

**Navigating the University System: The Effects of Chinese and Indian
Graduate Students' Social Networks on Academic Progression**

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Abstract

Currently more than half a million international students are enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities. All of these students face challenges associated with integrating into their new host education environments and learning how to make their way through the rules and regulations of their host university and community.

Social network theories attribute behaviors to the structural and relational attributes of one's social network including access to resources and information. The social networks of most international student's are insular, dense, and homogeneous and serve to reinforce cultural norms in the host society. Further, they provide little to no access to dissimilar others and limit information flow to redundant information.

China and India are the countries of origin of over 20% of U.S. international students. The goal of this research was to understand the constructs of the Chinese and Indian students' social networks and ascertain factors affecting satisfaction and influencing academic progression. Support related to making their way through the university system and residing in the host community framed the social networks. Among the variables studied were tie strength, homogeneity, roles and relationships of network members.

Results indicated that while significant differences existed within the Chinese and Indian student populations, their networks contained many similarities. Males' networks were more homogeneous and dense than females' networks and weak links were more prevalent in females' networks. Chinese males had the most insular networks. The networks of Indian students and Chinese females were in many cases more similar with one another and different from those of Chinese males. Network members were predominately friends and most were students. University faculty and staff were present in only 12% of Chinese males' networks and at least 25% of all other groups.

Not all students were satisfied that their networks met their needs. Despite having the largest networks, Chinese students wanted even larger networks. Just under half of Indian students wanted larger networks.

Universally, students indicated their networks enabled academic progression and Chinese females rated their networks more effective than all others. Despite significant differences among and between the populations, the students were able to invoke effective networks enabling academic progression.

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