Becoming a Successful International Faculty Member in a Striving University

Daniela Véliz
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela
Universidad de Tarapacá (Chile)

Astrid Pickenpack
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

Abstract: Hiring academics from abroad is one of the strategies that contemporary universities employ to become international institutions. At the same time, a growing number of academics are considering a wider range of academic opportunities, which has contributed to an increase in transnational academic mobility. However, most universities are not yet prepared to support the unique needs of international faculty members. Despite the crucial roles that international faculty play in colleges and universities, relatively little is known about their experiences since most of the studies on the topic are quantitative in nature. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the ways in which international faculty members navigate academic life at a striving university – defined as an institution that aspires to become a world-class university. Our findings show that the international faculty members who participated in this study underwent processes of adjustment in which their agentic responses intermeshed with institutional structures, posing challenges to both the faculty members and their host institution. However, it was found that the burden of adjustment is being placed upon individual academics. Therefore, we examined agentic responses to challenging academic environments that were not ideally suited for internationalization and will provide insights into how universities might better support international academics as they navigate uncertainty.

Introduction

Hiring faculty members from abroad is one of the strategies that contemporary research universities employ in their internationalization processes (Altbach, 2006; Barnett, 2016; De Witt, 2011). At the same time, a growing number of academics are considering a wider range of academic opportunities, which has contributed to an increase in transnational academic mobility (Kim, 2009, 2010, 2017; Pherali, 2012). However, most universities are not yet prepared to meet the unique needs of international faculty members, which may be particularly true in the case of striving universities – universities aspiring to gain prestige in international rankings (O'Meara, 2007).

Faculty members play an important role in colleges and universities, principally through research and by increasing overall productivity (Webber, 2012). However, relatively little is known about the professional experiences of international faculty members in general or about international academics moving to striving universities in particular. Studies on international faculty members tend to be quantitative in nature and analyse national datasets to examine specific academic outcomes, such as productivity, job satisfaction, and earnings (Froese, 2012; Kim et al., 2011; Lin et al, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2010; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2010; Tao, 2020). There are few studies addressing the experiences of international faculty members (Gimenez & Morgan, 2014; Kahn, 2009; Morley et al., 2018; Pherali, 2012; Sallee & Hart, 2015; Thomas & Johnson, 2004; Uusimaki & Garvis, 2016) and none at striving universities. Some authors (ECU [2014]; Kim & Locke [2010]) have actually encouraged other academics to do qualitative studies to uncover the stories behind this lack of statistics.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the ways in which international faculty members navigate the culture and policies at a striving university and the main challenges they face. The university chosen for examination is a striving research-oriented institution in the United States. At the time of this study, the university was not considered a top-tier university according to international rankings, nor was it a highly diverse university in terms of international population (considering both students and faculty members). However, the university has demonstrated a commitment to increasing its global prestige by strategically hiring international faculty members.

The assumption underlying this research study was that the particular characteristics of the striving university chosen would make the processes of navigating academic work demands particularly challenging for international academics. Additionally, we aimed to identify the mechanisms used by faculty members to effectively adapt to adverse institutional conditions. This seems particularly relevant in a context where most universities around the globe are compelled to become more international but very few – those in the top 100 international rankings – are prepared to address the difficulties involved in hiring international academics.

Framework

A Call for Internationalization

In this era of globalization, contemporary universities are increasingly focused on becoming international organizations (Altbach, 2006; De Witt, 2011) and, as such, they need to develop policies and strategies to promote internationalization (Barnett, 2016; Blessinger, 2015). Some of these policies and strategies include, at the student level, campus-based internationalization initiatives such as study-abroad experiences, curriculum enrichment via majors in international

studies or specific area studies, intensive foreign-language instruction, and sponsorship of foreign students (Haigh, 2014). At the faculty level, there are faculty mobility programs, visiting lecturers and scholars, international conferences and seminars, among others (Svetlik & Braček Lalić, 2016).

The recruitment of international faculty for the purpose of improving the academic prestige of a university - especially regarding research productivity (Bennion & Locke, 2010) - is paramount. Table 1 illustrates the importance leading international rankings place on recruiting international faculty, with the QS World University Ranking's faculty internationalization indicator contributing 5% to the overall ranking results (Top Universities, 2017).

Table 1
Weight of International Faculty in International Rankings

Ranking	Percentage Weighting	Indicator
QS World University Rankings	5%	International staff ratio
Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE)	2.5%	International staff ratio
Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)	0%	-

It is therefore not surprising that institutions around the world compete to hire the best academics to gain an advantage in the market and improve their international ranking (Baruffaldi & Landoni, 2012). Gaining prestige has become an aspiration for many institutions around the world, although only the most prestigious universities have the financial resources to take on the challenge.

