ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF INDIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCE AND PERSISTENCE IN POST-GRADUATE STUDIES IN ONTARIO

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Abstract

A significant body of literature exists related to the experience of international student integration socially and academically at post-secondary institutions worldwide, but only a limited number of studies look at the experience of international students from India, specifically those studying in Canada. This is a study of international students from India at Sheridan College in Ontario, Canada, and explains the initial challenges they encountered, the services they felt were important to them, the challenges that remained after their first semester, how they coped, and the strategies they used to persist. Study results revealed that students’ primary initial challenges included (1) housing, (2) weather, (3) financial difficulties, and (4) transportation from the airport, while later challenges centered on (1) financial difficulties (2) loneliness, and (3) transportation services. The study also revealed that English language comprehension affected their integration socially and their overall experience in acclimatization.

Keywords: International students, India, acculturation, academic, social, higher education, narrative analysis.
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Next I am grateful to my parents for continuously driving me to achieve more, you sacrificed a lot in your lives to give us a better life. Then, I offer my special thanks to my participants, who were very generous of their time and who trusted me enough with their experiences as international students at Sheridan.

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CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Recruitment of international students in Canada is a mixed picture. In 2008 about seven percent of undergraduate students in Canada were international, up from five percent in 2001 (www.statscanada.ca). On the one hand, there has been considerable growth in recent years. Yet in comparison to other Commonwealth partners, Canada’s numbers are still low. Australia and New Zealand, both with population levels significantly lower than Canada had much higher numbers relative to the overall post-secondary enrolment. In spite of recent growth, Canada is still far from a leader in the field.

Attention to international recruitment by Canadian post-secondary institutions extends back no further than the early 1990’s. Canadian universities have long had a significant international graduate student population, often between 15 and 20 percent of overall graduate enrolment at the major research institutions. Undergraduate enrolment, however, was uneven both by institution and region.

Institutions leverage large international recruitment fairs, or the shopping bazaar approach, where dozens of universities descend on a region, set up booths and encourage students to see what each institution has to offer. Sometimes institutions operate like domestic recruitment, with visits to key market areas, and rely on “partnerships” with international schools.

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance¹ (OUSA) is an advocacy group representing 70% of all Canadian college students. The group has seats on all government bodies related to post-secondary education that influence non-profit organizations and educational policy (Grewal, 2010). This study was conducted to acknowledge then Premier Dalton McGuinty’s goal of

¹ http://collegestudentalliance.ca/about-us/who-we-are/
increasing international student enrolment in the province by 50% over a period of five years. The study recognized that increased diversity on campus enables the province to retain highly skilled individuals, contributes to the economy, and helps all Ontarians learn more (Grewal, 2010). A number of institutions are not well prepared to support this increase resulting from the legislative changes announced by the premier, but were interested in the additional revenue potential. Bartram (2008) argued that the main drivers for international student recruitment were economic, labour market, political, and social imperatives, while others believed that the rationale for international cooperation in academia seemed grounded in the common assumption that internationalism was good, per se.

The number of international students from India studying in Ontario has increased from 1,500 to 13,000 students in 4 years (Popovic, 2013) due to changes in visa requirements through the implementation of the Student Partner Program (SPP). The SPP program alleviated the challenges faced by students applying for study permits in India by facilitating the process and improving the visa acceptance rate. More information related to the SPP program is provided later in the chapter. The change in governmental strategy has changed the nature of international enrolment for the universities and puts the government attention in context. This led to more post-secondary institutions shifting emphasis to recruitment of undergraduate students.

**Sheridan College**

Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning (Sheridan) is a large publicly funded College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) in Ontario. Founded in 1967, Sheridan has grown from a local college of 400 students to one of Ontario’s leading postsecondary institutions, educating approximately 18,000 full-time and 35,000 continuing and part-time studies students every year on four campuses in three Ontario cities–Oakville, Brampton, and
Mississauga all suburbs of Toronto. An award-winning institution, Sheridan attracts students from across Canada and around the world. Sheridan delivers programming in the fields of arts, business, community service, health, technology, and the skilled trades (www.sheridancollege.ca).

Sheridan utilizes a digital electronic learning system (desire2learn) for delivery of the majority of the courses at the college. The system provides students one location for communicating with faculty, a single location for retrieval of course outlines, and a strong understanding of assessment rubrics and course expectations. Each course must have a presence online for course content. The majority of courses are delivered face to face with a minimal number of courses delivered in hybrid format or fully online. International students from India may not have been exposed to this digital learning system.

**Campuses**

**Davis Campus**

Located in Brampton, one of the fastest growing and most ethnically diverse communities in Canada, Davis Campus built in 1967 is Sheridan’s largest campus, with approximately 8,000 students. It offers programs in business, healthcare, community studies, liberal arts, engineering, architecture, and information technology (www.sheridancollege.ca).

The city of Brampton, home to Sheridan’s largest campus, is located in the northwestern suburbs of Toronto. Home to over 523,000 people, it is the ninth largest city in Canada and the third largest city in the metropolitan Toronto area. 159,000 of Brampton’s residents are of East Indian background, of which 91,345 are native Punjabi speakers, and 10,060 Hindi speakers (www.brampton.ca). This campus experienced a significant decline in enrolments in the 1980’s due to changing demographics. In the early 1990’s, there was an increase in the number of
immigrants settling in the Brampton region changing the demographics and increasing the enrolments at the campus.

**Hazel McCallion Campus (Mississauga)**

The Mississauga campus opened in the fall of 2011 and is an exclusive location for the delivery of business programs. The new building is an innovation in GREEN building technology. The site has been approved for the addition of another building to be built on donated land from the city of Mississauga. Once completed, the new building will house additional programs.

The city of Mississauga, Canada’s sixth largest city, is located in the western suburbs of metropolitan Toronto. It is home to over 752,000 people, of which 24,000 speak Punjabi (www.mississauga.ca).

**Oakville Campus**

This campus is home to 7,500 students in a lakeside community west of Toronto. This campus offers programming in animation arts and design, advanced film and television, music theatre, business, community studies, liberal arts, and applied science and technology.

Oakville, the least diverse city, is a suburb west of Toronto and has a population of 182,520. It has few Punjabi or Hindi-speaking residents, and over 69% of the residents speak English. Other languages spoken are Italian, Portuguese, Polish, Spanish, and Arabic (www.oakville.ca).

In comparing the three cities, Brampton has the highest population of Indian immigrants living in the surrounding area of the Sheridan campus, with a significant number of them speaking Punjabi. The Punjab province in northern India is the original home of 75% of Sheridan’s Indian international students. The distance between Oakville and Brampton is
approximately 42km, and since all three campuses are located in different cities, the transit systems in all three cities are different, which makes transfers between the systems challenging, expensive, and uncoordinated. The trip between one city and the next could take over two hours each way using public transit. Classes can be scheduled at any of the three campuses for students during a term.

**The Research**

The purpose of this social science research is two-fold, (1) to improve the processes for international students at Sheridan and (2) to understand the phenomenon under study. Specifically, this research is an attempt first to understand the acclimatization process of international students from India at Sheridan and, second, to review current orientation practices in order to provide recommendations for improvement. Using web-based surveys, this study will investigate the experiences of international students from India (ISI) related to the onboarding experience upon arrival to Sheridan.

**International Centre at Sheridan**

The International Centre at Sheridan is responsible for the recruitment of international students as well as the overall branding of the institution in international markets. This department handles both the admissions and marketing activities as they related to international students. The international centre provides different support services to international students. Some of the services provided are (1) assisting the student in selecting the right program of study through appropriate agent training, career counseling software on Sheridan’s website, and providing one-on-one consultations through SKYPE and email, (2) advising, related to study and work permits, by assisting students in understanding the requirements for getting an off-campus work permit and for extending their study permits, (3) coordinating with the student services
INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM INDIA

Department to provide orientation services upon arrival, (4) providing each international student with health insurance coverage and helping students navigate the health insurance policy, and (5) providing academic peer mentor support, a service of the student advisement centre to assist both domestic and international students to acclimatize into their academic program (www.sheridancollege.ca).

Student Recruitment Process

Sheridan employs business development managers who are each responsible for specific geographic regions of the world. Their role is to promote the institution to the governmental agencies in their target market and to build strong relationships with the Canadian department of foreign affairs and trade commissioners in the target markets.

Agents. Sheridan recruits agents in markets to ensure an efficient network of offices across the world whereby students are able to contact local resources for information about Sheridan College. Agents are paid a commission fee of 15% of the student’s annual tuition, in all markets except India, where the commission is 10%. Agents are trained by the college to provide students with accurate information about the college, its programs, Toronto, and Canada. Prior to enlisting an agent, the business development manager screens the agent to ensure the agent is reputable and honest, in order to maintain Sheridan’s reputation.

Applying direct. Potential students are able to apply direct to the college through Sheridan’s website. Sheridan prefers this method of application as the cost to conduct business is lower, and because a customer service representative is involved, the information provided is more likely to be accurate. Sheridan maintains a strong presence on all the available social media avenues. An individual in the international office continuously monitors the social media outlets to ensure that all concerns are responded to in a timely manner and that the information included
on the sites is accurate.

**Living Accommodations**

*Residences*. Sheridan provides full-service student residence suites on site at each of its campuses. The facilities are modern, fully furnished suites with a kitchen and laundry facilities. The residence provides international students with all the basics needed to establish a life in a foreign country. The residence staff greets international students upon arrival at the college and provides them with a brief orientation to the facilities and a care package to start them off in their new home.

*Off-campus housing and homestay*. Sheridan partners with a third-party provider, www.places4students.com, to provide help services to international students in finding a place to live upon arrival as an alternative to staying in a college run residence. Additionally, Sheridan provides a service that matches international students with homestay providers.

**Student Services at Sheridan**

Sheridan provides a wide array of student services to assist all students including international students during their time of study.

*Co-operative education*. Sheridan provides students an opportunity to participate in co-op and internship programs that link classroom learning to employment experiences. These experiences are related to the academic programs, giving students an opportunity to understand their level of vocational understanding in their program of study.

*Student rights and responsibilities*. Ensuring students abide by the college code of conduct is the primary role of this office. This department manages all non-academic student behavioral issues, drafting individual student behavioral plans that advocate the idea of “good citizenship” at Sheridan. This department works in collaboration with all support departments at
Sheridan including counseling, advisement, international and admissions to create an environment that meets the needs of individual students. This also allows for an environment free from harassment and violence in the college.

**Opportunities for Students to Get Involved**

Sheridan provides a number of ways for students to get involved through activities and organizations catering to a variety of interests.

*Co-Curricular Record.* Sheridan has over 70 activities in the Co-Curricular record directory for students to choose from, providing them with an official institutional document that recognizes their out-of-classroom activities that enhance their learning and personal growth. In a competitive employment environment, this allows students who want to gain a competitive advantage an opportunity to position themselves as strongly involved in extracurricular work at the institution.

*Volunteer.* Sheridan provides students opportunities to gain new skills by volunteering in the local community and participating in events and activities at Sheridan. Many domestic students volunteer to act as mentors to first year incoming students as well as international students in the same fields of study.

*Sheridan Student Union–Clubs and councils.* Sheridan provides students opportunities to participate in many student-run on-campus clubs. The Sheridan student union (SSUI) promotes the use of student clubs serving minority groups as well as the development of academic clubs. The clubs are quite large in number, and one of the most interesting is the science and technology club where they have built a solar operated vehicle in the past.

*Varsity sports and intramurals.* Sheridan has many different options for students to compete in varsity sports, as well as many intramural sports, including basketball, ice hockey,
indoor soccer, and coed volleyball. Every student has cost free access to the campus gym, as well as the ability to participate in intramural sports that are organized and setup by the physical education department. The Bruins are the official soccer and basketball teams at the college. All activities and sports themes revolve around the Bruins official colors and competition schedule.

**Financial Support to International Students**

Sheridan provides minimal financial support to international students. On Sheridan’s website, there are three forms of scholarships or bursaries that international students can apply to. The eligibility criteria vary for each one, yet there is a high focus on academic achievement. The maximum bursary that could be offered to international students from the three listed on Sheridan’s website is $2000. The total available scholarship amount was not clear.

**International Student Orientation**

The international department at Sheridan, in partnership with the student advisement centre, delivers an orientation to international students arriving from abroad prior to the start of each term. Over the past 2 years, the orientation has been delivered to international students from India prior to their departure from India. The orientation delivered abroad is a coordinated activity involving staff from the library, admissions, advisement, and international offices. The topics covered during the international student orientation, both in India and upon arrival here in Canada, include (1) information about the support services available to all students at Sheridan such as counseling, advisement, library services, and tutoring services, (2) acclimatization to the Canadian winters, (3) information related to the health insurance plan and benefits for international students, and (4) a library session on the services provided and an explanation of plagiarism is provided to international students. The health insurance plan is required and is usually automatically included as part of the students tuition bill. Attendance at the orientation is
not mandatory, and some students may miss the orientation due to late arrival in Canada.

**Student Partners Program (SPP)**

The Student Partner Program (SPP) is an administrative framework designed and implemented in partnership between the Canadian visa offices and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC).

The SPP, initiated in 2009, allows students applying and completing 2 years of post-secondary studies to apply for a post-graduation work permit good for a period of up to three years, subject to the student’s maintaining good academic standing and a clean criminal record (www.cic.gc.ca). The Post-Graduation Work Permit Program allows students to gain valuable Canadian work experience after they have completed their studies in Canada. This can help them apply to become permanent residents of Canada.

To qualify, students must have graduated from a public or private institution that grants degrees or diplomas recognized by the province or territory. These institutions may include a university, college, or CEGEP.

Work permits under this program are valid for the length of the student’s study program, up to a maximum of three years. For example, if students graduate from a 4-year degree program, they could be eligible for a 3-year work permit. If they graduate from an 8-month certificate program, they would be eligible for a work permit that is valid for 8 months. The student must apply for a post-graduation work permit within 90 days of receiving written confirmation, from the educational institution, that they have met the requirements for completing their academic program.

With this permit, the students can work in any occupation and change employers anytime. Once the work permits expire, students are allowed to apply for permanent residence in
Canada. The Canadian Experience Class (www.cic.gc.ca) makes it easier and more convenient for international students to apply for permanent resident status in Canada. If the students have graduated from a post-secondary program at an eligible institution in Canada, and have at least one year of work experience in Canada in a managerial, professional, or technical trade or occupation after graduation, they may be eligible to apply for permanent residence in Canada. The path to a permanent residence has positioned Canada as an attractive destination for students from India to study.

**Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC).** The ACCC is a voluntary association that represents colleges and institutes in Canada and internationally. The ACCC was the institution that brought the SPP program together for the Canadian college system. Sheridan is a member of the SPP in partnership with the ACCC and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) for the Indian market.

The SPP program is open to Indian nationals only. Students do not apply to the SPP; they apply to the participating college and may be considered under the program if they meet specific criteria (www.cic.gc.ca). Students have to meet the program’s admission criteria, and the applications are at the discretion of the individual college. The SPP requires close cooperation between the college and CIC through feedback on the student’s attendance record at the college. Required for the program is the student’s consent to the communication between the institution and CIC. Students who have been previously denied a study permit are not eligible to apply to the SPP program. Students have to undergo a required medical exam if the duration of their study program exceeds six months. The SPP has allowed participating institutions’ students a process to gain faster study permit processing time as long as all their documents are complete. Since the implementation of the SPP program after 2009, the visa acceptance rate for
Increasing International Student Enrolment

Facing a demographic shift, over the next 25 years, Canada’s population is forecast to grow negligibly, according to the 2011 census data (www.statcan.gc.ca). A number of studies warn that Canada will suffer a severe shortage of skilled labor within as little as a decade (www.hrsdc.gc.ca, www.international.gc.ca/education). The shortage will encompass all levels of the workforce from the technical to the executive levels (www.hrsdc.gc.ca). These facts, in addition to the aging Canadian population, demand that this shortfall be addressed now. Seventy-five percent of Canada’s workforce growth now comes from immigration (www.international.gc.ca/education). Through the SPP program, students adapt to their new environment as students, complete Canadian post-secondary education, gain employment after graduation, and become contributing members of their community. Eligible graduates who have completed their post-graduation work term can apply for permanent residency. This leads to immigrants who will fill the gap in the workforce to meet the future shortfalls in the human capital necessary to build a world-class knowledge economy. In this way, international students can provide an excellent source of highly qualified and skilled persons to meet Canada’s current and future labor market needs. Since the implementation of the SPP program, applications to Sheridan from potential students in India have surpassed the conversion rate required to meet the college intake targets.

In the mid-1990s, the province of Ontario instituted a 15% funding reduction to colleges and universities, significantly impacting these institutions’ budgets (Windsor in Brief, 1995). Madgett and Belanger (2008) explained that the tuition collected from international students is
twice as high as what the domestic students pay, leading to an excess in funding that helps build infrastructure at funding starved institutions. In addition to being a future source of skilled workforce, the 265,400 international students in Canada contributed $8.4 billion to the Canadian economy in 2012, sustaining 86,570 Canadian jobs (DFAIT, 2014).

