

# EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT USING THE NSSE FRAMEWORK

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand international student academic engagement at a Midwest regional state university by qualitatively researching how international students perceive their academic engagement activities. Understanding how this unique and varied population is educated and served effectively is central to practice in higher education.

Framed by the research setting, the problem, and purpose, the research question was: What are the academic engagement patterns that emerge among international students at a Midwest regional state university?

This was a qualitative case study using international student focus groups. Five focus groups consisting of a total of fourteen students were interviewed. The data were then analyzed using a data management tool to allow themes to emerge from the data. The thematic data were then filtered using the NSSE theoretical framework to sort academic engagement data from cultural difference or traditional international student academic issues (i.e. language ability or testing concerns).

Key findings of the study indicate common success strategies international students employ may change as students adapt to the academic climate and that not all international students employ similar strategies. The strategies may resonate with the NSSE theoretical framework, but seem to be coping strategies when students first arrive rather than positive educational behaviors NSSE seeks to highlight. Further, international students' academic needs vary depending on country of origin and home culture and these needs change over time. Additionally, understanding nuanced international student needs will provide administrators and faculty with practical guidance to enhance international student academic engagement and assist students to develop meaningful and positive success strategies. This may have campus-wide benefits for domestic students and the environment as a whole.