

Bonistall Postel CSD Graduate Student Grant Report

Two years ago, I applied for funding with the Center for the Study of Diversity to support the data collection efforts of my dissertation. My dissertation focused on the needs and vulnerabilities of international graduate students with regard to sexual assault and gender-based violence. Before my research, international students were largely left out of research due to the complexity they bring to the research process compared to their domestic counterparts. For this reason, this dissertation project was greeted with skepticism because there was no research in the extant literature to indicate that international students, let alone international graduate students, faced victimization – or offending – risks on campus. This is not because there is no vulnerability, but because this population had been left out of our understandings of campus life. Receiving the prestigious graduate student grant helped give credibility to my research, and aided in my ability to collect rich data.

My dissertation sought to understand certain acculturation processes of international graduate students and how it may affect their vulnerability to sexual violence (both victimization and offending issues) because this population has been overlooked in the literature. The existing research on international students indicates that their experiences are different than their domestic counterparts, and the sparse literature on graduate students indicates their experiences are different from their undergraduate counterparts. A specific focus on the intersection of these two identities, international graduate students, is almost completely absent from the literature. Due to the lack of research in this area, the sensitive nature of the subject and respondents' reticence in

revealing their experiences, and cultural and language barriers, a mixed methods approach was best suited for the purpose of this study.

Although outside the scope of the original grant proposal, I received approval to use half of the funding to help incentivize respondents to participate in my survey. Because the survey was long and included very sensitive questions, I was concerned that respondents would either not fill it out, or would not complete the necessary sections. Respondents who completed the survey were entered into a raffle for ten \$50 Amazon gift cards. I believe this incentive was crucial to the high response rate in my survey. This resulted in very rich survey data. In addition to the surveys (n=367), triangulation, meaning there were multiple approaches used to investigate the research topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), was achieved using in-depth interviews with institutional professionals (n=11), and in-depth interviews with a subset of female and male international graduate students (n=28). Together, the triangulation of data allowed the findings to offer a more comprehensive understanding of international graduate students' experiences. With the success of the survey data and the triangulation, there was sufficient data collected for analysis. Thus, the remaining funds of \$500 will be unused.

Perhaps not typical in these reports, I wanted to share some of my key findings to show how influential the funding was. The survey and the interview data indicated that international graduate students, both male and female, have experienced victimization since their arrival in the US. Their experiences include street harassment, sexual harassment, dating violence, and sexual assault, at the hands of advisors, bosses, coworkers, partners, friends, acquaintances, and strangers. All five of the research questions aimed to understand a small component of the overarching question: what

factors, if any, make international graduate students vulnerable to victimization and perpetration? This research found seven different components that may influence such vulnerability, including students' perceptions of the US, friendship groups, adjustment issues, help-seeking behaviors, alcohol, consent, and the hookup culture. This research project provided the first step in understanding the complexities of international graduate students' experiences and their vulnerability to sexual violence. It uncovered factors that influence students' vulnerability and isolation, as well as protective factors that help reduce their risk and provide support in the aftermath of victimization. In addition to adding new knowledge to the gender-based violence literature, these research findings add to our sociological understanding of intersectionality and gendered institutions. Finally, from this data, tangible recommendations for universities and colleges have been developed to address this issue.

As outlined in my proposal, I achieved all of my dissemination goals. I presented on my work at the VAWA Conference and the Grad Forum, as well as an additional research conference. It guided my work on the VAWA Subcommittee on Underrepresented Populations (VSUP), and helped influence a presentation I organized for the Fulbright international student orientation. Finally, it directly influenced the value and richness of my data, which resulted in a completed dissertation! Please note that in my Acknowledgements section of my dissertation, I wrote: The success of the survey would not have been possible without the funding from the Center for the Study of Diversity Student Research Grant. Now that I have graduated, I will be pursuing the possibility of turning my dissertation into a book.

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