Striving Universities

Institutions that are aspiring to achieve high international rankings have been referred to in the literature as "striving institutions". A striving institutional culture is defined as the "pursuit of prestige within the academic hierarchy" (O´Meara, 2007, p. 123). Striving behaviors occur when institutions imitate more successful college and universities to gain market advantages (Véliz & Gardner, 2019). Striving institutions have been found to have several practices including (a) hiring more "faculty stars" who are more research focused; (b) a reduction in faculty teaching loads; (c) greater expectations for research productivity in tenure and promotion; and, (d) increased expectations for faculty to secure grants, awards, and fellowships (O'Meara, 2007). Universities that aspire to become more research-oriented have been seen to exhibit more striving behaviors.

Although higher education administrators are generally in favor of improving institutional prestige (Ortagus, 2016), scholars have argued that the upward drift always comes at the expense of academics (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2005) who face new professional pressures. For example, scholars have reported that the boundaries between faculty members' work and personal lives have been negatively affected by their striving university environments and that they have had to organize their time very carefully to meet institutional demands. (Gonzales et al., 2016). This concern with time management appears to be a prevailing problem in research universities, whose priority is to increase the number of publications, patents and grants won (Walker, 2009), which they refer to as 'real work' (Yliojki, 2013) as opposed to teaching, service and managerial duties. However, it appears that striving institutions exacerbate this problem (Gonzales et al., 2016). The research aspirations of striving universities pressure faculty members to change their work habits

in order to spend less time teaching and advising so they will have more time for research, grant writing and publishing

International Faculty Members in the United States

The concept of 'international academic' has been defined in many different ways in the research literature. In some cases, international academics have been identified according to their citizenship and birthplace (Lin et al., 2009; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2010). These definitions are problematic because they may include faculty members who were born and educated abroad but have become naturalized U.S. citizens. Some scholars have suggested that the country where international faculty members completed their terminal degree can identify international faculty more precisely when studying this population (Kim et al., 2011). For the purpose of this study, we define international faculty members as foreign-born academics who may be naturalized U.S. citizens or permanent residents that grew up outside the country and thus have perspectives, values, and attitudes that might be internationally influenced. We use, therefore, the terms "foreign-born" and "international" faculty interchangeably throughout this paper.

The number of international faculty members at U.S. universities has increased over time, nearly doubling in the past 40 years across all academic positions (e.g., assistant, associate, and full professor). For example, the number of foreign-born faculty members at U.S. institutions in 1969 was 28,276. This number has steadily increased to 74,220 in 1998, 115,313 in 2010, and 134,379 in 2017 (Institute of International Education, 2017). Currently, most international faculty members are employed at research universities and concentrated at the most prestigious universities in the United States, according to the Open Doors report, with the majority (76%) employed in STEM disciplines (Institute of International Education, 2017). International faculty members come from countries around the world, with China (33.6%), India (9.3%), and South Korea (5.4%) being the top three (Institute of International Education, 2017).

Although international faculty members have become more attractive to research universities as a means of improving global prestige and increasing research income and publications (Lin et al., 2009; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2010; Mamiseishvili, 2010), there are few studies that address their experiences in specific universities, such as striving institutions. Some studies have found that international faculty members are less satisfied with their jobs but more productive compared to their U.S.-born colleagues (Mamiseishvili, 2010; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2010). Despite these differences in productivity, scholars have not found significant differences in annual salary between international and national faculty members (Webber, 2012). Other studies indicate that international faculty members face cultural adjustments and language issues (Thomas & Johnson, 2004) and still others address how the gender and ethnicity of international faculty shape professional success (Tao, 2020). The focus of this paper is, however, the experiences of international faculty members who are on the tenure-track at a striving university since this type of study is not available in the literature.

International Faculty Members: Processes of Socialization and Acculturation

According to Merton (1957), socialization is the process by which new members acquire norms, knowledge, and the skills they need to flourish in a given organization. In addition, socialization is a ritualized process involving an exchange of cultural patterns of thought and action in which individuals influence the organization but, at the same time, are influenced by it (Trowler & Knight, 1999). Socialization is an ongoing process, but it can be more clearly observed when new members join an organization, such as when new faculty members enter an academic institution.

Similarly, the concept of acculturation refers to a two-way process through which both the incoming academic and the host institution change as a consequence of their encounter (Jiang et al., 2010). Understanding the experiences of acculturation can help institutions identify ways to facilitate and support the process, which will, in turn, contribute to institutional development and enhancement.

