

Enhancing the Well-being of Racialized International Graduate Students  
in a Canadian Post-Secondary Institution

by

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B.Sc. (Hons), Saint Mary's University, 2022  
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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory  
the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships  
with the land continue to this day.

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## Abstract

Racialized international graduate students, a rapidly growing population within Canadian post-secondary institutions, face systemic institutional barriers to their well-being. Despite the significant role that post-secondary institutions can play in promoting international student well-being, the Canadian educational context lacks standardized best practices that direct the quality of care provided to international students. Through a qualitative case study research approach situated within critical race and decolonial paradigms, this study sought to understand how racialized international graduate students understand well-being, and how their well-being is promoted or hindered within the academic and socio-political conditions of the university. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of 22 racialized international graduate students from 16 countries and five continents, studying in 17 programs at the University of Victoria. From a thematic analysis of the interviews, four major themes emerged that reflect different aspects of well-being: *Political-Economic Determinants*; *Academic Institutional Conditions*; *Socio-Cultural Influences*; and *Personal Wellness*. This research scrutinizes various institutional policies, practices, and actors that play a role in shaping racialized international student well-being, which led to the development of recommendations for institutional-level modifications to enhance the well-being of racialized international graduate students, targeting four key areas: *Affordability and Access to Education*; *Improving Academic and Work Dynamics*; *Meaningful Inclusion in the Campus Community*; and *Enhancing Student Services Provision*. The findings also uncovered the formal and informal strategies that participants practice to enhance their well-being. While the participants faced challenges in their journey as an international graduate student, they generally felt positively about their experience as it strengthened them and allowed for transformational personal and professional growth.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This thesis describes research undertaken to better understand and promote the well-being of racialized international graduate students at a post-secondary institution in Canada. The introductory chapter includes an overview of international students in Canada, and unique considerations impacting their well-being. This thesis utilizes critical race and decolonial frameworks that critique the common discourses of internationalization and multiculturalism while centring the experiences and agency of international students. Performed as a qualitative case study, the research questions and objectives are described. The significance of this research is established through the development of recommendations for promoting international student well-being at the institutional-level. Finally, the remaining thesis chapters are outlined.

### **1.1 International Graduate Students in Canada**

International students make large economic and social contributions to Canada and have been referred to as ‘ideal immigrants’ for their skill-based contributions to Canada’s workforce (Global Affairs Canada, 2019; International Education, 2019; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Labour and student-related fees totaled a \$21.6 billion contribution to the Canadian economy in 2018, including supporting almost 170,000 jobs (International Education, 2019). Since then, there has continued to be a rapid rise in the population of international students enrolled in Canadian universities, which grew by 156.1% from 2016 to 2022, comprising 18.2% of the national total student body as of 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2024). There were 72,675 graduate students enrolled in Canada in 2021/2022, comprising 25% of the national graduate student body (Statistics Canada, 2024).

“International students” are an inherently diverse group, yet they are frequently treated homogenously by institutions, and even on occasion within the literature (Jones, 2017; Tran & Hoang, 2024). Assignment as an international student is often based on the use of national citizenship as a proxy for cultural difference that creates an essentialized binary between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ (Bennett et al., 2024; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021). There are various limited conceptualizations and definitions of ‘international student’ that need to and have been problematized further to increase critical research practices within this subfield (e.g. Bennett et al., 2024; Jones, 2017; Ploner, 2024; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2023). For the purposes of this research, an international student is defined as a person who does not hold Canadian citizenship and spent their developmental years outside of Canada, migrating as an adult to attend a designated post-secondary learning institute in Canada.

Distinctions between domestic and international students occur at various macro (nation and province), meso (post-secondary institutions), and micro (social interactions) scales (Aarnikoivu, 2020; Calder et al., 2016; Khoo, 2011; Lee et al., 2004; Mori, 2000). These distinctions can be seen through the regulation, control, and exclusion of international students’ bodies that reflects the hegemonic power of national belonging (Aarnikoivu, 2020; Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007; Walia, 2013). The presence of these adverse conditions has significant influence over the experiences of international students, with consequences to their well-being.

### **1.1.1 International Student Well-being**

I chose to use the term ‘well-being’ to better capture the complex factors that influence health and distinguish from a biomedical-based approach. Well-being is defined by the World Health Organization (2021) as “a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, [well-being] is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and

environmental conditions” (p.10). The external conditions influencing well-being that an individual experiences throughout their lifetime are shaped by structures of power that operate on both a personal and societal scale (e.g. Marya & Patel, 2021; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). Within the context of a white settler nation like Canada, institutions such as post-secondary education are a part of the systems of white supremacy (e.g. Caxaj et al., 2021; Halpern et al., 2020; Koo et al, 2021), settler-colonialism (e.g. Gomez, 2021; Snelgrove et al., 2014), and capitalism (e.g. Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Xu, 2022). People will continue to feel irreparable institutional harm until these systems are dismantled.

In the transition to becoming an international student in North America or other white settler societies, there is an additional transformation for racialized (non-white) people into a minority racial identity that essentializes cultural distinctions based on ethnic or national origin (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017; Halpern et al, 2022; Yi, 2020). The construction of race is a social reality rather than biological fact and arose from the control of economy as a manner in which a controlling body could produce cheap goods by extracting labour from racialized bodies (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000). Racial hierarchies have remained deeply entrenched as a tactic to divide, conquer, and dehumanise and subjugate native bodies (e.g. Bardhan & Zhang, 2014; Grosfoguel, 2016; Razack, 2002).

Race is a dominant marker of foreignness, both within academia and the nation, that has harmful implications for physical and mental health as racialized bodies are not always seen as being deserving of the same quality and standard of care (Marya & Patel, 2021; Thobani, 2007; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). The production of systemic racial violence persists through the academy through various hierarchical means of asserting dominance over ‘Others’ that is contrasted by the privileges afforded to (white) citizens who are entitled to academic spaces

(Bazinet, 2018; Bunjun, 2021; Gottesman, 2016; Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2021). Lacking permanent status, international students are subject to the same forms of discrimination as other racialized students with fewer avenues for advocacy (Brown & Jones, 2013; Marinenko, 2021; Yi, 2020). Despite ongoing efforts to recruit international students in Canada, significantly less consideration is given to their actual experiences as an international student, and the implications for their well-being.

It is known that racialized international students arriving to post-secondary institutions in Canada generally lack federal, provincial, and institutional policies to support their financial, mental, and physical well-being (Bunjun, 2021; Calder et al., 2016; Page & Chahboun, 2019; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Within the academy, racialized international students' well-being is continually impacted by multicultural discourses that promote the presence of diversity while simultaneously enacting performative equity initiatives that maintain, rather than dismantle, barriers to promoting international student well-being (Ahmed, 2006; Linley, 2018; Ramia et al., 2013).

Acknowledging the colonial foundations of not only higher education, but also federal immigration policies and social attitudes towards international students deepens our understanding of how contemporary higher education institutional policies and well-being interventions are shaped (Caxaj et al., 2021; Halpern et al., 2020; Koo et al, 2021; Walia, 2013). There has been insufficient engagement with international students to gain insight on how post-secondary institutions can better promote international student well-being (Ankomah, 2022; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021; Page & Chahboun, 2019; Ramia et al., 2013; Seithers et al., 2022).

### **1.1.2 Case Study of International Student Experiences and Well-being at the University of Victoria**

The well-being of racialized international graduate students will be examined through a case study set in a mid-sized western Canadian university. Situated in the island capital of the province of British Columbia, the University of Victoria (UVic) is highly ranked within North America for international research collaboration, and hosts students from 118 countries (UVic, 2024). In 2021, international students comprised 12.5% of the total student body, with 30% studying at the graduate level (UVic, 2024). Graduate students are offered 47 programs in ten faculties, offering opportunities in a strong and innovative research culture (UVic, 2024).

Chapter 2 consists of further analysis of the context of higher education in Canada along with a document analysis of UVic policies to further contextualize how racialized international students are constructed as educational consumers by the institution without specific considerations for the overlapping structural and systemic barriers that distinguish both their experiences as unique from domestic students, and the impacts on their well-being. I seek to challenge those hegemonic institutional norms of coloniality and racelessness through this research to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways racialized international graduate students experience the matrix of power.

## **1.2 Research Frameworks**

This research is positioned within critical race and decolonial frameworks to critically reflect the structural conditions and lived experiences of racialized international graduate students in a Canadian post-secondary institution (see 4.2). I have chosen to use a critical race framework as racial oppression through colonialist and imperialist hierarchies shape racialized

international students' lived experiences at macro, meso, and micro scales (e.g. Bunjun, 2021; Gusa, 2010; Linley, 2018). The academy has long functioned as a “bastion of racism and White supremacy” (Patton, 2016, p.315), resulting in the absence of the consideration of race/racism as a factor affecting a student's positive educational outcomes (e.g. Caxaj et al., 2021; Harper, 2012; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021). A critical race approach builds on the social constructivism view that social phenomena are made of complex individual subjectivities that construct reality (Catungal & Dowling, 2021; Creswell, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Uses of this framework allows the research to undertake analysis with an understanding of interacting complex social positions that are influenced by broader macro and meso forces shaped by colonization.

I am also using a decolonial framework to critique structures of power that were implemented under colonialism and remain facets of our everyday lives within the white settler nation of Canada. Referred to by Quijano (2000) as a matrix of power, coloniality operates as a form of control across four interrelated domains: economy; authority; gender and sexuality; and subjectivity and knowledge. Through educational ideals, colonialism attempts to impose a ‘universal’ model of modernity that elevates and naturalizes whiteness (Bhambra, 2014; Shahjahan and Edwards, 2021; Stein et al., 2019). Historic global patterns of international student migration from the Global South to the Global North, and particularly English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US demonstrate how the pursuit of white hegemony is connected to the material world (Harrison, 2015; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). The common use of a deficit-based approach in relation to international students highlights how the construction of a ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ is a persistent colonial ideology that needs to be challenged throughout all stages of the research process (Heng, 2018; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021).

### 1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

This research will follow a qualitative case study research approach aimed at establishing what well-being means to racialized international graduate students at the University of Victoria and to identify the systemic institutional barriers to well-being, as well as factors positively influencing well-being. Post-secondary institutions have a vital role to play in promoting international student well-being, yet there are no standardized best practices that have been applied in the Canadian education context.

Post-secondary institutions have a vital role to play in promoting international student well-being, yet little is understood about how international graduate students perceive the structural conditions of the university, and the implications for well-being. University policies and administrative decision-making practices shape the day-to-day experiences for international students (Ahmed, 2006; Bunjun, 2021; Calder et al., 2016; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Centering international student perspectives on well-being and the multitude of factors that influence well-being is crucial to reframing the top-down approach that allows international students to be perceived in an infantilizing manner by administrators, faculty, and domestic students (Bunjun, 2021; Page & Chahboun, 2019). The knowledge generated from this research was used as a platform for participants to produce recommendations for the University of Victoria specifically, and post-secondary institutions generally, on how to better promote the well-being of racialized international graduate students. The research questions are:

- (1) What does “well-being” mean to racialized international graduate students?
- (2) How do the academic and socio-political conditions of the university help or hinder well-being?

(3) What institutional-level changes can be made to promote well-being for racialized international graduate students?

I am relying on a qualitative approach for this research as the research questions seek a greater understanding of the subjective perspectives of racialized international graduate students. The term ‘experience’ will frequently be used to discuss the interactions between international students and their environment, which are actively shaped by the practices of international students themselves (Deuchar, 2022). These ‘experiences’, that reflect both individual and collective action, lend themselves to a qualitative approach as knowledge of international student motivations, skills, and contributions are unpacked through reflective discussion and thematic analysis. The discussion addresses the complex social environment that influences racialized international graduate students’ experiences of well-being, as well as their agency and participation within the institution (Deuchar, 2022; Jones, 2017; Kaya, 2020; Patton, 2016).

This research uses first-person accounts and storytelling methods that are used in a critical race framework to work towards “psychic preservation” of marginalized groups while challenging the dominant stories that construct reality in favour of the privileged (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995, p. 52, 57-8). My research hopes to amplify the marginalized voices of racialized international graduate students through qualitative methods to seek a better learning and living environment at the institutional-level.

## **1.4 Research Significance**

This research contributes to the literature on international student well-being through a case study of racialized international graduate students at a mid-sized, research-intensive Western Canadian university. Since the on-set of the COVID-19 pandemic, international

students have gained a place in the Canadian public consciousness through news stories of their exploitation (e.g. Aulakh & Kelley, 2023; Das Gupta & Su, 2023), deaths of despair (e.g. PressProgress Sources, 2023; Sasitharan, 2023), and housing challenges (e.g. Balintec, 2023; Lone, 2024; Rana, 2023). The national discourse has been more focused on potential economic and labour contributions of international students rather than the quality of their experiences within post-secondary institutions (e.g. Choi et al., 2021; Crossman et al., 2022; International Education, 2019). At the post-secondary institutional level, there is a range of strengths and weaknesses when it comes to providing support for international students, leaving space for research-based interventions to further enhance how institutional services can better address the needs of international students (Bunjun, 2021; Ramia et al., 2013).

While similarities can be drawn between English-language higher education institutions within European or white settler nations as upholders of Eurocentric colonial epistemologies (e.g. Andreotti et al., 2010; Stein et al., 2019), the unique socio-political circumstances that motivate racialized international graduate students to study in Canada and campus culture that grows under a multicultural discourse deserve greater attention. These contextual differences alongside the drastic increase in international student recruitment in Canada warrants a participant-centred examination of the experiences of racialized international graduate students (Page & Chahboun, 2019; Stein, 2018).

While the findings of this research are dedicated to improving the experiences of racialized international graduate students at a particular educational institution, lessons learned should have relevance for the well-being of other groups of international or racialized students at other post-secondary institutions across Canada.

## 1.5 Thesis Outline

Following the introduction, this thesis contains five additional chapters. Chapter two expands upon the context of higher education in Canada in which international students are present, through the colonial founding of so-called Canada, racial construction of international students' bodies, and the ongoing federal commitment to internationalization as an economic and educational strategy. A document analysis of the strategies and policies of UVic relevant to international students and student well-being was also completed. Chapter three is a literature review that outlines various facets of internationalization, coloniality in academia, and the impacts of transitions and stressors on racialized international graduate student well-being. In chapter four, the research design is outlined, including the researcher's positionality statement, rationale for a case study methodology, a description of the methods used, the process of data collection, and the analysis techniques employed. Chapter five presents the thematic findings of this research exploring how forces at macro, meso, and micro levels influence well-being. Finally, chapter six concludes the thesis with a high-level summary of the research findings in the form of recommendations for academic institutions to better support international graduate student well-being. Concluding thoughts on the outcomes of this research, benefits for the participants, and potential avenues for future research are also shared.

## **Chapter 2: Context at the University of Victoria**

Chapter two expands upon the context of higher education in Canada in which international students are present. The discussion traverses through the colonial founding of so-called Canada, colonial control of knowledge and power and the economy, and the ongoing federal commitment to internationalization as an economic and educational strategy. The importance of international students to academic institutions is highlighted. An analysis of the governance documents of the University of Victoria (UVic) was also completed to expose the institutional context in which this case study was set.

### **2.1 International Students in Higher Education in Canada**

Mythologies of the colonial settlement of Canada creates a civilizing racial discourse that marks the white body as a natural citizen (Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007; Stein, 2018). The legitimacy of the white settler state is dependent upon the construction of a racial hierarchy that is used to maintain white socio-cultural, political, and economic dominance (Gusa, 2010; Razack, 2002). Racial hierarchies have constructed non-whites as sub-human through a dynamic process, which was used as justification for their exploitation, enslavement, and genocide in domestic and foreign lands (Omi & Winant, 1994; Roithmayr, 1999; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). The concept of national belonging is thus linked to hegemonic norms of shared racial identity, with white people positioned as true nationals that are granted the sole power to determine citizenship, and by extension entitlement to exist within national and institutional discourse (Razack, 2002; Shahjahan and Edwards, 2021; Thobani, 2007; Tuck and Yang, 2012).

The discourse around international students attending post-secondary institutions in Canada has changed over the years in response to political and economic needs. From 1945 to

1969, international students in Canada were seen as an opportunity to build favourable international relationships, primarily with European countries (McCartney, 2016). Post-1969, policy changes opened up Canada's immigration pathways to the citizens of the Global South, allowing non-European people greater access to education and settlement opportunities (Abu-Laban, 2024; McCartney, 2021). Around this time, there was a shift as international students began to be viewed as "politically and economically dangerous" and "a threat to the stability of Canadian culture" as Canada's policy priorities were shaped by the Cold War (McCartney, 2016, p.1). Shifting to formal race-neutral immigration policies has left a political legacy of legitimizing 'skilled labour migration' that perpetuates systems of social differentiation through a deficit-lens excepted with 'essential' contributions to Canada's neoliberal agenda (Abu-Laban, 2024; Ellis, 2023).

The introduction of differential tuition fees for international students occurred in the 1970's, which was influenced by the construction of international students as wealthy foreigners, who were permanent 'migrants' outside bounds of national care (McCartney, 2021; Ramia et al., 2013). The question of citizenship was influential in the types of protection students could receive, which was criticized as 'discriminatory', but cuts in provincial post-secondary budgets allowed this issue to quickly disappear from public and institutional concern (McCartney, 2021; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). The rapid growth in the international student population across Canada was an economic boon for Canadian post-secondary institutions that led to increased efforts on the recruitment of international students (Kim & Kwak, 2019; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018).

There were also socio-cultural and political motivators as the presence of international students was viewed as helping graduates develop intercultural competency skills to prepare them as global citizens (Guo & Guo, 2017; Larsen, 2015). Education became seen as a valuable

Canadian export, as exemplified by statements from EduCanada (2023, n.p.) such as “When you study in Canada, you invest in your future” and “Get a long-term return on your investment”.

This business-centric approach directs institutional priorities towards enticing international students as largely a key consumer market who serve nation-building interests (Brunner, 2017; McCartney, 2021; Stein, 2018; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). Strategies to differentiate Canada from other Anglophone destinations include the nationalist promotion of Canadian exceptionalism that depicts Canada as accepting, benevolent, and globally distinguished, and thus desirable to international students (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Stein, 2018).

Contemporary Canadian policy continues to pursue attempts to recruit international students to fill labour market gaps alongside increased efforts to attract foreign skilled labourers in a global competition to build a middle-class workforce (Abu-Laban, 2024; Ellis, 2023; Kim & Kwak, 2019; McCartney, 2021). As migrants, international students become a commodity that is exploitable in service of national interests, particularly economic interests (McCartney, 2021; Ramie et al., 2013; Tikly, 2004). For example, Canada’s *International Education Strategy (2019-2024)* prioritizes diversifying the recruitment of international students to Canada’s post-secondary sector to ensure long-term financial stability (International Education, 2019). This leads to a paternalistic and dehumanizing characterization of international students depicting them as economic tools. Parliamentary and institutional decisions around international students operate under this agenda, driving policies that are authoritatively assumed to be representative of international students’ goals (Kim & Kwak, 2019; McCartney, 2016).

As discussed by Thobani (2007), the possibility of developing an ethical relationship between white national citizens, ‘Other’ citizens of colour, and other ‘Others’ cannot exclude the impact of ongoing colonial settlement on Indigenous nations. Newer racialized migrants are also

participating in dispossession Indigeneity in benefiting from the established colonial state but come with their own histories of colonization that are sustaining global inequalities that lead them to seek resources that have been concentrated in metropolises and white settler nations (Andreotti et al., 2010; Chen, 2021; Sehdev, 2011). Racial minorities then also contribute to protecting Canadian identity through assimilation tactics that mold them within pre-defined boundaries of validity (Andreotti, 2011; Thobani, 2007). Establishing relationships of reciprocity among migrants and Indigenous peoples is discouraged by a nation that has whitewashed and sanitized history to make it compatible with contemporary white privileges, while Indigenous, racialized, and international students encounter frequent stigma and marginalization (Bazinet, 2018; Brown and Jones, 2013; Caxaj et al., 2021; Thobani, 2022). While this is not the focus of this thesis, it is pertinent to understanding how academic institutions operate as a colonial power in service of nation-building efforts.

### **2.1.1 Importance of International Students**

International students are often valued in national discourse due to large economic contributions through their differentially increased tuition fees, labour, and expenses living in Canada (Choy & Alon, 2019; Global Affairs Canada, 2019; Vakkai et al., 2020). Attracting high-quality students need not be limited to geographic region as schools competitively attract skilled and knowledgeable students that strengthen research and innovation (Koo et al., 2021b). Faculty that incorporated international graduate students into their research teams found that international students helped bring diverse cultural perspectives that enhanced the learning experience of domestic students (Trice, 2003). International students bring value to educational institutions through active social contributions within classroom environments and other formal and informal spaces (Bunjun, 2021; Deuchar, 2022). Increasing visible forms of diversity within

educational institutions is seen to naturally lend to improving intercultural competencies of all institutional actors and enrichment of campus culture (Koo et al., 2021b; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). Additionally, building international partnerships can enhance institutional reputation as internationalization is a prominent institutional strategy for growing global competitiveness (Hauptman Komotor, 2020; Soysal et al., 2024).

## **2.2 Policies and Practices at the University of Victoria**

The University of Victoria (UVic) is a mid-size, research-intensive university located in Western Canada. The university was awarded degree-granting status in 1963. Rapidly growing to a top-ranking research university, UVic has received global recognition for international research collaboration, preparing career-ready students, and promoting Indigenous visibility (Maclean's, 2023). UVic attracted 2,459 graduate students in 2021 to study in 47 programs with around 27% of the graduate student population being international (Times Higher Education, 2024; UVic, 2023). UVic has publicly released documents of various organizational strategies and plans available on their website ([www.uvic.ca/](http://www.uvic.ca/)). Through a critical race and decolonial analysis of current institutional plans and strategies I have identified three core areas relevant to understanding the institutional conditions, attitudes, and practices influencing racialized international graduate student well-being: internationalization; equity, diversity, and inclusion; and student well-being.

