

The Lived Experience of International Graduate Nursing Students Engaged with the US Healthcare and Educational System

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As higher education institutions across the United States (US) are working diligently to enhance diversity, cross cultural experiences, and enrollment, recruiting international students is a solution that contributes to the “personality”, diversity, and the financial security of the campus. There has been an influx of international students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) since fall 2014. More than forty international students were enrolled in the masters program in nursing. IUP has made a concerted effort to provide these students with a smooth transition into America’s culture, language, and education system. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of international graduate nursing students. The investigators wanted to identify potential opportunities and barriers experienced by these students in order to provide recommendations for faculty to facilitate student and program success. Twenty students were interviewed face-to-face by a trained graduate assistant using a descriptive phenomenological approach. Data analysis was conducted using Colaizzi’s (1978) method of qualitative data analysis. Five emergent themes were identified: Experiencing cultural differences, Taking on the new role, Navigating challenges, Reaping benefits, and Unfulfilled wishes. While some of these findings are consistent with previous literature, new themes emerged including ‘wanting to do good for their home country’, strategies students used for ‘cultural adjustment’, and ‘unmet or conflicting expectations’ that have implications for nurse educators and program administrators. Future recommendations for faculty include recommendations for front loading professional writing support for students, exploring opportunities for increased intercultural interactions in and out of the classroom, and workshops to increase faculty cultural awareness and strategies to mitigate the challenges facing international graduate nursing students. The theme of ‘unfulfilled wishes’ provides a rich understanding of goals that international students bring to the learning environment. Future faculty development opportunities and additional research questions to explore will be presented to the audience.