A faculty member's first years in a tenure-track position are the most stressful, perhaps due to the pressure of understanding the organization's culture. New faculty members may be affected by factors like loneliness, intellectual isolation, lack of collegiality, heavy workloads, and time constraints (Trowler & Knight, 1999). During the initial adaptation period, new faculty members learn about the institutional values and traditions that have the greatest impact on how they construct their academic identities and behave as faculty members (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014), as well as their relationships with other colleagues and students (Feixas, 2002). New academics' experiences act as interpretative frameworks that give meaning to their future actions and during this period, new faculty members try to exert agentic responses in order to strategically navigate their careers, such as contacting their department chair to discuss their vita and likelihood of promotion the following year (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014, p. 53).

While socialization and acculturation have been common conceptual lenses through which international students are examined (Elliot et al., 2016; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), few studies have used these concepts to broadly examine the experiences of international faculty members (Jiang et al., 2010), or specifically at striving universities. In particular, a cultural clash might be evident, especially involving faculty members moving from other continents and cultures. Additionally, international faculty members need to obtain permanent work visas and settle in with their families, which takes time and energy and puts pressure on them. It is in this context that an interplay between personal and family factors, cultural diversity and ethnicities (Uusimaki & Garvis, 2016), academic trajectories, institutional elements (e.g., institutional goals, the role of faculties, the department culture) (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014), academic disciplines, and global trends (e.g., internationalization processes and research productivity) come into play and produce tensions, which both new international faculty members and universities have to address in their mutual acculturation processes. In this paper, we examine the acculturation processes of international faculty members in a striving university from their own subjective experiences, taking into account these multi-level considerations.

Method

We conducted a qualitative study to understand how international faculty members navigate at a striving university and the main challenges they face. Qualitative studies are valuable when trying to understand the participants' meaning of the "events, situations, and actions that are involved with any of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 17). Social actors give different meanings to the situations they experience, and these meanings are diverse and, sometimes, contradictory and problematic (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Van Maanen, 1982) since they depend on complex social contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994). To capture the international faculty members' experiences, we used in-depth semi-structured interviews as our primary data source (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Our Case: A Striving University

This study was conducted at a research-oriented institution in the United States. Although said university is considered a research university nationally, it has been ranked in the third tier of U.S.

institutions (U.S. News and World Report, 2015). It occupies a position above 500 in the Times Higher Education while nationally, it is above position 150 (U.S. News and World Report, 2015). The university is also the state's land-grant[1] institution and the only doctoral-granting institution in its state. For the purpose of this study, we will refer to the university as Land Grant University (LGU):

> LGU is a rural, medium-sized institution with a predominately-white student population, but where less than 1% of its faculty members are designated as international. Additionally, the university is in a state that is not diverse in terms of racial ethnicities and international population. Based on a review of the university's stated mission, website, and official documents, it does not strongly promote a policy on internationalization. However, it can be considered a striving university since it has several traits of striving institutions, such as (a) a greater attempt to hire "faculty stars" who are more research focused; (b) a decrease in faculty teaching load, an increase in discretionary time, and a loosening of institutional ties with an increased emphasis on disciplinary ties; (c) an increased emphasis on research in tenure and promotion; and, (d) increased expectations for faculty to secure grants, awards, and prestigious fellowships. (O'Meara, 2007, p. 131 «sic»).

Participant Recruitment

Given the low degree of internationalization of the striving university where we conducted our fieldwork, international academics were scarce and difficult to find. Following the definition of international academic provided earlier, we selected the participants from a list of international faculty members provided by the university's Human Resource office. We identified 17 faculty members that were "international" or non-U.S. citizens. Interestingly, the list did not provide the real number of international faculty members employed by the university at that time since some of them had become U.S. citizens due to their marital status, so we did not include them on the list. Hence, it was not possible for us to identify these naturalized citizens unless they disclosed this fact to the university.

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[1] A land-grant college or university is an institution that has been designated by its state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890, and 1994. The original mission of these institutions, as set forth in the first Morrill Act, was to teach agriculture, military tactics, and mechanic arts as well as classical studies so members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of International Faculty Members at Striving University (LGU)

Pseudonym	Disciplinary Area	Country of Origin	Gender	Faculty Rank	Country of Completion of Graduate Studies
Ana	Professional / Applied	Europe	Female	Assistant	US
Tian	Social Science	East Asia	Male	Assistant	US
Ranjit	STEM	South Asia	Male	Full	US
Budi	Professional / Applied	Southeast Asia	Male	Assistant	US
Esmail	STEM	Middle East	Male	Associate	Canada
Ibrahim	STEM	Eurasia	Male	Assistant	US
Meryem	Professional / Applied	Eurasia	Female	Assistant	US
Max	STEM	Eurasia	Male	Assistant	UK

By e-mail, we invited all 17 international faculty members included on the university's list to participate in the study. We sent a reminder e-mail two weeks after the initial invitation. Only five faculty members from the list agreed to participate. The participant sample was then increased through a snowball sampling technique with those initial five participants, who helped us identify additional international faculty who held working visas or were known to be non- resident aliens. Said technique enabled us to increase our total sample to eight participants, comprised of two women and six men. All the participants held an academic tenure-track appointment. Six of the participants had applied for their position while living abroad. None of them had specific information about the university environment (such as its lack of an international environment). The participants had diverse cultural backgrounds, hailing from countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia (see Table 2).