### **2.2.1 Internationalization**

The Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) defines internationalization as “the process of integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions and perspectives

into the purpose, functions and delivery of education” (CBIE, 2024, n.p.). UVic’s *International Plan: Making a World of Difference 2017-2022* (2017) outlines similar priorities including expanding social and economic opportunities, increasing cultural competencies of all institutional members, and institutional financial stability. International engagement has been characterized by UVic as the exchange of technologies, economic partnerships, and global human mobility, with special attention being given to purposefully recruit researchers, including graduate students (UVic, 2017; UVic 2018). Efforts to develop greater intercultural competency are supported by the institution through resources and tools to promote global citizenship among faculty, staff, and students who are engaged in an increasingly multicultural environment (UVic, 2017). Global engagement, global partnerships, and international research are the key policy concerns highlighted on the UVic website, taking precedent over ‘international’ aspects that include supporting international students (UVic, 2024).

Pervasively embedded within all aspects of the institution, internationalization can perpetuate the legacies of settler colonialism and racialized hierarchies in Canada (Guo & Guo, 2017; Stein, 2018; Stein et al., 2016). The repetition of economic priorities, including a market-based approach to the recruitment of international students, indicates that the use of an internationalization framework by the university is primarily driven by neoliberal ideals of expanding euro western enlightenment and uniting the world in a global economy (Andreotti, 2011; de Wit & Altbach, 2021; UVic, 2017).

Notions of global citizenship, repeatedly drawn upon to espouse the benefits of learning cross-cultural competency as an enhancement to the student experience, normalizes ideals of hegemonic white supremacy as universal (Andreotti, 2011; Larsen, 2015; Wright, 2011). Efforts for global engagement, including an institutional commitment to eliminate global inequalities,

positions the university as ‘benevolent’ and ‘good’ while neglecting to address how power hierarchies and marginalization occur in the local context (Heron, 2007; Roshanravan, 2012; Shultz, 2007). Internationalization is associated with good quality in education but needs to be problematized as a projection of colonialism and continuation of epistemic violence (Andreotti, 2011; Yemini & Sagie, 2016). Critiques of internationalization are further discussed in the literature review (see 3.1).

### **2.2.2 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is a framework used by many institutions to address systemic inequalities through transformative institutional change. UVic’s Equity Action Plan (2022) was created to reach five goals: *Equity-Centred Culture; Relationality & Belonging; Recruitment & Retention; Access & Support; and Institutional Accountability*. These initiatives are embedded throughout various sectors of the institution and include targeted supports for different equity-seeking groups. Other relevant policies include UVic’s *Indigenous Plan 2017-2022* (2017b) and the *Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education* (2021).

Institutional-level EDI directives indicate an awareness of the barriers of access and retention for particular groups of racialized peoples within Canadian post-secondary institutions (UVic, 2022). UVic engages in decolonization and Indigenization work, which includes efforts to overcoming epistemic hierarchies that centre hegemonic euro western knowledge by addressing gaps in the curriculum to disrupt the perpetration of colonial systems (Bazinet, 2018; Kamola, 2014; Pardy & Pardy, 2020; UVic, 2017b). In 2021, UVic made a commitment to the Scarborough Charter, which aims to address anti-Black racism within post-secondary institutions (UVic, 2021). There is also increased attention being given to the experiences of graduate

students, as the university acknowledges that they have different needs from the undergraduate population who are traditionally the main demographic of institutional services (UVic, 2019; UVic, 2022). At the same time, equity-centred frameworks lack specific mentions of international students, who may also be a part of any equity-seeking groups or face intersecting forms of marginalization including on the basis of race, gender, class, dis/ability, queerness, status and more (Ploner, 2013; UVic, 2022; Walia, 2013). Educational institutes have a role to play in redressing inequalities and racism, yet institutional policies can also be viewed as a form of crisis management as academia has long been a site that sustained racial injustice and colonial hierarchies (Patton, 2016; Thobani, 2022).

Discussions around race, besides Indigeneity, have been noticeably absent at the University of Victoria when discussing internationalization, international students, and the *Equity Action Plan*. This forces the institutional environment into a state of racelessness wherein race, and its implications, are invisibilized despite ongoing efforts to diversify the student body, including with increased international student enrollment (Patton, 2016; Stein and Andreotti, 2018; University of Victoria, 2017; 2023). The unequal global material distribution of resources and trivialized demonstration of cultural and racial inclusion allows inequality such as through limited supports (or at least limited access to said supports) for well-being to persist despite a growing presence of racialized and/or international students (e.g. Brayboy et al., 2007; Brodin, 2014; Patel, 2012).

Incorporating racialized bodies into organizational spaces fosters an image of inclusivity that exceeds the boundaries of race and nationhood, yet it ignores racial histories and politics in favour of a broad rhetoric of ‘diversity’ (Bunjun, 2021; Hutcheson, 2024; Jefferess, 2012; Marya & Patel, 2021). While the *Equity Action Plan* has strengths in addressing other forms of inequity,

these policies demonstrate how institutional priorities are set in a hierarchical manner sustaining dominant discourses of colour blindness (Ahmed, 2006; Henry & Tator, 2009). The liberal assumption that all forms of difference are equal abstracts and naturalizes the hegemony of white supremacy, failing to interrogate how power and privilege are sustained by the very institutional structures (Banning, 1999; Harper, 2012; Linley, 2018; Patton, 2016). Frequently, the brunt of grassroots equity work is left to Indigenous and racialized faculty and staff, labour that remains marginalized and devalued (Ahmed, 2012; Bunjun, 2021; Stein & Andreotti, 2018). Social justice acts can remain complicit with settler colonialism when they are packaged into officially sanctioned equity and diversity portfolios, all the while neglecting and/or regulating the everyday and radical practices of oppression resistance contesting the dehumanization that is produced by the institution (Bazinet, 2018; Thobani, 2022).

### **2.2.3 Student Well-being**

Included within the *Strategic Framework (2018-2023)* is UVic's commitment to "creating a strong, healthy future for our students and for our local and global communities" (2018, p. 1). Facilitating conditions for individual and collective well-being to promote student success is an intention embedded at the highest levels of institutional policy (UVic, 2019). Interestingly, UVic is not a signatory of the Okanagan Charter (2015), which understand health promotion as a core mandate of higher education. UVic aims to foster student success through wrap-around support, including financial assistance, hand-on learning experiences, graduate student housing, and relevant academic support (UVic, 2018). These services can provide access to higher education for diverse groups, however, there is a lack of direct reference to services addressing the complex and intersecting determinants of health, particularly those occurring at systemic and structural levels (e.g. Raphael et al., 2020; Marya & Patel, 2021).

Academic well-being is defined by Bunjun (2021) as the “capacity of academic institutions to carefully conceptualize and implement with relevance the policies, pedagogies, curricula, and services that promote the mental, physical, and intellectual wellness of students” (p. 3). Using this definition, all aspects of the university can be reconsidered and reoriented to better promote various facets of student well-being. However, these actions would be difficult given that universities are not neutral sites, rather acting as political entities to exemplify the ideal of Western civilization, continually reproducing colonial violence that harms the well-being of racialized peoples through racial exclusion and disenfranchisement from academia (e.g. Bunjun, 2021; Hage, 2000; McEwan, 2018; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021).

While there is the need to assess the ongoing accessibility and effectiveness of university services, this type of race-blind approach has limitations. By solely focusing on making the same types of supports available to all students, institutional actions neglect to meaningfully address how hegemonic colonial power creates barriers for differently positioned students. I would also like to recognize the agency of international and other students who engage in practices of well-being that fall outside of institutional capacities and are therefore not reflected within official governance documents (Deuchar, 2022; Hayes, 2019; Tran & Hoang, 2024).

## **2.3 Summary**

In the University of Victoria’s (UVic) policy and advocacy frameworks there is scant direct mention of international students, which creates the assumption that international students do not have distinctive needs from domestic students despite evidence in the literature that international students face unique and/or additional stressors to their domestic peers (e.g. Can et al., 2021; Clarke, 2023; Vakkai et al., 2020). All students can exhibit high levels of diversity that

may require an adjustment to institutional services to deliver appropriate care on the basis of gender, dis/ability, race, and language to name a few, however, racialized international students have to navigate being cast as the ‘Other’ compared to the euro western educated elite (Bennett et al., 2024; Calder et al., 2016; Hutcheson, 2024; Ploner, 2024; Starr-Glass, 2018).

Acknowledging the colonial foundations of not only higher education, but also immigration policies deepen the understanding of how higher education institutional policies and well-being interventions are shaped (Caxaj et al., 2021; Halpern et al., 2020; Koo et al, 2021; Walia, 2013). As with many post-secondary institutions, UVic has a hierarchical organizational structure that operates to structure institutional priorities through top-down initiatives that can perform intentions of inclusivity without undergoing transformative structural change (Ahmed, 2006; Linley, 2018; Jones, 2017; Ramia et al., 2013). This document analysis reveals gaps in the policies and practices of UVic in relation to the well-being of racialized international graduate students, making this research valuable to uncover and provide recommendations for institutional-level modifications.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

This literature review provides a foundation for discussions around international students' well-being by considering various macro, meso, and micro level factors that shape how well-being is experienced. The chapter starts by looking at internationalization, which shapes the broader socioeconomic and political relationships present in governance policies in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Further understanding the legacy of colonialism in the policies and practices of academia in Canada gives an overview of how multi-layer factors play a role in the experiences of international students. Lastly, the literature is explored to better understand the experiences of well-being of both international graduate and racialized students to identify key barriers and necessary supports for enhancing well-being.

### **3.1 Internationalization**

The classic definition of internationalization comes from Knight (2004) as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education” (p.2). The process of internationalization occurs within and is reflective of broader patterns of globalization and neoliberalism and has gained prominence within higher education discourses (e.g. de Wit, 2024; de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Yemini & Sagie, 2016). There are a variety of institutional approaches to internationalization that are evident through distinct approaches to research, teaching, and service delivery that have allowed internationalization to develop into a complex phenomenon (e.g. Hudzik, 2015; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022). I engage with internationalization from a decolonial framework that critiques the colonial foundations of internationalization that unevenly value Eurocentric

knowledge and practices within higher education (e.g. Majee & Ress, 2020; Papoutsaki & Rooney, 2006; Stein, 2017).

The majority of research about internationalization is produced from the Global North, former colonial seats of power, in a unidirectional flow of knowledge from the Western world (Blanco Ramírez, 2014; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022). Discourses of international development produced by the Global North rely upon a common binary trope of an ‘Other’ that is pitiful and unfortunate, and therefore in need of ‘help’ from the modern/developed euro western world that is represented by the ambivalent and contradictory discourses of the national ‘Self’ (Aman, 2015; Jefferess, 2012; Khoo, 2011). This results in normative assimilatory expectations of global ‘Others’ driving a deficit-based narrative about the Global South, and international students in particular, whose migration is a driving force in internationalization (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). Grappling with power and privilege in internationalization needs to be explicit to avoid reproducing the same colonial narratives imbued with paternalistic dynamics (Mwangi et al., 2018; Udah, 2021).

### **3.1.1 Global Citizenship**

Global citizenship is a concept brought forth within internationalization strategies that continues the colonial construction of ‘Self’ (us) and ‘Other’ (them), to refer to the engagement of local citizens within non-Western nations (Andreotti, 2011; Khoo, 2011). The practice of global citizenship continues colonial frameworks of sameness and difference under a neoliberal ideology that elevates whiteness to a position of supremacy, without understanding the Global North/South divide as a continued construction of power relations (Andreotti, 2006; Dobson, 2005; Tikly, 2004). The common use of the pronoun ‘we’ in global citizenship discourse replicates the use of ‘us’ in colonial narratives, which acts to create distance by establishing

distinctive differences in duties and responsibilities on the basis of citizenship and national belonging (Jefferess, 2012; Khoo, 2011; Thobani, 2007). This confers an elite status to white people, constructing them as benevolent for engaging in a sanitized process of aid that produces actions with a myriad of unseen consequences within global socio-economic systems, rather than fostering international dependence that is continually amplified through transnational harm (Andreotti, 2011; Heron, 2007; Jefferess, 2012; Shahjahan & Edwards 2021).

For citizens of the Global North, engaging in global citizenship is an opportunity to recognize their status as elite holders of material privilege with a responsibility to share knowledge and technologies to alleviate 'Others' from poverty that is a threat to the current global economic system (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Mignolo, 2007; Tikly, 2004). The standard of material comfort being set by global citizenship pursuits "normalizes middle-class North American aspirations" (Jefferess, 2012, p. 23). Again, this furthers hegemonic euro western values through claims of universalism, which remain implicated in inequalities global citizenship claims to address (Pashby, 2011; Wright, 2011). Rather than feeling obligation towards rectifying the harm and disadvantages caused by the imposition of colonialist and capitalist systems, the desire to 'help' is determined by an obligation to share enlightened moral norms and values from western civilization in a manner that diminishes the agency of aid recipients (Andreotti, 2006; Dobson, 2006).

Activism on a global scale is marked by the motivation of asserting moral supremacy, which is fed by paternalistic expectations of gratitude and goodwill from 'Others' (Andreotti, 2006; McCartney, 2016). Those who perform these acts of benevolence through global organizational structures can obtain a social distinction for being morally good that is rooted in paternalistic notions of enlightened moral norms and globalizing power (Dobson, 2006; Heron,

2007; Jefferess, 2012). Without a critical lens, the economic and cultural roots of global inequality become normalized through a renewed “civilising mission” reminiscent of colonial times wherein euro western ideals are deemed universal and projected onto the rest of the world (Andreotti, 2006, p.41). The global citizenship narrative is continued in internationalization initiatives through the presumed natural transcendence of colonial knowledge and power across national borders.

### **3.1.2 Internationalizing Education**

Internationalization is a priority set by the federal government and post-secondary institutions to increase Canada’s competitiveness in a globalized world (International Education, 2019; McCartney, 2021; Stein et al., 2019). These efforts seek to achieve goals of increasing cultural competency and building international partnerships to combat declining state funding into higher education (International Education, 2019; Khoo, 2011; Sá and Sabzalieva, 2018). This has led to the treatment of Canadian education as an economic export that can be said to be aimed at bolstering the spread of Canadian ‘values’ and ‘attitudes’ (Andreotti et al., 2010; Jefferess, 2011; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021). Higher education in this context is used as a developmental tool to promote political and economic interests in benefit of imperial projects aimed at controlling the non-West through global development agendas (Stein et al., 2019; Tikly, 2004). The implications of internationalization are discussed within three key targets of internationalization: curricula; study abroad; and university rankings.

Internationalization initiatives have been focused on diversifying curricula to promote the dissemination of knowledge that frequently remains reflective of uncontested global social structures imbued with Eurocentrism (Aman, 2015; Stehr & Ufer, 2009). University life is shaped by material practices that socially reproduce a ‘global’ world view with tokenistic

inclusion of marginalized knowledges that is compatible with internationalization goals (Andreotti et al., 2015; Kamola, 2014). Curricula has traditionally attempted to convey ‘valid’ and ‘universal’ knowledge that subjugates ‘Other’ thinkers and forms of knowledge and can be used to integrate international students into their host environment (Owens & Boggs, 2016; Walsh, 2007). Utilizing other conceptual and theoretical frames to de-centre Western thinking must be inclusive of histories and praxis to avoid reproducing coloniality as reality (Stehr & Ufer, 2009; Quijano, 2000; Walsh, 2007). The pervasive and mundane manner in which modernity/coloniality has transformed from its roots in the sixteenth century is still a challenge for individuals and communities to reckon with how “decoloniality undoes, disobeys, and delinks from this matrix [of power]” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p.16).

Another facet of the internationalization of education is establishing study abroad initiatives that send domestic students across national borders to gain international experience for professional and intellectual benefit while exploring their identities as global citizens (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2019; Kishino & Takahashi, 2019; Larkin, 2018). Students can engage with study abroad practices as a ‘consumer’ who travels beyond the bounds of their home environment to explore the unknown (typically) non-Western world (Ficarra, 2017). Travel abroad frequently takes on an appropriative and extractive nature that reproduces colonial fantasies about hierarchical spatial imaginaries (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2019; Roshanravan, 2012; Zemach-Bersin, 2007).

Building upon the concept of global citizenship, study abroad reaffirms colonial hierarchies of knowledge and power that uses engagement in intercultural activities as a personal transformational experience that prepare students to work in a globalized world (Ficarra, 2017; Kishino & Takahashi, 2019; Larkin, 2018). Hegemonic knowledge practices are thus viewed as

limited by geographical location rather than epistemic dominance that omits non-Western forms of knowledge while treating engagement with cultural and racial ‘Others’ as an experience for self-improvement (Andreotti, 2016; Roshanravan, 2012; Thobani, 2007). There is the need for greater critical reflection and analysis on the glorification of academic tourism enabled by constructs of a ‘local’ and ‘global’ context that can be understood through superficial and temporary engagement (Andreotti, 2016; Larkin, 2018).

The perceived superiority of the education quality provided at Canadian post-secondary institutions is built through dominating Eurocentric epistemology and socially constructed rankings (Blanco Ramírez, 2014; Soysal et al., 2024). Conceived as a manner of scientifically evaluating performance, global university rankings use quantifiable metrics that are “proxies for quality” (Soysal et al., 2024, p. 253). Quality ideals and norms are produced and disseminated by the Global North, benefitting Western models of higher education (Estera & Shahjahan, 2016; Blanco Ramírez, 2014; Roithmayr, 1999). International aspects of an educational institution are incorporated into the growing metrification of higher education, increasing the commodification of intercultural competency and international bodies (Hauptman Komotar, 2020; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

Diversity is a prominent marketing strategy for post-secondary institutions to attract students as well as gain global prestige as an elite educational institute (Halpern et al., 2022; Harrison, 2015). Being highly ranked builds a university’s reputation over time, financially benefiting those institutions by increasing revenue from tuition fees and research grants (McCartney, 2021; Soysal et al., 2024; Waters, 2012). These ‘global’ rankings are not representative of the world yet contribute to the construction of Western education as having universal characteristics through epistemic oppression (Shahjahan et al., 2017).

### 3.1.3 Recruitment of International Students in Canada

International students, or foreign citizens on a student visa, are central actors in internationalization as education migrants (Brunner et al., 2023; Johnstone & Lee, 2014). The term ‘international students’ is frequently used as a homogenizing language to address a highly diverse population with subjective experiences, but nevertheless carries implications of an ‘Otherness’ that is culturally and academically lacking (Bista, 2018; Johnson et al., 2018; Jones, 2017; Sato et al., 2022; Yee & Smith, 2022). International student migration has historically been studied as global patterns of movement from the Global South to the Global North, and particularly towards Anglophone countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US (Harrison, 2015; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). This trend replicates the movement from colonies to metropole that establishes European and white-settler nations as the centre of knowledge production, demonstrating how the pursuit of white hegemony is connected to capitalism and mobility structures (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Stein & Andreotti, 2016; Quijano, 2000). While a growing number of international students are engaging in South-to-South migration, those migration experiences are less relevant to the motivations of international graduate students pursuing education at a Canadian post-secondary institute (Mittelmeier et al., 2024).

State actors, namely the federal and provincial governments are the primary policy agents regulating international student migration (see 2.1) (McCartney, 2021). The recruitment of international students aligns with national and institutional strategies for economic prosperity through growth of the labour force (International Education, 2019; McCartney, 2021; Page & Chahboun, 2019). The appeal of Canada as a ‘modern’ and ‘developed’ nation drives demand from international students, many who have come with their own histories of experiencing colonization and imperialism (Bunjun, 2021; Chen, 2021; Sehdev, 2011). Through educational

ideals, colonialism attempts to impose a ‘universal’ model of modernity that elevates and naturalizes whiteness through a global imaginary (Bhambra, 2014; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Stein et al., 2019). Through the process of colonialism, whiteness has been formulated as aspirational, driving the demand from international students from the Global South to pursue euro western education as a means for social and economic betterment (Kim, 2011; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Walia, 2013).

Education is marked as a space that reinforced social inequality along racial lines, reaffirming the intellectual traditions of the dominant euro western society while simultaneously ‘Othering’ racialized people (Ahmed, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Yao et al., 2019). Physical and psychological boundaries are asserted against racialized bodies, proclaiming whiteness as the dominating structure facilitating domination and oppression across social institutions (Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007; Walia, 2013). For racialized international students, the operationalization of the North/South dichotomy within internationalization efforts furthers the exclusion of international students in academia as they are positioned as colonial subjects that are intellectual inferiors to European enlightenment (e.g. Hayes, 2019; Khosravi, 2024; Moosavi, 2022; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). Through a systematic literature review on internationalization in higher education, Mittelmeier and Yang (2022) found that international students were frequently portrayed negatively through a cultural-deficit approach though there has been growing recognition of how systemic level factors create barriers that can hinder international students (e.g. Tran & Hoang, 2024; Udah, 2024).

There remains a clear distinction in the treatment between citizens and non-citizens, which positions international students, particularly those who are racialized, largely as consumers and commodities rather than holders of knowledge (e.g. Khosravi, 2024; Ramia et al.,

2013). Recruitment of international students from non-Western countries is presented as an opportunity to develop human and social capital while becoming more ‘Westernized’ as cultural ‘equals’ (Tikly, 2004, p.181). These complex conditions can certainly produce oppressive structures that are harmful for the well-being of racialized international students, yet international students hold agency to navigate their experiences, and power as knowledge creators and holders (Deuchar, 2022; Hayes, 2019; Tran & Hoang, 2024). There is still the need for research with international students that addresses assumptions about race, power, and other macro and meso factors that frame the dominant discourse around international students (Mittelmeier et al., 2024; Udah, 2024).