This is the case at Sheridan College. Studies conducted by a number of provinces revealed that for each dollar spent by the provinces on recruiting and teaching international students, international students spent three dollars on average in return, which is equivalent to $25,000 on average per person, per year to the local economy through rent and other living expenditures (Roslyn Kunin & Associates Inc. & DFAIT, 2009). Bevis and Harrison (as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p. 700) explained that not only should international students be considered a valuable financial asset, but the personal enrichment they provide will increase cultural awareness and appreciation. According to the author, there is a significant cultural sensitivity gained as both domestic and international students interact together both in the classroom and the college environment.

Furthermore, a research advisory panel showed that international students had positive impressions of the provinces they were studying in, suggesting that this group was a good source of future immigrants (Research Advisory Panel to the Minister, 2009). Since the introduction of the SPP program, students from India have become the third largest group of foreigners attending Canadian higher education institutions. A total of 13,000 students from India have taken advantage of the SPP program over the past 4 years, a significant increase over the initial 1500 students when the program was first instituted (Popovic, 2013). A revised report presented in 2014 pegs the number of students from India studying in Canada at 28,929, or approximately
10.8% of all international students in Canada (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada [DFAIT], 2014).

**English Education Culture in India**

Delivery of education in India is very different from delivery of education in North America. Many students coming into the college have expressed their frustration with not being able to comprehend the lecture delivery in the classroom and from reading textbooks. This is the case even though all international students applying into programs at Sheridan are required to have completed either the TOEFL or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test. Ramanathan (2002) explained that English language studies in India are simply taught in survival mode where the instructors focus on teaching the minutia of writing (capital letters, writing neatly on a line, punctuation). Teaching only involves local contexts with very few readings by international authors or addressing global concerns, and students are taught by teachers who themselves are not fluent in English. In contrast, education in Canada is focused on teaching independence, building self-confidence, teaching critical thinking skills to engage students in complex reasoning, and helping students develop a voice in their writing (Ramanathan, 2002). The teaching methodology, English language studies as delivered in India, does prepare students to succeed in the English language assessments, but students successfully completing the language assessments does not mean the students will be successful in their postgraduate studies.

**Problem Statement**

The question of why international students leave a post-secondary institution before completion, after overcoming financial hurdles, admissions requirements, and anxiety, is what the researcher is attempting to answer through this study. Additionally, the financial impact on
the students having to return home without an education and with a big financial burden will represent a significant toll on their families due to the real estate guarantees required to secure the student loans to study abroad (Personal communication, December, 2013). According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), there were 28,929 international students from India studying in Canada in 2012, representing a 65% increase over the number of Indian students in 2010. This is due largely to the SPP program instituted in 2009. According to the Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE), international students from India studying in Canada currently represent the third largest group of international students (Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE], 2012). The number of students from India studying in Canada grew by 65% from 2010 to 2012 (DFAIT, 2014). With this significant increase in international students from India studying in Canada, the need to understand the acclimatization experience, both socially and academically, is extremely important in allowing students to gain the skills needed to function in a new culture and environment.

Data compiled by administrators at Sheridan College reveal that out of 729 international students enrolled in September 2011, only 523 students continued on to their second semester of studies in January 2012, which is a retention rate of 71.74%. The international centre further reported that the international students from India represent 85% of the international student population at Sheridan. This study only looked at students that have completed their first semester of studies. Due to the SPP program, Sheridan realized an increase in international students from India, beginning with under 300 to over 2000 since 2010. Parkin and Baldwin (2009) argued that somewhere between 10% and 20% of postsecondary students in general may not complete their study credential, and many require a longer period than the standard to finish. The data indicating that approximately 28% of Sheridan students from India do not complete
their studies suggest that the institution’s strategic enrolment approach is not effective. Strategic enrolment management (SEM) is a concept and process that enable the fulfillment of institutional mission and students’ educational goals (Botranger, 2004). The SEM process for different students varies depending on their circumstances. The loss of almost 30% of the international students enrolled at Sheridan is far higher than the number identified by Parkin and Baldwin (2009). Table 1 compares the retention rate for both domestic and international students, moving from the first term of study to the second term.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>71.74%</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2012</td>
<td>79.88%</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The higher than industry attrition rate represents a significant financial cost to the institution since 15% of every student’s annual tuition is paid in commissions to recruitment agents abroad. Based on the numbers represented earlier, the agent commission’s cost is approximately $309,000 for students that dropped out, not accounting for the administrative costs related to recruitment at Sheridan. Additionally, the cost to the affected students is significant, since many of these students’ families take on a significant amount of debt in loans taken out to enable the students to study abroad. Failure to retain these international students is a costly shortcoming, and addressing this now will help mitigate the workforce shortfall, allowing the students to complete their studies, stay in Canada, and give back to the Canadian economy.

Theoretical Framework

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2 Source: International Centre & Student Advisement Centre at Sheridan Institute of Technology, Oakville, Ontario.
3 International Centre at Sheridan Institute of Technology Oakville, Ontario.
This study explored the effectiveness of Sheridan’s on-boarding processes in acclimatizing international students from India, both socially and academically, into the college and surrounding community. The current SEM process at Sheridan is outlined in Figure 1. As shown, each department functions on its own, in its own silo. This process requires students to travel from one department to another seeking response to their questions, resulting in a lack of support and social integration (Personal Discussion, personal communication, December, 2013).

Figure 1. Current enrollment perspective at Sheridan.

The approach to linking students to the services in the college is the same without any regard to the students background. There is no differentiation in the process regardless of the type of student being targeted. Students can be international, aboriginal, or first-generation post-secondary learners, yet the messaging and support services are all homogenous. The traditional enrollment perspective focused on functions typically associated with the admissions funnel, whereas the SEM perspective captures all elements along the continuum. The current activities delivered by the Sheridan Student Advisement Centre to all incoming students are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Acceptance Presentations</td>
<td>Presentations to local high school students on the transition to post-secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One semester prior to start</td>
<td>Communications to some groups of students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM INDIA

focused on transitional issues preparing for start of term
Peer mentors call all incoming students to welcome them and invite them to orientation

Start of term
Orientation activities
- New student orientation
- Mature student orientation
- International student orientation

Extended Orientation
Offered to some higher needs student groups (Learning and physical disabilities, Mental diagnosis)

Early move in program
For those staying in residence

Transitional initiatives
- Student advisement staff visit each first year classroom to discuss important deadlines and promote visiting the student services centre
- Survey to gauge ongoing transitional issues

Table 3

Specific Activities Targeting International Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Departure Orientation (in India)</td>
<td>2 months prior to start of term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-departure webinars (information on arrival to Canada i.e. What to pack, health insurance, finances, getting involved on campus etc…)</td>
<td>2 months prior to start of term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start of Term</td>
<td>- Orientation at all three campuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Oakville community bus tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Activities</td>
<td>One per month during the academic year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Niagara Falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Downtown shopping trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Wasaga Beach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The activities are mass produced and do not promote an individualized customized
program to the different student groups (i.e., aboriginal, mature, or programming to the different international students). Additionally, the programming does not include activities to promote social interaction between international and domestic students.

**Vincent Tinto.** Vincent Tinto is a distinguished professor at Syracuse University and the former Chair of the Higher Education Program. Dr. Tinto laid out a theory and policy perspective on student success that is considered the benchmark to which other related work is compared. His work lays out a framework for institutional action for student success, describing the range of programs that have been effective in enhancing student success, and the types of policies that institutions should follow to successfully implement programs to improve student retention over time. As outlined by Tinto (1975), the significant lack of social activities could impede the integration of the international students from India. In further reviewing the activities provided by the student advisement centre as outlined in Table 2, it is evident that the majority of activities are front loaded, and activities designed to integrate students socially are absent from the orientation plan.

The SEM perspective at Sheridan is concerned with supporting students’ academic success and views this success as not only an academic responsibility, but the responsibility of all functional departments at the college. A recommended approach to SEM (Botranger, 2004) is outlined in figure 2, reflecting the interactivity and communication between the different relevant departments.
Additionally, a study by Tinto (1988) found that the incidence of students leaving was the highest in the first year of college, and the factors that cause students to leave in the first 6 weeks of their studies are fundamentally different than the reasons they leave later during their college life cycle. Although Sheridan does provide programs aimed at acclimatizing students through orientations to the college and community, according to the attrition data they may not be enough. The conceptual framework that informed how this phenomenon is studied is Tinto’s (1975) theory of Student Integration. The theory looked at the students’ family history, past schooling of the applicants prior to their arrival at the college. The theory further looked at the students’ commitments and goals all prior to the students’ arrival at the institution. This research looked at the academic and social systems at the college related to retention of international students from India.

Integral to the research was gaining an understanding into how committed these students were in achieving their credentials, which may be an opportunity for future research. Even though Tinto’s (1975) framework highlights the motivators that got the students to the post-secondary institution, this study did not look at the factors that may have influenced their journey since understanding the motivators can represent a research study to its own, and the applicant
pool to Sheridan is currently oversubscribed, indicating that attracting students from India is not a current concern. Rather the research looked at how the social and academic systems at the institution play an integral part in the student’s retention and credential completion.

Specifically the study examined the role that social interactions with peers as well as faculty play in social integration. Additionally, the study investigated how the cumulative effect of both social and academic integration helped the students achieve their academic goals and develop intellectually, leading to improved retention rates for students at the institution. It is important to note that the attrition data at Sheridan do not include information on whether students left the college voluntarily or were terminated due to academic challenges.

This study looked for emerging themes from the web survey developed by the researcher to examine Sheridan college social systems in comparison to the following themes that came out of the literature review: (1) Social and psychological needs, (2) Dealing with culture shock, (3) Dealing with discrimination, (4) Homesickness and loneliness, and (5) Adjustment. Additionally, the study looked for the following emerging themes related to the academic system at the institution: (1) Test taking anxiety, (2) English proficiency, (3) Pedagogy, (4) Understanding plagiarism, and (5) Academic support services available to students.

In summary, the goal of the research was to obtain direct feedback about their learning and living experiences in Ontario and to obtain information as to what their expectations, fears, and needs are, related to being successful in studying at institutions in Ontario.

**Tinto’s Theory of Student Integration**

Questions emerging from data in this thesis were interpreted through Vincent Tinto’s (1975) theory of student integration. McCubbin (2003) explained that Tinto’s student attrition model was designed to offer an explanation of all of the aspects and processes that influenced an
individual’s decision to leave college or university and how these processes interact together to eventually produce attrition. In his model, Tinto aimed to differentiate between different types of leaving behavior, which include academic failure and voluntary withdrawal. The present study did not look at the factors that led to the students’ enrolling at the institution, nor the participants’ attributes as they relate to Tinto’s framework prior to entry into Sheridan. The study explored the participants’ experiences based on the institutional services provided, related to Sheridan’s academic and social system, as highlighted in Figure 3. The focus of this study was to gain an understanding related to the student’s experience of the services offered to them at Sheridan.

Figure 3. Tinto’s Theory of Student Integration (1975).

Tinto (1975) argued that dropout occurs because the individual is insufficiently integrated into different aspects of college or university life (McCubbin, 2003). He identified academic and social integration as the two most important systems at college and determined that dropout could occur through a lack of integration in either or both of these systems. Tinto (1975) pointed out that extreme integration into either the academic or social systems at college would likely
lead to problems in the other. Tinto (1988) explained that students are moving from one community to another, and he identified three transition stages students go through--separation, transition, and incorporation. This process involves the students’ being separated from their home and local community and entering a new environment. This process of separation from the past may be “somewhat stressful,” he noted (Tinto, 1988, p. 443).

Mamiseishvili (2010) explained that Tinto’s (1975) student departure theory emphasized that student integration into both the social and academic systems would have a positive impact on them and increase the likelihood that they would persist to completion. Furthermore, after examination of all of the theoretical perspectives of student persistence or institutional retention rates, the in-college experiences have proved to be the determining factor relating to student persistence (Bartram, 2008; Chen, 2009; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Parkin & Baldwin, 2009). Additionally, research has shown that students who complete their first year and return for their second year are more likely to persist (Mamiseishvili, 2010). Given the importance of the first year, it is important to understand the factors, characteristics, and experiences that affect first-year student persistence.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

Providing educational services to students who are culturally and linguistically diverse can be both challenging and rewarding. Educators must increase their knowledge of the diverse needs of international students and become more adept at servicing this diverse population (Birnbaum, 2008; Hamayan, Marler, Lopez-Sanchez, & Damico, 2007; Roseberry-Mckibbin, 2008). This thesis is concerned with first-year international students from India. This is a descriptive and exploratory study aimed at understanding the acculturation experience of ISI’s at Sheridan Institute of Technology. Tinto’s theory of student integration was applied as a
theoretical framework. The research question is:

What information, resources, and skills are important to international students from India for adjusting to academic and social life at Sheridan?

The sub-questions include the following:

1. What knowledge, resources, and services did ISI’s consider as responsible for positive academic experiences as learners at Sheridan?

2. What knowledge, resources, and services did ISI’s studying at Sheridan see as critical for their adjustment socially?

Significance of Research Problem

Over the past decade, strategic enrollment management (SEM) has become a key focus for post-secondary institutions in the drive to create efficiencies through student retention. Attrition and retention are both important measures of performance for any education institution. Madgett and Belanger (2008) highlighted student retention as an attractive method to ensure a steady supply of skilled workers for many nations. Albert (2010) explained that attrition rates at colleges in Canada are higher than at universities in the US. In general, when analyzing student retention, the focus in early studies was on the quality of the student pool at the enrollment stage; currently focus has shifted to the on-boarding stage of the student lifecycle or strategic enrolment management since this is the component that institutions can control. Challenges with student on-boarding exist at every post-secondary institution in Canada experiencing significant growth in international students from India.

This study is a basic qualitative study using General Inductive Analysis as the methodology to provide a detailed understanding of the acclimatization experiences of international students from India studying at Sheridan.
Guided by the research questions mentioned earlier, the research has contributed to the understanding of the acclimatization experience both academically and socially. By examining the experience that international students from India have had in acclimatizing to a new culture, life, and environment, this research has the potential to deepen understanding of the experiences of international students from India in Canada, and hence to fill this gap in the literature.

As the number of international students from India increases, informing practices which would ultimately increase retention rates at post-secondary institutions is important as they eventually transition into skilled immigrants in Canada. To date, ISI’s have not been the subjects of acculturation research in Canadian institutions. The recent growth and government policy changes such as the SPP program, which was instituted in an effort to attract ISI’s, positioned this study as timely, as the need for post-secondary institutions to develop and refine frameworks for integrating ISI’s is growing exponentially. ISI’s should be classified as sojourners, those who are residing temporarily in a different country.

With the increasing numbers of ISI’s at Sheridan, the study will help the Student Advisement Centre, Office of the Registrar, and the academic faculties at Sheridan to better understand the needs of this population and ensure they provide the right services to these students. Additionally, this study could serve as a pre-departure guide to ISI’s looking to study in Canada and could serve as an information tool related to what challenges they can expect in embarking on their studies abroad. This should enhance their experience and ensure they are better equipped to achieve their goals and have a successful sojourn that may lead to permanent residency in Canada.

These potential contributions may further help to enhance the reputation of Sheridan in attracting international students from other markets, since students that are well acclimatized and
happy will use the web and other sources of media to promote the institution. Additionally, this study may contribute significantly to the study of people moving across cultures, something that will continue to happen as borders disappear in a globalized world.

Finally, this study demonstrates how the needs of international students from India are different from those of domestic students, an idea put forward by Madgett and Belanger (2008). The literature review explains how ensuring international students’ success can have significant rewards in internationalizing the campus through curriculum, domestic student interactions, and faculty professional learning through a better understanding of the needs of international students from India studying at Sheridan.

The literature review does provide some information related to acclimatizing international students into the post-secondary institution’s culture and the country, yet further investigation is needed to determine the accuracy of literature in describing the process (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Smith and Khawaja (2011) explained that the choice for students to study in Western countries can bring many challenges in adjusting to the environment in the host country. The authors identified language barriers, educational difficulties, loneliness, discrimination, and practical problems associated with changing environments as key issues faced by international students in their new environment.

Additionally, Mamiseishvili (2012) explained the importance of international students to post-secondary institutions as they provide cultural and economic benefits. Finally, further research may look at application of the different sections of Tinto’s (1975) theory of student integration to gather information related to personal and institutional goals and how they both relate to student retention. Recommendations for future research will be discussed in more detail at the conclusion of this paper. Data from the research will help Ontario public post-secondary
institutions to understand and enhance the study and adjustment experiences of international students.

**Researcher’s Position**

The researcher is employed at Sheridan as an Associate Dean in the Faculty of Health and Community Studies overseeing the School of Education. The faculty serves 5,000 students in diploma and degree programs in Health Studies, Community Studies, and Early Childhood Education. The international students in these programs represent 4% of the overall total of students. The researcher previously held the position of Director of the International Centre at Sheridan, responsible for the recruitment and support services related to international students at the institution. This experience allowed him to gain an insider’s position on many aspects of the research and provided access to the participants’ student pool due to the researchers’ relationship with department personnel. The researcher was not in a position to influence the participants’ responses or participation since the selection process does not solicit participation from the researcher’s current program portfolio within the School of Education.