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were our main source of data collection. After obtaining informed consent from each participant, we used a semi-structured interview protocol. Protocol questions spoke directly to the faculty members' experiences in their processes of adaptation to their new host institution. Interviews were conducted by one member of the research team and lasted approximately 60-70 minutes. With the permission of the participants, they were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interviews were sent to the interviewees so as to ensure the accuracy of the conversation.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data via the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978), which allowed us to develop emergent themes and to compress large amounts of data into meaningful units. We

established the trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) of the data analysis in three stages. First, we conducted a member check by sending a preliminary summary of the findings to each interviewee for verification and feedback. Second, each member of the research team (composed of three members) individually read each interview. Later, in the third stage, the research team held several research meetings to come to an agreement on the main categories emerging from the data.

Despite the fact that we were only able to recruit a small number of international academics, the different demographic characteristics of the faculty members allowed us to identify "common patterns and core experiences and shared aspects of the cases" (Emmel, 2003, p. 38). Hence, we obtained "detailed descriptions of the uniqueness of the cases and …. the shared patterns that cut across cases" (Emmel, 2003, p. 38). Our categorization process was specifically focused on establishing codes for the personal, academic, and institutional factors that shaped the acculturation processes undergone by the international faculty members in their host institutions as well as the role that said institutions played in facilitating/obstructing such processes. We were particularly interested in the factors that helped the participants become successful faculty members. We then refined and reduced our initial set of codes to obtain 19 codes that reflected the purposes of our study.

Table 3

Grouping Codes of Being an International Academic into Categories

Personal Factors	Academic Factors	Institutional Factors
Cultural, religious, geographic issues	Perceptions about teaching and students	Type of university
Family of origin	High teaching standards	University culture
Language issues	Being international (in relation to students)	Welcoming institution
-	Being a foreigner (in relation with colleagues)	Facilitating international faculty members lives in administrative terms
-	Moving to another country for better academic opportunities	Supportive authorities
Building networks within and outside academia		Visa issues
		Mentor figure
Settling down		

After this analytical process, we looked for relationships between the codes and then grouped them into categories that allowed us to understand the process of being a faculty member in an international context, particularly at a striving university (see Table 3). We decided to categorize 'settling down' as a transversal code present in all the categories analyzed.

Given the small sample of academics deployed in this study, we do not claim that the results offered here can be generalized. Rather, our aim was to examine the rich, detailed stories that academics were willing to share with us in order to seek 'out insights that illuminate both variation and significant common patterns' (Emmel, 2003, p. 39) in their academic experiences.

International Academics at a Striving University:
An Ongoing Process of Being and Becoming

We organized our findings by distinguishing the experiences described by the faculty members from the academic teaching and research tasks from the institutional factors that facilitated/obstructed their adaptation process.

Re-shaping the Tasks of Teaching and Research

Being a faculty member involves, in broad terms, the construction of an identity that revolves around classic teaching, research, and service tasks (Clark, 1991; Guzmán-Valenzuela & Barnett, 2013), which in themselves are complex. According to most of the international faculty members who participated in this study, teaching, research, and service are pivotal academic tasks and being a successful academic involves performing all of them well.

The participants in this study were new faculty members – not in the sense that they had to learn their academic role since they had all been hired partly for their academic experience – but in the sense of learning how to be an international academic in an institution located in a new country/continent with a particular organizational culture and demands. These international faculty members were thus in a transitional stage that involved learning how to be a faculty member within their status of being international at a striving university. According to Ibrahim (Eurasia): "It's culture, institution. Well… a) institutional culture; and b) general, cultural activities and behavior, you know? Social expectations for different people, and language."

Four out of seven participants pointed out that the university was a rural university lacking an international environment – a dimension that wasn't noticed by the participants during their application process – which made the acculturation process more difficult for international staff, as captured in this comment from Meryem (Eurasia) "For me, it is really important to work in a multicultural environment so you know? I really would love to see more international faculty, to be honest." However, most of the participants had received several job offers when they were on the job market and three participants said they accepted their current position because they valued the quality of life that the university could provide them and their families.

As noted earlier (in the framework), international faculty members, in general, face cultural and language challenges when moving to a university in another country. What is unique in this case is that international faculty members at this striving university have also had to adapt to two features that are not present in most research-intensive universities in the United States: rurality and minimal international presence. In this context, language and cultural challenges and weak academic support structures for international academics were exacerbated since said universities (managers, academics and students) were insufficiently prepared to address them.