### **3.2 Coloniality in the Academy**

Educational institutions in white settler societies, such as Canada, are built upon Indigenous dispossession and genocide, and have a vested interest in reproducing narratives benefitting ongoing colonization and Eurocentric epistemological dominance (Caxaj et al., 2022; Gomez, 2021; Stein & Andreotti, 2016c). Education is one such strategy used as a means to assert the global power of Canada, while belying generosity towards the non-Western world for allowing them to share in dominant forms of knowledge (McCartney, 2016; Quijano, 2000; Udah, 2024). Canadian universities are built upon discourses of white dominance that naturalize white bodies in academia while driving global migration from former colonies in the Global South to Anglocentric educational institutions (e.g. Caxaj et al., 2021; Halpern et al., 2020). The national history of policing non-white bodies extends into the commodification of international students through authoritative internationalization initiatives as economic resources rather than human beings (International Education, 2019; Ramia et al., 2013; Whatley & Fischer, 2022).

This section uses a decolonial approach to examine how colonial narratives influence the broader academic and socio-political environment at post-secondary institutions through diversity and inclusion practices, classroom pedagogy, and non/equitable access to institutional services. While there are ongoing efforts at post-secondary institutes to decolonize or Indigenize academia (see 2.2.2), the pervasive impact of colonial power on institutions and international students is still under addressed.

### **3.2.1 Diversity and Inclusion**

Hegemonic discourses within universities celebrating diversity conflict with the reality of high levels of loneliness and isolation that racialized international students experience within the academy (e.g. Linley, 2018; Seithers et al., 2022; Wei & Bunjun, 2021; Yi, 2020). Harmful experiences of exclusion that take place on campus or within the context of the university, are reflective of broader racial and cultural interactions within society that maintain colonially based binary thinking (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017; Gusa, 2010). Casual racism, or other experiences with various forms of discrimination, demonstrate to international students that the campus climate is not prepared to tolerate ethnic and cultural differences that fall outside of whiteness (Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee & Rice, 2007). Institutions remain hesitant to fully embrace decolonial and anti-racist practices as it would lead to uncomfortable shifts in white hegemonic dominance (Adams & Estrada-Villalta, 2017; Thobani, 2022). Yet, despite the challenges to inclusion of international students within the broader campus community, institutions can still play a crucial role in supporting the well-being of international students.

Race and racism are frequently undermined in academia through a refusal to name the systems of power that still operate within liberal academic spaces, which hinders equity work (Harper, 2012; Henry & Tator, 2009; Thobani, 2022; Yao et al., 2019). Institutional norms are

structured by the ideologies of colonialism and racism that provide material and epistemological privilege to whiteness while international students are left to grapple with the socio-political consequences (Bunjun, 2021; Gottesman, 2016; Yang, 2019). For international students, race becomes a framework to understand their marginalization and exclusion, yet discussion of race as social experience is deemed in academia as too subjective and minimized to maintain the status quo (Bista, 2018; Uдах, 2021). When diversity is practiced nonperformatively by institutions, desired in statements but not in practice, ideals of equity and tolerance are not pushed beyond mere lip service to inclusion of racialized bodies (Ahmed, 2006; Linley, 2018; Pardy & Pardy, 2020). The performative practice of diversity in regard to international students includes making assumptions about what international students desire from their experiences in the academy through a hierarchical decision-making model that tends to prioritize economic security (International Education, 2019; Sherry et al., 2010; Page & Chahboun, 2019).

The student-institution relationship still lacks systemic support for international students despite a suggested moral imperative to provide a safe and supportive environment for these students that is capable of promoting international students' well-being (Fu et al., 2022; Whatley & Fischer, 2022; Uдах, 2021). When institutional support is lacking, international students are therefore forced to create their own safe spaces outside of the institution that use transnational kinship networks to enhance their own well-being (Bunjun, 2021; Koo et al., 2021a). Self-segregation into communities of co-nationals is a well-being strategy that has the benefit of providing respite from Eurocentric academic and social environments (Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Beech, 2015; Fu et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2018). While it can be harder to form strong domestic-international peer relationships, these types of positive interactions can also play an

important role in cultivating a sense of belonging within the institution through engagement across cultural boundaries (Collins & Callaghan, 2022; Daddow et al., 2020; Gomes 2020).

### **3.2.2 Classroom Pedagogy**

Exclusion, in subtle and overt forms, characterizes much of the academic experience of racialized international students as the classroom is a space where power and oppression play out on international students (Aman, 2015, Hayes, 2019; Wei & Bunjun, 2021). For example, the Western norms of classroom participation through discussion-based activities privilege verbal communication, which is frequently used as a stand-in for language proficiency and to measure classroom acculturation (Gong et al., 2021; Heng, 2018; Yi, 2020). While generally considered a solid educational practice, a classroom discussion utilizes pedagogies that are embedded in dominant western paradigms, facilitating conditions of silence for international students who are unfamiliar with these unwritten rules (Bai & Wang, 2022; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Halpern et al., 2022; Seithers et al., 2022).

Failure to expose the cultural underpinnings and pedagogical influences in such educational approaches ends with international students being penalized for a lack of understanding over what forms of participation are valued, while also preventing classroom space from facilitating intercultural engagement (Banning, 1999; Moore-Jones, 2022). A lack of classroom participation through speaking leads to an association of incompetency for international students and is most commonly associated with East Asian students from China, Japan, and Korea who are constructed as silent and passive (Bai & Wang, 2022; Yi, 2020). Prejudice and stereotypes from teachers and peers alike around a perceived lack of English fluency excludes racialized international students from group work, resulting in frustration, and

lower self-esteem and academic engagement (Koo et al., 2021; Seithers et al., 2022; Wei & Bunjun, 2021).

Approaching international student engagement through a deficit-based approach presumes that they are inherently unprepared for and undeserving of the Western academic environment (Heng, 2018; Kerr, 2014; Stein & Andreotti, 2018). The current expectations place the onus of cultural and academic adaptation on the international students that can result in superficial inclusion within the classroom (Collins & Callaghan, 2022; Karkour & Jusseaume, 2020). Recognition of diverse culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogy would improve the educational experience for international students within an equity-based framework (Brayboy, 2007; Gong et al., 2021; Kerr, 2014).

### **3.2.3 Accessing Appropriate Institutional Services**

There are barriers for international students accessing institutional services due to a lack of staff cultural competency and relevance of the service (Halpern et al., 2022; Penman et al., 2021). Due to the strong correlation between acculturative stress and mental health support, access to social and professional services networks are a critical factor for the maintenance of international student well-being (Bunjun, 2021; Lee et al., 2004). An emphasis on the importance of cross-cultural interaction often places the responsibility on international students to adapt to their host culture while domestic students and staff have limited cross-cultural capacities, leading to an inability to form meaningful relationships through non-practiced interaction (Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Seithers et al., 2022). There is the need to build greater trust in institutional capacity to provide appropriate support services to promote international student well-being.

Health providers are in a position to advocate for care for international students, further building trust within the student-institution relationship, yet mental health professionals receive

little guidance from the literature on appropriate treatment models for international students (Choy & Alon; 2019; Vakkai et al., 2020). Acknowledging that well-being stressors, such as racism, may be overlooked by common assessment tools, such as the ‘Intentions to Seek Counselling Inventory’ provides the opportunity to implement cultural sensitivity protocols as a foundational part of the institution’s approach to wellness (Yee & Smith, 2022). Use of alternative comprehensive culturally relevant models, such as the ‘Holistic Wellness Model (Chandler et al., 1992; Koo et al., 2021a); and ‘Acculturative Stress Scale of International Students’ (Johnson et al., 2018), or a resilience framework (Kim et al., 2019) focus on the disproportionate burden international students face from oppressive environmental conditions that can manifest in psychological and physical symptoms (Marya & Patel, 2021). When service providers cannot make use of these tools, international students may be discouraged from (re)accessing institutional services if they cannot receive appropriate care that considers how macro and meso aspects of environment are influential to well-being.

### **3.3 Student Well-being**

The integration of intersectional analyses into public health research reflects how concurrent and interacting characteristics influence health outcomes (e.g. Bambra, 2022; Hankivsky, 2012; Harari & Lee, 2021). Thus, it is important to have data that reflects how various systemic and individual factors construct health. The general state of well-being of people in Canada is measured through several quantitative surveys on well-being at a national or post-secondary institutional level (e.g., Canadian Campus Well-Being Survey (2024); OECD Better Life Index (2024)) with the aim of implementing interventions to improve overall population well-being. Student well-being encompasses a holistic promotion of health,

sustainability, and social justice within post-secondary institutions. Relevant to all aspects of the institution and campus culture, student well-being can be promoted through student interactions with their institutional setting (Okanagan Charter, 2015).

Concern for the well-being of post-secondary students, but particularly international students, has grown since the COVID-19 pandemic as the changing policy landscape, modes of academic delivery, and social connectedness has been difficult to navigate (e.g. Anandavalli et al., 2020; Bardill Moscaritolo et al, 2022; Firang & Mensah, 2022). In instances where the student experiences varying differences in socio-economic, socio-cultural, and linguistic factors from the host country or institutional culture there are greater challenges in adapting to their new environment (Caxaj et al., 2021; Jones, 2017; Penman et al., 2021). Taking into consideration the complex and varying identities and positionalities of post-secondary students, the literature can provide a greater understanding of the challenges to the promotion of well-being for international, graduate, and racialized student groups.

### **3.3.1 Transition and Adaptation**

While the transition to post-secondary education is challenging for all students, many racialized international students face additional barriers due to large cultural differences, language barriers, more limited access to national and institutional resources, and race-based discriminatory treatment (Campos et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2018; Kapilashrami & Hankivsky, 2018; Lee et al., 2004). Institutions need to take action to safeguard against potential harms as navigating a complete set of new systems without a strong support system has significant implications for international student well-being (Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Vakkai et al., 2020).

The process of adaptation is not linear for international students as transition experiences affect individual international students differently, based upon personal, social, and academic

factors, that drive attitudes towards integrating with the dominant host culture (Aladegbaiye et al., 2022; Jones, 2017; Kaul & Renzulli, 2022; Krsmanovic, 2020). Larger cultural differences, as shaped by the binary east-west paradigm, can create conditions of greater stress that may manifest as mental illnesses (Can et al., 2021; Shadowen et al., 2019). International students are at an increased risk for mental health problems compared to domestic students, including higher rates of depression, anxiety, and alcohol use disorders while also being less likely to seek professional support (Clarke, 2023; Kim et al., 2019; Shadowen et al., 2019). To mitigate these harmful effects, international students also develop resiliency tools, such as self-compassion, to lower psychological distress (Larcombe et al., 2024).

The immediate transition to a new academic institution is often buffered by an orientation period, however this implies that international students must undertake an integration within an established time period (Shokirova et al., 2022). Orientation services typically do not include vital support for broader settlement, such as securing housing, further contributing to precarity for international students (Calder et al., 2016; Shokirova et al., 2022). A portion of the literature focuses on how international students build support networks to sustain well-being, which can help mitigate the stressful impacts of transition into a new educational, social, and cultural environment (Lee et al., 2004; Shadowen et al., 2019). As migrants, international students are naturally distanced from their support networks and known natural environment that can lead to feelings of isolation and grief (Akhtar, 2007; Karkour & Jusseume, 2020). When coupled with the immediate stress of transitioning to a new environment, establishing strong sources of support critical to maintaining well-being remains difficult (Johnson et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2004). Positive interactions between a student and other actors in their educational environment

is important for international students to develop a sense of place and connection to their institution (Moore-Jones, 2022).

Shared nationality or cultural background is a frequent foundation for international students building new interpersonal social networks that hold a greater sense of belonging and improves confidence (Daddow et al., 2020; Fu et al., 2022; Kaul & Renzulli, 2022; Moore-Jones, 2022). These relationships between co-nationals are also a primary resource for information sharing, followed by university staff and other peers (Mori, 2000; Sato et al., 2022). A study looking at outgroup favouritism among Chinese international students found this type of social preference was viewed by the students as being effortful on the part of the international student (Ji et al., 2022). Those students were also perceived as taking advantage of stereotyping to distinguish themselves from other international students, which resulted in them being pushed out from the in-group (Ji et al., 2022).

Sharing physical proximity often does not increase interactions of domestic and international students, yet domestic students have a role to play in integrating international students into the campus environment and host culture (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Daddow et al., 2020; Leask & Wallace, 2011). In many cases, there is a lack of social interaction among domestic and international students' groups, showing a preference for homophilic student networks (Collins & Callaghan, 2022). International students that receive mentorship from domestic peers may more easily overcome psychological and acculturative stress of adaptation to a new environment (Thomson & Esses, 2016). Post-secondary institutions can take advantage of planned interventions, such as through casual social activities that deliberately increase contact across cultural groups, to provide benefits for international students through greater academic

performance and sociocultural adaptation (Collins & Callaghan, 2022; Johnson et al., 2018; Vakkai et al., 2020).

### **3.3.2 Graduate Student Well-being**

Graduate students face a different set of challenges to well-being compared to undergraduate students, which requires unique considerations for well-being. For example, international graduate students can have a more complex journey of academic migration that complicates the linear treatment of cultural adaptation (Hoffman, 2009; Shokirova et al., 2022). Within the North American educational context, racialized international graduate students have been more openly sharing their experiences through autoethnographic work that illuminates how their experiences have been shaped by socio-political factors and resistance to dominant colonial narratives (e.g. Castañeda Muñoz, 2022; Chen, 2021; Zabin, 2022).

Graduate students generally have a lesser sense of belonging to their educational institution compared to undergraduate students (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). A sense of belonging within academic spaces has well established positive impacts on psychosocial health (Kaul & Renzulli, 2022; Penman et al., 2021). It has also been suggested that a sense of belonging influences academic outcomes for domestic students, but this relationship is less clear for international students (Bowman, 2011). Mental health studies focused on international graduate students are fewer, however research suggests international students in the US have higher prevalence of mental health issues compared to domestic students (Bolotnyy et al., 2022). A comparison between international and non-international graduate students found that international students were significantly less likely to have sought help from a mental health professional or indicate intention to do so in the future (Clarke, 2023).

Academic and career-related stress, particularly networking, were identified as having a negative impact on the life satisfaction of international graduate students (Clarke, 2023; Suh et al., 2022). Additional layers of precarity arise in graduate studies due to the supervisor-student relationship. Much of the quality of the educational experience for graduate students relies on the relationship they have with their supervisor, and personalities and power differences are amplified by intercultural barriers (Ankomah, 2022; Manathunga, 2014). International graduate students in the US were less likely to have informal interactions with faculty, including discussions about well-being (Bolotnyy et al., 2022). A positive relationship dynamic where faculty members show a concern for the unique needs for their supervisee, as an international student and as an individual, has benefits for both mental health and academic performance (Ankomah, 2022; Manathunga, 2014; Trice, 2003).

### **3.3.3 Racialized Student Well-being**

For racialized students within the academy, white normativity and supremacy creates unsafe environments, impacting international students' mental and physical health (Caxaj et al., 2021; Gusa, 2010; Koo et al., 2021a). In predominantly white environments, such as academia in Canada, minority stress theory identifies "the excess stress from which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position" (Meyer, 2003, p.675). This concept is further extended into racial battle fatigue for racialized people in white-dominant environments that accumulates from "blocked opportunities, and mundane, extreme, environmental stress" (Smith et al., 2011, p.64). Despite these impacts of race being described in the critical race literature, educational institutions have not yet made sufficient systemic change towards racial equity at all levels of the institution (e.g. Brady et al., 2017; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2018; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). If a racialized student has a non-

Anglophone accent, this further identifies them as the ‘Other’, which leads to a devaluation of their position as a knowledge holder (Hayes, 2019; Khosravi, 2024; Young, 2017).

Interactions amongst all members of the institutional community can have a significant effect on the well-being of racialized students by cultivating a sense of institutional/community belonging (Collins & Callaghan, 2022; Moore-Jones, 2022). Yet, positive diversity interactions are more frequently seen to offer benefits to the mental well-being of white students, whereas racialized students feel more impacted by the psychological effects of negative diversity interactions and racial microaggressions (Kilgo et al., 2016; Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Present in various forms, microaggressions can include denying lived experience of racism (microinvalidations), demeaning a person’s heritage and identity (microinsults), and purposeful discrimination through verbal or non-verbal attacks (microassaults) (Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). These types of attacks can lead to racial clustering amongst students, in contrast to prominent utopian diversity narratives, to create a greater sense of belonging by building community with other racialized students (Gomes, 2020; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso & Lopez, 2010).

Racialized international students have expressed difficulty in connecting with institutionally affiliated mental health services, resulting in a reduced likelihood of seeking and benefitting from professional services (Johnson et al., 2018; Koo et al., 2021; Yee & Smith, 2022). While various sociodemographic identities of international students do influence use of services, the literature does not provide a clear correlation between racial or cultural background, and the use of mental health services (Kim et al., 2019; Yee & Smith, 2022). Perceived accessibility of mental health services is an important factor to consider when trying to increase international student uptake, which can be inhibited by culturally based stigma around psychological problems and a perceived lack of staff cultural competency (Kim et al., 2019;

Mori, 2000; Shadowen et al., 2019). International students with higher levels of acculturation have more positive perceptions of mental health services (Chen et al., 2020). To be clear, positive attitudes are not directly correlated with seeking help through these services, however, it is important to create spaces where international students feel empowered when utilizing campus resources and services.

### **3.4 Summary**

Internationalization initiatives make international students desirable to post-secondary institutions to increase revenue and build cultural competency domestically. The influence of global structures of economic, political, and social power are crucial to understanding the decision-making of international students, and institutional and nation-state actors. Institutional policies and practices remain situated within colonial pedagogies and approaches to transcultural interactions to create conditions of exclusion for international students upon entering the academy.

International students experience more adverse effects transitioning to a Canadian post-secondary institution than domestic students, and they can struggle to find institutional services appropriate for their needs. The literature found that cultural differences and a lack of staff cultural competency are treated as primary barriers to accessing institutional supports. Thus, international students may rely on informal networks that are primarily located outside of the formal setting of a post-secondary institution, which reveals the marginalization embedded in the international student-institution relationship.

There are also more subtle ways in which the well-being of international students is undermined within the structure of post-secondary institutions which remain colonial in their

orientation. Ultimately, these realities underscore the importance of taking on this work at an institutional level to address a broad-scale lack of preparedness and will within the academic institution to promote the well-being of international students.

## **Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods**

In this chapter, I outline the research design and methods used to understand the experiences of well-being among racialized international graduate students at a Canadian post-secondary institution. Rooted in critical race and decolonial paradigms and using a qualitative case study research approach, I conducted 22 face-to-face interviews to produce participant-driven findings that identify institutional gaps when it comes to supporting the well-being of racialized international graduate students. The findings from this research produced institutional-level recommendations for promoting the well-being of racialized international graduate students. This chapter begins with my positionality statement; outline of the research design, including the rationale for a case study methodology. Next, the actual methods, analysis techniques, and knowledge mobilization strategies are described.

### **4.1 Positionality Statement**

Locating oneself within social positions of power and marginalization is a powerful exercise to responsibly engage in social research. In order to remain transparent about my motivation and engagement with this research, I describe how my positionality has been dynamically constructed through temporal and spatial spheres (Adriansen & Spangler, 2024; Spangler, 2023). This is not a comprehensive self-analysis but encompasses the most influential connections, experiences, and mobilities that I have grappled with throughout this research process. I come to this research as a mixed-race Canadian citizen that was born and raised outside of Canada. My mum is a third-generation white-settler Canadian. My dad is British of Gujarati descent, his parents having settled in Uganda before being forced as refugees to England with their young children. I have four younger siblings completing a core family of seven.

I was born in Singapore but was able to inherit Canadian citizenship as an infant, and it remains my only passport. I do not hold patriotic beliefs though I acknowledge the significant privilege of mobility and economic and social capital that has been granted to me. After a childhood filled with global mobility (living in Singapore for six years, Qatar for ten, and China for two along with travel to nearly 30 countries) and common and profound environmental changes has created an extended “state of alienation” (Akhtar, 2007, p. 169). Singapore was the only place for me that was unquestionably ‘home’ and has taken root in my psyche as a space of extreme nostalgic desire that contributes both a sense of security and pervasive restlessness (Akhtar, 1999; 2007). I continued to engage in practices of mobility while completing this research. The majority of this thesis was written in Shenzhen, PCR where my family has been located for the past seven years. The historical recent loss and trauma of forceable dislocation in my paternal lineage, and my own experiences of a lost homeland and fragmented cultural identity has provided the foundation for my interest in mobility across space, place, and culture (Akhtar, 1999; 2007).

Despite having always identified as ‘mixed-race’ I did not have a significant conceptualization of what race meant or experienced it in harmful ways (at least consciously) until I entered adulthood and moved to Canada as an undergraduate student in Kijipuktuk/Halifax in 2017. Outside of my household I have never been part of the ethnic or cultural majority, but growing up in different regions of Asia I was not confronted with the hegemonic whiteness that has been a source of discomfort throughout my post-secondary education. However, the international school environments I was in still held global ideals of the desirability of whiteness or Western-based culture, which also had an influence on my choice to study in Canada (Fakunle, 2021; Kim, 2011; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021). Settling in Canada as a ‘homeland’

was further complicated for me by my new identity as a racialized settler, a journey I find parallel to many racialized international students (Bunjun, 2021; Thobani, 2007). Having had personally transformative experience engaging in critical race, intersectional feminist, and decolonial thought and praxis I cannot remove myself from these political and social sensibilities.

My parents both work in schools, so perhaps it is not surprising that I have come to interrogate an educational institute as a space for social change and greater equity. While my identity has shifted throughout time as I have grown and deepened my self and social knowledge throughout my moves across different spatial realities, I felt that my similarities with participants were most deeply engaged in this work. At the same time, my life experience of mobility, marginalization, and strength gives me additional insight and empathy to conduct this research.