The researcher was also aware of the danger presented by this insider status--for example, the potential for the researcher to make assumptions about the participant’s meanings--yet the site selected for this study is the researcher’s place of employment, where he has a vested interest in ensuring international students are served well. Additionally, in this qualitative inquiry the researcher was the primary contact with the interested participants in the study, whereby he interacted with the selected participants directly through the web surveys, and interpreted the data directly. This research may provide the foundation for a framework to improve retention for use at Sheridan and other Canadian institutions interested in recruiting international students from India.
Limitations of the Research

This research study was designed to gain an understanding into the acclimatization process of international students from India studying at Sheridan and also to examine the social and academic impact on them. The study specifically looked at international students from India in their early stages of study, those completing semester one and going into semester two. This study attempted to describe the experience of these students as they entered a new environment and culture. The study does not look at what motivated international students from India to study abroad, or why they chose Canada or Sheridan specifically, since that constitutes a complete study on its own. The scope of this study is narrow in an effort to ensure a thorough understanding into the problem.

This chapter identified the challenge arising with the increase of ISI’s in recent years due to changes in the visa acceptance rate, as well as the creation of a path to permanent residency for those students who have studied at a Canadian post-secondary institution. In recent years the provincial funding to institutions in Ontario has been reduced due to budgetary limitations. This study highlights how the reduction in financial support to educational institutions has created the need for alternate forms of revenue generation.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are presented for clarification and focus on the terms as they pertain to this study. My hope is that by presenting fundamental interpretations, any potential confusion will be reduced. The definitions of the terms used in this study are presented here.

Acculturation. “Culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems” (Berry, 2005, p. 701). According to the Social Science Research Council (1954, p. 974), “Acculturative change may be the consequence of direct cultural
transmission; it may be derived from non-cultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modification induced by an impinging culture; it may be delayed, as with internal adjustments following upon the acceptance of alien traits or patterns; or it may be a reactive adaptation of traditional modes of life” (as cited in Berry, 2005).

_**Internationalization.**_ Refers to the international dimension of higher education. Despite some similarities and interconnectedness between internationalization and globalization, internationalization is seen as “more oriented toward bilateral and/or multilateral processes involving knowledge of specific countries, which leads to the development of business, educational, social and cultural relationships” (McCabe, 2001, p. 141). Internationalization of higher education not only includes a series of international activities, services, and programs offered to students and teachers both at home and abroad, but also means promotion of international cooperation, intercultural understanding, and global-mindedness.

_**International student(s).**_ Students from countries other than Canada, who are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents of this country. Many students travel abroad to improve their language skills, and some students travel abroad exclusively to gain specialized credentials from Western institutions due to the quality of higher education in their home country or for the reputation that a foreign education provides.

_**Mentoring.**_ “Is about creating an enduring and meaningful relationship with another person, with the focus on quality of that relationship including such factors as mutual respect, willingness to learn from each other, or the use of interpersonal skills” (Salinitri, 2005, p. 858).

_**Student services.**_ Student services are one of the major departments of any post-secondary institution, with oversight of all issues and resources related to student life. Student services are usually a group of smaller units created to serve all students with support in
academic advising, personal counseling, career guidance, employment support, accessible services, and financial aid.

Student satisfaction. There is no single agreed-upon definition of this concept, yet all higher education institutions are monitoring it in some way. Student satisfaction is defined by Aldemir, Gulcan, and Eylul (2004) as a positive or negative response to a question posed.

Colleges and universities use student satisfaction data to better understand, improve, and change campus environments, thereby creating settings more conducive for student development.

Persistence. Defined by Mamiseishvili (2010) as the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education.

Sojourner. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) describe sojourners as temporary residents and student visitors as those who live in a different country for a period varying from one semester to a number of years for the purpose of gaining an academic credential from an international institution.

Description of Chapters

Chapter two is divided into two parts. The first part provides the Canadian framework, covering an overview of international education in Canada including the steady rise in the number of international students. This increase is driven by the shift in governmental policy to increase the number of international students from Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC) markets and provide an overview of the Student Partners Program related to the increase in students from India.

Secondly, the literature review that follows gathered information related to current challenges experienced by international students in general, related to integrating both academically and socially into institutions and what adjustment issues and integration challenges
they faced, while highlighting the minimal available literature on international students from India (ISI’s). In this part, the chapter outlines the cultural transition experiences of ISI’s that are related to language mastery, academic adjustment, intercultural interaction, and sources of social support.

Chapter 3 explains the theoretical and methodological approaches that were employed in the research. Guided by Tinto’s (1975) Theory of Student Integration, the study adopted a qualitative General Inductive Analysis approach as the research strategy. The study gathered data from web-based surveys designed by the researcher, and the responses were analyzed for recurring themes leading to the discovery of consistent messages about challenges faced by the international students from India in regard to their integration as voiced in their own words.

Chapter 4 outlines the results related to the research study retrieved from the web surveys. The results were analyzed using Nvivo10 determining themes and categories to display the results.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion of the study, integrating the various issues identified in the body of the research paper. This chapter includes the researcher’s comments related to the results including implications, recommendations, and the need for further research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The review began with a Google search using keywords related to international students, induction, India, discrimination, pedagogy, and acclimatization. Through the Google search, additional key words were determined to be of value to this literature search, and a number of enquiries were posted on the electronic communication networks of various professional organisations related to international education (such as the Canadian Bureau of International Education and Association of Canadian Colleges). Additionally, the researcher conducted a search of various organisation web-sites (e.g., CIC, Statscan), consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs Canadian High Commission Office in India, and the International Office at Sheridan. The opportunity to search these resource sites provided relevant current information about policies, legislation, and other subjects related to international students in Canada. Additionally, a literature search was conducted through the Northeastern University (NEU) Snell Library online search engine, returning a significant number of peer reviewed articles related to international students’ needs in general. The report on Economic Impact of International Education in Canada (Roslyn Kunin & Associates Inc. & DFAIT, 2009) was especially helpful in providing statistical information related to the search. Surprisingly, however, the literature review uncovered very little information on one of the biggest groups of international students in Canada, those from India (www.statcan.gc.ca). This paper aims to address this gap in the literature, focusing on the support needs and experiences of international students from India studying in Canada, by examining the experience of those students at Sheridan College.

In the International Education Marketing Action Plan (www.councilofthefederation.ca), the council of Ministers of Education encouraged provinces to share relevant information with
one another to ensure that the educational experiences of international students in Canada are positive. The results of this study will be shared with the institution, and the other 24 CAAT’s in the province, many of which have seen a significant increase in international students from India.

**International Students in Canada**

In 2010, there were 218,000 international students in Canada, of which 55% were enrolled in university programs and 10% were enrolled in community colleges and trade schools. Canada’s share of international students grew from 4.8% in 2000 to 5.5% in 2010 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011).

![Figure 4. Ratio of international students to domestic by country (OECD, 2011).](image)

A relative newcomer to hosting international students, and lately realizing the significant contribution to the Canadian economy through higher tuition and personal spending, the Canadian federal government has begun to increase its support to attract international students by making study permits more accessible in certain markets where demand for skilled labor exists, such as Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan (ACCC, 2010). The Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) concluded that Canadian post-secondary institutions are engaged
in international activity to provide their graduates with a distinct competitive advantage, allowing them to compete effectively in the global arena.

**Internationalization Strategies in Higher Education**

Internationalization in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) is seen as a process of institutional transformation from a local focus to a broader international perspective. A question facing many HEIs is how to translate their institutional commitment to internationalization into comprehensive and practical strategies to guide the transformation of their institutions. Knight (2007) illustrated some organizational strategies that promote internationalization at the institutional level, which include the four key areas of *governance, operations, services,* and *human resources* in HEIs. In the *governance* area, internationalization is supported by committed senior leaders with articulated rationales, goals, and objectives explicitly stated in institutional mission statements and strategic plans to manage and evaluate international activities appropriately. In the *operations* area, internationalization is integrated into appropriate organizational structures that support systematic planning, budgeting, and quality review systems for communication, liaison, and coordination at departmental and institutional levels. In the area of *services,* including both academic and non-academic support services, the institutional strategies focus on providing support for students, faculty, and staff involved in international activities and programs. Developing institutional strategies in the *human resources* area is also crucial in supporting an institution’s efforts at internationalization, especially the sojourners studying locally (Song, Wang, & Song, 2011).
Internationalization at Sheridan

Sheridan has been active in the international recruitment arena since the late 1980s. The largest market for Sheridan at the time was the United States. As the Canadian immigration policy in Canada shifted over the years, the mix of students coming into Sheridan changed. In 2009 the implementation of the SPP led to an increase in international students from India studying at Sheridan (Roslyn Kunin & Associates Inc. & DFAIT, 2009).

With the increase in enrolments, the staff in the international department increased significantly to better support the recruitment efforts and services provided to students. The table below outlines the change in personnel in the international department:

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Original count</th>
<th>New count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Advisors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Development Managers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission Coordinators</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Administrator</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems updates</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The business development managers (BDM) that were brought on board were assigned focused regions to develop, ensuring the ability to spend time in market to build strong
relationships with agents and penetrate the market. The markets that Sheridan focused on were primarily India and China due to the SPP program.

With the increase in the number of international students, there was a need to clarify roles and responsibilities with the student advisement centre in the college. Through a steering committee among different stakeholders at the institution in 2010, it was determined that the international centre would provide specialized advisement services to international students. The international centre would (1) provide advisement related to study and work permits, (2) provide orientation upon arrival, (3) provide issuance of official letters for CIC, (4) provide and explain the health insurance plan, and (5) provide guidance to the different departments at the institution.

Crosby (2010) explained how International students in Canada face a variety of financial, academic, and social barriers. The international students studying at Sheridan in 2008 were much younger than the students in 1992 (Fischer, 2011), and were enrolled in undergraduate programs (www.statcan.gc.ca), thus representing an added challenge in acclimatizing this group due to their lack of maturity. These international students might be leaving home for the first time and might get involved in the challenges of learning how to take care of their basic needs, all while engaging in the rigours of their studies.

The literature provides a vast amount of information related to internationalization. As defined by Knight (2004), “Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization” (p. 5). The purpose of this research is to determine the best approach to enhance the experiences of international students from India throughout the service life cycle (from recruitment to graduation). The study targets international post-secondary students currently enrolled at Sheridan who have completed their first semester of studies.
The research is intended to help the institution identify what needs to be included in the curriculum and student support services at Sheridan to create an internationalized program as part of the institution’s offerings. As more and more immigrants and international students arrive in Ontario, this program will facilitate their integration into the education system, allowing faster credentialing and integration into the community. The curriculum will be customized to better meet the needs of non-native English speakers by providing a program that scaffolds learning. The customization will ensure library resources are available to assist students in the writing centre.

Sherry, Thomas, and Wing Hong (2010) outlined the reasons why students pursue international study. Some of the reasons include opportunities to discover different cultures, understand how others think and behave, meet new people, and enhance their knowledge of different cultures. Andrade (2006) explained that many students look at things differently, improve their self-esteem, become more confident, and gain independence and maturity as part of their immersion in a new culture. Institutions that do not address the unique needs of international students from India, however, will leave these students disappointed, unfulfilled, and even feeling used, according to Andrade (2006).

Many students arriving for studies in Canada are faced with cultural and environmental shock upon arrival. Russell, Rosenthal, and Thomson (2010) explained the needs of international students in the following order: (1) Academic needs including English language proficiency, and (2) Physical and psychosocial health needs. The authors further explained that institutions have placed a greater emphasis on the first and usually neglect to address the second. Should their needs not be resolved, these students may not be successful in their programs of study. Before the 2013-2014 academic year Sheridan had not conducted studies related to the state of physical
or psychosocial needs of international students from India. Curran, Hollett, Hann, and Bradbury (2008) determined that an effective orientation process can assist new international students in making successful transitions to studies and settlement in their new countries, reducing isolation and enhancing the integration of students into their new communities. Madgett and Belanger (2008) explained that international student programmes must become more accountable for providing suitable services to these individuals who are paying hefty fees to have the privilege of participating in Ontario’s education system. It is also important because the success of an institution and the success of its students are inseparable. Furthermore, the authors argued that colleges and universities should not forget that globalisation cannot be completely avoided.

This paper aims to address the scarcity of research by focusing on the support needs and experiences of international students from India studying in Canada by exploring services provided at Sheridan related to meeting the needs of ISI’s. The literature search focused on studies conducted related to (1) social and psychological needs, (2) dealing with discrimination, (3) homesickness and loneliness, and (4) adjustment to new environment and academics.

**Challenges Faced by International Students**

Chen (2009) explained that the process of living and studying in another country is a very important transition in a person’s life. This transition involves social, psychological, and environmental changes, which will often lead to stress, anxiety, sense of loss, and depression. The author further explained that these students face significant uncertainty, threats, changes in customs and lifestyle, and challenges adjusting to their new environment. Cetinkaya-Yildiz, Cakir, and Kondakci (2011) concluded that foreign students need to go through a preparation process prior to arrival, and an orientation program in the host country.
A study by Tas (2013) highlighted the following top reasons for an international student to leave a university, not listed in sequential order: (1) Not making friends nor interacting with domestic students, (2) Food on campus not being multi-culturally friendly, (3) International student office not being welcoming, as it is the first point of contact, (4) Insufficient academic assistance, and (5) Limited cultural and social activities.

The Ontario Committee on Student Affairs recommended supporting areas in Health & Wellness, ensuring the availability of on-campus student health services, including both physical and mental health care, and developing a culturally sensitive strategy for handling all instances of sexual assault involving international students (Ontario Committee on Student Affairs, 2012). In regard to student living, it recommended enhancing campus eating places to make them more attentive to international students, especially with regard to dietary restrictions that students have for cultural or religious reasons; providing residence opportunities that meet the needs of specific international communities and married students; supporting students through the break and summer periods; and increasing involvement of international students in on and off-campus activities and in initiatives that will result in international students making friends with Canadian students early in their student experience. In regard to Academic Support, the committee suggested providing professional and culturally sensitive academic advising for international students, enhancing academic acculturation initiatives including those associated with academic integrity, providing support for oral and written English communications, and increasing connectivity between career services and international student support. In terms of transition, the committee recommended developing orientation programs and increasing awareness efforts to ensure that international students learn about their rights and responsibilities in Canada, especially for students from different countries who may have unique circumstances and
different requirements as well as supporting spouses, children, and family members. Finally, in regard to cultural sensitivity, the committee recommended providing intercultural competency training to all support staff, faculty, and students.

**Understanding the Acclimatization Process**

Berry (2005) explained that not all groups or individuals undergo acculturation in the same way. The author further explained that the rate at which individuals acclimatize depends on their attitude and behavior in maintaining their cultural heritage and identity and how interested they were in seeking relationships among groups. Significant research in U.S.-based institutions has focused on the barriers and challenges international students faced in their adjustment into colleges and universities, with no specific studies related to students from India. Mamiseishvili (2012) further explained that research on students’ persistence has been limited. According to the author, institutions measure student retention; therefore, in the context of this study, understanding how the services provided by Sheridan to ISI’s influences their persistence to remain at the institution should be helpful in improving the retention rates at the institution. Yeh and Inose (2003) sampled 359 international students in a North American university and found that international students who were socially connected and were content with their social support networks felt better integrated. The availability of a support network for international students to aid in their coping is crucial to their success, as demonstrated by Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, and Ramia (2008), where the authors concluded that when students felt lonely, they turned to social networks (friends) to cope.

**Language Difficulties**

Smith and Khawaja (2011) argued that language challenges are the major adaptation

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4 Defined by Mamiseishvili (2010) as the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education.
stressor international students will experience. Chen (2009) explained that language proficiency is required for the most basic simple daily living and for the more complex academic activities, including studying in higher education. The author explained that stringent requirements for success, coupled with the lack of language proficiency, result in significant psychological stress on the student with long lasting impacts. The inability to communicate effectively will pose difficulties in performing everyday functions, and more importantly in performing successfully in their studies as well as socializing with their local peers (Chen, 2009).

Current admissions English requirements for international students applying to Sheridan are in line with other colleges in Canada and vary by program of entry and country of applicant. The English requirements for applicants from India are listed in the Table below.

Table 5

Admissions Requirements for International Students from India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>TOEFL or IELTS Requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diploma or Certificate</td>
<td>iBT 80 with minimum of 20 in each section or IELTS with an overall minimum score of 6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>iBT 88 with a minimum of 21 in each section or IELTS with an overall minimum score of 6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>iBT 88 with a minimum of 21 in each section or IELTS with an overall minimum score of 6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback from faculty at Sheridan indicated that international students from India were
able to express themselves verbally but were challenged in their writing and comprehension of the material required (Personal Discussion, personal communication, December 2013). The overall score for TOEFL and IELTS does not ensure mastery of the comprehension and writing skills required to succeed. Applicants may exceed the requirements for listening and speaking and achieve poor results on the reading and writing while achieving the overall score requirement for admission.