Teaching: Expectations and Adaptation

Teaching is particularly challenging at this striving university since it takes place in an environment where students have diverse expectations and their ethnic background is mainly white. In particular, of the fact that most students had not previously been exposed to cultural diversity was an important issue for most faculty members in this study. Some interviewees mentioned ethnic or racial issues that had made teaching particularly challenging because it implied a kind of culture clash. As Tian (East Asia) stated:

> We do not have a lot of international students or even students with different
> cultural backgrounds. Pretty much Caucasian. Yeah, pretty much I can say 90% of

the students are Caucasian so being a professor with an Asian cultural background is kind of difficult.

The teaching standards and expectations of the new international faculty members also played a role. Cultural differences in the teaching approaches in their home countries did not always match the expectations in their new institution, even for those who had previous teaching experience in the United States. For example, Budi (Southeast Asia) had this to say about the differences in teaching styles between his home country and the university:

> Some students can complain about the way of teaching. For example, where I am from, we basically don't tell students what is going to be on the test or exam. They have to study hard; they have to be able to answer all the questions. Here, in the US, we let them know and tell them what is going to be on the exam, tell them what to study. A totally different way of teaching.

The faculty members in this study had generally graduated from more ethnically diverse institutions with more prestigious academic reputations. Consequently, faculty members had higher expectations regarding the academic achievement of their students. In order to fit into the environment at the striving university, these academics had to adapt and change their academic expectations, summed up here by Max (Europe): "I have had to re-educate myself; you have to change your educational expectations." In order to assimilate a new teaching culture, academics had to talk to other faculty members in their departments as well as students.

Being a Researcher: Learning New Rules and Traditions

Although all the interviewees had an established research career, there were challenges in developing research networks within the country. International faculty members needed to re-learn how to follow certain research paths that obey cultural patterns and research guidelines in a particular country, as Max said:

> In the UK and Europe, you are forced to be multinational, and to an extent, the US is almost the reverse. I mean, you know? Europe is this kind of melting pot of culture, languages, and I worked a lot, especially in the last 10 years, doing trans-European research. … you come to the US, and they don't look out. They look at the US, and they are holding everything else out… If you want to build a proper research connection, it is very difficult, and… so that's been kind of fun.

The perception of a closed research culture in U.S. academia may well be common among international academics who have moved to the United States. At this striving university, there are other cultural and institutional challenges, such as tension between a local institutional culture and the presence of incoming international faculty members with their own research networks that might extend beyond the United States. Additionally, some faculty members explained that the university had recently experienced budget cuts, which had caused anxiety among international academics about obtaining institutional funds to conduct their research. The lack of reliable funding forces universities to seek alternative ways to survive, such as recruiting more students, raising tuition, increasing extramural funding, and/or expecting faculty 'to do more with less' (Gardner et al., 2014).

LGU has only recently begun intensifying its focus on research. Faculty members in this institution are, therefore, assessed according to their ability to attract research grants for the

institution and achieve research outcomes. Consequently, research competition and productivity could also become a source of conflict for these faculty members. Esmail (Middle East) had this to say:

> When you come just to start your work, and you are not established, I think everyone is nice with you, right? And kind of…, but I think, after I started to receive certain grants, and establish my group, and I had sort of more students, and kind of get more established at work, I felt that there were a few people that were not happy about the situation so I don't know if it was related to my acknowledgment, that they didn't like that, or it was because they felt there was somebody working more, they have to work more, so… or something like that.

This quote illustrates the emerging perception among academics in the host institution that their international colleagues are conducting tasks that carry more prestige and extend over a longer time period, threatening their own academic identities. Finally, while all research universities in the US have to address challenges with research budgets, it is likely that this striving university (like other striving universities) has to make additional efforts to obtain and invest research monies in pursuit of its research aspirations.

Institutional Factors

Overall, participants agreed that the organizational climate at the university was positive in the sense that it was a good place to work with a sense of community which was greatly valued by participants. This seems to be connected to the fact that they work at a striving university. According to Ibrahim:

> My experience in general has been good. It is a nice community. We are not a big university, so you get to meet all kinds of people, with all kinds of backgrounds from different departments. I have several good friends, colleagues from different departments. As for as the university itself, I would say I am mostly happy with it.

One of the most recurrent topics among faculty members in relation to international staff's adaptation process was the importance of receiving institutional support with administrative issues regarding their international status. Most of the participants agreed that their interaction with the administration was positive and helpful, especially because international faculty must fulfill many special requirements, particularly regarding visas.