## **4.2 Research Design**

This research project employs a qualitative case study research design to develop a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of well-being of racialized international graduate students at the University of Victoria. Baxter (2021) defines case study research as “the study of a single instance or small number of instances of a phenomenon in order to explore in-depth nuances of the phenomenon and contextual influences on and explanations of that phenomenon” (p. 109), in this case of international student experiences. A case study examines the phenomena of interest as a contemporary event studied in its natural setting, with the researcher not acting to influence behaviour or outcomes (Tardi, 2019; Yin, 2009). This approach allows the researcher to capture the complexity of real-life social settings through analysis of micro, meso, and macro-level forces.

Case study methodology is a versatile approach to research that has been used across disciplines to explain social phenomena through both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Tardi, 2019). The knowledge produced has great explanatory power as the research is rooted in a concrete and practical analysis of the place-based phenomenon (Baxter, 2021; Yin, 2009). Due to the literature gap in understanding the lived experiences of racialized international graduate students and the complex array of structural and individual factors that contribute to well-being, a case study is a valuable methodology as it can capture the complexity of colonial relations of power while maintaining considerations of individual agency when attention is given to relevant power relationships (Creswell, 2013; Deuchar, 2022). This research uses critical race theory and a decolonial approach to amplify marginalized perspectives while critiquing the power hierarchies embedded within Western academic institutions.

Addressing issues of power and marginalization that occur across multiple structures of oppression is relevant to avoid essentializing the identities and experiences of racialized international graduate students (e. g. Jones, 2017; Madriaga & McCaig, 2019). Page and Chahboun (2019) have demonstrated how researchers are just beginning to include the perspectives of international students by engaging with them as knowledge holders, in a manner that challenges deficit narratives (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021). This gap in the literature in personal narratives and marginalized perspectives reflects the notion that institutional norms of neoliberal engagement with Eurocentric epistemologies and approaches to well-being can offer the most universal and desirable practices (Andreotti et al., 2015).

The broad purpose of my thesis is to reframe the assimilatory approach to international students' well-being rooted in Western supremacy that challenges their belonging in academia (e.g. Stein & Andreotti, 2016; Heng, 2018). This research was pursued as a case study methodology in order to comprehensively understand and articulate the structural conditions that

influenced the experiences and well-being of racialized international graduate students at the University of Victoria. It was anticipated that the findings would reveal gaps in institutional support and services for these students, guiding this research to be action-oriented with the development of institutional-level recommendations to enhance the well-being of racialized international graduate students. My research questions are:

- (1) What does “well-being” mean to racialized international graduate students?
- (2) How do the academic and socio-political conditions of the university help or hinder well-being?
- (3) What institutional-level changes can be made to promote well-being for racialized international graduate students?

#### **4.2.1 Critical Race Theory**

My research is situated within a critical theory paradigm as I am conducting a form of social health research that critiques structures of power, specifically within post-secondary institutions. Using a critical race theory (crt) framework within the field of education began with Ladson-Billings and Tate’s seminal work in 1995 to expand upon the development of Critical Race Theory in legal studies. Greatly informed by American intellectual tradition and social critiques by Black American scholars, critical race theory holds relevance to the Canadian context as a white settler society that also benefited from Indigenous dispossession and enslaved Black labour (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Race can be difficult to define as it is both an ideological construct and a social reality that does not permit the easy categorization of people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Omi and Winant (1994) consider race as both “social structure and cultural representation” as “racial formation is linked to the

evolution of hegemony” (p. 56) that has been sustained through disparities in the education field (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2018; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

A critical race approach cannot provide the provisional understanding of reality produced through realism, however, from the epistemology of social constructivism social phenomena are made of complex individual subjectivities that construct reality (Creswell, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For too long, the academy has functioned as a “bastion of racism and White supremacy” (Patton, 2016, p. 315), resulting in the absence of the consideration of race/racism as a factor affecting a student’s positive educational outcomes (Harper, 2012; Henry & Tator, 2009). To develop strategic interventions within academia that can tackle both immediate forms of violence and long-term equity work there needs to be a greater continuing engagement with critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Stein & Andreotti, 2018).

As the objective of this research focuses on the perspectives of racialized international graduate students and their views on well-being, there are multiple (interpretations) of realities that contribute to an intersubjective interpretation of the social world (Bista, 2018; Tardi, 2009; Uda, 2021). Choosing to use interviews as a qualitative method addresses experiences of social and institutional inequity from the experiences of those who do not benefit from white privilege, challenging dominant paradigms that continue racial suppression (Creswell, 2013; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

#### **4.2.2 Decoloniality**

I am also using a decolonial framework to critique structures of power that were implemented under colonialism and remain facets of our everyday lives through hegemonic whiteness. Referred to by Quijano (2000) as a matrix of power, coloniality operates as a form of control across four interrelated domains: economy; authority; gender and sexuality; and

subjectivity and knowledge. The liberation and independence of former colonies across the Global South signified an end to explicit colonialism, however, the West's global model has remained the golden standard through which imperial control of power and neoliberal control of economy continues today (Mignolo, 2007; Tikly, 2004). Post-secondary education particularly concerns itself with the domain of subjectivity and knowledge, as educational institutions maintain ideals of modernity and enlightenment that have been structured by positivist universalism and European thought (Grosfoguel, 2016; Roithmayr, 1999; Thobani, 2022).

The decolonization movement in Canada is tied to the liberation of Indigenous peoples, specifically seeking to return land and sovereignty to Indigenous nations through explicit dismantling of colonial structures (Stein et al., 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This epistemic shift with post-secondary institutions permits deeper engagement with Indigenous ways of knowing, embodying a core value of relationality that can unsettle universalism as a fundamental way of being (Bunjun, 2021; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Stein et al., 2019). Research with international students within a critical theory paradigm must be contextualized by hegemonic colonial narratives that position international students largely as racialized consumers of education rather than knowledge holders (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021; McCartney, 2021; Ramie et al., 2013). International students are also implicated within settler colonialism and ongoing violence in a way that is not the main focus of this research but warrants further investigation because it is also not separable from this research. A greater number of racialized international students are sharing their reflections on navigating this complex positionality (e.g. Anonymous, 2022; Bunjun, 2021; Chen, 2021; Gomez, 2020).

Decolonial theory and praxis are intertwined to seek the end of coloniality, thereby eliminating future need for decolonial work (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Stein et al., 2020). Getting

to that stage requires continuous sustained efforts, and the engagement and participation of all relevant actors. Producing research that is grassroots and action-oriented, in this case through the development of recommendations to enact equity-oriented systemic change at the institutional-level, aligns with the decolonial praxis.

### **4.3 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics approval for this research was received from the University of Victoria's Research Ethics Board (#23-0094). Funding was received from the Guru Nanak Institute to support data collection. This funding allowed for a small honoraria to be given to participants in appreciation for sharing their time and knowledge.

Participants were highly concerned with confidentiality and the removal of non-identifying information like program name and nationality due to the limited size of graduate programs. While maintaining confidentiality is a standard ethical practice, some current students felt fearful of repercussions for their participation in this research. There was also hesitancy around sharing adverse experiences or institutional criticisms that could negatively impact their relationships with institutional members, like supervisors, who are instrumental to academic and career success. This reflects an additional layer of precarity that international graduate students hold that had to be accounted for that influenced how the findings could be presented (Bunjun, 2021; Mittelmeier et al., 2023). The interviews were confidential, and only the researcher had access to voice recordings that were used to produce a transcript. Participants were made anonymous in the thesis through the use of a pseudonym (Appendix A). Some participants selected their own pseudonym, while others were comfortable with being assigned a pseudonym by the researcher.

In regard to the planning and execution of this research, the first step involved critical reflection on my position within this research (see 4.1) (Creswell, 2013; Spangler, 2023). It is important to be transparent about where my interest in this research lies, and how I have influenced the research. Identity markers like race and nationality can be used as an indicator of difference, which has commonly produced a deficit-based approach to research with international students, focusing on the ways students are responsible to adapt to their environment rather than reflecting on how institutional conditions can be adapted to their needs (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021; Madriaga & McCaig, 2019; Yao et al., 2019). Treating international students, particularly non-Anglophone students, that lack cultural and legal boundedness within the research setting as “epistemic equals” (Hayes, 2019, p. 555) in research has historically been inhibited by global socio-political relations that elevate Western nationhood and knowledge (Quijano, 2000; Tran & Hoang, 2024).

The research frameworks of critical race theory and decoloniality were selected and utilized to consciously disrupt the typically paternalistic narrative surrounding international students in Canada that seeks strategies and interventions without the input of international students (Bunjun, 2021; Mwangi et al., 2018; Page & Chahboun, 2019). While I am deeply engaged in this work, my role as researcher does place me in a position of authority through my control over the research process. In order to mitigate solely relying on researcher interpretation, feedback from participants was elicited throughout the analytical and writing process. Participants were offered the opportunity to review a transcript of their interview in a member-checking validation way, and extracted quotations were also subject to their approval (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Linley, 2018; Motulsky, 2021).

## **4.4 Methods**

As this research used a case study methodology, a variety of methods could be utilized to study the unit of analysis in greater depth (Tardi 2019; Baxter, 2021; Creswell, 2013). Using a process of qualitative inquiry, data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews with racialized international graduate students enrolled at the University of Victoria (UVic) to explore their conceptualization of well-being in the context of a mid-sized, research-intensive university in Western Canada (Creswell, 2013). By limiting this exploration to a single post-secondary institution, the macro, meso, and micro level factors influencing racialized international graduate student well-being could be consciously interrogated.

### **4.4.1 Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 racialized international graduate students at UVic in August and September 2023. A series of interview questions pertaining to their experience as an international graduate student were provided to participants ahead of time (Appendix B). The interviews were digitally recorded to produce a transcript, and the interviewer took written notes of observations and immediate reflections during and immediately after the interview.

The semi-structured interview aimed to incorporate aspects of a timeline interview to gain information about life history (Spangler, 2022). A timeline interview uses a temporal lens to collaboratively understand students' mobility through "past and present relational and social ties" (Spangler, 2022, p. 7). Gaining knowledge about such factors influencing their decision to become an international student at the University of Victoria provides a basis for understanding individuals' overarching goals and motivations to cultivate a more intimate understanding of

their experiences. The interview questions exploring how institutional conditions impacted participant's well-being were designed to be broad and open-ended to minimize interference of preconceived assumptions around the interactions between international students and their environment (Bennett et al., 2024; Vossoughi & Zavala, 2020).

As an interviewer, I was focused on efforts to engage in active listening, as the process of attending fully and reflecting back to the speaker through the interview is vital to the co-production of knowledge (Guion et al., 2011). Responses as an interviewer are important to the quality of the data as “the ways various interventions on the part of the interviewer open up (and foreclose) possible trajectories of co-thinking” (Vossoughi & Zavala, 2020, p. 152). Being able to respond to the discussion and follow the flow of the participant decentralizes the role of the researcher, who instead brings their expertise to the analysis, synthesis, and presentation of knowledge. This approach further deepened understanding of the data as my engagement in the interview allowed me to relay my immediate impressions of the participant's responses to receive immediate feedback on the accuracy of the interpretations.

#### **4.5 Research Participants**

To adequately capture the diversity of the international graduate student population, broad inclusion criteria were created to determine who is eligible to participate in this research. To be interviewed, individuals had to be an international student who self-identified as racialized (or as a person of colour or visible minority). Additionally, they must have lived in Greater Victoria, and be enrolled in their program on or before September 2022. Potential participants were initially screened for these characteristics before confirmation of an interview.

The participants were a diverse sample in regard to nationality, racial and ethnic identity, program, type of degree, and year enrolled. A total of 22 participants were recruited to participate in interviews. They represented 16 nationalities (from five continents) and 17 graduate programs. 14 participants were studying at the master's level. Eight of the participants were completing a PhD program, with five of those participants having been in Canada for a sufficient amount of time that they were eligible for, and successful in obtaining Permanent Residency status. The gender representation was balanced with ten participants identifying as female, ten as male, and two as non-binary.

*Table 1: Breakdown of participants by nationality region and discipline*

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
North and South America	4
Europe	2
Africa	3
Asia	13
<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Social Science, Humanities, and Fine Arts	11
Health, and Natural and Life Sciences	11

#### **4.5.1 Recruitment Strategies**

Once approval was received from the UVic Research Ethics Board (#23-0094) research participant recruitment occurred through purposive and snowball sampling (Wall Emerson, 2015). In order to reach the international graduate student population, recruitment materials were distributed in August 2023 to graduate students through department secretaries, the Graduate

Students' Society bulletin, and the UVic Global Community social media. The opportunity to participate in this study was also shared via word-of-mouth, with some of the participants informing me that they were encouraged to participate through peer networks established by ethnic and program connections.

Despite recruitment occurring at the end of the summer there was a rapid rate of response and a high level of interest from international graduate students. I was able to secure a sufficient number of eligible participants in the first round of recruitment, allowing the interviews to be conducted in August and September 2023. The majority of interviews were conducted over Zoom, with several taking place in-person in a private room at the McPherson Library on the UVic campus.

#### **4.6 Coding and Analysis**

My positionality as a non-international, racialized settler graduate student that grew up outside of so-called Canada directly informs my engagement with this work, including influencing data interpretation. In addition, my own position as a racialized graduate student at the University of Victoria gives me a more intimate, emotional, and personal perspective on, and connection to the research. I utilized the reflexivity framework developed by Mauthner and Doucet (2003) to meaningfully incorporate my social location, emotional responses, and epistemological assumptions in the analysis. A thematic analysis of the interviews was the main analytical tool, following the process described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Sendze (2019).

Digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed by Microsoft Word Transcribe and hand-checked for accuracy. Minor edits were made to the transcripts for purposes of clarity and comprehensibility. Participant details were anonymized through the use of a pseudonym, and the

interview transcripts were stored and coded in NVivo (v.14.23.2). I conducted the data analysis concurrently with the data collection to facilitate an ongoing inductive and deductive process of analysis (Baxter, 2021; Sendze, 2019). Knowledge in this research is co-produced between the researcher and research participants through the interview process and subsequent member-checking (Mayan, 2009; Vossoughi & Zavala, 2020). By engaging my research participants in the analytical process through member-checking by reviewing their own transcripts for accuracy, they were able to enrich and provide more context to an interpretive code.

The transcription process, along with re-reading notes taken during the interviews, allowed me to familiarize myself with the data. The initial coding was a mix of open and descriptive, developed by reviewing each transcript and identifying attributes of participants' experience and well-being that were both positive and negative. These pieces of data were collated into labelled codes, undergoing continual refinement to ensure consistency in code assignment (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nicholls, 2009; Sendze, 2019). A summary of each code was compiled into a coding dictionary (Appendix C), and an example is provided in Table 1.

**Table 2:** *Sample of coding dictionary*

Theme/Code	Description	Example
Academic Institutional Conditions	Covering the experiences of participants within an academic institution. This theme is concerned with all levels of institutional governance, supports and services provided for students, pedagogy, and interactions with faculty and staff members.	
Academic Environment	Broadly incorporates the experiences of participants as graduate students within a mid-size, research-intensive university in Western Canada.	“It's great that I reached out to these different departments and resources available and again, UVic was actually pretty good at providing all these different support systems so, I felt great. I was just sort of disappointed with

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Experiences Within the Classroom	The experiences of international students within their coursework and the classroom environment are reflective of dominant pedagogies and power relations. This code encompasses how participants navigate classroom materials, teaching faculty, and peer relationships.	the fact that my department should be more responsible for its grad students because I feel if you are brave enough to accept these students, then you should be able to offer the same kind of support. And I feel like a lot of faculty members, at least within that department, they just got so busy with themselves, like with their own research projects. So, they had their own agenda, sometimes they just forgot about the fact that grad students existed.” - D
Student-Supervisor Relationship	A highly important element of the graduate student experience, this code characterizes the relationship that an international graduate student has with their primary supervisor(s). A supervisor is responsible for overseeing academic work, and may also assist a student in accessing funding, securing employment (within and outside the university), and achieving professional goals.	“Because there are some friends, I'm thinking, OK, if I ask anything if I'm wrong or [have] wrong pronunciation it would be fun[ny] to everyone, maybe. So sometimes I want to ask something, but I can't because of this hesitation.” - Alex
		“I feel very grateful for my supervisor. They know my situation and they respect me and [...] they understand me and maybe empathize and respect me. But also, they sometimes advise me [...] but they are doing that kindly, they are not blaming me [...] or criticizing me. No, they want me to succeed.” - Christina

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The initial codes were grouped into four major themes that reflected how well-being is constructed for racialized international graduate students at macro, meso, and micro levels (RQ1

and RQ2): *Political-Economic Determinants*; *Academic Institutional Conditions*; *Socio-Cultural Dynamics*; and *Personal Wellness*. Each theme encapsulated the factors significantly influencing well-being as described by participants. These themes and code branches were visually depicted in a coding tree (Figure 1). This assisted in depicting the relationships between emerging themes and provided internal cohesion in the analysis (Cope, 2021).

**Figure 1:** Coding tree of the four major themes



After multiple rounds of reviewing the validity and reliability of the emerging minor themes, they were incorporated into the coding dictionary and used in the interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sendze, 2019). Use of these codes allowed me to illustrate the service interactions and gaps experienced by racialized international graduate students to directly inform the development of recommendations for enhancing their well-being (RQ3).

#### 4.6.1 Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria used to assess the quality of the qualitative thematic analysis are dependability, confirmability, and resonance (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2009; Myer & Dykes, 2020). Dependability refers to the consistency and accuracy of the approach in data collection and analysis (Nicholls, 2009). Providing a thorough explanation of the research process, including justification for the research design and methods, allows the researcher to demonstrate that decision-making throughout the process occurred in a consistent and accurate manner (Baillie, 2015; Nicholls, 2009).

Confirmability is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Baxter & Eyles, 1997) as the “extent to which biases, motivations, interests or perspectives of the inquirer influence interpretations” (p. 512). The intentions of the researcher as well as the research process are described in a transparent manner to demonstrate how the researcher has affected the findings (Nicholls, 2009; Spangler, 2023). Taking steps to elicit feedback from participants regarding the findings and conclusions through member-checking further enhances confirmability without replacing methodological and interpretive rigour (Motulsky, 2021). Maintaining an audit trail also supported my decision-making process, enhancing both dependability and confirmability (Cope, 2021; Nicholls, 2009). I kept a written journal throughout the research process to maintain a record of my “theoretical, methodological and analytical decisions”, which allowed for greater critical reflection and insight (Carcary, 2020, p. 166).

Resonance “inspires understanding and invites action” (Myers & Dykes, 2020, p. 93), which supports the intention of this research to mobilize research-informed recommendations to enhance racialized international graduate student well-being. Measures of resonance include sufficiently contextualizing the research, providing a detailed description of the methodological

choices, reflecting on challenges, and maintaining an engaging manner of communication (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008; Myers & Dykes, 2020).

#### **4.7 Knowledge Mobilization**

Diversity and anti-racist initiatives within academia frequently take a performative stance through broad declarations that do not create systemic change at various levels of the institutional structure (Ahmed, 2006; Patton, 2016; Stein & Andreotti, 2018). Emphasis on the notion of equality (rather than equity) focuses interventions on enabling access to the same resources and opportunities (i.e. inclusion), thereby reducing racism and other forms of exclusion to individual bias rather than a structural condition that is embedded in the rules and regulations governing institutions due to “legacies of colonialism and hegemonic whiteness” (Stein & Andreotti, 2018; Uda, 2021, p. 1). To avoid these pitfalls, this research has explored the experiences of racialized international graduate students in a manner that centers their voice and agency. This approach challenges the dominant narratives of assimilation that have shaped institutional approaches to international students while creating an opportunity to promote well-being (Heng, 2018; Moosavi, 2022).

This research produced recommendations for the University of Victoria, suggesting institutional modifications to enhance well-being for racialized international graduate students. The findings of this research will be presented to the UVic international student community, key administrators, and service providers, minimally including the Dean of Graduate Studies, Associate Deans, International Centre for Students, and Graduate Students’ Society. The recommendations will also be provided to the aforementioned members of the UVic community in a stand-alone document that can be used for student advocacy and institutional change-making

purposes. While generalizability is not a part of the evaluation criteria for qualitative research generally, the knowledge about racialized international graduate students' conceptualizations of well-being and strategies for enhancing well-being at the institutional-level may be applicable to various post-secondary contexts in Canada due to historical and cultural similarities in the social context (Baxter, 2021). The recommendations can also be relevant for promoting the well-being of international and racialized students generally at other post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, and across Canada.

## Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter describes the findings from interviews with 22 racialized international graduate students at the University of Victoria in 2023. Participants picked a pseudonym or were assigned one to remain anonymous. The findings are discussed in two main sections reflecting research questions one and two. Firstly, the conceptualization of racialized international graduate student well-being is explored through the four major themes that arose during the data analysis. The second section discusses in more detail how interactions with the institutional environment and actors affected participants in ways that enhanced or hindered their well-being. These findings were then used to inform the institutional-level recommendations brought forth by racialized international graduate students that are presented in the next chapter (see 6.2).

### 5.1 Well-being of Racialized International Graduate Students

‘Well-being’ is a term with many definitions, including “well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, [well-being] is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions” (World Health Organization, 2021). In order to understand the influences of macro, meso, and micro level factors on the well-being of racialized international graduate students, participants contributed to creating a holistic conceptualization of well-being that was specific and relevant to their experiences at the University of Victoria, which is a mid-sized, research-intensive university in Western Canada. The data analysis led to the conceptualization of four major themes that will be explored in this section: *Political-Economic Determinants*; *Academic Institutional Conditions*; *Socio-Cultural Influences*; and *Personal Wellness*.