**Loneliness and Homesickness**

Studies related to ISI’s at Canadian institutions are limited, yet there is abundant literature related to international students and their feeling of loneliness at Australian institutions. The studies related to international students from India studying at post-secondary institutions may provide some insight into this study. Sawir et al. (2008) conducted a study where they found that one third of all international students had experienced problems with loneliness in the early months of their sojourn due to loss of contact with families and networks. In addition to the loss of family and social networks, the authors identified cultural loneliness as triggered by the absence of their cultural or linguistic environment. The challenges faced by sojourning students relate to financial changes, foreign languages, and navigating unfamiliar territory and settings. Kwon (2009) identified homesickness as more prevalent than intimidation, discrimination, or loneliness. Female students were more likely to feel homesickness than male students (Kwon, 2009). This study does not look at gender related to the challenges of integration.

Sawir et al. (2008) argued that loneliness will happen to all human beings at some time in life, and it usually occurs during circumstances such as prolonged absence from home. The authors further defined the need to belong, as the need to maintain a minimum volume and quality of interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the authors identified emotional loneliness
and social loneliness as both being experienced by international students; the latter is related to
the lack of an engaging social network, and the former to the loss of an intimate tie such as to a
parent or sibling.

Sawir et al. (2008) identified numerous studies related to the causes of loneliness, naming
language competence as a key link to severe loneliness and low self-esteem. According to
Statistics Canada, Brampton, where one of Sheridan College’s campuses is situated, has 127,565
residents of Indian background, more than 25% of the city’s population according to the 2011
census study. Many of these immigrants live within close proximity to Sheridan. Additionally,
there are a significant number of businesses around Sheridan that sell products and services from
India. However, Sawir et al. (2008) explained that loneliness can still be severe, even for those
with regular contact with people from their own city or culture.

International students tend to be lonely in their new surroundings, where these
surroundings never included any familiar friends or their own social networks. A significant
amount of literature reinforces the idea that English language proficiency is important to the
success of international students and without their proficient use of English, students will feel on
their own. English language skills are very important in terms of both the academic and social
adjustment of international students (Andrade, 2006).

Financial Challenges

The available financial subsidies, bursaries, and scholarships for international students
have always been limited since the expectation is that these students have sufficient funding
available for their studies. Therefore, it is important that students have a clear understanding of
what the financial costs will be for those studying abroad, including living expenses (Ontario
Committee on Student Affairs, 2012).
Oropeza, Fitzgibbon, and Baron (1991) explained that without financial resources, basic survival becomes an issue, and a study they conducted found financial factors as one of the main stressors on international students. The authors further explained that financial challenges cause students with limited resources to find additional means of gaining income by taking on a part-time job, and/or to reduce their course load, both of which add significant stressors on the students due to the implications for their study permits, which require international students to carry a full subject load. To assist some of these students in coping with the additional stress, the Canadian government has allowed many of them to apply for a work permit once they have been studying for a period of 6 months, maintaining a GPA of 2.5/4.0 (www.cic.gc.ca). A study by Tinto (1988) explained that orientation programs have a strong effect on first-year students but fade later, while financial aid will have a strong effect on retaining students at the latter stages of their studies.

Social and Psychological Needs

The literature provides a significant amount of descriptive material related to the student’s needs through both qualitative and quantitative research, but is lacking descriptive information regarding students from India specifically.

Russell et al. (2010) explained that many institutions put more emphasis on the academic needs, and not enough on the physical and psychosocial needs. Yeh and Inose (2003) suggested that international students’ experiences at foreign institutions can result in feelings of racial discrimination. Additionally academic, financial, language, and cultural barriers become challenges due to the loss of social support, leading to feelings of homesickness and alienation. Furthermore, the authors identified several problems such as adjusting to a new culture; differences in pedagogy; developments in the home country such as death or sickness of a family
member; anxiety about returning home should they fail academically; and dealing with financial, emotional, and cross-cultural challenges (Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010). International students are also subject to exploitation, especially through for-profit institutions seeking a quick financial return. These students invest heavily in travelling from their home country to Canada, only to find that the institutions have misrepresented their facilities, accreditation, and reputation. International students are exploited by having to pay higher fees and receiving low quality education at such institutions, which prefer to go after international students as customers simply to sell them a product, referring to them as “foreigners” (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). Bartram (2008) concluded that Indian students want to integrate and usually make a significant effort to overcome cultural barriers by trying to build local networks while maintaining their family links and values.

Other than being exploited financially, international students face significant social challenges in their new environment. It is important for international students to interact with Canadian students to ease the sociocultural stressors of culture shock and social isolation, and to make working through racial discrimination and prejudice easier. International students new to North America may experience social isolation since they have experienced significant loss in their social relationships (Hayes, 1994). Hayes further explained that due to the loss in social networks, the students often feel less confident, experience increased tension, take more time off, and become confused over how to have fun, then feel a higher sense of social isolation than do non-international students (1994).

**Culture Shock**

Oberg (1960) defined culture shock as a disease suffered by anyone who has suddenly moved abroad. The author went on to say that simple changes, such as when to shake hands, how
to greet people, when to tip, where to complete simple purchases, how to order food, and when to take statements seriously and when not to, are all simple cues that were taken for granted in the sojourner’s homeland. These simple daily nuances become causes for anxiety. Typical symptoms of culture shock include a feeling of helplessness, a desire for dependence on longer term residents of their own nationality, and increasing concern over things such as simply walking to the corner drug store (Fischer, 2011).

Oberg (1960) offered a number of recommendations to help overcome culture shock, such as getting to know the people of the host country in order to learn the language of the host country as it is the main method of communication. The author further explained that having sojourners lean on their compatriots for assistance will start the healing process.

Accordingly, Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) found a correlation between the level of interaction with people from the host country and the level of culture shock experienced by the sojourner; as the level of interaction with the host people decreased, there was an increase in the level of culture shock experienced by the sojourner.

A study by Tompson (1996) found that our communities are becoming more and more diverse, yet neither the way we teach nor the classroom environment has changed. Many international students may regard such practices as eating and drinking in the classroom and students and teachers calling each other by their first names as extremely disrespectful. Additionally, the study found that students from Asian backgrounds may be puzzled and confused with the frequent discussions and presentations that they have to participate in (Tompson, 1996). Students from India learned in an environment where the curriculum is overloaded, rote memorization is the norm, and no critical thinking skills are developed (Stewart, 2009). Additionally, Rienties, Heliot, and Jindal-Snape (2013) explained that international
students have different strategies and attitudes for developing learning relationships and friendships with their classmates of varying backgrounds.

**Discrimination**

There is abundant literature available related to discrimination towards international students, especially those from Asian backgrounds in Australian universities. These studies conducted in Australia helped shape the themes in this study. Australia is a nation with many characteristics similar to Canada, such as (1) a similar post-secondary education system, (2) the same language, and (3) a similar industrialized economy. Perceived discrimination or biases towards international students, either academically or socially, are difficult to eliminate, but Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) explained that it is possible to reduce them, and it should be a priority since they have a direct link to homesickness. The authors further explained that when institutions fund special student services and student aid programs, they report lower levels of racial tensions than in the institutions that do not fund these programs (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Sheridan does not have programs customized for international students from India. Sheridan does provide significant services to all students to ensure advising, support and counseling services are available to leading to retention and student success.

Lee and Rice (2007) described how discrimination can range from students being ignored to verbal insults and confrontation. Their research showed how this occurs both in and outside the classroom, by peers, faculty, and members of the local community. The interesting conclusion is that not all international students are subject to the same hardships. Students from Western and English-speaking countries encountered minimal to no discrimination compared to students from other regions such as China and India (Lee & Rice, 2007). The authors suggested, based on their findings, that the institutions are accountable to ensure student satisfaction and
positive relations with students from foreign countries. It is important for institutions to create intellectual communities that foster “cross national acceptance and learning in rejecting the perpetuating stereotypes” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 406).

**Adjustment**

The literature is lacking in providing descriptive information related to student adjustment in a new country. The literature provided information related to student adjustment within the institution but only minimal information related to adjusting to the community. Khawaja and Stallman (2011) conducted a qualitative study, concluding that international students need to learn basic life skills, such as finding housing, opening a bank account, understanding public transit, washing their clothing, and basic cooking skills. International students experienced culture shock and showed a lack of understanding of their institution’s educational systems, which often led to frustrations (Fischer, 2011).

A study by Salinities (2005) into the effects of mentoring on international student retention found that attrition rates dropped to single digits for students who were part of an official college mentoring program versus 20%-30% for those that did not participate in an official mentoring program at their post-secondary institution. Sheridan does provide mentoring to students, both domestic and international. At the start of the student’s freshman year, new students self-identifying as needing additional support are paired with a students in the same program of study at a sophomore or higher. An attempt is made to provide international students with mentors studying at later stages of their programs. The selection is based on the program of study to align a level of expertise with the new students.
**Academic Needs**

The literature had abundant information related to the lack of English level proficiency and its effect on student success, yet the literature was lacking information into classroom delivery methodology that meets the needs of international students. There was no mention of any approach to teach students the collaborative learning environment that is in practice at institutions across North America. Russell et al. (2010) concluded through a study in Australia that the main concern with international students is the lack of attention on the part of educational institutions toward providing English language learning whereby students gain the proficiency appropriate for successful participation in university studies. Furthermore, the students were not informed of the academic approaches used in Australian universities, leading to a sense of missed expectations on the part of the student.

**Culture-Related Learning Differences**

Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, and Elsayed (2013) explained that studying abroad can be a very challenging, demanding, and stressful experience for international students. International students need to find affordable transportation and housing, learn to communicate in English, and become accustomed to the educational system. According to the authors, international students are encouraged to take an active approach and initiate frequent contact with the local culture by joining clubs and activities on campus, giving them an opportunity to practice their English and meet local students. A report by the Ontario Committee on Student Affairs (2012) explained the need for international students to receive academic acculturation, in which academic advisors provide ongoing support to ensure that students are familiar with the expectations in a Canadian post-secondary classroom. Topics provided relate to writing skills, research skills, and the availability of support services academically.
Karuppan and Barari (2011) concluded that a lack of experiences in active and collaborative learning environments in their new institutions creates a perception of a poor quality student, yet the students are simply participating as if in a teacher-centered classroom environment since this is all that they have experienced in their home country. The authors further explained that the students’ limited English-speaking skills exacerbate this situation, limiting their interaction both inside and outside the classroom. The authors further concluded that “English skills foster the dynamics conducive to inclusion and participation in social and academic circles and therefore promote a pleasant and enriching educational experience on US campuses, irrespective of ethnicity” (p. 79).

**Academic Support Issues**

Mamiseishvili (2010) explained that support from peers, family, faculty, and staff is crucial for international students to succeed academically. The author further explained that being engaged in the institution, integrated into the campus culture, involved in spiritual life, engaged in courses, and involved in extracurricular activities were among the factors frequently reported by international students as reasons related to their ability to persist. Many international students studying at Western institutions are not familiar with academic integrity rules, leading to an overrepresentation of international students in academic misconduct violations (Ontario Committee on Student Affairs, 2012). It is important for institutions to inform international students early of Canadian academic integrity rules. A study by Baik and Greig (2009) confirmed that discipline-based language and academic skills support programs at post-secondary institutions can assist English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learners in improving their academic outcomes as well as their integration into the institution through the opportunity to provide networking opportunities for building a student’s social network.
English Proficiency

Kwon (2009) explained that international students with strong English proficiency felt that the classes were taught well and their learning was good. The author further explained that international students who had been in an ESL program were more likely to report feeling isolated or even intimidated, once in their programs of study, than those that had not. The author also found that instructors needed to make an extra effort to involve international students, especially from Asian countries, in participation in the classroom. “International students need to become more deeply involved in classroom discussion by oral participations without the fear of making mistakes” (p. 8), he concludes.

Jones, Jones, and Packham (2009) suggested that a lack of English proficiency may be the single greatest barrier experienced by international students, since it affects both their ability to succeed academically (which itself influences their psychological state of mind), and their ability to engage socially with other students. Tutors can reduce student stress by communicating at the beginning of the course the type of challenges faced by students, providing coping skills, and clearly outlining the support services that are available at the institution.

Pedagogy

Janjua, Malik, and Rahman (2011) conducted a study that found that the majority of international students experience discomfort, confusion, and difficulty in adjusting to their host environments and have to struggle hard to fit in. Their problems were due to the differences between their experience in their current host location and their previous educational experience at their home institutions. Strang (2010) explained that international students are open to group work, yet they tend to congregate only with students from their own culture. The instructor should be able to understand the different dynamics in the classroom and put together a lesson
plan to better meet the needs of all students. Sawir (2011) explained that “Internationalisation is not merely about incorporating international elements in the curriculum; it is about being open to alternative ways of thinking.” The author further explained that teachers need to be globally competent to more efficiently teach students in socially and culturally diverse classroom situations. They would be expected to know not only their subject, but also the ways it can be understood, the ways it can be misunderstood, and what counts as understanding.”

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism amongst international students from Asia tends to be high, due to not understanding the meaning of the term or how to properly cite their work (Zimerman, 2012). Hilliard, Crudele, Matulich, and McMurrian (2010) explained how different parts of the world define the word “plagiarism,” emphasising honesty and integrity, yet some failed to provide guidelines for citation. The authors clearly differentiated Canada as having less tolerance for cheating, through permanent notations placed on student records. On the other hand, Latin America had defined the term as cheating, yet had no defined consequences; this is an area where an institution can ensure clarity to international students by providing them with clear explanations and clearly outlined penalties, including training on properly citing their work.

**Conclusion**

Therefore, whether Canadian universities are servicing domestic or international students, these institutions must understand that the needs of international and domestic students can be exactly the same or completely different.

The literature review uncovered extensive articles related to the academic adjustment difficulties of international students, and the literature provides studies showing that the traditional North American curriculum and teaching methodologies at colleges and universities
in the Western world do not allow for the success of international students. The literature
provided clear approaches for tackling the challenges with curriculum and pedagogy, including
an internationalized curriculum that recognizes the diverse backgrounds and learning styles of
international students. However, the literature review explains that the development of an
internationalized environment including curriculum requires the collaboration of the complete
institute including the academic, student, and administrative teams.

Many Canadian institutions have added international cultural programming into their
courses and programming; however, this ad hoc approach is not enough to ensure the success
and meet the needs of international student learners with diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, Yeh
and Inose (2003) determined that English language fluency was a significant predictor of
acculturative distress. Specifically, higher frequency of use, fluency level, and the degree to
which participants felt comfortable speaking English, predicted lower levels of acculturative
distress among international students. The authors believed that this is associated with the fact
that higher English fluency may be related to smoother interactions with the majority group
members in the community and in the school. Should institutions change the English admissions
requirement to ensure a much better functioning student? Further research is required into the
acclimatization approach beyond the academic into the services needed to assist international
students in further settling into Canadian culture and their new communities. Further research is
needed to gain a better understanding of how to reduce stress related to social and academic
differences.
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Chapter 3 details the research design this study adopted to gain an understanding as to what the acculturation process is for international students from India (ISI) studying at Sheridan. A discussion on the use of qualitative research methods, including General Inductive Analysis, is included. Next, the data collection and data analysis procedures are presented. The source of data collection is a web survey that was distributed to international students from India studying at Sheridan who have completed their first semester of studies. The web survey will be explained in more detail later. Data analysis was conducted using Nvivo 10 to generate themes and categories from the data retrieved from the web surveys. The strength of the dissertation is also discussed, stressing a triangulation approach. Finally, the confidentiality and ethical concerns related to the respondents, as well as justification for the data modifications, are presented. The research questions were:

What information, resources, and skills are important to international students from India for adjusting to academic and social life at Sheridan?

The sub-questions include the following:

1. What knowledge, resources, and services did ISI’s consider as responsible for positive academic experiences as learners at Sheridan?
2. What knowledge, resources, and services did ISI’s studying at Sheridan see as critical for their adjustment socially?

Theoretical Perspectives

The literature review has revealed a gap in the research regarding Indian international students’ acclimatization experiences in Canadian post-secondary institutions. This study is concerned with a group of students moving from one culture to another and their interaction
within a Western environment, and it looks at the academic and social integration of international students from India at Sheridan Institute of Technology. To address the gap in the available literature, the current study drew on Tinto’s theory of student integration as a theoretical framework to guide the investigation into the research problem regarding the integration of these students socially and academically.

**Conceptualising the Research Problem: Tinto’s Theory of Student Integration**

This study sought to determine what the problem associated with integration of international students into Sheridan College. This study examined how Tinto’s (1975) theory of student integration drives student acclimatization or lack thereof. According to Tinto (1975), the process of transitioning from high school involves signs of disassociation or discontent.

Vincent Tinto’s (1975) framework of student integration offers a model that covers all of the external and internal factors that would explain the forces that affected an individual’s decision to leave college or university, and how these forces worked together to produce attrition. Tinto highlighted two types of attrition, voluntary and involuntary (i.e., those related to dismissal due to academic failure).

Tinto (1975) based his model on Durkheim’s Theory of Suicide, which proposes that an individual’s likeliness to commit suicide is dependent on the level of that person’s integration into society. Durkheim argued that if individuals have a good social support network and strong moral integration, the likelihood that they will commit suicide is greatly reduced.

Tinto (1975) argued that dropout occurs because the individual is not well integrated into different aspects of college or university life. Tinto identified academic and social integration as the two most important systems at college and explained that dropout could occur through a lack of integration in either or both of these systems. Tinto pointed out that extreme integration in
either the academic or social systems at college would likely cause problems in the other since the student would not have a healthy balance in either.