At the departmental level, most participants agreed that they received great support from a variety of people at the university, such as the dean, department chair, faculty colleagues, and staff at the international student office, which they appreciated, as described by Tian: "I have to say that there are several people very helpful, very supportive here, in this college. I think the most important one is the Associate Dean…. she is very supportive and tried to protect me a lot."

Many participants received support related to the expectations of academic authorities. Having clear expectations from the beginning made adapting to the college easier for these faculty members. As Esmail stated:

> I think the most helpful person in my department was the department chair. Mainly because on the first day, or even before that, the day of the interview, he described exactly what are the sort of job functions for faculty member… he clearly described that I had to write proposals, bring research dollars, and I had teach these courses

in undergraduate, and graduate level, and I had to do research, publish, advise students…

Mentorship was present in the participants' experiences as well. Many participants emphasized the role of their formal and informal mentors in their adaptation process. According to Meryem:

Professor XX, he is my mentor here and he has been very helpful. Since the day I was hired, or I received the offer, he always sent me emails telling me what to do, you know? What comes next, the stages, and he even helped me create my first syllabus for the first semester, so he has been very helpful.

Institutional support – either formal or informal – is important for international faculty members during their adaptation to a new host institution. However, in striving universities – whose research profile is less developed compared with the most research-intensive universities in the United States – such support is vital.

Additional Institutional Structures to Support International Faculty Members

In general, the participants appreciated the initiatives taken by some colleagues and the support they received from the institution when they began working. However, some challenges arose from their specific international status and the university was not always able to deal with them. The broad spectrum of issues they faced ranged from difficulties navigating the immigration processes and moving to another country or state to buying a car or house in a foreign country. Some participants recounted that while the university had the resources and office capacity to process their visas, the process itself was still complicated. Most of the participants felt that the timelines and extra paperwork required for international faculty members added extra pressure at the beginning of their employment. Surely, the striving university was not well enough prepared to deal with these issues.

In particular, some academics felt the visa process caused a great deal of stress in their families. Budi described his experience as follows:

My wife's visa permit had expired! When we heard about the news, because we were so stressful because usually if you are out of status just for one day, you are not allowed to come back for another three years, right? So, she went back to – [Asian country], and I told them, if she cannot come back, I'll quit, so they helped her to come back.

International academics, in general, realized that the university did not have all the services in place for international faculty members because there were so few of them at the university and because the university was relatively small. In general, the services available were primarily to assist undergraduate students, not faculty members. Ranjit (South Asia), summarized:

It is also because of the size. It is a small university. They simply do not have the resources to support many of these extra things so I think that is a limitation. It is a small university. There are pluses and minuses of being in a small university.

Other issues that affected their settling down had to do with accommodating their partners in the process. For example, Ana (from Europe) moved with her husband, who was also international. Since he was ineligible to work, he applied to graduate school to keep busy. In sum, most of the

aforementioned issues had implications in all spheres of the faculty members' lives (personal, family, and academic).

Becoming a Successful Academic at a Striving University

The experiences of the eight foreign-born faculty members examined here provide insight into the complex acculturation processes at a striving university in the United States that is not completely prepared to provide all the necessary job conditions. There are intricate factors at different levels (micro, meso, and macro) that interact and play roles in shaping these faculty members' experience as they strive to become successful international academics at the new host university.

Some of the factors are basic – such as visa status for the academic and their family – and others are negotiable and fluid during the acculturation process involving the academic and their host institution. Other factors point to a rather closed or parochial organizational culture lacking the institutional structures to assist international academics in their adaptation processes. Also, the intrinsic characteristics of the academic community (managers, academics and students) can become a source of tension due to their unfamiliarity with the high research and teaching expectations of international academics.

International academics at this striving university undergo processes of adjustment and assimilation in which their agentic responses interlock with institutional structures, posing challenges to the academics and their host institutions. However, a personal will to succeed and job conditions that need to be met by the host institution condition the rest of the factors.

All the international faculty members participating in this study were successful academics in their home countries that had decided to emigrate to boost their academic careers and live in a family-friendly environment. The chance to work in a relatively small rural university (surrounded by a spectacular landscape) surely influenced their decision.

All of them have brought their personal and family histories as well as a series of academic practices. They had learned how to teach, conduct research, and do service tasks. Although these are common academic tasks, their realization is attached to a particular cultural context with its own codes, expectations, and rules that need to be learned during the socialization process. Consequently, faculty members in this study found themselves re-learning how to succeed as academics at a striving university. In this re-learning process, all sorts of structural factors came into play, adding complexity to the adaptation process. At the same time, there are also sources of conflict or even anxiety, such as language issues, cultural backgrounds, geographical elements, ethnic aspects, and visa arrangements, that are exacerbated in a striving university.