### 5.1.1 Political-Economic Determinants

Global neoliberal capitalism has transformed international education to prioritize economic productivity and control of labour within hierarchies of race, border control, and economic power contributing to the conception of international student as objects used to achieve these national goals by Western states (Fakunle, 2021; Quijano, 2000; Walia, 2013). The journey to becoming an international student is often influenced by broad political and economic factors that operate at national and international scales to influence decision-making (Brunner, 2023; Harrison, 2015; Hoffman, 2009). Many international graduate students are specifically choosing Canada as an ideal study destination over other English-speaking nations due to positive impressions of Canada, relatively cheaper tuition fees, and the potential of long-term settlement, particularly with family members (Sá and Sabzalieva, 2018; Stein, 2018). Coming to Canada was seen by Swan and D as an opportunity to have a better quality of life due to greater political security and economic prosperity compared to their home countries.

*“Well-being to me is having job security, income security, residential security and living in a condition with the lowest amount of inflation... and living in a condition that you just think that if you try [your] best, you can achieve what you want.” - Swan*

*“Whenever I have a conversation with people back home, they always think [that] once you have moved to Canada, everything will be automatically paved in gold. Life will be better automatically, you know, like you don't really have to work as hard and life is just great, in general, [that] everything is well covered by the government.” - D*

Before their arrival, international graduate students had strong positive perceptions of Canada as a democratic economically developed nation, where personal freedom, low rates of

crime, and celebration of diversity are draws. These features were usually specifically contrasted with the United States of America, where political discourses, gun violence, and recent calls for greater racial equity has dampened the enthusiasm of racialized international students looking to pursue an education in an English-speaking country.

The participants particularly expressed how they sought educational opportunities with potential for long-term migration and stability as they saw education as a steppingstone to gaining Permanent Residency (PR) or even Canadian citizenship. These impressions are often shared with their home social networks that makes studying abroad an expected part of the life course as students hope to obtain a better future for themselves and their families (Beech, 2015). Dan, Alex, and Junior shared similar sentiments around how their perceptions of Canada made it a desirable place to study.

*“I knew that Canada is a good country in terms of so many different things; one of them is education; second one is social security; third one is like there is near to zero racism or this kind coexistence of diversity, right? And I also knew that the immigration process here is easier, at least than the States.” - Dan*

*“In [home country], everyone thinks Canada is a very developed country and all the sectors, I mean education, health, everything is good here.” - Alex*

*“Actually, I really love Canada from the start. I always wanted to study here.” - Junior*

The financial investment to study in an international context is coupled with the desire to live in a safe environment with economic security that is frequently not provided in the participant’s home countries. However, the rapid inflation has created economic conditions where it is difficult for all students to meet their basic living needs, creating conditions of

extreme stress that are harmful for well-being (Marya & Patel, 2021; Raphael et al., 2020). Being in Canada under a student visa also renders international graduate students ineligible for many sources of funding and scholarship, leaving them reliant on financial support from the institution and their supervisors. The international graduate students receiving this type of financial aid expressed that while it helped them pay their tuition fees, the funding did not extend to cover basic living costs. Josh and Dan shared how their funding needed to be supplemented by additional work:

*“When I first came to Canada, the economic crisis was lower than it actually is right now. But right now, it's very difficult to live on a budget and live on your stipends [...] it's just that you live in bare minimum” - Josh*

*“I needed more financial security because the amount that we received, any amount that we receive is not that much, especially because I have a family here. And considering my age and everything, it's not feasible to live with the funding [that] I receive from UVic. I do have to work, no matter what, [as an] TA or RA. If it's not a TA or RA, I [have] had to work [off-campus] to secure my finances.” - Dan*

Having a more accurate understanding of the current costs of living may help to alleviate some financial stress as students can appropriately plan to undertake their studies with adequate support. Doing research into living costs can be supplemented by clear communication from the institution that supports financial planning. For some international graduate students, they shared additional obligations to family not just in Canada, but also in their home country. Alex shared that his expectation of having income in a “developed” country would provide an opportunity to financially support his family due to favourable global monetary exchange rates. As Adam

expands, he chose to study part-time while working a full-time job (as a PR holder) as the limited financial aid packages do not provide enough financial support to pursue a Canadian education as a single international graduate student.

*“I think here at this moment [saving money is] not possible, because the cost of living is disproportional to earning, [and] it's growing day by day. Actually, I can't send [my family back home] a single money. I wanted to send, I thought if I go to Canada, I'll earn more and I can just give some money to my [family]. But I said [to them] I can't do this at this moment.” - Alex*

*“Here, like I don't care what you're doing, you will need to put your hand in your pocket if you don't have family. Someone is putting their hand in your pocket for you to be able to just live a regular life. So, there was no appeal to going back and being a full-time student. I think it's nice to be able to focus on your studies and just fall into that academic life. It's all very idealistic. It's a beautiful thing, but that's not something I could afford to do.” - Adam*

The lack of financial support not only adds stress for international graduate students, but also denies international graduate students the freedom to pursue an education under equal conditions. Although the perceived ideals about life in Canada may differ from the harsh economic reality that international students experience, the conditions that consistently draw international students to Canada reflect global political and economic conditions of inequality that will continue to bring international students to Canada (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). Participants also described how undertaking a graduate program in the English language also offers global mobility and greater work opportunities due to the global

recognition of a Canadian education as high-quality (Blanco Ramírez, 2014; Khoo, 2011; Soysal et al., 2024). However, the condition of being a temporary migrant also creates political stress for international students, as they must learn and comply with regulations set forth by the federal government, dictating their travel, work, and study (Canadian Bureau of International Education, 2024; McCartney, 2021). These conditions have a significant influence over the rest of racialized international graduate students' experience by limiting their work and funding options, as Dan and May explain:

*“When you come here and you see that if I can work 20 hours off-campus, I can earn this much money and money is needed because the funding that I get is not enough. Then you kind of derailed yourself a little bit. You focus less on your studies, and there is no guideline there, like nobody keeps you [looking at the big] picture [of] what happens if you don't focus on study and go [off-campus] for work.” – Dan*

*“I did not opt for a funding in the beginning [because I did not want to harm my chances of getting accepted]. [Then] my professor does not have a grant that can support me in my thesis, and I asked her that it would greatly help me if I can get like funding, and then she told me all of these like practical issues.” – May*

Treating international graduate students as having the same support systems or opportunities as domestic students neglects to acknowledge the way international students are already being treated differently throughout federal, provincial, and institutional systems on the basis of nationality and visa status (McCartney, 2016; Walia, 2013). There needs to be greater recognition for how the migration process can disrupt international students' support systems, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation and mental distress (Fu et al., 2022; Tran &

Soejatminah, 2018). A protective factor for international graduate students was migrating with a partner or family as it reduced isolation and loneliness. Swan found that migrating with their partner was helpful to their well-being as they were able to maintain a strong part of their support network. Others, like Tom Jones, found that their living environment came with a built-in support network that has been beneficial for well-being.

*“The existence of my [partner] has considerably help[ed] me. And to be honest, I think that immigration for a person who is alone is considerably harder than a person like me, who at least has someone in Canada.” - Swan*

*“I'm gradually building my support system here in Canada. So now I know that if something ever happens to me, there are people I can rely on, even though there are not many, it's about the quality of the people.” - Tom Jones*

As temporary migrants, international graduate students require greater considerations for additional institutional support as the external environment that places them under greater mental and financial strain (Akhtar, 2007; Calder et al., 2016; Firang & Mensah, 2022). Financial stress is one of the most significant burdens on racialized international graduate students. Most participants expressed feeling some measure of stress resulting from financial insecurity, which had negative implications for their mental and social well-being, including preventing them from joining social situations due to a strict budget. Anecdotes from D, Krystal, and G suggest that there is a need for greater institutional support for not only financially supporting international graduate students, especially during a leave or other times of crisis, but also in making the resources on campus more affordable for students.

*“So, if you really want to [become an international graduate student], make sure you can actually stay committed for at least two years because you're going to be poor. You'll probably be broke, financially. So, choose wisely.” - D*

*“Whenever there are personal situation changes that require an academic leave the problem is [that] when students are on academic leave, the scholarship is not paid. Yet they may still need to live here. So that bureaucratic rule for stopping scholarship when you are [on] academic leave is a little bit nonsense I feel because that's actually when the student needs extra help.” - G*

*“University is a place for students and supposedly you should make things [on-campus] affordable for students because they're supposed to be able to focus on their academics and other important things in their life. But if they're making things not as accessible, or expensive, it's just not very good for the students, and it's also adding an extra burden on the students.” – Krystal*

The political and economic conditions in Canada play an important role in the experience of racialized international graduate students. Policies at the federal level regulate the conditions of student visas, creating limitations for international graduate students to be awarded or earn sufficient financial support to focus on their role as a student. The financial packages many international graduate students receive from the University of Victoria are not sufficient to cover costs of living in Victoria, pushing them to rely on savings, income from a partner, or work off-campus to reduce their financial struggle. Being an international person within a new national system comes with the additional need to advocate for yourself, as Lynn pointed out, as there are

limited efforts being made by government or institutional actors to address structural barriers that have largely negative implications for racialized international graduate students' well-being.

*“Being a grad student means you have to advocate for yourself a lot, and being an international student means that you have to advocate for yourself in a political system you did not grow up in. And so there may be things you're not used to, or things you're just not aware [from] not being in the system.” - Lynn*

### **5.1.2 Academic Institutional Conditions**

Canadian post-secondary institutions' acceptance of international graduate students is enabling a growing type of migratory pathway that builds upon the desirability of obtaining Eurocentric forms of knowledge and knowledge production (Brunner et al., 2023; Quijano, 2000). Domination of colonial knowledge forms the foundation of Western academia, shaping interactions between institutional actors through histories of violence and assimilation (Henry & Tator, 2009; Quijano, 2000; Thobani, 2022). The academic environment consists not only of the classroom, but also the broader institutional environment concerned with education, and the institutional supports and resources provided to students. Junior suggests that these resources are very valuable for students to feel they are in an environment that sets them up for success, contributing to a sense of belonging. Swan indicates that the orientation period is a vital time for international graduate students to become better acquainted with institutional resources.

*“Resources do matter a lot. Having resources [and] support does matter a lot, because that would [help me] keep a positive tone mentally.” - Junior*

*“I think if in the orientations they explain [the services] it is so great. So, we can be aware of all of these opportunities and we could use these opportunities.” - Swan*

Leaving one's home environment and entering into the Canadian academic system can also be a major challenge and stressor for international graduate students (e.g. Campos et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2018). Educational aspirations are a central part of the lives of racialized international graduate students, yet the feeling of being an outsider within hegemonic Western academic institutions is often present and perhaps heightened due to gaps in support during the initial academic transition that imply international graduate students should be able to operate independently from the moment of arrival. These expectations of individual self-sufficiency add undue hardship for racialized international graduate students who would be better supported through the promotion of mentorship from peers and faculty (Bunjun, 2021; Calley, 2021). G found that UVic lacked role models that could help her envision a successful academic trajectory as an international racialized female graduate student:

*“I really love my research, I still have a lot of hope and ambition for this research. But in my eyes, maybe [because of] my personality, maybe my cultural [up]bringing and the experience I had in my K-12 education. I just never felt confident about having the ability and skills to [do] my research.” - G*

Developing a strong student-supervisor relationship becomes a great source of support for international graduate students to progress through their program and helps them to find a sense of place in the institution (Manathunga, 2014; Thomson & Esses, 2016). Dedicated mentoring time and constructive academic feedback from the supervisor helps ease the transition of racialized international graduate students into a foreign academic environment. Participants shared both positive and negative supervisor experiences, providing an opportunity to highlight what supervisory practices helped students feel most supported through their academic journey. Aziz was not provided sufficient timely guidance from his supervisor, which had academic

consequences, while Jenny found that her supervisor was careful to engage her in discussions about well-being that strengthened their working relationship.

*“[Only] after I failed, my professor admitted that OK, I should have spent more time with you. They were busy with their ambitiousness, which I admire, but still that was impacting their performance [as a supervisor]. [It happened] not [just] me, but to many other students.” - Aziz*

*“It was kind of a very interesting mini cultural shock that I had after coming here because back [home], people don't really care about your mental health and it is kind of still a taboo talking about it. For example, when I was doing my undergraduate thesis we still have supervisors and we do meet them regularly, but they don't really check in with your mental health and your emotional status at the [time]. Right after you sit down, the first thing that your professor asked you would be [a] really technical check-in for your chapters, [like] how many words have you written this week. But then it was kind of very interesting that [the] supervisor that I have now, they were really empathetic and they really care about your mental health status and your mental well-being.” - Jenny*

As representatives of the institution, the supervisors also offer opportunities for students to become aware of the resources that are available to support their holistic well-being. While there are numerous academic supports available to international graduate students, the participants had a low-level of awareness about the institutional resources available to them. For example, some participants shared that they received feedback intended to improve their written work, however they did not know about the Centre for Academic Communication where they could receive such writing support. Having institutional resources that target academic skills was

something participants wanted more of, yet as most were unaware of the services that already existed this suggests that greater promotion of resources is necessary. Alex describes the kind of support he wished for to feel more confident engaging in course work:

*“If there was any way, or free opportunity, [for UVic] to teach me how to deliver a presentation, how to speak [in class], it would be great actually.” - Alex*

Within the classroom environment there were some common challenges and barriers to participation described by international graduate students. Many participants commented on the difficulties of engaging with discussion-based pedagogy when they were still uncomfortable with their English language skills (Gong et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2022). This is not the case for all international students, as some even speak English in their home country in social or academic contexts, but those who do have a larger language barrier find it can create negative constructions of their character in the eyes of domestic faculty and peers (Bai & Wang, 2022; Hyams-Ssekasi & Caldwell, 2018; Lomer et al., 2023). International graduate students like Aziz and Krystal took on additional work to learn the English language and accompanying social behaviours to better fit into social settings.

*“I made my own curriculum of learning the [English] language for myself. I used the idea of mirroring, like when kids are mirroring, and they learn language, body language, culture and everything that comes with it. So, I started using that every time I was in a public sphere, I was just listening to people and seeing how they were talking and not talking, how the performances between people [differed depending on the setting]. I was spending more time reading [English] books and going through the dictionary.” - Aziz*

*“After studying here, I think it has definitely enhanced my English skills, like it has enriched my vocabulary, my expressions.” - Krystal*

Peers could be a vital source of support in adjusting into the academic institution, yet linguistic and cultural differences made it effortful to connect with domestic students (Collins & Callaghan, 2022; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Domestic students are known to play an important role in supporting international students to overcome transition stress, including acculturation (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Daddow et al., 2020; Thomson & Esses, 2016). However, when domestic students perceive their international peers with prejudice and stereotypes through a deficit-based narrative that sees international students as unable to be successful within a Western academic environment, this causes substantial harm to international students' well-being (Heng, 2018; Koo et al., 2021b; Seithers et al., 2022; Wei & Bunjun, 2021). Alex expressed that his experience with these negative perceptions created hesitation to connect with peers and fully engage with his academic environment:

*“Because there are some [domestic] friends [and] I'm thinking if I ask anything, if I'm wrong or [have the] wrong pronunciation it would be fun[ny] to everyone, maybe. So sometimes I want to ask something, but I can't because of this hesitation.” - Alex*

Transitioning to a new academic environment comes with the challenges of adapting to a different classroom culture, developing new academic expectations and skills, and navigating a supervisor-student relationship. Some participants felt there were expectations placed on them of full academic independence that made it difficult to get help for challenges that could be addressed with adequate mentorship opportunities. The findings also indicate that there is a gap

around awareness of institutional resources that prevents them from being accessed by racialized international graduate students, creating additional unnecessary stress and harming well-being.

### 5.1.3 Social-Cultural Influences

International graduate students are impacted by the socio-cultural factors of their national, local, and institutional environment that marks racialized bodies and cultural attributes as inferior to European or Western hegemony (Quijano, 2000; Vakkai et al., 2020). Culture is a very broad category that can be treated rather simplistically through binary paradigms of East/West and primitive/civilized (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000). Institutional appreciation of international students performs narratives of open acceptance of diversity, yet there is implicit pressure for those from non-dominant cultures to conform to the established socio-cultural environment (Aman, 2015; Caxaj et al., 2021; Coloma, 2013). Lily and Aziz found while many Canadians they interacted with had good intentions and perceived themselves as open-minded, as international students they still frequently encountered stereotypes and marginalization.

*“I think Canadians in general tend to be more culturally aware, or at least conscious that the world is a big place and people come from all over. There are many different ways and styles of living, so I do actually feel that a lot of Canadians I've met [are] genuinely curious, or they don't have malign intent even if the outcome is patronizing or racializing in one way or another.” - Lily*

*“I'm not trying to demonize them, but it's just like when you're from a dominant culture it doesn't matter what the minority tells you to change your mind, the stereotype remains there. It's a collective thought and it never changes. Although you start to give them some perspective that this is the background, because you need to give them the history and the*

*background a little bit and they're like oh, interesting. And when people usually say, oh interesting, that means I'm not hearing that. I'm just trying to give you a respectful answer.” - Aziz*

Academic institutions in Canada were borne from Euro western thought and act to uphold Western ideologies and norms that are rooted in the colonization of these lands (Majee & Ress, 2020; Stein, 2017). This includes racial hierarchies that determine who is deserving of knowledge, and the social and political power that comes with it (Razack, 2002; Stein et al., 2019; Thobani, 2007). For international graduate students that are racialized within the context of Canada this positions them as outsiders within the academy, even with equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives that have increased visible diversity at post-secondary institutions (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Stein, 2018). Christina reflects on how international students can both benefit from and be harmed by these dominant national and cultural ideologies:

*“The [image I have of Canada] is mostly positive, but I know no country is perfect. I know it's a colonial country and I know that there would be racism or those kinds of things, and the dominance of the Western ideology or the Western culture. So, after I came here, the positive side, I think the reality confirms this because I really benefited from the more chill, the more respectful environment. But also, I experienced some racism [on the UVic campus].” - Christina*

Participants reflected on their experiences of being placed in race-specific stereotypes that limits their ability to express themselves and be perceived as a complex individual (Ploner, 2024; Tran & Hoang, 2024). The imposition of racial constructs places external limitations negatively influencing well-being by leaving racialized international graduate students feeling

that they have to continually assert that they belong within the institution (Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee & Rice, 2007; Linley, 2018; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). This included negotiating access to academic support from professors and supervisors that was not always forthcoming. G and Adam found they needed to use various forms of personal agency to resist persistent racial marginalization (Bazinet, 2018; Yi, 2020).

*“Being a person of colour, being female, and being a female coming from East Asian culture I think all of this can somewhat be a heavy burden. It's who I am. I totally accept who I am. But I see the intolerance in academia. I talk about a female coming from East Asian culture as a character, or as a description, because my personality is definitely influenced by that culture and that culture has a feature which is hierarchical [to] respect people who are above me. And people who are above me are naturally almost everyone around me, actually, and this would play into my study experience. When I talk with professors I always lower myself as [if] I don't know more than them and I shouldn't go against their will, or I shouldn't say my own opinions too straightforwardly or too confronting. So, I'm really performing all those stereotypes about a female coming from East Asian culture, that is obedient. I mean, I don't want [to], but I acknowledge my personality has that part that I can't easily get rid of.” - G*

*“It's like typesetting or someone is trying to pass you into a role that is not who you are. Making sure you don't take that on is super important because people, especially when you're alone and you're an international student, because you kind of lose who you are. Who you are is based on how you fit into the society and where you're from, and you don't fit into this [new] society, you fit into the one you came from, and so if you forget*

*how you fit and you allow people to tell you 'this is who you are'. 'You're not good at this, or you're good at [that]', then it doesn't go well."* - Adam

Cultural well-being is a lesser discussed aspect for international students, as racialized migrants are expected to adapt into the dominant white Canadian culture (Andreotti, 2011; Thobani, 2007). Racialized international graduate students do resist this assimilatory narrative, finding ways to practice and celebrate their culture with others. Building relationships with co-nationals helped participants build strong social support while strengthening their cultural identity (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Sharing culture in diverse spaces prioritizing inclusivity is a way international students bring a piece of home with them, allowing them to build community while bridging the gap of feeling like an outsider within academia (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017; Bunjun, 2021). International graduate students had different perspectives about the effectiveness of on-campus spaces, like the UVic Global Community, which seek to create space for social engagement and cross-cultural exchange. Some, like May and Krystal, felt that these types of spaces enhanced their well-being through creating opportunities to build a sense of belonging in the broader institutional community.

*"I will say that even as a new student I was very excited about the fact that there's this [Global] Community that's only for us [international students]. I always say that we're all so different that we fit."* - May

*"I introduced them to [my food] and they really enjoyed it as well, and it's like one of those moments that I felt very glad that I was able to share my culture with other people."* - Krystal

These social spaces create intentional diversity that is not always reflective of the social interactions within the local environment. Outside of the institution, the separation of racial and ethnic communities is common, creating distinct social networks based on shared language and culture. This separation also influences who international students are able to connect with on an interpersonal level can leave international graduate students more isolated from the broader community as they remain siloed in interactions with other of a shared or similar background. Swan found that while they experienced less discrimination in Canada compared to what they had been warned about from other international students, they found the social environment was stratified into many independent racial communities. Tom Jones found that the types of diversity present was not equally shared among racial/ethnic groups, so it was difficult to naturally find community based on shared identity.