The research questions and web-based questionnaire (Appendix B) represented the student’s level of integration into the academic and social life at the college. Tinto identified different levels of social integration, each level having differing consequences for student retention (McCubbin, 2003). The author (McCubbin, 2003) stated that according to Tinto, social integration in college was “directly related” to persistence, and while the lack of social integration would lead to attrition.

McCubbin (2003) highlighted the importance of social integration at each level in the institution. In addition to being socially integrated at the institutional level, the author argued that Tinto (1975) stressed the importance for students to be socially integrated at the faculty or school level. This approach increases both the level of social integration and the level of academic integration, leading to better success. The author explained that Tinto’s theory of student attrition confirms that “academic integration directly influences the student’s goal commitment while social integration directly influences their commitment to the specific institution” (McCubbin, 2003, p. 3).

As illustrated in Figure 5, Tinto’s (1975) framework conceptualises the background factors, institutional interactions leading to social and academic integration. Tinto’s model highlights the need to investigate key features of the institutional commitment to student integration and success, where the dynamic interplay among all these components is held to affect attrition and acclimatization.
Research Design

Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (2012), "A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (p. 16).

Based on the literature review, little is known about the effects of poor social and academic integration from the perspective of international students from India studying in Canada. The only significant data relate to demographic information of the current student population; therefore, the study has an exploratory purpose, particularly to examine the perspectives in the acclimatization of these students into Sheridan Institute of Technology, both academically and socially. A qualitative study such as the one conducted by the researcher has not been conducted at Sheridan in the past. Creswell (2012) explained that when the literature yields little information about what is being studied, then the researcher would need to learn more from participants through exploration. A quantitative approach through the use of surveys
is not appropriate since there were few known variables. A qualitative researcher conducts inquiry that explores dimensions of a human or social problem (Creswell, 2013). Using in-depth, descriptive data, the researcher attempts to create a comprehensive image of the problem through web surveys and conducts in-depth data analysis to seek out the themes that relate to the international students’ experiences at Sheridan. Therefore, a qualitative research design was chosen for this study as Creswell (2012) explained that a qualitative study is needed when the literature yields little information about the phenomenon under investigation.

General Inductive Analysis

Although ISI’s are classified as sojourners, those residing in the host society temporarily (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011), ISI’s have rarely been seen as possible research subjects in the past. How ISI’s acclimatized into post-secondary education in Canada has not been studied much in the past, and not at all at Sheridan. It is for these reasons that this study was undertaken.

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study to address a research problem in which the variables are unknown and the need to explore further exists (Creswell, 2012). The approach chosen for this study is a General Inductive Analysis (GIA) or Basic Qualitative Research Study. Thomas (2006) explained that an inductive approach is used (1) to summarize general and varied raw text data into a brief format, (2) to create clear links between the research goals and the summary findings derived from the data, and (3) to develop or add to a model or theory about experiences or processes that are evident in the raw data. The goal of this study is to report a model outlining themes related to the reasons ISI’s may not persist at college. Thomas (2006) explained the value of using an inductive approach, as follows: “…Although the inductive approach is not as strong as some other approaches in the area of theory or model development, it does provide a simple, straightforward approach for deriving findings linked to
focused evaluation questions” (p. 246). The benefit of using a GIA approach for this study is the general nature of the approach to summarize general text down to themes relevant to the descriptive nature of the study.

**Research Setting**

The research was conducted at a College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) in southwestern Ontario, Canada. Fifteen percent of the total populations are international students, of which, according to internal records, 75% are from India. As with many other institutions, Sheridan places an emphasis on ensuring proper onboarding for all international students through a yearlong student orientation program. Information about Sheridan College’s onboarding process was presented in Chapter 1.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was completed by web-based surveys designed by the researcher, where the researcher’s goal was to collect stories from individuals about their lived and told experiences in line with a GIA approach (Creswell, 2013). The advantage of GIA is that this process provides an “elaborated account of a commonly used and straightforward option for analyzing qualitative data” (p. 245)

**Web-Based Surveys**

**Reasons for Using the Web Surveys**

The web surveys were used to explore the general attitudes, behaviors, and impressions of the Indian international students at Sheridan. The web survey using broad open-ended questions covered a wide range of issues that are of greatest importance to this student group concerning their integration, both socially and academically, determined by responses to services and extra-curricular activities available at Sheridan. The researcher emailed the unique link to the
surveys to the participants that agreed to participate in the study. This type of interviewing, according to Creswell (2012), provides rapid access to large numbers of people and a detailed rich text database for qualitative analysis. To overcome the ethical challenge of not having permission for individuals to participate in the interviews, using Survey Monkey or an alternate, a page digitally signed by each participant, having given consent and agreeing to having understood the purpose and process of the interview, was required prior to moving beyond the consent page.

**Participant Selection**

During the fall of 2013, the researcher submitted the documentation to the IRB at Northeastern University for approval to proceed with the study, which was granted on November 4, 2013. Next the researcher submitted an application to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Sheridan for approval to proceed with the study. The REB approval at Sheridan was received on November 22, 2013. The researcher contacted the International Centre at Sheridan and asked the student coordinator to send an email to international students from India who had completed their first semester of studies, seeking prospects interested in participating in the study. Stratified sampling (Creswell, 2012) was used to contact prospects who might be interested in participating in the study. Participant selection for this study focused on international students from India studying in their second semester at Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario. This allowed students in their second semester an opportunity to reflect on the acculturation process that they had gone through. The researcher was not interested in any additional demographic information about the participants, although it might be a subject for future research studies. When selecting a sample size, it is important to determine the size of the sample needed (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) went on to explain that the larger the sample size, the less the potential error that the sample will
be different from the population.

A sample size of 10% of the population, or approximately 50 participants, was the target participants in the study; more information related to the participant’s selection is presented in Chapter 4. The students were contacted by the student services coordinator in the International Office, and the contact information of those willing to participate was passed on to the researcher. In determining the ideal sample size for the study, Trotter (2012) explained that the ideal standard for a qualitative study is to interview to redundancy, which is the process of sequentially conducting interviews until all concepts are repeated multiple times without new concepts or themes emerging. The author further explained that triangulation (same information acquired from multiple unconnected sources) and then qualitative reliability had been achieved.

Data Collection Overview

Creswell (2012) explained that a qualitative interview occurs when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their answers. The researcher asked questions related to the students’ experience in acclimatizing to life at Sheridan, both socially and academically, seeking information related to what challenges ISI’s faced integrating into the institution. The researcher utilized a web survey with open-ended questions to gather the data for analysis. Creswell (2012) further explained that it is possible to ask some closed-ended questions allowing, for the confirmation of some relevant data. Some of the closed-ended questions would confirm the term of study for the student and other data. The author further explained that gathering data electronically may raise ethical questions related to the obtaining of the participants’ signed consent. To overcome this issue, the researcher asked each participant who had agreed to participate in this study to sign an electronic consent online acknowledging his/her understanding as to any risk in participating in the study. The study is a descriptive study into
learning how international students from India acclimatize into Sheridan.

This approach is relevant to the General Inductive Analysis approach since it gathered a significant amount of descriptive information that would lead to strong themes and help answer the research questions related to international students from India studying in Canada and how their acclimatization has been into Sheridan College.

The surveys were conducted online through Survey Monkey. The collected responses were stored on Survey Monkey’s secure servers accessed exclusively by the researcher’s login username and password. Once the data were downloaded from the Survey Monkey servers, the data were stored on an external hard drive on the researcher’s personal computer. This external hard drive has no access to the internet, and the computer requires a username and password to gain access. Once the data had been downloaded, any participants’ identifying information was changed to pseudonyms to maintain their privacy. The original data on the Survey Monkey servers was saved until the completion of the data analysis, at which time that backup was deleted to maintain the participants’ privacy.

Data Analysis Process Overview

The initial step in data analysis involves preparing the data and organizing it to make the process accurate and simpler. The steps outlined by Creswell (2012) are as follows:

1- Organize Data: Since the approach used to gather data was a web-based survey, the organization aspect of this study was simpler than had it been a traditional interview with a need for recording and transcription.

2- Analyzing by hand or by computer: The researcher analyzed the web-based questionnaires using computer software by converting the content to text format and uploading the file into the computer.
The researcher had access to NVivo for Windows, which is powerful software that assisted in indexing, searching, and theorizing the data.

Dierckx de Casterle, Gastmans, Byron, and Denier (2012) outlined the following six major problems that each qualitative researcher is faced with when analyzing data: (1) Over-reliance on qualitative software packages; (2) Word overload due to line-by-line approaches; (3) Coding using a preconceived framework; (4) Difficulty of retaining the integrity of each respondent’s story; (5) Full potential of data is not exploited; (6) Data analysis as an individual process.

Ziebland and McPherson (2006) explained that the aim of coding is to make sure that all the web survey sections that are related under the same heading can be retrieved with ease. The authors went on to explain that a secondary aim is to make sure the volume of data under each of the headings is manageable, and there is no value in gathering vast amounts of text and phrases under code. It is also important to explore all the relevant data well and ensure that the explanation is solid.

Coding the data from the survey transcripts is the process of looking for words or short phrases that symbolically “assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). The author further explained the approach of coding as taking more than one run. Descriptive coding, when taken from the transcription, summarizes a primary topic (Saldana, 2009).

One of the challenges in qualitative data analysis, as explained by Dierckx de Casterle et al. (2012), is the ability to distinguish relevant information from less relevant information. The authors went on to explain further challenges in discovering the key story lines that are answering the research questions; therefore the research question must guide the analysis.
process, directly leading to better insight into the phenomena studied rather than gathering a story.

Adair and Pastori (2011) explained that making decisions about how to categorize people’s personal experiences is an interpretative act. The authors went on to say that interpretation includes making decisions about topics, themes, and primary and secondary coding, “and often entails a struggle with interpretations and perspectives” (p. 40). Thomas (2006) explained the process of initial coding, continuing on to creating secondary coding and comparing the two to identify overlapping themes and eventually merging both lists to create one robust set of categories.

Trustworthiness

Ethics

Ethical issues were addressed in the following ways. First, ethics approval was obtained from Northeastern University’s IRB before the commencement of data collection. Second, ethics approval was obtained from Sheridan Institute of Technology. Third, electronic consent forms were prepared and uploaded to Survey Monkey, where participants cannot move forward without signing their consent electronically. Survey Monkey is an online survey creation and distribution system allowing for secure electronic survey distribution and simple data gathering tools that can be used to analyze vast amounts of information.

The consent form explained the objectives and procedures of the study, the benefits of the study to the participants, and the participants’ rights to participate voluntarily and to withdraw at any time. The researcher did not offer the participants any incentive to participate.

Quality of the Research

Maxwell (2012) explained that with qualitative research, the study can be faced with
problems related to misinterpretation of participants’ meanings, biases due to single research methods, researcher’s biases, researcher’s influence on participants, and a lack of generality of the findings. Some strategies that will be applied to mitigate the risks are triangulation, rigorous coding, and peer review findings.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has explained the theoretical and methodological approaches that were employed in the research. Guided by Tinto’s theory of student integration, the study has adopted a qualitative General Inductive Analysis approach as the research strategy. The study gathered data from web-based surveys.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the findings related to the acclimatization of ISI’s into Sheridan College. Data for this chapter are drawn from responses to the web survey questionnaires related to these topics. The researcher believed that a better understanding of this phenomenon would allow Sheridan and other post-secondary institutions in Ontario to more effectively deliver onboarding programs to international students from India. Findings are presented by starting with an overview of the survey participants to gain an understanding into their relevance to the study. Additionally, the participants’ responses to the survey were organized and analyzed, based on Tinto’s (1975) framework of student integration, as presented in chapters 1 and 3. The researcher used Nvivo 10 as the software to analyze, categorize, and align the data with the framework. The final analyses of the findings are presented, based on the research questions outlined in chapters 1 and 3.

The framework and models presented by Tinto’s model of student integration (1975) provided the general structure of the conceptual framework for this dissertation. The literatures review in Chapter 2 highlighted themes and categories related to social and academic integration. The themes generated from the literature review guided the survey question development, and these categories were highlighted during the surveys. In analysis of the survey responses and after reviewing the findings, these themes and categories became clearer. A code was created for each theme and category during the coding process. The themes included the application process, coping strategies, sources of social support, group affiliation preference, attitudes towards the way of life, and acculturative stress. These themes and categories are presented in the following section.
As the themes and categories are presented below, feedback from participants is included as support for those themes and categories. The responses have not been edited for grammar or spelling errors, in order to maintain the authenticity of the responses.

**Participants**

The survey was sent to 457 international students from India studying at Sheridan College. All of whom had completed their first semester of studies. Forty-six students participated in the study, of which two chose not to consent. Of the 44 that continued on, three students were ineligible to participate due to their permanent residency status, and one student had not completed the first semester of studies, leaving a total of 36 eligible to participate, all of whom were working towards a diploma at Sheridan College. The gender of the students participating in the survey was not collected as it was not relevant to the study. In addition to gender, demographic data related to geographic region of origin in India, marital status, academic achievement abroad, and so on were not collected. The demographic information was not collected, in order to ensure the scope of the study was narrow and achievable. To continue and build on the results of this study, demographic and data related to motivations for studying abroad could provide insight into this student group. This information could better prepare institutions in acclimatizing this group of students. All the information from the studies could lead to greater efficiency in recruitment and better branding for Sheridan College and other colleges in Ontario. The data collected from the 36 participants were analyzed through Nvivo 10 software to deliver the findings.

**Analysis of the Findings**

By using the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3, the responses of the participants during the web surveys were combined and categorized in Chapter 4. The
frameworks and models presented by Tinto’s (1975) model provided the general structure of the conceptual framework for this dissertation. Background characteristics and other themes and categories that came out of the literature review presented in Chapter 2 were considered as well when creating categories and themes while analyzing the data. In the analysis of the participants’ responses and after reviewing the findings, these themes and categories became clearer. A code was created for each theme and category during the coding process. The codes included coping, challenges, discrimination, support, social integration, academic support, financial challenges, and communication with Sheridan. This dissertation focused on the extrinsic factors affecting ISI’s while studying at Sheridan in Canada. Extrinsic factors include support systems, financial challenges, etc.; additionally, participants described their level of satisfaction with the overall college climate and experience, adding suggestions for improvement for other international students. Each of these themes and categories will be presented in the following section.

Applying to Sheridan

Sheridan utilizes a web space allowing students and agents to apply directly to Sheridan, eliminating the need for the employment of data entry specialists at Sheridan. This process expedites the evaluation of the applicant’s documents and allows Sheridan to turn around a letter of acceptance to students within five business days. With the extremely competitive environment in India, a number of colleges have resorted to opening offices in India to facilitate the application processing for their prospective students. The ability to turn around letters of acceptance to prospective students within five days of applying provides Sheridan with a distinct competitive advantage. Prospective students in India usually continue their application with the institution from which they receive the first letter of acceptance. The participants used a multitude of resources to prepare for their studies at Sheridan; 25 participants used Sheridan’s
website and communication from the college as the main source of information, followed by information from family and friends. Seventy-six percent of the participants applied to study through an agent, followed by twenty percent applying directly on Sheridan’s website. Many of the participants were very satisfied with the responses received from Sheridan during the application process. This study only asked about the students’ experience for those that applied directly to Sheridan, and it did not gather information related to how responsive the prospective student’s agent was. The feedback related to the responsiveness by Sheridan staff in the international office was overwhelmingly positive. An example of the feedback received from the students from the survey questions about their experience with Sheridan staff directly follows:

When I visit Sheridan Website, they have given so many information and also lots of course in which I was interested. Then I called them and get more information about courses fee structure etc. which information was helped me a lot to choose right college for my further education. College representative was so helpful and given me all detailed information I was looking for. Then I applied to course and now I am in Sheridan College studying my third semester. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Sheridan utilizes an automated client management system that, as the prospective student application is updated by the admissions counselor, triggers an automated communication process continuously updating the prospective student about his/her application status. Based on the automation process, it is not surprising to see that participants were very positive about the college’s speedy responses to email queries and the follow-up with continuous updates received on their applications. Participants praised the continuous information flow, as mentioned by this participant:

I received email about my inquiries from Sheridan College. Also, they used to inform me
about any other information regarding my studies or program through email. They give me student username and password and I started using that to get information about my program. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Even though the majority of participants found the continuous communication from Sheridan satisfying, the information could get overwhelming since it requires recipients to prioritize the messages. A participant expressed a challenge fielding through all the communication that was received from Sheridan, as expressed below:

> There were too many emails sent to me and I was finding it hard trying to prioritize the importance of the mails. And there was no clear format of things expected out of me. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Even though the participant below mentioned that he/she would ask for help if necessary, not all students would be open to asking for help. The communication from the International Centre is meant to assist those students that are not as open to asking for help; therefore the volume of email may be irritating to some (as shown below), yet important to others:

> I wish the international centre would stop bombarding me with emails! If I need help, I am very capable of finding it. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Accompanying the letter of acceptance, Sheridan provides a list of required documentation to prospective students and agents related to applying for their study permit. Over 70% of students applying to study at Sheridan do so through agents. Sheridan does provide training to their agents, conducted by the business development managers when in market, and through an agent manual and training provided online via WebEx. It seems that these processes are working well, as expressed by a participant’s confidence in applying for the study permit at the High Commission in India below. The confidence seems to be the same whether the students
applied through an agent or without:

I applied through an agent so I did nothing. He was the one who took charge of everything related to my visa application. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Some participants leveraged the expertise of their friends to gather the lists of required documents, as explained by a participant: “I enquired about all the documents needed to apply for, from friends and took the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test” (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013). Those participants that had communicated directly with Sheridan responded positively as the information received by email was helpful, while others looked to the internet to gather the list of required documentation and submitted them for approval. In reviewing the High Commission in India website, the information available for students to determine what is needed to apply for a study permit is quite clear.5

**Orientation**

Sheridan delivers orientation to both domestic and international students at the start of each term. Sheridan over the past 2 years has delivered orientations in India to students that have received an offer letter and have paid their first term fees. The feedback related to the orientation in India has been very positive as it prepares students well for their arrival in Canada. Eighty-one percent of respondents had attended the orientation session held at the college upon arrival, while 14% did not attend, and 4.5% were unsure. Of the information presented at orientation, those that attended found information related to the academic support services at Sheridan the most important, followed by information related to the community surrounding Sheridan, health

insurance, and finding a place to live. During the orientation, the International Centre brings in a number of third-party presenters to talk about the products they deliver. Some of the third-party groups to participate in the orientation are the health insurance provider, residence manager, and the internal college support systems such as student services, counseling, and the library.

