view, particularly if you are international graduate students studying in the US yourselves or if you are graduate faculty who work with IGSs in your programs)

Key takeaways:
- Faculty mentors' and IGSs' understanding of care differs. Mentors viewed care as a balance between formal and emotional support, whereas IGSs viewed care as support of their embodied experiences.
- Faculty mentors and IGSs valued the role of curiosity, listening, empathy, and flexibility in mentoring.
- Faculty mentors and IGSs emphasized the importance of direct communication and feedback, even at the expense of potentially making mistakes.
- On the whole, faculty mentors did not seem aware of the role they could play to introduce IGSs to potential social connections in the program, the university, or in the community. This appears to be a missed opportunity that could help IGSs find other sources of support beyond faculty.
- We were surprised that IGSs did not describe themselves as bringing new knowledge or resources to their programs or to RWS. Instead, they described themselves primarily in terms of what they could gain as learners. Some faculty, on the other hand, did describe IGSs as having the potential to change their programs or RWS as a field in positive and substantial ways. Therefore, programs should encourage IGSs to identify the transnational perspectives that they bring to the field. This can occur in coursework, mentoring relationships, and in research and teaching.

- We noticed IGSs experienced a tension between wanting to be visible in their programs–as whole people with valuable perspectives–versus invisible, where they hope they will not be seen as a problem or a deficit to be dealt with. Programs can do more to help resolve this tension and create a welcoming environment in which IGSs will have confidence about the contributions they can make and a sense of belonging to the program and the field.