During the analysis of the interviews, we identified a series of responses from these academics that revealed how they dealt with challenging personal, academic, and institutional situations. It became evident that our participants deployed a capacity to act in pursuit of clear goals, putting a set of actions into practice. For example, all the faculty members we interviewed made their academic decisions before applying to LGU. They were pursuing long-term objectives (most of them on a tenure-track appointment) requiring years of planning that had started, for most of them, when they resolved to undertake their doctorates in the United States and establish an academic career in the country.

From a variety of job offers, they decided to establish themselves at this university since they believed it provided good research opportunities and conscious strategic decisions about where to focus their academic efforts in order to succeed, as articulated by Esmail:

> I had offers from Europe, from France. I had offers, two offers from Canada, and two offers from here. So, between these different [options] in terms of like living, standards, they were all similar, Universities… some of them were more famous than here but I think the research opportunity that I could get here was the most important part of why I came here.

Once inside the institution, the participants showed high levels of proactivity, academic empowerment, and openness to learn and adapt to challenging new situations. Tian described what we labeled 'a will to succeed' while talking about the changes she has made to reopen a therapy room in her new institution:

> I am trying to establish a lot of new structures and rules there. So yeah, a lot of change but not particularly due to my cultural background or anything. It is pretty much like … It is more like my specialty area and my experience that I bring in here.

In this quote we see Tian bringing her own standards and ways of organizing academic work, which she has developed from her past academic experiences so as to extend the institution's opportunities. Likewise, Max had this to say:

> When you are in the bottom of the system, you are trying not to upset people, and you get caught up in politics… Thankfully, I've been doing science work quite a long time so I think if you are relatively new to it, it might've been an even worse experience, but because I come in with the experience I have, I think [I]'ve managed better than some people might've.

Max showed an awareness about being at 'the bottom of the system' but was also conscious of having a repertoire of experience and competencies that helped him deal with his new academic life at a university that was unable to sufficiently meet his expectations and standards. Furthermore, our participants showed the capacity for adaptation and strategic decision making, as well as the belief that a positive attitude towards change could make the adaptation process easier and help them succeed.

> It can be an interesting experience; it can be a funny experience. It's really a matter of, you know? To the person to make the best of the situation, they are in. It is really up to the person themselves. You have … the culture that you come from but there is also your own, individual attitude that really impacts how you interact with other people at the university. (Ibrahim)

In this quotation, Ibrahim stated that even though everyone has different cultural backgrounds, personal attitudes towards change are an important part of succeeding in a new institutional environment. A positive attitude is especially important in a striving university that is learning how to accommodate the complexity of hosting international faculty members that have invested time and effort into getting to know the university's academic culture across diverse areas. Tian referred to the teaching process and the time she has invested in learning about her students and assimilating what she calls cultural 'atmosphere': "Yeah, so I spend about one semester to get to know students and know the entire cultural atmosphere here."

Although institutional structures to support these international academics were insufficiently developed, the faculty members we interviewed were able to seek help and support from other

faculty members and authorities in order to reach their goals, as described by Max: "And whenever I have a question, I really don't feel shy. I can know I can just knock on someone's door and ask my question."

The role of (formal or informal) mentors at a striving university is essential to supporting international faculty members in the challenging process of re-learning their roles as academics. Mentors might support new international staff socially and emotionally as well as with the many tasks involved in teaching and research, even though they might not necessarily be familiar with research demands and procedures.

In addition, administrative support is essential to help faculty members with the bureaucratic requirements necessary to achieving a civic status that provides sufficient social security, healthcare coverage and other items they require. These administrative issues need to be solved so the faculty members and their families can properly settle down in the new country (especially in regard to securing the proper visa status). Without these minimum conditions, it is difficult to survive as an academic.

These academics also had to re-learn how to become new citizens (with civil rights and duties) in a foreign country that may be on another continent that is completely different their own homeland (in ethnic, religious, and cultural terms). They experienced challenging transition and adjustment processes, which affected their academic lives as well as their personal and family lives causing them to get social support in diverse areas. They deliberatively sought to develop social networks with colleagues and friends that helped them feel more integrated in the new culture.

To sum up, the international faculty members who participated in this study were highly determined. They had very clear academic expectations and goals and they devised and implemented strategies to help them succeed at the striving university. These academics were able to create spaces to exert their agency and become the kind of faculty members they want to be in a completely new international environment – this is, a university aspiring to become a prestigious research university. Finally, their success was a result of the ways they realized their agency as academics. However, a will to succeed was not enough: the university had to be prepared to create the structures to guide and support international faculty members in their journey. Despite the fact that their internationalization agenda has become increasingly imperative, striving universities are not always prepared to deal with management, human resource and personnel issues or meet the teaching and research expectations of international faculty members.