*“Before I came to Canada, I heard that there are kinds of discrimination between white people and other immigrants, but I wasn't aware of more things. For instance, I wasn't aware that Canada is a country especially based on different communities. I mean, for instance, Indian people support each other, not other communities. White people support each other, not other communities. And I hadn't expected this level of social detraction in Canada.” - Swan*

*“Canada is a very multicultural country, but where I am right now, the only multicultural thing about it is Asian. Right, like you see Indian, you see Chinese, Korean, but you don't know a lot of Black people. If I wanted to see people of colour, that would be in the church.” - Tom Jones*

Social connections were found to help racialized international graduate students develop a network that buffers the impacts of stress by offering emotional support when navigating challenges stemming from life and academics (Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Marya & Patel, 2021; Vakkai et al., 2020). Ethnic networks are communities that form based upon shared nationality, culture, and language and can transcend national borders. These communities are some of the first that are accessed by racialized international graduate students pre-arrival as these networks utilize online spaces to share information to help with the transition to a new country (Gomes, 2020; Ji, 2022). These networks allowed international graduate students, like Krystal, G, and Christina, to access to material goods within Victoria, including housing, that international graduate students otherwise struggle to secure due to a lack of connections.

*“I think the first person that I met from Victoria [was from my country]. She moved here 30 years ago and she offered to pick me up from the airport, and she drove me to her friend's place and I spent the night there and then the following days, she also drove me around. She showed me places and it brought me to grocery stores, and she also offered me a lot of advice [to help me settle].” - Krystal*

*“I think if I summarize my rental hunting experiences, eventually it's [the] ethnic network that helped me. I guess because they trusted me or have a bit more understanding of our situation that I'm here as a student and my [partner] is here to accompany me while looking for a job.” - G*

*“It's more like a [nationality] base here they have already established. So, when I came here as a newcomer, I just began to know a circle of maybe 10 people at the same time. Then we regularly had gatherings and also, I rented a room from this landlady and my*

*roommates, they're also students at UVic. So, it's a very familiar cultural environment. We are not only roommates we are also very, very good friends.*” - Christina

Frequently international graduate students rely upon those ethnic networks during their migration journey, making them a great source of social support when transitioning to Victoria. English language proficiency is often judged as a barrier for international students when integrating into academic and social life (Koo et al., 2021b; Seithers et al., 2022; Wei & Bunjun, 2021). While the global popularity of English has allowed many non-Anglophone international students to be exposed to English, whether through their home education system or various forms of media, being immersed in a different linguistic environment is draining. Even for international students that do come from an English-speaking background, variation in accents becomes a perceived flaw that marks international graduate students as outsiders, both within Canada and academia (Khosravi, 2024; Young, 2017). Swan and G described how their non-native English was sometimes treated like a flaw that limited their potential success in academia:

*“In a way [local people] judge [me], but because English is my second language and it is the truth that although I try hard to learn English or speak in English, I can't ever talk, write, or read English [like a] native.”* - Swan

*“After years of studying PhD here, I have more hesitation about [whether] I [should] do a PhD because I see more of the so-called successful PhD [traits]. The personal image of a successful PhD looks like someone who first has great language skills. [They] have no problem writing [and] reading, [having] English [language skills] that I don't have.”* - G

Racialized international graduate students who had not previously been immersed in an Anglophone context, expressed how the language barrier made them feel insecure when building

social connections. It was commonly noted by participants that it was more difficult to engage with domestic peers due to language barriers, and a lack of cultural understanding and openness from Canadian faculty and peers. For some, like Alex, this created a pattern of avoiding social peer interactions that harmed self-esteem. Aziz and May also commented on how accented language skills can emphasize cultural and social barriers.

*“I think language is also a main barrier, as I am not fluent in English and this is not our mother tongue, so sometimes actually there is some communication gap with my friends. So, I also sometimes feel hesitant to talk to some friends because they are very fluent, but I am not. I don't have so many foreign friends here, I mean, whose language is native English. So, I don't have too many friends, there is no opportunity to learn or to improve [my] English proficiency here.” - Alex*

*“I just came over with the language barrier, and I think it's one of the biggest issues that comes to minorities, the other communities in terms of culture, and this is something they usually don't talk about, and I don't know why, because to me [language] was like the big wall that you just wanted to go through. And because I always believe, I don't think it's my saying, but I think language is the carrier of culture.” – Aziz*

*“There was a[n initial] gap of social stability or like social connections. I did come with an agenda of not sticking to friends [of the same background] because I felt like it's very easy to go back into your comfort zone and like I could have done that in [my home country] so, like why am I here and stuff like that? I was deliberately pushing myself to talk to other people and then when you get [negative] responses like that, you start*

*questioning everything. So, I question stuff like my accent, like does my accent give me away? Is that why people don't like me?" - May*

Perceiving a sense of distance and inferiority from domestic students made it easier to develop friendships with other international students, from both the same and different linguistic backgrounds. Participants found connections with other international students were rooted in shared experiences of adapting to a new environment, as well as an increased open-mindedness and respect towards linguistic and cultural differences. These relationships were able to develop more quickly and were likely to have a dynamic that felt safer for international graduate students to express themselves without judgement. Jonny and G both found that friendships with other international students felt like more of an immediate, genuine connection.

*"I realize I like to hang out with people I can share my difficulty with. And in my department, there are many great peers who are Canadians. I really, really love them because they are really nice and help me a lot, but on certain issues or difficulties I may not find my Canadian peers being people I talk to or share with. It's also because I developed friendship with other international students in other departments and we share a similar cultural background, or we don't share a similar cultural background, but we are both international students and there are issues [where] we just understood each other immediately." - G*

*"Most of the students, which I actually interacted with were international students, and it was quite fun because it was quite easy to understand each other." - Jonny*

Some of the participants were highly involved in various communities on- and off-campus with a strong social network, while others were struggling to cross social barriers,

leaving them feeling extremely isolated. Students that had fewer social connections were also less familiar with institutional resources and services, as many international students preferred to utilize a peer network to access information (Mori, 2000; Sato et al., 2022). May found that struggling to “fit in” had negative mental and emotional effects, as she had initially expected social connections to happen effortlessly and easily. G recommends that positive social interactions with English additional language learners need to be grounded in respect:

*“I had very high self-esteem when I came and when all of these things were happening to me. I did not think like, oh people did tell me it happens. No, it just felt like something that's happening to me and everybody else seems to fit in very well, like what's wrong with me?” - May*

*“I feel the key is the non-native speaker feeling respected [...] because respect comes from you genuinely wanting to understand each other. You genuinely want to hear this person, not just [have] a very superficial conversation.” - G*

Building a social network allowed participants to foster a sense of belonging within the city and academic institution, increasing their satisfaction with their experience as a student and member of the community (Daddow et al., 2020; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Mars underscores that social connections are a foundational aspect to racialized international graduate students’ resiliency by acting as a protective factor for well-being.

*“When it comes to social well-being, social connections, [building] relationships and a sense of belonging, these are very vital for well-being. You need to understand the fact that you have a friend [then] you know you have [a place] where you belong.” - Mars*

Being able to share cultural connections with peers and members of the institutional community that contradict assimilatory expectations for international students has immense benefits for well-being. Interactions grounded in respectful communication and cultural appreciation is important for racialized international graduate students to thrive when building social relationships as well as when accessing all types of institutional services. There were some common difficulties for racialized international graduate students when forming social connections, particularly outside their ethnic networks, however socioemotional well-being was highly regarded as influential to their overall well-being, academic satisfaction, and sense of belonging in Victoria.

#### **5.1.4 Personal Wellness**

As individuals, the participants had unique needs when it came to their personal wellness, which is affected by a myriad of factors, including interactions between biology and the natural and social environment (e.g. Hankivsky, 2012; Marya & Patel, 2021). Macro and meso level circumstances operate under conditions of universal social domination reflected through colonial identity binaries that construct different forms of vulnerability for racialized international students (Caxaj et al., 2021; Quijano, 2000; Udah, 2024). In order to maintain the anonymity of participants, many specific identity factors will not be discussed in great detail, however, they hold significant relevance when developing interventions to promote well-being.

The interviews found that participants were primarily focused on mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of well-being as individual-level drivers of health. Mental well-being was identified by participants as being tied to having resources and strategies to promote their mental health and the ability to cope with various forms of personal and academic sources of stress. While short-term education-based migration can be associated with a temporary moderate

amount of burden on mental well-being during the transition period, some participants shared that they had prepared themselves for the difficulties of being away from home, which allowed them to be more resilient to towards their lifestyle change (Larcombe et al., 2024). Other participants, like Aziz and D, found that their mental health only declined over time upon arriving in Canada (Anandavalli et al., 2020; Baghoori et al., 2022).

*“So, when I came to Canada, I was being very hopeful about this new life, like I was just seeing it like heaven and mental health was just like, it's just mental health. What are you talking about? I'm feeling OK. So, I started, like, cycling, doing more activities and like, you know, getting back to life. But then after a while, the honeymoon was over. Then I went through all those experiences, language barriers, putting myself in challenges. I was going through them all, but I noticed that still my depression has started to increase.” - Aziz*

*“When things started, you know, making more sense in terms of how it worked physiologically, you know, it's like, alright, I'm going to try to do all these things [to get better]. It was not an easy one because you know, I was just super depressed and anxious. So, I felt like it was so hard to even leave my own bed every morning.” - D*

Academic challenges have a strong impact on mental well-being, as failure or setbacks within an academic program can threaten international student’s security within the country (Zhang & Sustarsic, 2022). Conversely, anxiety around academics can lead to lower academic performance (Tang et al., 2022). Many of the participants that alluded to challenges with their mental well-being had utilized counselling services offered through the Student Wellness Centre on campus, or Support Connect, which offered virtual counselling sessions. This did not suggest

that cultural differences were limiting help-seeking behaviours (Clarke, 2023; Kim et al., 2019; Yee & Smith, 2022). While institutional provision of mental health services was welcomed, international graduate students with more complex and chronic mental health issues felt that staff did not have the expertise to support them, particularly at a frequency greater than once per month, as Lynn explained:

*“I kind of wanted to see someone who was a full-time psychologist, not a student [counsellor]. Like I wanted to see someone who could be there for me at the frequency that I needed them.” - Lynn*

Other international graduate students also felt frustrated by the limitations of counselling staff that could relate to their experiences as a racialized international person (Kim et al., 2019; Mori, 2000; Shadowen et al., 2019). A lack of staff cultural competency was an influential factor in whether students maintained recurrent use of on-campus services. Participants, like Swan, brought up the lack of comfort and support they felt when accessing Counselling Services due to the lack of shared identity and culture with available counsellors.

*“The counsellors were mostly Canadians. They [aren't] aware of different cultures, which totally makes sense, but I think as a counsellor, a good counsellor, should be aware of the [different] cultures and try to talk to people based on their own culture.” - Swan*

Some students felt pushed to access mental health support from off-campus providers, or even their home country, to find care that was more culturally competent and could suitably address chronic mental health concerns. Negotiating care amidst the power dynamic between racialized international student and counsellor was difficult for Christina, who felt she was not

being heard or understood in sessions as the counsellor overpowered their interactions. Aziz similarly found that his previous experiences with mental health were not treated as valuable, which limited the support he received from care providers on-campus.

*“Then because of the limited amount of sessions [due to insurance coverage for mental health providers off-campus] I had to go back to Student Wellness Centre to see the counsellor there. But the counsellor there compared with the previous [positive] experience [off-campus], sometimes I don't know how to express myself so I just sit there, and she talked, talked, talked, talked and then what I can do is just nodding, nodding, nodding.” - Christina*

*“I saw a doctor who referred me to a psychiatrist at UVic and I talked to the psychiatrist, and I gave them the feedback from my [home country] therapist to make it easier for them to understand my situation. But [it] seems like [that] feedback was not important for them because it was probably coming from a third world country and they're behind, and I could just see that in their body language, their entitled attitude, which was very stupid. And all they could do was ask me, have you done CBT workshop class, which was like not something that I could get help from because I already [tried that]. CBT classes are good, but I already had those learnings from my own therapist years before. So, they were not offering me things that could be better than what I already have.” - Aziz*

For participants with less positive experiences, the accumulation of disappointing or harmful interactions with service providers over time diminishes trust in the institution, while further isolating international graduate students (Johnson et al., 2018; Koo et al., 2021a; Yee & Smith, 2022). Demonstrating a greater sensitivity towards the power dynamics that exist between

racialized and non-racialized, domestic and international, staff and student, is crucial to providing services oriented towards improving mental well-being. G found that she was filtering the topics she discussed based on the response from the service provider, instead of prioritizing the issues she needed support for.

*“I only just talk about things I think they can handle because when I talk about my supervisor, this counsellor isn't sensitive about power dynamics between my supervisor and me. From then I feel I can't really open up this other aspect [of my struggles].” - G*

On the other hand, international graduate students that were generally using these mental health resources for coping with transition stress and navigating interpersonal relationships were satisfied with their experience. This suggests clear limitations to the scope and expertise of services in promoting racialized international graduate students' mental well-being.

Physical components of well-being are frequently a prioritized aspect of well-being due to the obvious markers of disease and illness that can decrease quality of life. For participants who live with chronic illness, physical limitations shaped well-being as they had to come to terms with those changes and create new expectations for their body, as Lynn described.

*“[To] have the double whammy of I'm not feeling well, and I also feel bad that I have not been feeling well. Even though it's something that I couldn't [help], like I'm controlling my condition with medication, I'm controlling my condition with diet. I'm not 100% perfect, but I'm better than I used to be and I'm doing the best I can. It's OK if even despite all of my precautions, my condition worsens anyways. Like learning how to be OK with that, it's been one of the major things I struggle with when it comes to my well-being.” - Lynn*

Racialized international graduate students spoke about the importance of maintaining a balanced lifestyle through diet, exercise, and sleep to enhance their well-being. This was oftentimes a challenge, particularly early on in relocating to Victoria or during times of academic stress, however, having a comprehensive approach towards physical well-being had positive effects on other aspects of their lives, including socioemotional health and academic performance. Krystal and Adam found that incorporating movement into a wellness routine acted as a stress reliever and ritual that promoted overall health.

*“I think sleep is very important for me and I was just in a very tense and stressed state for like [a whole] year, so my sleep quality hasn't been very great. Starting from my first semester I would play [intramurals] every week and it was the biggest stress reliever for me because not only was I able to play with my friends, [but] I've made some new friends.” - Krystal*

*“[Exercise is] a ritual you do every day, it takes time. When you're done, you're tired. You sleep well. So, no matter where you're going through, having a ritual really helps.” - Adam*

Maintaining physical well-being also includes safety from crime and violence in public spaces. While people generally move around Victoria without fear of physical violence, several participants shared experiences of receiving abusive language referencing race or ethnicity that occurred on the University of Victoria campus. These encounters removed that feeling of safety, even without direct threats of physical violence, as the psychological harm being inflicted reestablished to international graduate students that they were unwelcome ‘Others’ within the institution (Caxaj et al., 2021; Lee & Jones, 2013). Pathways for reporting such incidents were

unclear, and participants expressed that it did not feel worthwhile to bring forward these experiences to staff as they were ashamed or felt that this type of incident was a personal challenge to overcome rather than reflective of socio-cultural attitudes towards racial differences.

Mars and Christina shared their experience:

*“I had [an experience of abusive language] twice at school. It was really emotional, why should you have to discriminate? But I thought about it, I took it upon myself that [it] can never [get me down]. I [still] need to focus and achieve my goal.” - Mars*

*“[I heard] a very explicit and brutal insult to me and my [international student] friend without any stop, nonstop. Then I didn't go to [that place on-campus] again.” - Christina*

Interactions of marginalized racial and gender identities can also create additional physical threats through increased vulnerability to sexualized violence (Bhambra, 2014; Linley, 2018; Sue et al., 2007). While only one participant brought up this type of experience, it is important to emphasize how individual identity shapes interactions with the institutional environment and actors. Lily gave permission to share her experience of an incident for which she received a high level of support from her department. Having navigated bureaucratic procedures implementing accountability and restoring her sense of safety highlighted to Lily the importance of trauma-informed institutional responses to harassment and violence.

*“I did face some experience of [sexual] harassment [on-campus from another student]. So, when I set up a meeting with my department chair, they were very well aware of EQHR at UVic and [I received great support, but it made me] reflect that having a racialized and gendered presence here also makes some of us more vulnerable to some of these encounters. - Lily*

The colonial control of gender and sexuality required the implementation of strict binaries that replicate hegemonic social ways of being, punishing those who act outside of these boundaries (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000). These forms of social control have also been implemented globally, sometimes being regulated more harshly in former European colonies. In those cases, some students seek to come to Canada for the opportunity to more freely explore and express their gender and sexual identities without fear of violence or prosecution, as was the case for Tom Jones (Fakunle, 2021).

*"[Being in Canada], I get to explore, because back home I was questioning my sexuality, and it wasn't really safe to do that." - Tom Jones*

Encompassing both spiritual and religious practice, spirituality is an important aspect of well-being for many people (Koo et al., 2021a; Qi et al., 2021). The significance of spiritual or religious faith and practice to well-being varied amongst participants, providing limited data, but it bears mentioning to create a comprehensive understanding of the personal ways that well-being is formed by racialized international graduate students. For some participants, maintaining spiritual practice is linked to identity and community, making it a central part of well-being. Christina and Jenny found they were still learning about the role spirituality played in their lives.

*"Also, [while] adapting to the new environment my mental health could be at the lowest state so, I reached out to the Multi-Faith Chapel to ask help from the spiritual care provider." - Christina*

*"Yeah, I do have the urge inside me to kind of look into what kind of spiritual growth that you can [have] if you don't believe in any religion. But I'm still searching for it." - Jenny*

Joining a faith-based community provides a pathway to foster community connections, which are also rooted in identity, and provide further socioemotional support for well-being. Religious practices can also carry a lot of weight due to histories of conflict and colonization, which adds a layer of complexity for international students negotiating their position as a racialized settler. This type of internal conflict has the potential to detract from well-being, rather than enhance it. Adam described how religion brought up complex feelings for him:

*“The spiritual [realm] is quite interesting being an international person and someone who grew up in, essentially whose religion has been prescribed based on colonization is something I definitely I’m aware of and something I think about. And I think about how to adapt that and ensure it’s something that works for me. So, when I think of my spiritual well-being, I not only think about the religion of my parents and the religion of my youth, I also think about the religion that was not given to me, that was taken away from me and how I can build connections with that as well and ensure that I’m a full person, that I present in a way that is who I am and not who I was prescribed to become based on colonization.” - Adam*

Overall, spirituality was not overly emphasized by these participants as a central component of well-being, giving the sense it is a more personal experience than some participants were willing to share in a research setting. Along with considerations for mental and physical well-being, personal wellness highlights the diverse strategies that racialized international graduate students use to promote their well-being. There remain some gaps in the provision of culturally competent institutional care that can address broad challenges to well-being, yet international graduate students are resourceful in seeking out the resources they need and using informal strategies and resources as needed.

### 5.1.5 Summary

There are many influences on the well-being of racialized international graduate students presented within this chapter operating at macro, meso, and micro levels. Despite these sometimes-adverse conditions, racialized international graduate students had individual and community strategies they used to promote well-being (see 6.1.1). It is important to highlight the diversity among participants as international students have individual perspectives on well-being that may consist of distinct approaches and strategies that are best suited to promote their well-being (Bennett et al., 2024; Starr-Glass, 2018). Becoming an international student in Canada can also be a transformation in altering understandings of identity and well-being through increased knowledge of intersectional forms of marginalization, as Lily describes:

*“I definitely do feel that since coming to Canada. I've been more exposed to a multidimensional idea of well-being because in many other countries people were not that comprehensive with what well-being meant. They talked about it very generally like ‘are you OK with money?’ ‘Is your mental health OK?’ And that seems to be pretty much it. But the students here in Canada, the community, they have [an] intersectionality wheel, and they have all of these new ideas [and dimensions like gender identity and dis/ability] that people can take at their own comfort level.” - Lily*

Exploring the various conceptualizations of and influences on well-being in more detail also allows for the institutional-level gaps in supporting student well-being to be identified and critiqued with the intention of being more inclusive (see 5.2) (Bhambra, 2014; Hankivsky, 2012). While D summarizes that his overall experience as a graduate student was rewarding, there remain many systemic challenges that impact well-being.

*“I'm not saying it's not a good option [to become an international graduate student] because it will definitely make you a better person, but to reach that level, there's some hard layers that you have to go through.” - D*

## **5.2 Institutional Factors and Circumstances Influencing Well-being**

With a deeper understanding of racialized international graduate students' experiences of well-being this research directs attention to the ways in which institutional factors and circumstances enhance and hinder well-being (RQ2). Analysis and discussion of the data using the major themes allowed for the development of seven target areas where participants had experienced barriers to well-being: *High Costs of Living in Victoria, BC; Transition Support; Interactions with Institutional Services; Student-Supervisor Relationship; Balancing Work and Life Responsibilities; Building a Future in Canada; and Critical Awareness as a Racialized Settler*. Racialized international graduate student participants had large variations in experiences, so these findings summarize the commonalities among student's experiences while highlighting areas where and why disparities existed. These findings directly contributed to the recommendations for institutional-level changes (see 6.2) to promote the well-being of racialized international graduate students. Aziz describes the challenges of being an international student like coming to a new planet:

*“[As an international student] I am coming to a very different world [...] I need you to tell me where I should stand in this unknown world. It's like I'm coming to a different planet.” - Aziz*

### 5.2.1 High Costs of Living in Victoria, British Columbia

Victoria is known for being an expensive city, with the cost of living having increased in recent years, impeding fiscal accessibility for students (e.g. Kloster, 2022; Uguen-Csenge, 2022). While the high cost of living and difficulties finding housing in Victoria is a great barrier for all students moving to Victoria, international graduate students have additional barriers as they face financial pressures of being a student and a migrant, with limited access to funding and work opportunities that can provide a livable wage (Ellis, 2023; Gomez, 2020). Swan spoke of how the greater economic burden international graduate students face was not being addressed by the institution, such as through increased scholarships.