Presentations during orientation related to academics, identified as most helpful to students, were those on academic honesty. One participant explained, “Academic honesty was one topic that I was informed about in the orientation and was really helpful” (Web Survey, December 2013). In general the students found the orientation sessions very valuable, as expressed by participants in the following statements:

I like the orientation. Because i just arrived i dont know anything about here. so I pay close attention to information in orientation and try to grab as much as i can. All the information was helpful to me and since now it is helping me. (Web Survey, December 2013)

Orientation is very important for new comer and i like all topics. (Web Survey, December 2013)

Canadian winters can be extremely harsh for students from India, where the average annual temperature range is +15 degrees Celsius in the winter, compared to -20 degrees Celsius in Canada. Participants arriving in January for the winter term are faced with a harsher environment than those arriving for the fall or spring terms. The need exists to ensure students are aware of the severity of the weather so that it is one less thing to deal with. A participant was seeking additional information related to adapting to the Canadian environment, which included weather-related challenges but also the social and community environment and how things worked, as seen in the participant’s feedback:
A lot of them are there to be covered but the one I want to tell you is that they should tell how to adapt in Canadian environment because it too hard than it looks. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

A number of participants expressed their desire to attend longer orientations focused on their program of study. Sheridan delivers specific program orientations after the general orientation to students enrolled in each specific program. The purpose of the specific orientations is to provide students an overview of the academic program, the program faculty, academic advisors, and what to expect in the program. Attending only the international student orientation did not allow them an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding about their program of study and the systems used in the program, as expressed below:

Many students are not even aware about Slate and access Sheridan service on Sheridan website so students are confused till the school start so they should be advised to visit Slate and access Sheridan on the orientation day so that they are aware about their timetable very well and their courses and teachers. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Provide more information about the teaching methods. - Share information about course methodology. - Provide information about people to contact about details, or even have agents provide such information to students (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013).

During the orientations, Sheridan creates an opportunity for all students to integrate by providing a combined session where students are asked to introduce themselves to one another. At the end of the orientation session, Sheridan provides an opportunity for students to mingle and get to know each other through a barbeque lunch. Another participant expressed an interest in
facilitating meeting people during the orientation as a way to limit the loneliness experienced and create a peer group to support the newly arrived students in their new environment:

A buddy system would be cool on our orientation. Maybe an easter egg hunt in small groups of students where new students are paired up with older ones. That way we get to see the facilities, have fun, and chat casually. I'm not sure what specific information would have helped me, maybe in the learning commons there could be a help center set up where anyone who has had issues with finding their schedule, can go and a technician or another student can guide them through Sheridan Access and tell them where their classes are and when. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Students were keen on getting a study permit to gain employment. The students were looking for a way to supplement their income. A recurring theme expressed in the survey by participants was the need for information related to study and work permits. The participants expressed the need to receive this information early on. It is important for students to understand the implications to their academic results and how that affects their eligibility for a permit. Some of the students felt that waiting till the scheduled workshops was too late, as seen below:

  timely give information on work-permit, study-permit and PR ( may be through e-mails or meetings) -one on one help with the filling of work, study permit form (as they are sometimes so confusing). (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Other participants praised the quick response times associated with their queries, with one student also praising the offer from the college to attend an orientation in his/her hometown in India:

  They offered me to attend their orientation in Chandigarh, Punjab (India). Which helped to answer my all questions. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)
The material provided during orientation gave students basic information, such as how to open a bank account or find a place to live and general information on how to dress for the harsh Canadian winters. According to participants’ responses, these topics were all of value and did help in acclimatizing the students to the Canadian way of life, yet students were looking for in-depth information or alternatively additional sessions that built on the basic session.

**Acclimatization**

Participants were asked how they were acclimatizing to the environment in Canada; the majority of participants, 68%, strongly agreed that they were getting used to the Canadian way of life in relation to communication, getting around, and expressing their opinions. Only 31% of participants, however, expressed their understanding of jokes, sarcasm, idioms etc., indicating the need for stronger support in regard to the nuances of the English language. Participants expressed the necessity to learn and to integrate into Canadian culture and life. Other participants indicated that integrating into Canadian culture was simple since they lived in “mini Punjab” (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013), referring to the Brampton area, where Sheridan’s north campus is located, a community of Indian immigrants.

Participants ranked the following four items as their top challenges upon arrival in Canada: (1) Finding a place to live at 27.7%, (2) Adjusting to the weather at 27.7%, (3) Overcoming financial challenges at 18.18%, and (4) Finding transportation from the airport at 9.09%. The participants did not express concerns over academic challenges. Understanding the professor’s lecture was a concern for 4.5% of participants. Finding out where and how to register for courses was not selected as a Top 10 challenge.

When asked whether the top ten challenges have gotten better after their first semester in college, the following were the top four challenges at that point: (1) Meeting academic
requirements at 28.57%, (2) Solving financial issues at 27.27%, (3) Overcoming loneliness at 22.73%, and (4) Finding transportation at 22.73%. Financial challenges and loneliness/homesickness continued to be challenging for ISI’s, as expressed by a participant:

Loneliness, difficulty making friends. People just talk to you nicely during class hours. They even take your number only if there is a need to talk about class work. But never try to meet you out of class or college. So it's according to me very formal. Especially the international centre, the people working there don't have half of the answers to my questions. Even if they have to say no to your question, they just say a big NOOOO, but do not explain you well. Every time I e-mail international centre, they never return until it passes 15 days, so what's the use of texting when a person can't get back to you when he/she really needs to. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Participants were also asked about what their expectations were related to the challenges they faced and whether they had thought about these challenges prior to their arrival in Canada, and many students did not expect to find things challenging, as indicated below:

I was extremely in shock when I experienced the real life here. It is far away from what I thought. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

No not even a single one. picture of canada in india is 100% different from the actual Canada. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

I expected some of them, because i know that i am going to different country, different culture and nobody knows me. so i think they are common challenges and they are not only for me, but all international student expect and feel. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

The message from participants was very strong related to the need for assigned peer
mentors, to check into the progress of students throughout the duration of their studies:

all international students shld have peers mentors with whom they should meet up with
during the semester. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

One of the things identified as a major challenge upon arrival was finding a place to live in Canada. These participants explain it quite well, as follows:

As much as it is a personal responsibility, I feel the college should expand their services in helping International students to find places to stay. The residence in school is great but the space is quite limited and it fills up fast so I am sure quite a few students don't get in. Most of those who apply may not have connections or know even a single person here in Canada, and not being able to view the apartments or be here to settle agreements before coming here is a virtually impossible task. From my personal experience, find a place has been the hardest part of transitioning from my home country to Canada, and it has not been the most rewarding part of my new life here. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Housing information provided was not useful at all, I had two nasty experience with shared places, as an international student I didn't have any reference or credit history, even some room rental ask for that information. School should find a way to provide students some sort of reference or support when looking for a place, so students are able to sign leases on decent places, not choosing places because they are the only options. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

**Financial Challenges**

Unlike perceived challenges (loneliness, homesickness, etc.), financial issues emerged to be a major problem for many participants as they stayed longer in Canada. Since there are no
scholarships offered to international students, all students from India were self-funded or funded by their own families. Financial challenges rated as the second most challenging issue after the first semester of studies, as expressed by the following participants:

One challenge that I still feel is that financial issues and somewhat about food. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

No available financial support for international students, we pay more tuition than domestic students, yet have no scholarships available. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Good Food, financial problems, finding jobs. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

In expressing concerns about their financial state, many expressed the need to find a “good job” to supplement their income and help pay their expenses, as expressed by the following participant:

Lastly, college should open more gates of employments for the international students so they can work while studying in order to support themselves and get Canadian workforce experience. Every semester, there are very few job openings for international students. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

International students can apply for a work permit, having completed 6 months of study with a GPA above 2.0 (www.cic.gc.ca). Tuition costs for international students are twice as high as those that domestic students pay (Madgett & Belanger, 2008). This, in addition to the high cost of accommodations, food, and transportation, causes significant challenges for these students.

A participant expressed hopes that Sheridan would provide residence accommodations
that included breakfast at a very convenient and combined rate without the frills, to ensure affordability by international students from India, as expressed by this response:

Yeah, if Sheridan residence was more cheaper with option of food, I would really like to go with it. It can be done cheaper by excluding useless facilities (if provided) like T.V, cable etc. Because internatiol students dont have enough time to pay attention to them. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

The need for bursaries or scholarships for international students was expressed by a number of participants, including the following:

I am looking forward for more scholarships options of an international students. Being a student in international country there are lot of expenses going on, in order to encourage and motivate them I want college to start special scholarship programs. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

The only one thing i dont like is that there are no good scholarships for the international students, Universities in US help the international students a lot. Sheridan should look into that so that they can encourage students who really work hard away from their homeland, family. Students work part time and manage their studies so by giving them scholarships will uplift their morale. Thanks. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Scholarship is unfair for international student. Canadian can apply and get the scholarship easier than any international students. So more scholarship programme should be opened to international student. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Even though the institution does make an effort to create social events that bring students together, many of these events require financial contributions on the students’ part, which has the
following participant expressing discontent:

Not sure. I feel like most of the social events cost money, which I do not have much of, and so couldn't attend any of them and had a pretty bad time with loneliness (and still do) at the school partly due to that and heavy work load or program. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Even though international students are provided with health insurance upon arrival, they are still required to pay out of pocket and submit their receipts for reimbursement, which causes financial hardship for these students:

Better health resources. Making sure the international students don't need to pay for medicines even after having a health card. Although we get the refund, arranging for a medical emergency on the eleventh hour can be tricky. Cashless option is nowhere available. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

So financial help would be very helpful. Also using student guard is not very comfortable. After I getting a receipt I need to send bunches of letter about it so I felt uncomfortable with it. But over all, I'm satisfying with Sheridan very much. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

International students have problems with the medical services. Whenever they have medical issues they have to pay upfront which is difficult with limited resources especially during the first 6 months when they are not even working. So a better health plan can help. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Coping

The literature widely expressed that living in a culture other than one’s own is a stressful experience, often requiring significant changes and adaptations by those involved (Khawaja &
Stallman, 2011). Adapting to their new environment, sojourners require a significant amount of time to adjust (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Similarly, the web survey responses have provided a view into the changing challenges from those experienced by international students from India upon arrival to those challenges that remain after completion of their first semester of study. Participants were asked how they coped with these challenges, both in the short term and in the long term. Most of the participants leveraged the support of friends and colleagues, while two participants looked toward Sheridan student services for help in coping with their challenges. In data extracted from the web surveys, it is evident that students coped with the challenges identified in the transcripts in various ways. Some participants coped on their own, as expressed by the following phrase extracts: “Patience and trying hard,” “Dedication, devotion, and focus,” “Bravely,” and “I thought that if these people can do this, then I can also do it” (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013).

Other participants sought out support from their friends either, by growing their network or leveraging an existing group of friends, as evidenced by the following statements: “With my self-confidence and also my friendly nature helped me a lot to find new friends and to get help and overcome this challenges,” and “Going better to handle this problem, mostly via growing contacts” (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013). A number of participants leveraged support from the college in dealing with the challenges, as explained in the transcripts “by hardworking and getting help from Sheridan advisement department” (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013).

As part of the web survey, the students were asked whom they would count on when seeking support in dealing with the challenges mentioned above, and 73.68% responded that they would call on a friend. Full results are displayed in table 6 below.
Table 6

*Whom ISI’s Count on When Facing Difficulties.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>73.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan Student Advisement Centre</td>
<td>31.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other International Students</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Coordinators</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advisors</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants selected the advisement centre as their second choice for support in dealing with challenges at 31.58%.

**Friends**

Irrespective of their length of stay, the participants passionately discussed how building friendships with domestic students remained challenging and out of their control despite their wish to have local friends and their constant efforts to realize this wish. As evident in the responses, friends play a significant role in supporting students’ social integration. When asked whom they preferred to make friends with, the participants’ responses were evenly split among international students from India, domestic students originally from India, and Canadian domestic students from other nationalities. Participants reported that self-expression was the area in which they seemed to have the most challenge using English, as well as finding it challenging to express their feelings in English. The majority of participants expressed their desire to befriend local students, while other participants felt that domestic students or those that were born in Canada were taking advantage of them, as explained by the following student:
I like their way of living, but hate when they do not help after taking help from me. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

A number of participants expressed the positive aspects of befriending domestic students, such as learning the language, culture, and country and acclimatizing faster into the college. Increasing the size of their social circle was a key advantage in building relationships with domestic students, as expressed by the following participants:

- It is great opportunity for us to learn how to live in a multicultural country. We can learn a way to socialize. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

- Getting different experiences and getting use to their rituals. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

- It is good to have friends who are Canadian because they know this country better than me so I can get good and wise advice to face my problems. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

- Glad to be friends with Canadian students as it helps to improve speaking skills, you know about the Canadian culture. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

- I have come to know that in Canada or I believe in any foreign country, it is very important to interact with people and have some experience of Networking in that way some additional information related to Outside/External activities would have been helpful. Secondly, some additional information related to Application of this program in Canadian Industry Market from Employment point of view after completion of program would have helped a lot to understand the program outlines and expectations. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)
This participant expressed frustration with those from his country, India, for constantly talking in their mother tongue, making it difficult to get better in speaking and comprehending English:

…not particular, but I don't prefer most of the international students from India and China. The reason behind is: Indian students all the time talk in their mother tongue, so in this way you can never learn the accent and increase your vocabulary; and you are left within your own circle that never let you explore. Secondly, Chinese students, because I do NOT understand when they talk in English; due to their Chinese accent. I keep on asking pardon me please pardon me please. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Participants expressed the need to have opportunities to meet both domestic and international students for opportunities to socialize to improve their loneliness, as expressed by this participant:

The college is the place where students end up spending most of their time during the day, mostly so for the international students. So, the college is the place where they interact with all the people, I think we need to introduce some means which can help the international students mingle with the others on the campus in order to leave the factor of home sickness behind and lead a cheerful life. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

I have come to know that in Canada or I believe in any foreign country, it is very important to interact with people and have some experience of Networking in that way some additional information related to Outside/External activities would have been helpful. Secondly, some additional information related to Application of this program in
Canadian Industry Market from Employment point of view after completion of program would have helped a lot to understand the program outlines and expectations. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

**Discrimination**

Even though Toronto is a very multicultural city, many of the participants felt or have experienced discrimination from local students, though some participants expressed that their inability to communicate fluently or comprehend local students effectively makes it all the more challenging to integrate:

Dont know they are kind of racist like a lot of them specially all the brown guys who are born here. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Its not that hard but they avoid indians... . (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

They are good..but they have diferent thinking from us and they cant mingle with us. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

In responses to questions related to facing discrimination, the majority of participants mentioned subtle actions that made them feel uncomfortable. Table 7 below portrays the participants’ perceptions related to their experience with discrimination and explains how it varies by the interaction from one person to the other.

