

## Chapter 51

# Career Counseling for International Students: Using the Framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory

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### ABSTRACT

*International students are a group with diverse career needs and concerns. The challenges international students face (e.g., psychological and sociocultural adjustment issues, language barriers, sense of loss, financial problems, getting used to a new educational system) when they come to study in the United States, as well as their expectations of coming to a new country, may significantly influence their career needs and decision-making processes. In this chapter, the authors suggest social cognitive career theory (SCCT) as a framework for working with the undergraduate and graduate international student population by emphasizing intervention strategies and making specific recommendations.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the use of the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as the framework for engaging career counseling interventions and strategies for international students in U.S. undergraduate and graduate education. The term *international student* refers to students who study at an educational institution in a country other than their country of citizenship (Paige, 1990). Several colleges and universities in the U.S. may have seen their highest number of enrollments of international students in academic year 2016-2017 with an overall total of 1,078,822 (Institute of International Education, 2017). This figure represents a 3.4% increase in the total number of international students over the previous academic year.

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The growing number of international students suggests that there is greater diversity of career needs and interests to which U.S. institutions must respond. The Institute of International Education reported that in 2017 of the total number of international students, 40.7% were in undergraduate studies, 36.3% were in graduate studies, 16.3% were in optional practical training, and 6.8% were in non-degree programs. Considering that moving to another country to pursue undergraduate or graduate education is an important career decision, there is need for greater understanding of the role of career counseling in international students' success. Therefore, the authors present SCCT as a framework for better understanding and addressing the career needs of international students.

## **International Students' Career Needs and Challenges**

Coming from different cultural groups, international students represent a heterogeneous group of people with diverse career needs and concerns (Paige, 1990; Yang, Wong, Hwang, & Heppner, 2002). First, international students face the immense challenge of cultural and emotional adjustment when they come to study in the U.S. (Bulgan & Çiftçi, 2017; Cozart & Rojewski, 2015; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Wang, et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2007). Previous studies have indicated that international students' common difficulties include lack of social support, sense of loss, culture shock, language barriers, financial problems, and adjusting to a new educational system (Arthur, 2016; Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Kilinc & Granello, 2003; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Mori, 2000; Russell, Thomsom, & Rosenthal, 2008).

Second, taking into account that the choice of studying in another country is a significant career decision, international students need support to deal with their career needs and goals. Fortunately, studies addressing the career-development needs of international students are increasing in number (Cozart & Rojewski, 2015; Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014). Specifically, international students need to make sure that their academic and vocational training in the U.S. will be of use to their future status either in the U.S. or in their home country (Leong & Sedlacek, 1989). Thus, career counseling will prove useful in guiding their choices.

Third, international students face numerous vocational challenges like language and cultural barriers in job search and legal requirements and bureaucratic procedures for employment in the United States (Spencer-Rodgers, 2000; Spencer-Rodgers & Cortijo, 1998). Spencer-Rodgers (2000) found that vocational needs of international college students are focused on getting work experience, overcoming interview barriers, and developing job-search skills. In another study, international students felt that they need help with preparing for careers of interest and exploring job opportunities (Manese, Leong, & Sedlacek, 1985). In addition, Leong and Sedlacek (1989) found that career needs of international students are different from those of American students. Particularly, international students are more interested and in need of vocational guidance compared to American students. The career needs of international students become more complicated since they consider employment in the U.S., in their country of origin, or even other foreign countries (Shen & Herr, 2004; Spencer-Rodgers, 2000). In other words, international students' career development needs tend to focus on the U.S. or on foreign job markets (Spencer-Rodgers, 2000). Given their future plans, they require different steps for the counseling process.

Fourth, career needs of international students also vary due to their developmental stage and level of career planning and preparation (Arthur, 2016; Shen & Herr, 2004). Shih and Brown (2000), in a study on undergraduate and graduate Taiwanese international students in the U.S. found that age and acculturation levels were important predictors of vocational identity. Specifically, older students were more likely to have a clearer understanding of their career interests, abilities, and goals (Shih & Brown,

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