*“I think [there needs to be] more equal conditions for the graduate students, especially international students, in terms of the economic condition. [This] is one of the most important things for them and maybe, the university can find some ways to help these international students to get some more monies.” - Swan*

While individual financial planning is important, international graduate students require information and institutional support to promote their financial well-being. The total costs associated with living in Victoria were a surprise for some students, as estimates around the cost of their living expenses did not match up with reality, which did not prepare them for potential high levels of financial stress. It was difficult to receive information from the institution that provided a more accurate representation of the current living costs, which Jenny found especially problematic as graduate students are more likely to move to Victoria with family.

*“I would say the main recommendation is to update the information that you provide to international students, like the estimation for the living cost is not accurate anymore. It*

*[rose] so much and some of the students that they come with family, then it could really [catch] them off guard that they didn't really expect that it could be so much, especially if they have children or come with their family members.” - Jenny*

A lack of knowledge about other aspects of life in Canada, such as tipping culture, added additional financial burden upon a constrained budget. Transparency from the institution around total expected costs for pursuing a graduate degree would help international graduate students to adequate budget and determine whether they are in an appropriate financial situation to undertake a graduate degree program in Canada. Mino described how they were intentional in financially planning in preparation to become an international student, yet the budget they set did not match current economic conditions in Victoria.

*“So sometimes I have to struggle to budget everything. [I] go to Walmart, which is very far from my home, and come [back] with 4 bags of groceries because if I go to Thrifty Foods or whatever that's closer to my home, I'm going to spend double the money to get the same amount of groceries. I wish I knew all of this stuff before coming, just mainly for being able to budget everything and to make the final decision on [my monthly expenses]. Also, I didn't know that tipping was a thing here in Canada, so I didn't [include] that on top of everything” - Mino*

Housing is not only a large expense, but is also a crucial determinant of health (Marya & Patel, 2021; Raphael et al., 2020). There is a severe lack of on-campus graduate housing to accommodate the needs of international graduate students for safe, secure, and affordable housing. Residence Services holds 50 places on-campus for single graduate students, which only accounts for approximately 2% of the graduate student population. Other graduate students may

be eligible for family housing, but the long wait list does not make this a feasible option for many students when arriving in Victoria. These limitations created frustration for students like Mino and Dan, as from the outset Residence Services did not meaningfully facilitate access to housing, nor were staff empathetic to these challenges.

*“I don't know how many graduate students are at UVic, but I believe it's more than 50. But 50 are the only places that we got for Graduate Housing, and that's insane because I need to live somewhere.” - Mino*

*“[The staff] have all this kind of attitude that you take it or you go, we don't care. [That's] all the people who deal with these [residence] applications. At least I found this experience like they don't care [whether] you take it or you don't take it.” - Dan*

Difficulties in finding reliable housing starts as soon as there is intention to move in Victoria. Securing a place off-campus is compounded by distance (there is a rapid turnover in leases), and a lack of ability to provide suitable Canadian references and credit history check. The use of credit cards is not common in all countries, as shared by Mino, and Victor found without Canadian-based income or employment, landlords and rental companies are hesitant to take on tenants that do not easily fulfill their requirements of demonstrating sustained financial stability. G described the process of finding housing as so stressful that it continues to harm her mental health.

*“I've been trying to rent places and they try to look into your credit score. Well, I don't have one, because I've never used a credit card, like it's not a thing in [my home country].” - Mino*

*“It's a problem for everyone [to find housing], not only international students. But then, having no credit history, no nothing, makes it more of a challenge, and also knowing no one like at all, like coming here fresh. It's definitely a struggle.” - Victor*

*“I don't feel any sense of belonging for Victoria because I don't feel this place is so welcoming, actually. And the rental being so expensive for a student having no connection and no foundation, no history in Canada upon their first arrival. It was a horrible nightmare. I think I have PTSD from finding a place. Constant rejection or just no follow-up at all after sending out so many emails introducing who I am. I think the places being so expensive and inaccessible for students is a huge problem, yet the overall government, city government or provincial government or the federal government embrace the rich investment people put in the real estate here and don't think [of] students' basic shelter needs as something important. [Same for] UVic. I'm very angry at our university [for] not providing enough family housing.” - G*

If it is not possible to secure housing with a reputable management company or landlord, international students may use alternative options like room shares or subletting. International students who rely on more informal housing arrangements may be taken advantage of due to a lack of knowledge of tenancy rights, pathways for advocacy, and an inability to walk away from a harmful living environment if they need to remain in Victoria (Calder et al., 2016). Krystal describes the challenges she had with securing a rental apartment and being forced to move over five times in her first year in Victoria, often with only days' notice, adding significant mental, physical, and financial strain.

*“It was extremely challenging because I remember I was still not able to secure a place a week before my arrival. I think I got, like, my housing confirmed maybe just 3 days before I left for Victoria.”*

*“So, the first place that I lived in was also a shared house situation. I lived with the landlady, and she only accepted cash for rent payment. And because she didn't accept the e-transfer or any other electronic methods I asked if I could have a receipt, and she refused to issue a receipt. I just felt kind of sketchy about that and she got very angry with me, and she just told me to just move out as soon as possible. So, the next day I had to move out.”*

*“[At my third apartment, the landlord used to through my stuff when I was out, she then] told me that the tenancy was not working out and she wanted me to move out as soon as possible. Then I had to start looking for housing again and it was very, very stressful because I was poor, you know. I was working part time, and I was also very busy with course work because it was my first semester and I was very much overwhelmed.”*

*“After I moved out of that place, I moved into another apartment near downtown. And then again, I had a very bad allergic reaction because people were able to smoke cigarettes and weed in that apartment. And the smoke was pretty intense because I could smell [it on] my clothing. I think the smoke has even infiltrated my wardrobe and even my body smells like smoke, so it was not a healthy environment for me.” - Krystal*

In order to stretch their financial resources, many racialized international graduate students commented on their frequent reliance on both on-campus and off-campus food banks. While those support services are available to help ease the financial stress, the reality is that the

funding packages given to graduate students, which include employment with the university, are at times insufficient to cover the basic costs of living in Victoria. G explains that food banks are a necessity for her to cope with the financial limitations of her student funding.

*“I want to say the financial pressure is a very, very big inevitable rock in our life. We just have to live a very, very simple, moderate life. I rely on food banks. I am very grateful for the community. That is one good thing the university has provided, [the] Community Garden Food Bank, I also go to [a community food bank]. So, I go to these two places every month to reduce my food cost. It helps a lot.” - G*

International graduate students have not found that food services on-campus are a suitable option due to strict budget constraints. Alex could not find food options on campus that were not only affordable, but also did not serve culturally relevant food that was outside of Western diet norms. This further isolated him from community spaces as he was unable to feel a sense of cultural belonging and inclusion within the institution. May further describes how the food costs limited her ability to engage in social activities that largely centre around food.

*“If I don't take any lunch with me from my home, I can't take anything from here on campus. I actually have nothing to eat [because it is too expensive and not culturally appropriate].” - Alex*

*“Say for example, you've met a couple of new people in the course, and then they want to hang out on-camp. You have this financial restriction in your head, but you also want to fit in and not miss this hangout opportunity. [So, you decide to participate but] not [to] eat because then I have to order food that I might not be able to afford or like ruin my budget for the month.” - May*

The financial situation of many racialized international graduate students creates conditions of immense stress that are harmful to well-being (Marya & Patel, 2021). High costs of living due to housing and food costs, combined with financial precarity stemming from a lack of access to institutional financial support are leaving many racialized international graduate students struggling to meet their basic living needs.

### **5.2.2 Transition Support**

For international graduate students, the transition to a Canadian educational institution starts after their acceptance when they are applying for their visa. The length and difficulty of this process varies by country of origin and occurs under federal jurisdiction, but this process offers the first opportunity for the university to respond to international graduate students with empathy to the stressfulness of the process. Alex found it challenging having to wait and see if he was successful in getting a visa after working hard to secure a supervisor and funding for his program.

*“It's stressful because you have to manage your funding, your supervisor, you have to get admission [to] your university. After that you are not sure [if] you can go [to] Canada or not because of the visa only. So, it's a very long process. It's very stressful.” - Alex*

The institution assists international students with the visa process by providing a study permit letter, which allows immigration services to determine the length of the study permit an international graduate student receives. This would ideally cover the entire program, to allow international students greater security to complete their program. As Krystal shared, discrepancies in study permit length have a significant impact on the student's ability to complete their program by adding uncertainty, stress, and additional costs.

*“There is a problem with my study permit now because the study permit letter that I got from UVic only stated one year as the length of the program. But this is a 2-year full-time program, so [when] I received the study permit information, I immediately sent an e-mail to the office asking if they have made a mistake in stating the duration of the program. They told me that the length of the program written on the letter is not supposed to cover the entire duration of my studies. They told me I have to apply for an extension when my study permit is going to expire. It just felt pretty odd at the time and that is why when I'm here, I started to ask my classmates who are also international students and who are also doing the same program as me, and they have like two or three years on their study permit letter. So, I was just very confused, and now I have to apply for an extension of my study permit because I still have one more year to go and I am actually kind of upset because I have to pay for the extension of the study permit letter and also, I have to pay for the study permit extension.” - Krystal*

Once international students have received all the necessary approvals and are ready to begin their program, they can participate in orientation activities to bridge the transition into the University of Victoria. Events and workshops for all new students are typically organized in the first week of September to coincide with the start of classes. This experience can be intense, with international students participating in a condensed schedule filled with information and social activities. The compact nature of orientation also means that students are crammed with information in such a short period of time, which many participants, including Alex, did not find effective for them to become familiar with the various institutional resources and services available to them.

*“Actually, in the orientation they explained so many things at the same time, so many around ten, twenty, thirty clubs. So many things to do. I didn't get to memorize everything at the same time because when I came here, I am fully new in Canada. I'm nervous here. Orientation is the first day of the university so, when they deliver everything at the same time, actually it's very challenging to capture, to memorize everything. Yeah, I really forgot everything.” - Alex*

For international graduate students that are unable to attend due to visa delays or a lack of secure housing, they miss the opportunity to access valuable information and begin building peer relationships. Even for students that were in attendance, the format of orientation does not necessarily allow for information about student services to be reinforced in a manner that is useful during times of stress. Jenny noticed some of her international peers were still unaware of the resources that were available to them, which led to feelings of helplessness when they were not able to identify a clear resource or staff person to turn to.

*“I see the other international students in my program that may not have the resources, and if they are not that proactive to actually go do more research on it, then they're really lost, and they can be really helpless as well.” - Jenny*

International graduate students that have a greater number of social connections were more aware of the services that the university offers as they can utilize a peer network to ease their transition and bridge the knowledge gap (Daddow et al., 2020; Gomes, 2020). Receiving mentorship from both domestic and international peers is invaluable to finding support and community within the confines of the institution (Bunjun, 2021; Calley, 2021). May found that building relationships with other incoming students even before physically being on campus

helped her feel a sense of belonging, while Jenny thought that structured social activities, like those available during orientation, helped make the transition less lonely.

*“[I attended some online events before coming to campus,] so it didn't feel like I was entering an alien university because the orientation is technically the first thing that you're given when you come on campus, and then if you can see even like 3 familiar faces in a span of like 200 people, you like it. I think that was something that it was a common theme that I tried to achieve throughout my journey, which is like finding people who I've already connected with [to] help me to overcome the initial hiccups of basic things, like I didn't know how to cross the road, or how [Canadian] money works.” - May*

*“I would say really look into opportunities to make friends like, especially if you know you're not the kind of person that you can just start chatting with random strangers in restaurants and pubs. That you need some kind of structure to help you make friends here.” - Jenny*

The different ways academic institutions operate globally makes it important for international graduate students to become familiar with the university services and resources that are currently available to them. A lack of awareness is a significant barrier to accessing important supports for enhancing well-being. However, the typical orientation period is insufficient for providing racialized international graduate students with the information they need to be successful (Shokirova et al., 2022). Placing a greater emphasis on building support networks for international graduate students, such as through the use of peer mentoring, will help students be able to seek out the resources they need (Gomes, 2020; Thomson & Esses, 2016).

### 5.2.3 Interactions with Institutional Services

Educational institutions provide a great number of services to support their students across multiple aspects of well-being, however, there remain challenges for racialized international graduate students to know, access, and feel comfortable with institutional services (e.g. Halpern et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Shadowen et al., 2019). As D summarizes, broadly speaking international students have unique stressors and institutional support needs, which is why there are specific campus services like the International Centre for Students available for that student population.

*“Not everyone could fully understand what the international students have to go through.”*

*“As UVic staff, sometimes [they have] no idea that the visa things can be quite challenging. Immigration can be quite challenging. So, I think again, maybe if it's kind of like an individual department where it's related to your own study, not everyone could fully understand what the international students have to go through. Which is why this university has an International Centre for Students so if they're clueless or they haven't really been able to find answers from their respective departments they could always swing by and make an appointment and then, you know, ask around.” - D*

Many participants shared that it could be confusing to know where to go and what services were available to address their unique concerns. Even when students do try to reach out for support, there may not be additional knowledge gained from interacting with institutional staff, as Tom Jones and Dan found:

*“I saw what they said about it online, but I needed clarification, so I went there and the [only] explanation that I got was the [staff] person just read the information on the Internet to me.” - Tom Jones*

*“I did not find anything new when I went [to the International Centre for Students]. They were just saying the same things that I was able to find easily by a simple Google search.” - Dan*

Some international graduate students did not know of a direct pathway to getting support as institutional resources were not shared or became lost in the overwhelming amount of information that gets pushed out during orientation. It is necessary to sustain the promotion of institutional services across the international graduate student body to ensure that they can fulfill their purpose of aiding students. For example, many participants did not know there was a space on campus where they can get support with academic writing despite receiving feedback on their coursework that their writing needed to be strengthened. This suggests a gap in communication about academic supports that could also be bridged by professors referring students to services as necessary. However, institutional spaces that offered technical expertise were viewed positively, as described by G, as the interaction felt respectful and encouraging.

*“My original intention was to have technical writing support help, but in the end, I got both sides of help because the questions they ask make me see my research and my proposal in another way. I think the question they ask constantly goes back to what I value, what I care about, why I want to do this. It's like the questions open up more possibilities for a deeper understanding of me and my project. [...] I guess I felt the respect and encouragement [from staff]. They have a constant sense of encouragement,*

*of really not diminishing my sense of writing ability, but helping me to see how I can better express my original ideas.” - G*

Other services, such as the Student Wellness Centre, are inaccessible for students as they operate at a capacity that is unable to meet the regular demands of the student body. While the mental health and medical services provided for students may have an off-campus alternative, there remains a gap in promoting these resources among racialized international graduate students. Without explicit direction towards alternatives there is the risk that international graduate students will not receive the care they need, forgoing necessary service rather than continuing to advocate for access to appropriate care. Krystal shared how being unable to access on-campus medical resources felt like a dead end:

*“I think maybe there could be more things that GSS could have done in terms of, like helping graduate students to connect and also maybe providing more support for the Student Wellness Centre. For example, when I looked up their website, and on the website, they're saying that their appointments are like completely full for the entire summer, but I was looking at this like in June. So, I thought that maybe they are understaffed. I'm not sure if it's understaffed or maybe there are other reasons, maybe summer is just very busy. But I think wellness is such a crucial thing for students and I think we are not getting well supported.” - Krystal*

When they were able to access services on-campus, participants expressed feeling discomforted in their frequent interactions with staff from a homogenous Canadian background. Without staff explicitly trained in intercultural competency, racialized international graduate students felt they were being dismissed when asking for help. Even with particular services, like

counselling, that require an empathetic client-centred approach, dissatisfaction was expressed by participants as they had to take on additional labour by helping staff understand how racialized international students experience the institution differently due to their positionality (Akhtar, 2007; Ploner, 2024). Aziz shared how a language barrier can make interacting with institutional services frustrating, while G reflected on how gender and racial identity influence power dynamics between service provider and student.

*“One thing that I notice is very hurtful for most of us with a language barrier is when it comes to bureaucracy [...] it's that you feel that you're always being misunderstood or dismissed when you're in different offices.” - Aziz*

*“Probably [the] university, or the contractor agency the university partners with, [needs to] emphasize more of the identity preferences. I wish it was a female, a person of colour counsellor who can relate or understand what it means to be a person of colour in this environment.” - G*

The lack of experience of post-secondary institutions in accommodating the diverse needs of international students can result in them relying more on informal information and practices to support well-being. These findings suggest that institutional services need to find ways to address the gap in awareness of services to ensure all students can benefit from these resources (Calder et al., 2016; Moore-Jones, 2022). Unfamiliarity with how things work in Canada, and language and cultural barriers are not insurmountable obstacles when an interpersonal connection can be developed during the course of a service. Positive engagement with staff occurred when racialized international graduate students felt they were being heard and respected.

### 5.2.4 Student-Supervisor Relationships

The relationship between a graduate student and their supervisor(s) is one of the critical determinants of a student's satisfaction and success within their program (Aarnikoivu, 2020; Manathunga, 2014). Supervisors are a main source of support throughout the student's academic journey, and have significant power over their students, both as subject experts and the evaluators of a student's work. This hierarchy occurs against the backdrop of the knowledge economy that utilizes internationalization initiatives to facilitate inbound international student mobility into institutions grappling with racialized educational inequalities (Majee & Ress, 2020; Stein, 2017; Stein et al., 2019). As Dan explains, the supervisor is a constant for graduate students in a research-based program:

*“There is no system who kind of takes you through this whole journey apart from the supervisor.” - Dan*

The level of engagement a supervisor has with their graduate student's life will vary, however, international graduate students felt that supervisors that provided mentorship beyond mere academic supervision were helping them to succeed within Canadian academia and beyond. Supervisors play a crucial role in obtaining financial aid and scholarships, and internal and external work opportunities, which allows their influence to extend beyond a student's time at UVic. Mino and Christina characterized their relationship with their supervisors as positive due to the mentorship that extended beyond purely academic and work activities.

*“[My supervisor] was one of the only people that actively helped me, like find a place to live before moving, like ‘please keep me updated, I will write you whatever letter you need to apply for any place, please contact me for whatever you need’. [Another]*

*example, I needed to get a book for my thesis also not too long ago, and she was like 'please contact the library they can get it for you and if they can't please just contact me and I will get it for you. I will use my own funding to get this book for you, this is important for your thesis'. I mean, I got the book from the library. There wasn't a problem, but she was willing to do that also. She's being really, really good [about] being listed as a reference for jobs that I got and all that. But one of the things that I appreciate the most [about] her is that she's very honest and very sincere with everything that she says." - Mino*

*"I feel very grateful for my supervisor. They know my situation and they respect me and they understand me and maybe empathize [with] me. But also, they sometimes advise me, but they are doing that kindly, they are not blaming me or criticizing me. No, they want me to succeed." - Christina*

For international graduate students that do not have a strong or positive relationship with their supervisor(s), their experience of doing research was associated with more feelings of isolation and stress. The power dynamic between student and supervisor is amplified by racialized international graduate student's precarious residency status, financial reliance on RA/TA work, and unfamiliarity with the Canadian education system. Supervisors that are authoritative or absent towards their graduate students are fostering an environment where international graduate students are not able to thrive. Faculty members may be at times more focused on their own career development, like Aziz and D experienced, that leaves international graduate students feeling neglected.

*“Then I noticed it, what a selfish person. Despite telling [my supervisor] that this is my situation, this it's so hard for me to even pay for the admission fee, pay the application fee [...], she was negligent. She just wanted to retire and just forget about me. So, I was put [under] a lot of pressure, but then I came to my current [supervisor], who is still supporting me. Who's a very nice one that I told you [some] issues and stuff, but still through time, I notice she's always there for me.” - Aziz*

*“It's great that I reached out to these different departments and resources available and again, UVic was actually pretty good at providing all these different support systems so, I felt great. I was just sort of disappointed with the fact that my department should be more responsible for its grad students because I feel if you are brave enough to accept these students, then you should be able to offer the same kind of support. And I feel like a lot of faculty members, at least within that department, they just got so busy with themselves, like with their own research projects. So, they had their own agenda, sometimes they just forgot about the fact that grad students existed.” - D*

For international graduate students that have greater struggles with their English language proficiency there is additional stress from the daily communication barriers. Faculty and staff members that are more engaged with students, such as by asking them simple personal questions, are able to build more trust with students and become a significant source of academic and mental support (Bai & Wang, 2022; Bunjun, 2021). When supervisors react out of frustration to language or cultural barriers, or without intentionally creating space for international graduate students to voice their thoughts, that drives a wedge that affects the student's confidence, and ultimately their academic performance (Manathunga, 2014). G explains how different interactions with faculty members could be:

*“Overall, I think it's exposure to international students. I personally think my supervisor doesn't have a lot of experience with international students, that's why my supervisor has little consciousness of what I go through. They never ask how I feel, how my life is going. Never. They just talk about academic stuff with me. The more friendly professor I see, they start with 'how are you?' 'How is your life going?' I feel no matter [if] it's a way of greeting or a genuine interest [in] caring about students, at least they gave the space for students to express how their life is going. Life is not [just] academic. I think the intimidating professors just do their job in the way they think best, which is I tell you what to do, I give you what I can give you. They're doing their job very well. I mean they don't need to carry the burden from the international students, but it's just good for students to be heard, to know that the person they will work with for a long time actually cares about their life, or cares about them as a person, not just a student.”*

*“Then my supervisor says you should be more confident. I just become speechless in how I react [...] but I often can't react right away, I can't express myself in English. What I can say at that moment and the professor, I don't know how they think, the professor maybe took it as I'm too slow or again, not confident in speaking up for myself, but it was more like I had too much to process and can't react right away and also it's a little bit intimidating so I can't find an immediate response to share this. With professors who I feel more trust with, who show more friendliness and care, I feel much easier to actually share what my immediate thoughts are. Just for professors who are intimidating I don't even have words to say. I'm afraid to say anything wrong, or I'm trying to find the best way to answer so that they care about me or value me. But for professors who are friendly I don't worry too much because I know that they try to understand me.” - G*

With the quality of their experience as graduate students relying heavily on their supervisor relationship, faculty members need greater awareness about how their interactions with international graduate students can have a profound effect on the student's mental and emotional well-being. Establishing clear expectations for the student-supervisor relationship along with strengthening practices of mentorship are vital to increasing support for international graduate students.