**Table 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I think that others behave in an unfair or negative way toward Indian students.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.05%</td>
<td>26.32%</td>
<td>31.58%</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I feel that Canadians have something against me. 10.53% 0% 36.84% 21.05% 31.58%

I don’t feel accepted by Canadians. 5.26% 15.79% 36.84% 15.79% 26.32%

I have been teased or insulted because I am from India. 5.26% 5.26% 36.84% 21.05% 31.58%

A participant felt that the experience of discrimination was not only from other peer students, but also from a faculty member in the program, as explained below:

I don't feel any such thing strongly, but somewhere I do feel. I feel racial difference with one of my teacher but don't wanna mention anything about her as I prefer keeping it personal. I worked hard for all my professors, but for her I worked extra hard, even then she marked me lowest; which really affected my overall gpa and I am upset. She gives so rude and weird comments after she gives back the test papers or assignments. If I try to include my personal comments, then she just comments as If I have plagiarized. She doesn't write that straight away but her comments sounds like same. ECE is a different kind of program, at some points you can include what you know or feel about childcare, but my teacher wants everything to be copied from textbooks or what she taught. Well, that's disgusting. you are not free to express yourself. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

**Transportation**

Transportation was outlined as the second most challenging theme that persisted after the first semester was completed. The campuses are not located in the central region where the public transportation system is well built and includes an underground subway system. Many participants have to travel between campuses for classes, which could take over two hours per
trip using public transportation. Participants expressed frustration with the system due to the length of wait for buses, and their lack of understanding of how the system works. This frustration is expressed by the following participant:

I have issues with transportation (only winters), going from home to college is a long road and takes a lot of time. Need better transportation system in the evening and for the weekend. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

About their arrival as international students in Sheridan, a number of participants expressed challenges with getting the basic necessities due to their lack of knowledge about the transit system. A participant proposed the college provide each student with a transit pass:

First thing the college should do is to provide the students the transit passes as being an international student we are unaware about the places so its hard, at the very beginning when we come its like we convert every single dollar into our currency so its hard to spend money. So the students hesitate to take busses which further leads to the problem of being stuck at a single place no outing nothing that leads to depression or home sickness.

**The college should make effort to provide atleast one meal for a weeks time to the students (int) as many students come by themself they do not have any known one here so its hard to find all necessary things like grocessary and stuff at the initial stage. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)**

Better information on local transport services like Brampton Bus Transit, Go Transit, TTC Rail and Bus. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

**Support Systems**

International students from India leveraged the use of technology to keep in touch with
their relatives and families in India, with almost 60% of participants contacting a family member in India on a daily basis. As mentioned earlier, many ISI’s asked for assistance from their social support system here in Canada when they were seeking help to cope with their challenges. Forty-seven percent of participants reported they have more than 10 friends that they could count on for support. When it comes to support for academic challenges, the responses were varied as to their choices for whom they would rely on for support, with some students choosing their professors, others their friends, and some the student advisement centre or international office. Lecture delivery in Canada is different than the delivery of programs in India, as expressed by students, and getting accustomed to the approach is challenging for students, as expressed by this participant:

> honestly saying even the most bright students in high schools in india become dull over canada because the way of teaching is different, language and society change and only a few of them use any services. evntually they cannoy study much they have to work, make food for them call over home and other chores too. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

**Academic Challenges**

**Study Load**

A number of participants expressed how challenging the study workload is, and felt that this was not articulated to them effectively upon applying to the program, as expressed below:

> I did not like the description about the course as it did not say how heavy load it will be and that as an international student doing everything on your own you will not have any time left to do anything else. It did not say you will literally be doing assignments all the time, it was not in depth at all, it just mentioned what courses you will be taking, thats
about it...since students are coming from another country all most everything is
different..you do adjust overtime but still please do describe the course in detailas to what
is expected from them in the course like assignments, group assignments, its difficult if
you do not have any person from your community in the class....please do include these
so that students are mentally and physically prepared for the course.... . (Web Survey,
personal communication, December, 2013)

Another example of the frustration caused by not clearly understanding the study work
load is expressed by a participant below:

I started this course since January. No one told me that has no break. It is too much work,
then I can't handle the portion of assignment. Especially, summer semester classes are all
compressed as 7 weeks course each classes. I had 7 hours for one class per day. That is
ineffecient way to learn. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

English Comprehension

A majority of the participants, international students from India, coming into Sheridan
with good IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or TOEFL scores still find it
challenging to comprehend the concepts as presented in the classroom (Personal Discussion,
personal communication, December, 2013). Students expressed their challenges related to
understanding the professors in class, or while looking through the content on the online learning
management system. Students from India are not familiar with rubrics; course outlines etc., and
have a challenging time understanding how to meet the requirements of a specific assignment
(Personal Discussion, personal communication, December, 2013).

Relevant to the above sentence, a participant expressed the challenges experienced with
misunderstanding what constitutes academic dishonesty or the professors’ expectations related to
assignments and quizzes:

A person is not able to express what he/she feels. If you do so, that means you have plagiarized, very funny but disturbing. Teachers can say indirectly that you plagiarized but they don't have any matter to prove. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

professors need to make some standard to evaluations of our exams which should be clear in first class and throughout the first month just like a quick reminder. Some professors clarify students what they except as our responses of Mid-Term or monthly test after conducting the test which doesn't help students because we already wrote the exam. It should be clear before conducting exams. This is how the moral of the students start dropping because of low/failing marks in main test or exams. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Additionally, the ability to interpret and deliver assignments in APA format is a challenge, as described by a participant:

APA guidelines were little difficult to understand while the start of semester. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Another participant expressed disappointment with academic results because he/she was once a top performing student in India, as expressed by this statement:

i didnt expect that i would become this weak in studies over canada. i had high dreams in india and i was one of the toppers in high school. what i thought over india was that i will also do my degree there but now completeing diploma only seems impossible task sometimes. i miss my home too. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013).
A participant expressed the need for language assistance prior to students arriving into the market to help them find a place to live, as follows:

Mostly, new international students or newcomers are concerned about how to get a place to live and language. I believe that interpreters or phone interpretation service will help applicants and their parents, who are mostly not able to communicate in English, to get answers what they want to know about programs and basic Canadian campus life. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

International students participating in this survey also expressed their challenges in understanding the college language and idioms used in daily Canadian life, as expressed below:

Understanding an international student's mindset and using a common language, for example when I came to Canada, everybody was saying drop a course?? and I was not sure about it.. and was so new and shy to even ask my fellow classmates to ask because I was the only girl and an international student in the class, but thank God I went to the international center to clarify what it meant, because I was confused if I m gonna skip something that is really important?? (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

The most important problem faced by all the international students is learning the accent. Sheridan should start classes or workshops for students who want to learn Canadian accent. It smoothens our communication and prepares us more to survive in the professional jobs. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

A number of students expressed their disappointment in their lack of English language competence, as expressed by the following participant:

I strongly feel that English language is a basic problem for international students.
Because they can not express themselves or view their idea that what they feel. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Another participant explained how some professors were easier to understand, or adjusted their teaching style to meet the needs of international students in their classroom:

My main problem as an international student that I want to succeed a lot in my studies in the college but I am unable to fulfill my dreams so far due to the problems I am facing in my study like complete change in atmosphere, understanding english. I understand English only the teachers like RM and VV who speak slowly and clearly. About others I understand only few words in the whole lecture. Thats what makes me feel that I am not getting upto the mark which is needed. (Web Survey, personal communication, December, 2013)

Often this was because students were not well prepared in terms of English; English teaching in India is focused on reading and writing, not on speaking and listening. The participants also mentioned how their limited ability to comprehend English had hindered their ability to fully acclimatize in their community.

**Discussion**

This chapter included an exploration of various aspects pertaining to the acculturation attitude and acculturation behavior of ISI’s in Canada. The study showed that integration was the most preferred acculturation mode by the participants, and the surveys showed that students were putting significant effort into doing that. Furthermore, students showed a strong interest in full integration. The application of Tinto’s (1975) framework for student integration in this chapter helped reveal that ‘transportation,’ ‘weather,’ ‘friendships,’ ‘academic challenges,’ and ‘financial challenges’ were the most persistent challenges faced by ISI’s studying at Sheridan. The findings
were in line with Tinto’s theory of student persistence as they relate to social integration and students’ experiences making friends, their experiences of homesickness, and academic integration. The framework does not address financial and transportation challenges as they relate to the difficulties expressed by the students.

There were a number of factors that could explain students’ non-integration. Most of these factors appeared related to the other perceived challenges students discussed above, including lack of English language competence, racism, a lack of finances, and the inability to build friendships with domestic students and people of other ethnicities.

The findings indicated that ISI’s encountered a number of acculturation challenges, which made achievement of some of their expectations difficult and caused them to remain separate from the community they were temporarily living in. The most significant challenges that emerged from the study are in line with findings of past studies reviewed in the literature.

The findings were in line with Smith and Khawaja’s (2011) findings that, compared to other groups of international students, ISI’s tend to experience more problems in their stay. The international students from India are the largest group of international students at Sheridan. Therefore, the results helped fortify the argument that living in a culture different from one’s own may be fatiguing, bewildering, and overwhelming (Safdar, Calvez, & Lewis, 2011). Like other studies in the literature, the findings of this study specified that academic adjustment, homesickness, and daily life matters appeared to be of great concern to most participants (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008).

Findings of this study related to the impact of students’ limited English ability are similar to those reports by Smith and Khawaja (2011), who found that a lack of English proficiency often caused problems for ISI’s while living and studying overseas. It was reported by
participants in the present study that a lack of English language competence made many participants unable to integrate into Canadian society successfully. Support for students’ challenges related to the consequences of the lack of English comprehension can be found in the study by Chen (2009), confirming the importance of language as a way to express and clarify their identity in relationships.

Regarding the experience of racism, the participants’ description of minor or veiled racism appeared to confirm what social theorists have advised in recent studies (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Racism when initiated, from the point of view of the victims, still appears to be relatively common. The participants’ expressions of feeling used when classmates behaved nicely in class and then disregarded the connection in external social events are examples.

The study’s finding about ISI’s inability to build friendships with Canadian domestic students is consistent with several past studies reviewed in the literature, which also reported that, regardless of how much ISI’s expressed an interest in making friends with domestic students, interactions and relationships between international learners and domestic students were limited (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). The participants explained that their lack of ability to build friendships with domestic students, and as a result, their inability to realize their integration inclination, was due to a number of factors including racism, lack of opportunities, and the lack of interest from the domestic student population. Additionally, there were a number of other factors such as their limited ability to comprehend English, lack of finances, and lack of social interaction skills. This finding adds to the existing literature related to the factors that may hamper interactions between ISI’s and the domestic student population, leading to the formation of a small social network among international students (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004).

This study is also similar to other findings in studies related to integration of international
students, showing that international students often described feeling isolated (Kwon, 2009) and lonely. According to Kwon (2009) the best remedy for loneliness is integration into the new social environment. In this study, loneliness was identified as a form of isolation that described a situation in which students had limited interaction with their local hosts and other international students. There were a number of factors that led to these situations, but the students’ inability to build friendships with non-Indian students seemed to be the main reason for their non-integration socially. As in the present study, several past studies have identified international student isolation as being due to a lack of interaction with locals (Kwon, 2009; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

The findings of this study suggest that most ISI’s in Canada have only one network of support, comprised of other Indian students. Family in the home country constituted another important component of this network, providing emotional and financial support. In the literature it has been evident that international students often experience a sense of disillusionment as a result of not having their needs met nor their expectations fulfilled (Kwon, 2009). Additionally, the results suggest that ISI’s appeared to experience a sense of frustration related to unmet expectations. The reason for the disappointment may be related to the students’ overestimation of their ability to adjust to a new culture (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

In summary, this chapter discussed the acculturation challenges ISI’s experienced at Sheridan. Students were found to utilize certain coping strategies and sources of support to address their challenges in order to achieve the goals associated with studying at Sheridan and to integrate properly into Canadian culture. From the students’ perspectives, the inability to integrate socially were beyond their control. From the responses analysed some of these reasons could have been related to racism, language challenges and financial challenges.

Summary: Relationships Among Themes
By using Tinto’s (1985) framework of student retention, it is evident that many factors are interrelated and interact dynamically to influence students’ perceptions of their integration. Based on the analysis of the web surveys, the participants created a clear picture of the types of challenges they confronted at the beginning and approximately six months into their studies. The survey questions asked participants to outline the top challenges that affected their acclimatization upon arrival, and additionally to outline the challenges that still persist after their first term of study. From the data, it seemed that all the participants were resourceful yet had challenges navigating the academic and social systems of the college. Regardless of the students’ academic and social integration, all the respondents expressed their commitment to completing their program.

Figuring out the transportation system and being able to find employment to support their financial situation seemed to be additional hurdles that ISI’s had to navigate. Outside support such as friends, counselors, both academic and student life advisors, and instructors were deemed significant to the students’ success. Based on these findings, the themes and categories presented in Tinto’s (1985) framework shown in Figure 3, were expanded to include a revised persistence model, as shown in Figure 6 on page 108, that includes financial and transportation challenges.
Introduction

This chapter will provide a brief summary of the concepts and issues that have been addressed in the previous four chapters. The conceptual framework used for this dissertation and findings from the literature review will be discussed. The survey feedback will be compared to the current student services and the researcher will provide recommendations for improvement. Additionally, the research method, data analysis process, and findings of this study will be summarized. Recommendations for the college to improve the environment that supports the needs of international students from India are presented. Based on the participants’ responses and the literature review, these recommendations will serve as a plan for the college to address any gaps identified related to serving international students from India in all aspects of college life. Finally, this chapter will contain inferences and recommendations for theory, practice, and future research.

Summary

As presented in chapter 1, the significant increase in international students from India has presented the need for this study to present recommendations to better acclimatize these students into the institution and community through gaining an in-depth understanding through web surveys about the students’ experiences. The purpose of this dissertation is to present rich, in-depth data on the experiences of this student population and to present strategies for persistence and retention of this student group, providing feedback to college support personnel on how to better work with international students from India.

The research questions for this dissertation addressed the complex and dynamic relationship of social and academic themes and categories that affected the students’ persistence in their programs and the extent to which they integrated both socially and academically. The
research questions examined the themes and categories that allowed the respondents to express what gave them the ability to persist in college and provided insight and perspectives on how they might improve their situation so that suggestions could be offered to college staff focused on these topics.

In this study, Tinto’s (1975) theory of student integration shown in chapters 1 and 3 served as a concept map where the various themes and categories pertinent to the study were clarified and presented in the revised model below in Figure 6. Based on the findings in the study, Figure 6 is Tinto’s Model of Student Integration, revised with the addition of the financial and transportation support systems to ensure student success.

\[ Figure 6. \text{Tinto's (1975) Theory of Student Integration including financial and transportation support for international students.} \]

This study highlighted the obstacles that improve on or undermine the academic and social integration experiences of international students from India at Sheridan College. To some
degree the responses highlighted how these experiences are affected by the attitudes of peers and faculty members. This was evident in responses as presented in Chapter 4.

The review of the literature and the findings in the data addressed the connection between ISIs’ perceptions of integration and the college support services. The research design was outlined in Chapter 3. To provide rich, in-depth descriptions of the integration experiences of international students from India, all international students from India that have completed their first semester of studies at Sheridan were invited to participate in a web survey. The qualitative method, including in-depth web surveys, was used as part of the research design for this dissertation.

The application of the conceptual framework, Tinto’s Model of Student Integration (1975), to the analysis highlighted the similarity in the participants’ experiences and interpreted the findings of the study. It was found that the convergence of many factors that were considered in Tinto’s framework of student retention was integral to the academic and social integration experiences of international students from India.

Key findings were presented in chapter 4. The findings supported previous research found in the literature in several ways. In particular, the findings were similar to factors affecting persistence of international students, as described in chapter 2, from the literature whereby similar themes related to discrimination, making friends, language challenges, academic challenges, adjusting to the weather, and transportation challenges were presented.

The dissertation is significant in that it provides a wealth of information to post-secondary institutions desiring to provide support to international students from India studying in Canada and seeking best practices to better support the students’ integration both socially and academically. In addition, the study increased the limited available research related to
Discussion

This dissertation has explored the experiences of 36 international students from India studying at Sheridan College. The participants’ characteristics, other than being international students from India studying at Sheridan College and having completed their first semester of studies, were virtually unknown. The participants expressed similar experiences overall related to their academic and social integration into Sheridan College. This study examined a variety of factors that influenced their perceptions. The findings confirmed the need to treat international students from India as a homogenous group with specific needs that may not be applicable to the overall student body. A significant category that comes out as a uniform challenge is related to financial support. Since one of the main drivers for institutions is revenue generation, providing bursaries to international students may not be possible.

This study’s findings demonstrate the resilience of the participants, who were seemingly undeterred by the limited support services, which may have undermined their ability to focus on their academic studies. Other mitigating factors, such as supportive faculty, strong social networks both on and off campus, and the desire to successfully complete, motivate the students to persist.

One of the most significant findings in this dissertation validated claims made by previous researchers that international students who have strong social links are most likely to succeed. For instance, in this study respondents mentioned increasing the size of their support group as a way to cope with their challenges. Another finding is that all international students from India should be provided with customized support services to ensure that they can accomplish their academic endeavors. The majority of students expressed financial challenges as
the primary ongoing challenge. Consequently, the institution should look at supporting international students with some form of tuition scholarship.

The government of Canada does allow students to work part time, a maximum of 25 hours per week, once they complete 6 months of study and are in good academic standing. Yet many participants expressed the lack of available quality jobs that would assist in their gaining some income to supplement their expenditures.

Most participants expressed a desire for Sheridan College to increase its commitments to international students from India. Ideally the programming and availability of college programs and services should allow the full participation of ISI’s and increase the opportunities for their interaction with Canadian students. Activities to create opportunities for international and domestic students to meet can happen early on. Social media avenues create excellent opportunities for students to get to know each other at the outset. The ability of students to communicate through Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ creates the opportunity for these students to begin the communication process. These early communication opportunities would allow students to gain an understanding from current students about the weather challenges or an opportunity to gather information related to housing.