Conclusion

The international faculty members in this study made deliberate decisions about their careers and personal lives in order to become successful academics at a striving university. After listening to their stories, no one could doubt that these faculty members are exemplary global academics. They had many opportunities and offers and they made strategic decisions that brought them closer to their academic aspirations. All of the international faculty we interviewed were determined to be successful academics prior to joining the university. They brought their own academic capital (especially built around research) but were also prepared to adapt, negotiate, and learn the new rules associated with working at a striving university in the United States. Because they knew the rules about research (which follows 'global' codes), re-learning some rules about conducting competitive research in their new environment was not that difficult. Teaching was a different matter: these faculty members had to invest effort and energy into adapting their teaching codes or scripts to local needs, developing 'culturally sensitive teaching skills' (Pherali, 2012, p. 329). Therefore, teaching required extra effort for these academics.

All the faculty members in this study had academic experience in the United States, as well as in their home country (only one participant completed their graduate studies outside the United States), which contributed to their abilities to successfully adapt to the new institutional environment. Additionally, all participants came from universities that were much more prestigious than the current one so their academic productivity 'standards' and teaching expectations were consistent with their own narratives and higher than those at the host institution. These factors, coupled with the academics' own sense of agency, provided a unique scenario for these academics. We argue that when successful international faculty members move and choose to live in another country and work in a striving university, their personal, family, academic, and financial investment is extremely high. These academics not only find ways to adapt quickly to ensure a stable academic position (tenure); they also extended the institutional boundaries of an aspirational university that still had to develop structures (at different levels) to support these academics.

In short, our participants are strategic and flexible international academics that are constantly negotiating their identities to obtain the best opportunities for themselves, their families, and their academic careers within an institution in the process of becoming more international. These capacities are ready to be re-shaped in a new academic context. The identity they built during their years as successful local academics in particular countries was challenged to morph into the identity of a successful academic at a striving university.

These faculty members have been successful thanks to a combination of personal and academic agencies that they had already learned in the past. At the same time, some components situated in the present call for action by the institution to welcome these academics. The striving university where these faculty members worked was willing to accommodate and support their international academics by putting certain academic and administrative procedures in place to help them settle down. Both social and academic support (especially from colleagues and mentors) were described as key factors in a smoother transition to the university environment. Supportive institutional structures were, therefore, crucial to helping faculty members adapt, although in some cases, basic work conditions (such as visa status) and teaching and research expectations were not fully met. Accordingly, the burden of adjustment was placed upon individual faculty members. This poses challenges for striving universities around the globe that are working to become more international even though they are currently not prepared for internationalization.

According to the experiences examined here, both academic agency and academic capital are necessary conditions to succeed as an international academic at a striving university. At the same time, the space and support that universities and, particularly, departments can provide for faculty members are relevant as well. In developing strategic responses to succeed in academia, it turns out that both international faculty members and their striving university are effectively pursuing their objectives.

Recommendations and Future Research

Until recently, there has been little evidence that universities have considered the experience of international faculty members. As Kim, Wolf-Wendel, and Twombly (2011) pointed out, international faculty members usually obtain attention because they are viewed as problems, specifically due to language barriers or teaching skills. However, with more countries (such as China, Russia, or India) competing in the global university rankings based on international

indicators, universities located in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia cannot take their positions for granted.

Universities interested in hiring international faculty members could consider providing incoming faculty members with more explicit information about the student culture as well as teaching expectations. The interviewees also suggested that the university offer courses on cultural awareness to assist students both in and out of the classroom. This might also apply to other, non-striving universities. Institutions might also consider arranging a special orientation program for new international academics.

Some of the difficulties that participants encountered were related to their visa status. It is surprising that this kind of support is quite established in U.S. universities at the undergraduate level, but it seems that it is not that well developed for faculty members. There is still a substantial portion of the immigration process that falls onto international faculty members' shoulders, producing extra pressure, especially for faculty members during their tenure-track period. Cultural adaptation support is also needed and might include discussions of the current context, especially in environments that are predominately culturally homogeneous.

Future research might continue to explore other institutional contexts as well as the experiences of international faculty members in different countries and institutions. In this regard, qualitative studies might help us better understand these experiences and create new formulas to support international academic staff. Another important aspect to be considered in future research –which has been underexplored – are gender differences in the international faculty experience. In addition, the disciplinary dimension in connection with the internationalization process and research productivity in the university need further exploration. In this study, most of the participants were specialized in the hard sciences, where research productivity tends to be higher than in the soft sciences.

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Author Notes

Daniela Véliz
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile
dvelizc@uc.cl

Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela
Universidad de Tarapacá
cguzmanv@academicos.uta.cl

Astrid Pickenpack
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile
aspickenpack@uc.cl

Arizona State University

Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College