Another opportunity to create dialogue between international students is during orientation. Even though this may be a time of anxiety, the opportunity to leverage the event would be ideal. Once the formal activities are complete, the International Centre could create an opportunity for students to partake in some social events such as a potluck. Based on the responses, having the ability to partake in some social events would limit the feeling of loneliness that may be felt by many international students.

Additionally, this study’s results confirm the requirement to have reliable services to
support international students from India. According to some participants in this study, the college did not have strong academic support services related to academic honesty and tutoring. In addition to the academic areas, students could not rely on the availability of financial aid or the availability of transportation services on weekends or after hours to attend evening classes.

Finally and most significantly, the ISI’s experiences of their academic and social integration could be enhanced considerably if colleges educated their community about the importance of diversity. The institution should deliver sensitivity training to faculty, administrators, and support staff related to cultural diversity and inclusion. Faculty members can create an environment that is sensitive to different diverse groups in the classroom. Even though many of the participants felt that they were well received by the domestic students and the majority of them felt that their experience at the college was satisfactory, there was a sense that all of them had a challenge to create their own space in a culture that did not acknowledge their unique needs and interests. In their own way, all participants had to make major adjustments to adapt themselves to their environment, knowing that the environment of the college would make few concessions to truly include them.

The sample in the study was unusually small relative to the over 450 requests sent, yet the detail provided by the 36 participants presented a significant amount of information that was quite valuable to the study. Sandelowski (1995) explained that the right sample size is one that allows deep analysis and a “new and richly textured understanding of experience” (p. 183).

**Comparing Study Results to Tinto’s Model of Student Assimilation/Acculturation**

Comparing findings in the literature review to the results produced in Chapter 4 offers interesting insights regarding issues significant to the experiences of the participants in the present study. The findings of this study indicate that international students from India perceived
their main goal as succeeding in academics and future careers. These results offer some support of Tinto’s (1975) model of student integration. Tinto (1988) explained that if social integration is to occur, it must occur in the classroom, because the classroom functions as a gateway for social involvement in the academic and social communities of a college (Tinto, 1975).

To create an inclusive environment for the academic and social integration of international students from India in college settings, the recommendations outlined below are provided to improve the academic and social environment for these students as addressed in the research questions and confirmed by the literature and the findings. Although these recommendations were initially formulated to improve programs at Sheridan College, they can be applied to other institutions in Canada that have a population of international students from India. Overall students responded positively to their experience at Sheridan and were satisfied with their educational experience, therefore suggesting that academics is supporting acculturation in accordance with Tinto’s model. This dissertation emphasized components that specifically influenced the ability of international students from India to persist at Sheridan. The component financial support was added to the conceptual model and will be important to include in future studies. Additionally, financial support also applies to college budgetary systems allowing financial support to service departments related to international students’ services.

The review of how the different variables related to academic and social integration of students is quite complex. This study does not necessarily enable administrators at the college to determine which factors were the most influential in the students’ decisions to persist. For example, one of the challenges highlighted was the lack of financial support to students from India, yet the majority of students expressed that they felt their experience at Sheridan was quite positive and leveraged the support of friends and other students. Future research should target a
larger population of international students from India and use in-depth interview methods to
gather further valuable information related to other components of Tinto’s (1975) theory of
student integration, such as the motivation for students from India to study in Canada. It may
also be valuable to gather the perspective of faculty and support service providers related to their
thoughts as to how to better integrate international students from India, especially since the
participants called on both faculty and support service providers when in need of help.

Limitations of the Study

There were four primary limitations to this study. First, only one institution was studied,
and this institution has its own uniqueness. Second, it was not possible to take into account other
demographic data such as age, gender, English level proficiency, or other data to provide
comparison to domestic and other international student acclimatization experiences, since this
data can constitute a larger scope for a study. Third, conducting a web survey did not allow the
researcher the ability to probe further based on the responses that participants delivered, limiting
the ability to further delve deeper into the issues. Finally, although there was no indication in any
of the completed surveys that any respondent had difficulty understanding the questions, it is
possible that a lack of proficiency in English affected the validity of some of the data.

Study Recommendations

To create a more inclusive environment for the academic and social integration of
international students from India in college settings, the following recommendations are offered
to improve the academic and social situation for these students. Although most of these
recommendations were initially formulated to improve programs at Sheridan College, they can
be applied to other post-secondary institutions in Canada that host international students from
India.
**Student Orientation**

Students should attend new student orientation upon beginning their program to get to know other students and become more familiar with their program and respective faculty. Sheridan College might consider offering early registration to international students from India to be sure they get the classes they need and to secure time in advance for requesting special academic assistance. Sheridan should continue the practice of delivering orientations abroad and should allow for social activities exclusively for international students after the completion of the full group orientation upon arrival in Canada.

**Faculty and Staff Orientation**

Faculty and staff at Sheridan College should be informed about how the institution supports international students from India. In addition, other campus staff should be trained to provide the variety of services that are needed by international students from India, such as help with the challenges they face in comprehension and their understanding of academic honesty. In-service workshops should be provided for faculty, support staff, and administrators during the course of the school year, detailing how to work with this student population.

**Information Prior to International Student Arrival**

Results of the survey indicated that international students are least satisfied with the following: student financial services, job availability, transportation services, and academic support. Survey results indicate that the college would be served well if it managed student expectations by providing information regarding limitations of these services to students before their arrival on campus. For example, prospective students should be informed of a lack of opportunities for financial assistance and the lack of off-campus employment due to demand, and
sparse on-campus employment, which is mostly limited by available spots. It is also important to provide the students with information related to the harsh Canadian winters, thus allowing students an opportunity to prepare for this experience.

**Student Financial Services**

Tuition payments are a concern to international students. Given the limited availability of scholarships, grants and assistantships for international students, most must rely on personal funding. Therefore, it is advisable that the institution ensure that international students are given clear guidelines regarding tuition payments and increases. In addition, Student Financial Services could change their policies in regard to penalizing international students who are affected by sudden foreign exchange rate increases by giving the students affected additional time to complete payments. The institution could provide payment to students in supporting faculty and students in their applied research project and for acting as peer mentors to their fellow students.

**Transportation**

International students from India that participated in the web survey expressed difficulties getting to and from campus due to a lack of convenient transportation options. Some ideas to alleviate the situation include the following: (1) Sheridan College could start a “safe ride” service that provides taxi pickup anywhere within the institution’s city limits and delivery to a student’s residence. This service would be available to students at night through to early morning. (2) The student advisement centre could offer a list of students that drive and are willing to offer carpooling services to international students from India. The institution began offering a shuttle bus service between its three campuses, which has significantly helped students taking classes at more than one campus where the distance between campuses could be up to 42 km each way. This still does not address the participants’ concerns related to travel between their
residence and campus or travel on weekends. Additionally, the shuttle service runs between 7am or 8am and 4pm or 5pm, depending on the campus and direction, leaving those students with evening classes limited choices for travel back to their home campus after the end of their class at 9:30 pm, as well as limited choices on weekends.

**International Student Services**

International students rely on staff in the International Student Services office to guide them through the extra procedures and paperwork necessary due to study permits to attend Canadian institutions. Feedback from participants was that they felt well prepared to apply for their study permit either due to support from the international office by email, or through their agent, who assisted with the preparation of documentation for the application. Not surprisingly then, the knowledge and efficiency of international student advisors are quite important to international students.

**Campus Diversity Initiatives**

The programs and activities organized on campus should celebrate the diversity of different cultures, especially the largest foreign population on campus, those studying at Sheridan from India. Sheridan must provide more education about Indian culture. It is important to include this student population when developing and implementing campus diversity initiatives. By offering and implementing a variety of campus policies and activities, the college can acknowledge its willingness to embrace difference and encourage students and staff to examine what mainstream culture means to them and better understand their assumptions.

**Discrimination**

One issue that arose repeatedly during the interview process was discrimination based on ethnicity. To alleviate this issue, much could be gained by improving the quality of interactions
between Canadian and international students. An effort could be made to increase global awareness and intercultural competence, for example, by offering more multicultural and international courses. Additionally, multicultural and sensitivity training for staff and faculty would also help increase their understanding related to the challenges faced by these students.

**Best Practice**

The following are best practices for implementation based on feedback from the participants in this study:

1. It is recommended that the institution convene an advisory council formed from all different student advisement groups in addition to members from the academic groups.
2. This group should review the findings of this study to gain an understanding into the needs of this student group.
3. Orientation into the needs of this student population should be delivered to both faculty and staff as part of the hiring process for new employees. A plan should be put in place to provide current staff and faculty an opportunity to gain a better understanding into this group’s needs.
4. Expand the information provided to international students prior to arrival explaining the challenges that they may face upon arrival to Canada.
5. Look at expanding the transportation services provided to students between campuses to include evening routings since classes are offered all the way till 10pm.
6. A financial aid fund should be allocated for international students to provide subsidies or support. This could be funded by allocating a small percentage from the tuition paid by international students. The college should determine guidelines to be used when distributing the funding leveraging the currently existing guidelines used for other
financial awards.

7- Explaining to students the impact and severity of the cold winters in Canada will help them prepare psychologically and physically for the weather.

8- The college should allocate a specific number of on campus employment opportunities for international students.

Recommendations for Future Research

To clearly understand the needs and expectations of international students from India, in any future assessment the study institution should assess the experiences of subgroups of international students to be sure that the institution is addressing student needs by meeting the expectations of all the subgroups.

The implications of this research are clear. The results show that merely asking for responses to a single survey item may hide the true satisfaction level of students, especially when the survey is general in purpose and meet the needs of the entire student population. A college may believe that its students are satisfied with their educational experiences even in situations where there is clear evidence that the college is not performing up to student expectations.

Sheridan conducts classroom surveys each semester to gauge student satisfaction with the learning experience. The survey targets all students, both domestic and international. Even though the college results are above average, it may be misleading to the administrators, and the percentage of international students will not skew the overall results to cause concern. It can be suggested, based on the results of this study, that administrators should customize surveys to meet the needs of the different student subgroups.

Recommendations for future research are made based on the wish to address the limitations of this study, as outlined above in this chapter, and to promote future research
Due to the lower than anticipated response rate to the web survey and the nature of the web survey, the study survey would have been better had a larger sample size been realized. It is suggested that future research be conducted with a larger size as well as in a personal interview or focus group approach. Additionally, this study looked at students who have completed the first semester of studies. It is agreed that acculturation takes time, and integration may not be achieved this early. This study looked at temporary residents or sojourners, as defined in chapter 1. This group is studying in Canada and has been here for a short period of time. The findings of the present study may be used as a point of reference for future research into similar issues. For example, there may be research examining motivation to study abroad and the acculturation experience of ISI’s in Canada. These studies will form a solid knowledge base that will enrich the existing literature experiences of international students, especially ISI’s.

**Concluding Remarks**

This study is an attempt to understand the acclimatization process of international students from India studying at Sheridan. The study does somewhat contribute to the literature, which includes many acculturation studies related to the students’ experience, yet very few studies exist related to international students from India in Canada.

This study was initiated based on a number of concerns, such as the fact that ISI’s are growing in number, yet they are a group of students that are not fully understood according to the limited literature available on the group, from an acculturation perspective. This group of sojourners has a distinct set of cultural characteristics that might make their integration different from other groups of international students. The challenges identified by this group relate to language challenges that other groups of students may not encounter. Additionally, the financial burdens on this group of students provide an added challenge not experienced by many other
groups of students that may be funded by their own governments. Findings presented in this study address their concerns and provide support for these assumptions.

Despite the students wanting to integrate, they are faced with a number of challenges that are not of their own making and have their expectations unmet and end up adapting poorly to their new environment, as confirmed by Kwon (2009) and Smith and Khawaja (2011). To ensure appropriate student integration, individual efforts by students as well as institutional interventions are needed.

Finally, by providing an in-depth analysis of the integration experience of ISI’s in Canada, this study adds to the existing literature and creates a base for future research. This is one of the many attempts intended to facilitate the acculturation process of sojourners transcending borders to have a better future and to integrate with others both socially and through their new environment. It is in the best interest of institutions to ensure proper acclimatization of this student population as they have the potential to deliver short-term revenue gain to institutions and the surrounding economy, as well as potential highly skilled immigrants to Canada.

APPENDIX A

Recruitment email
This email was delivered by the international office to all international students from India that have completed their first semester of study asking them to participate in the research study.

Subject title: Requesting your assistance with a doctoral thesis

Dear _____:

An associate dean at Sheridan, Maher Ghalayini is a doctoral student working on his dissertation at Northeastern University, which is located in Boston, Massachusetts. I am reaching out to you to ask if you would be willing and able to participate in his dissertation study.

The focus of his dissertation is to gain an understanding into the acclimatization process of international students from India into Sheridan. His research will focus on the services provided by Sheridan to you, and whether they were helpful in acclimatizing you both socially and academically into the institution, and looking for feedback as to what additional services would have made the process better.

Once students integrate socially and academically into an institution and market, their success at the institution is significantly improved.

You are a current international student from India studying at Sheridan, and your perspective on the adjustment process is invaluable and your participation would be greatly appreciated.

As a current academic administrator at Sheridan College, Maher has a vested interest in the success of international students, both for the commitments that you have made personally and professionally to embark on this adventure, and to ensure that Sheridan is providing you with the right services to help you acclimatize both socially and academically to ensure your success.

He is very passionate about this topic and hopes you will consider participating in this study. In a few days Maher Ghalayini will reach out to you via email to follow up to gain your approval to participate and provide you additional information about the study.

Sincerely,

International student coordinator

Appendix B

Unsigned consent form
UNSIGNED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR WEB-BASED ONLINE SURVEYS

Northeastern University, Department of: College of Professional studies

Principal Investigators Name: Dr. Lynda Beltz

Student Researcher Name: Maher Ghalayini

Title of Project: Integration of international students from India into Sheridan College.

Request to Participate in Research

I would like to invite you to participate in a web-based online survey. The survey is part of a research study whose purpose is to improve the acclimatization process of international students from India into Sheridan College both socially and academically. This survey should take about one hour to complete.

I am asking you to participate in this study because you are a current international student from India and have recently completed your second semester of studies. You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey.

The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the web-based online survey, you can stop at any time.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, your responses may help us learn more about how Sheridan College can improve the services it provides to international students from India.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being affiliated with this project.

If you have any questions regarding electronic privacy, please feel free to contact Mark Nardone, NU’s Director of Information Security via phone at 617-373-7901, or via email at privacy@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Maher Ghalayini at Ghalayini.m@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Lynda Beltz, the Principal Investigator.
If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

By clicking on the survey link below [Or the “accept” button below] you are indicating that you consent to participate in this study. Please print out a copy of this consent form for your records.

http://____ (To be created using survey monkey)

_________________________________________________

Thank you for your time.
Web survey

Validation questions:

1- Which of the following best describes your current status in Canada?
   a. Canada Study Permit Holder
   b. Diplomatic Visa Holder
   c. Work Permit Holder
   d. Permanent Resident

2- Are you a current student at Sheridan College?
3- Did you complete your second semester of studies?
4- What type of program are you taking?
   a. Diploma
   b. Degree
   c. Post Graduate

Research questions:

Pre-departure:

1- How useful were the following sources of information in helping you prepare for your studies at Sheridan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>Not at all useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Did not use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements or stories in Magazines, Newspapers or on TV</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan’s Website</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Recruiter or agent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures about the institution</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct communication from the institution (Email, etc...)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with students/alumni from the institution</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends or acquaintances</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational/college fair</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Education Centre in India</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2- Describe your experience in applying to study at Sheridan College?
3- Tell me about the communication received from Sheridan once you inquired and applied to Sheridan College?
4- How prepared were you to apply for the Canadian study permit or visa process at the high commission in India?

Arrival-Acculturation:
5- Did you attend the orientation at Sheridan on your arrival?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
6- Describe how helpful you found the information provided at the orientation session including if possible what information specifically was helpful?
7- Were there any additional topics that you would have liked included in the orientation?
8- What were the top four challenges for you during your first 6 months in Canada? Have they gotten better?
9- What are the challenges that still affect you today?
10- Did you expect such challenges prior to your departure from India?

**Coping with challenges, social support and network:**

11- How have you coped with your challenges?
12- Who do you often count on for support when facing difficulties?
13- How often do you contact your family in India?
14- How diverse is your social network in Canada? Who do you prefer to make friends with?
15- What do you think about making friends with Canadian students?
16- How have you been treated by the locals and people of other ethnicities? If any, have you felt any racism/discrimination towards you or any of your friends?
17- What challenges did you encounter living in the community and getting involved in extracurricular activities at and outside Sheridan?
18- Where have you gone to have your personal questions answered?

**Coping with Academic Challenges**

19- How difficult has it been to adjust academically to studying at Sheridan?
20- Where have you gone to have your academic questions answered?
21- Have you experienced any difficulties studying in English?

**Closing**

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience as a new international student at Sheridan?
References


Tas, M. (2013). Best practices in hosting international students in the U.S. *Cross-Cultural
Communication, 9(2), 14-17.


Emerald Insight, 113 (5/6), 290-299.

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