### **5.2.5 Balancing Work and Life Responsibilities**

The significant academic and work demands of being a graduate student make it difficult for many international graduate students to maintain a work-life balance that is conducive to well-being. Graduate students have a heavy workload, with many finding that their research projects become such a consuming part of their lives that it becomes difficult to find time for other life tasks, including sleep. These work conditions were exacerbated by the lack of employee-related protections available to international graduate students who have work requirements incorporated into scholarships and funding packages. Victor describes how that system can be exploitative for international students, while D found that the workload negatively impacted his physical health.

*“When I started, the expectations were that I don't only do my research for certain hours per week. So, there's no set limit on how many hours I have to work per week because on the university's paper they gave me this scholarship. They pay me money. They're not paying money for nothing. They pay me money because I'm a research assistant. That's what they write down in the paperwork. But in reality, I'm not treated as a research assistant, I'm treated as a student and all the work I'm doing is not because it's “work”.*

*It's considered part of your life. So, because kind of there's a loophole there that they're exploiting in a bad way for international students specifically.” - Victor*

*“[Doing] coursework [required] just pulling like a bunch of all nighters. Maybe like five nights out of seven days a week I had to do that. There were nights where I had to [sleep] in the lab because I felt like there's no way I can actually drag myself home. I was just too tired, and mind you, I live pretty close so I could have walked, but I just didn't have the strength to do that because I really, really worked hard. I would say [I worked] maybe up to like 75-80 hours a week combined.” - D*

For international graduate students, many of their funding packages include work as a Teaching Assistant (TA). TAs at UVic are unionized positions with a set number of hours per semester and outlined responsibilities, yet international graduate students frequently expressed it took them longer than their weekly assigned hours to finish their tasks. This was particularly evident for newer English speakers when having to mark large amounts of coursework. The extra time spent working does not come with additional compensation, but does require more time and energy from international graduate students, as G explains:

*“A professor tried to streamline the teaching, so we don't use too much of our [TA] hours to prepare. But, for me with English as a second language, teaching something or facilitating discussion, all that is really taking some time for me to prepare. [Especially] marking. My peers who have English as a native language can mark pretty efficiently because I communicate with them [about] how fast they can mark, or what's their pace and I think it took me at least three times [as long] to finish a similar portion of work because I have to read [student's work].” - G*

Stress is exacerbated by financial precarity that requires international graduate students to take on an even greater workload to meet the high costs of living in Victoria, BC. Financial pressures push some international graduate students to pursue additional work off-campus, typically within the service industry. This type of work frequently does not contribute to long-term career goals, only serving as temporary employment to provide enough income to support themselves and their families (Ankomah, 2022). Although Dan found it to necessary to pursue different avenues of work, he cautioned that it could detract from his priorities as a student.

*“It's very easy to get like all those [minimum wage] jobs which are not good in a sense that if you work those jobs that takes so much of your energy that you can't concentrate on your studies.” - Dan*

The work expectations placed upon racialized international graduate students, both inside and outside of academia, creates high conditions of stress. A key difference for international graduate students is the lack of safety net, as their ability to remain within Canada is reliant upon their continued student status and success within their program. They also require financial security to focus on their studies, yet many students found was limited institutional support in this regard, pushing international graduate students to work to support themselves. G and Mino suggest that there needs to be greater institutional awareness of the pressures on international graduate students that require flexibility as they navigate life alongside their studies.

*“[UVic] assumes we have [the same] safety net as domestic students. International [students] do not have a safety net if they can't finish the program, they can't keep the student visa and they have to leave the country. And that adds pressure to, OK, have to finish the program, have to finish the coursework on time or despite all kinds of struggles*

*they might be facing. But the assumption by [the] university is they don't need an extra safety net.” - G*

*“Again, flexibility is the key word here. They should be able to know that people don't come here just to study. They come here to live, and sometimes you cannot make it because you have to take care of your laundry. Or like because you have to cook whatever meal that you miss a lot from your country and instead of just using 30 minutes of your time, you're using three hours because you really miss [the food] and you really need to heal your inner self. And because you need to go out[side] as well and go to the gym. Just going to take a walk to the beach or whatever you need because you're all alone here, from the people that you were raised with and everything that's familiar for you. They cannot expect you to act as if nothing has happened, or as [if] you lived like ten minutes apart from your family, because that's not the case.” - Mino*

Managing academic and financial pressures as new immigrants makes it difficult for racialized international graduate students to achieve the kind of balanced lifestyle where well-being can be prioritized (Akhtar, 2007; Raphael et al., 2020). Many of the participants expressed how their lack of a support network did not allow opportunities for rest or activities that could nourish their holistic self. Increasing institutional financial support for international graduate students, along with reconsidering institutional responsibilities towards student employees will have a significant effect on reducing stress and promoting well-being.

### **5.2.6 Building a Future in Canada**

As most of the participants expressed intent to pursue career opportunities within Canada upon graduation, they had spent time thinking, and worrying, about what their future would be

like. A key draw to pursuing a graduate education in Canada over English-speaking countries was the possibility of remaining in the country upon graduation to continue to build a life in Canada. As Junior succinctly put it:

*“I just wanna stay [in Canada after graduation]. I also want to work here.” - Junior*

New migrants will often seek to obtain Permanent Residency (PR) in Canada, which grants greater security to stay in the country long-term, as well as enables them to access more job opportunities and sources of funding as students and researchers. Victor recognized the limitations of a student or temporary work visa as a driving factor pushing him towards PR.

*“It’s going to open more doors. Yeah, I know that for a fact. That’s one of the reasons why I want [PR], you know. It’s definitely going to open more doors because I do have plans to work in Canada and it’s much easier to do it well if I was a Permanent Resident or Canadian citizen rather than being an international student. It’s much easier, more funding opportunities, it’s just more opportunities overall.” - Victor*

There are numerous PR pathways, but education and work experience are vital components to a successful PR application. Given that experience gained outside of Canada is rarely considered as valuable, the work opportunities that international graduate students have while completing their programs increases the potential they can remain in Canada with greater future earnings (Choi et al. 2021a). This hierarchical valuation of knowledge and experience uplifts Canadian work practices as superior and requiring necessary assimilation (Ellis, 2023; Roshanravan, 2012; Tikly, 2004). Swan found the current opportunities available to them as a student were significantly valuable for their career. They also had experience with essentially

restarting their research career by working as a research assistant, rather than being able to hold a higher position in their lab than domestic colleagues with less research experience.

*“[Work opportunities] reduce my stress and tension for the future because the more job experience I have during my studies, it is more [likely] that I [will] get a good job after graduation.”*

*“I’m a PhD student and I see my colleagues who are also PhD students, and you know the number of my publications is like more than them, the amount of work experience that I have is in somewhat more than some. But I had to start from scratch being a research assistant in Canada although I had over five years of research experience in my country. But my colleagues can start from being a research advisor or research coordinator. And it is like a kind of negative thing that happened during the immigration, but it totally makes sense because the systems are different. It takes time for us as immigrants to learn things, learn the new system and be ready for being a research advisor and [to] get promotions.” - Swan*

Current work opportunities on-campus for international graduate students are largely limited to Teaching or Research Assistant positions. This is a neglected opportunity as graduate students bring vast skills and workplace experiences that would enrich the institutional community. Being able to work on-campus is important as student visa conditions restrict international students from working more than 20 hours a week off-campus. Jenny describes how difficulties in finding relevant off-campus work pushes international graduate students to take entry-level jobs off-campus that do not advance their career goals.

*“I don't see a lot of opportunities to work on-campus, and then they're only recruiting for volunteers to show people around the campus. I feel like a lot of international students may already have the qualification to do some higher-level jobs [...] but then there are very limited offerings for those positions that force students [to] do entry[-level], labour intensive jobs outside campus and on-campus as well.” - Jenny*

Work opportunities, such as through co-op or post-graduation, are more difficult for racialized international graduate students to obtain due to a lack of relevant Canadian work experience and professional networks, leaving international graduate students feeling their skills are undervalued when entering the labour market (Ellis, 2023; Choi et al., 2021a). Institutional resources like the Office of Co-op and Career Services can adapt their services to better suit the needs of international graduate students. Aziz found that staff were underprepared for assisting him to find relevant work that was suitable for his education and experience.

*“And I still, I tried. I went to the Co-op [Office] since two years ago [...] I did all this, but I still couldn't find [a job]. I got a lot of rejections, obviously not just as being as an international student, but I still had to work as a security guard, which was giving me some realistic views of this current society.”*

*“In terms of integrating international students into the job market, [the Office of Co-op and Career Services'] capabilities are very limited. They just [serve] ones who [have] never had a job, who was just 18 years old, got into university and now they would just want to get into the job market. But would they offer a job or help them to integrate to the job market if, let's say, there is a young fellow, a 25-year-old got her master's from another country, getting her second master's in Canada, and she had some working*

*experience back in her home country. The Co-op and Career wouldn't look at those and say, OK, based on what you only gained in the master's and since you got here, I don't think these [entry-level] positions are OK for you. We're going to just look for better positions and negotiate with more institutions or organizations to get you into [higher-level jobs]. They don't do that, and it's not their fault. If you go to WorkBC it's the same thing.” - Aziz*

Moving to a new country means the loss of a professional network for international graduate students, inhibiting career building by limiting their opportunities for relevant work experience. While obtaining a Canadian education can provide competitiveness in the job market, a lack of professional contacts compounded with limited relevant job opportunities during the course of their program can leave international graduate students to struggle to reach their career goals. Lynn and Swan felt the limitations of their networks in a new national context, which was an area they felt required more institutional support. Jenny also shared that domestic peers were a valuable opportunity for building a professional network as an international student.

*“[I don't] have a professional network anymore because [my] professional network is in [home country]. If you're not working part-time or full-time, and you're not able to get a Co-op program, once you graduate you don't have a professional network. You have to end up building up on your own. I think maybe that's another thing that I would want to see offered more strongly to students. I want there to be more opportunities for international students to network with peers in their industry.” - Lynn*

*“I came to Canada [some] years ago so, the number of networks that I have is considerably fewer than other Canadian people, but when I want to apply for a grant,*

*fewer people know me. When I want to apply for a faculty member job I have [a smaller] network and it is the truth. When we bring all of these things together, it is less possible for me to get a job that I am qualified for in totally equal conditions.” - Swan*

*“Then I was thinking to myself, if you want to stay here long-term, meeting locals or like domestic students is always kind of better for me personally to kind of start building connections, especially in terms of career.” - Jenny*

For racialized international graduate students, thinking long-term is heavily focused on the economic viability and security of staying in Canada while pursuing their career goals (Fakunle, 2021). The barriers international graduate students face due to their migrant status creates conditions of stress and uncertainty about their future. The institutional resources available to them have not felt adequate enough to help prepare international graduate students to transition into the Canadian labour market, exposing a gap in institutional support for the well-being of racialized international graduate students. Areas identified by racialized international graduate students where they require greater institutional support to ease the transition post-graduation are gaining relevant work experience and building professional networks.

### **5.2.7 Critical Awareness as a Racialized Settler**

The process of immigrating to so-called Canada occurs within a colonial system that promotes migration for educational purposes as a strategy for economic prosperity (International Education, 2019; McCartney, 2021; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). The global image that Canada projects as gracious and kind relies on the dominance of the culture, practices, and values of white settler society (Shahjahan and Edwards, 2021; Thobani, 2007). While there was general acknowledgement of the significant European influence on the North American continent, many

racialized international graduate students come with little knowledge about the history of European settlement in Canada; from the dispossession of Indigenous peoples to policies that restricted the immigration of racialized peoples (Andreotti, 2011; McCartney, 2021; Razack, 2002). For example, Mars expressed that in his educational journey he had not yet had an opportunity to develop knowledge in this area.

*“This is not [some]thing I am being exposed to, you know. If I’m being exposed to [this knowledge], I would love so much to understand” - Mars*

Unless integrated within their specific program of study, it is possible for international students to remain ignorant of these learnings around social structures that place international students and racialized people at a disadvantage in Canada, and even place them in competition with each other for national resources (Thobani, 2007; Walia, 2013). Specifically, engaging with decolonial concepts and pedagogies within the classroom provides a unique opportunity for international students that disrupt the dominant conceptualizations of nationhood and belonging. Krystal expressed how initial exposure to these unfamiliar concepts was confusing, but repeated learnings over time has been very impactful for her intellectual growth.

*“Before I came here, I didn't even know the word Indigenous. So, I was not exposed to any kind of information about Indigenous people. I think in my first and second semesters there are two separate courses that I've taken that have included decolonization as one of the topics. And I remember just getting very confused and overwhelmed because I think I missed a piece of colonial history in Canada, and then I just jumped right ahead to decolonization. This summer, I'm very glad that I got to take two courses that allowed me to learn more about the history, the historical trauma and also the oppression that have*

*happened in the past and that are also happening today. So then that kind of allowed me to piece all the information together now, like the things that I've learned in my first and second semester and now they're starting to make more sense to me.” - Krystal*

The classroom was an important space for these types of conversations, as international graduate students in Social Science and Humanities disciplines were able to learn more about the importance of decolonization initiatives, including those being undertaken by the university (Mousavi, 2020). Topics covered in courses that racialized international students highlighted as beneficial to their growth as a critical scholar ranged from understanding the significance of a land acknowledgement to medicine wheel models of healing. As Lynn shared, it was important that education started from the basics for international students to build a more complete knowledge that can allow them to meaningfully embody decolonial praxis (Sehdev, 2011).

*“[Another] thing that was integral was learning about land acknowledgments and what they mean so that when we begin, when we undergo, when we start a process or when we are convening in groups, or when we are introducing who we are to other people we also remember that the land that we're on is not ours. And especially as a settler scholar, I'm here to learn about the traditions and the way things have been in this country. Like the whole notion of Indigenous traditions and First Nations peoples, they are living today. Their knowledge isn't gone. It's knowledge that we need to incorporate into what we do, and like that was really interesting to me in terms of the reasons why we pay homage to the Indigenous people who were on the land before you arrived.” - Lynn*

Racialized international graduate students varied greatly in their understandings of colonization and settlement in so-called Canada, with some students identifying the experiences

of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island as parallel to the experiences of people in their home country at the end of colonial rule. Colonial hierarchies remain deeply embedded in public and private domains, emphasizing the significant work required to undertake Indigenization and decolonization efforts (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2000). Drawing from their personal and ancestral experiences, like Adam did, allowed international students to build solidarity with Indigenous peoples that extends outside of the academic community.

*“The journey of Indigenous peoples in Canada is, to me, parallel to where I came from, to African colonization. It makes my understanding and my passion for Indigenous sovereignty a lot higher. My understanding and my passion for reclamation of land and reclamation of resources a lot higher because I understand how these things were. I understand how systematic they were, [...] and I understand the ongoing generational effects of these things.” - Adam*

There remains a disparity in how much students from different disciplines are able to engage with decolonial knowledge and praxis. Students that had been in Canada for a longer period, such as those undertaking a PhD, and students studying in Social Science and Humanities faculties were better able to verbalize the complexity of the position they held as temporary settlers in Canada as it related to the ongoing occupation of these lands (e.g. Chen, 2021; Gomez, 2020). Christina shared how these kinds of critical reflections were transformational for her personally, and as a scholar.

*“When I was in [my home country] I'm a majority [in terms of ethnicity] and now I'm a minority, so I began to learn more about the hierarchies of different lines, in terms of gender or nationality or race, or the professor and the student, or the doctor and the*

*patient. It's very relatable. And also, colonization and First Nations, and the uninvited visitors like me. The relationships are much more complicated in my life. It of course stimulates my thinking, and my reaction so I think it's a good experience. It's a very meaningful and informative experience to be an international student here.” - Christina*

These discussions around Indigeneity and colonization can be challenging for international students due to the way that Canada has been idealistically constructed for them as a land of equal opportunity and freedom (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2018; Stein, 2018). The findings reveal that this type of decolonial education remains a gap in the experiences of racialized international graduate students across a range of disciplines, but specifically in the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science. Critical spaces are encouraged to provide anti-racist decolonial education for international students that align with institutional decolonization and Indigenization initiatives and empower critical research and praxis.

### **5.3 Rewards of Being a Racialized International Graduate Student**

The experience of being a racialized international graduate student is challenging, but also richly rewarding as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Even within challenging conditions, participants found strategies to promote their well-being (see 6.1.1). Adapting to a new environment comes with additional pressures on well-being, however, the creation of new social bonds, within and beyond ethnic and linguistic networks, fosters a sense of belonging within the institutional environment (e.g. Bunjun, 2021, Gomes, 2020). May and Josh spoke highly of the community they had created, with both domestic and international peers, as an opportunity to build connections across cultures was a highly desired part of their international student experience (Aladegbaiye et al., 2022; Zhang & Garcia-Murillo, 2018).

*“I think the core of everything I’ve achieved is connections. I’ve received jobs because of it, friendships because of it, community because of it.” - May*

*“[It has been great] to experience a new culture, become more independent and more mentally strong, and finding new friends from different backgrounds.” - Josh*

For international graduate students, becoming part of a new community not only benefits them, but also contributes to enhancing global awareness and intercultural skills for all community members (Halpern et al., 2022; Heng, 2018; Lizotte, 2024). There can be personally rewarding opportunities to build a global social circle. Lily found it fulfilling to have an impact on domestic and international peers through culture sharing that decreased ethnic prejudice.

*“[I feel I made a difference] also in the lives of many Canadian students and friends. I think this whole thing is like a reciprocal community, because as an international I think when you speak about your own culture or when you are kind of sharing some part of your life that perhaps a Canadian student or another international might not have known, but they are curious about and you see their eyes light up in a way that is like they’ve learned something new. Or they kind of realize that there’s one more thing in common between you and them.” - Lily*

Along with the community connections and personal growth, there is an overarching desire by racialized international graduate students to be recognized, by the university and broader community, for their identity, contributions, and achievements. This occurs through awards, publications, job opportunities, and more; from this recognition international graduate students feel there is a place for them here as valuable members of the community. Participants, like Swan and Mino, highlighted how the opportunity to pursue their academic and career

interests was immensely rewarding as it afforded them new and better opportunities than their home countries, and built-up self-confidence to move towards their goals.

*“Studying at UVic positively influenced my self-confidence a lot. After lots of hard work in [home country] and seeing that there are lots of issues through working and to achieving my goal, I was so unhopeful to be able to achieve what I want [professionally until I came here].” - Swan*

*“[The institution] actually doesn't care what you look like as long as you are good at what they're looking for. You know also being able to explore so many other options, being able to actually feel that I can work and do something with my studies that I wasn't feeling that I could do in my country, it's been really, really, really rewarding. I can feel I'm in a state of like peace of mind right now, like I'm moving forward, I've been feeling that I've been stuck so many years and now I'm moving forward a little bit and being here as a student has been so rewarding in that sense because I can feel that I'm actually doing something with my life.” - Mino*

The international graduate student community contributes a lot to academic institutions, while also gaining valuable experiences that contribute to their own growth. Highlighting some challenges to well-being that racialized international graduate students face due to structural global, ideological, and institutional conditions does not negate the agency that racialized international graduate students have to pursue their goals in academia.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion**

This research explored the well-being of racialized international graduate students at a mid-sized, research-intensive Western Canadian university. Interviews were conducted with 22 participants at the master's and PhD levels from across 17 programs regarding their understandings of their well-being, and how interactions with university services, programs, and events enhanced, or hindered their well-being. Institutional-level recommendations arising from the findings are presented in this chapter along with the strategies racialized international graduate students are currently using to support their well-being. Ideally, I will share these findings with the international student community, Dean of Graduate Studies and Associate Deans, Vice-President Academic and Provost, International Centre for Students, and the Graduate Students' Society at a minimum. In this final chapter, I conclude with reflections on the strengths and limitations of the research, and future directions.

### **6.1 Summary of Findings**

The goal of this research was to better understand how institutional conditions help or hinder the well-being of racialized international graduate students at the University of Victoria (UVic), with the aim of identifying institutional modifications to enhance well-being. The topic was explored through semi-structured interviews to determine how personal and institutional factors influence their well-being. A summarized version of the findings (presented in full in Chapter 5) are provided to highlight the key findings that are reflected in the recommendations presented in section 6.2. The findings of this research reveal that institutional services offering academic, mental, and social support could benefit from a few changes to be better suited for the needs of racialized international graduate students. There were gaps in students' awareness of

what services are available, ability to access to resources and services, and the cultural competencies of staff they were interacting with. These results suggest that there are several pathways by which the UVic might consider improved supports for racialized international graduate students.

Migration can be an isolating process, and international graduate students frequently find themselves struggling to integrate into the UVic community due to cultural and linguistic barriers. Racialized international graduate students felt there were limited opportunities to build peer connections across departments and faculties and wanted to have more dedicated spaces to build community among graduate students. It was easiest to build connections with other international students and im/migrants, which created vital networks for sharing information and resources. International graduate students wanted to be recognized as valuable members of the community and to feel there is a place here for them. Almost all the participants reported experiences of exclusion, whether through casual paternalism or racial harassment. Consequently, many struggle to feel a sense of belonging.

Financial precarity is another major source of stress for international graduate students, which impacts their overall well-being. High costs of living and limited access to funding placed limitations on the extent to which international graduate students were able to be involved in both academic and social capacities. Although the university space is supposedly geared towards student success, without intentional engagement from the university racialized international graduate students may feel they lack the institutional support they need.

### **6.1.1 Strategies to Promote Well-being**

Despite the challenges racialized international graduate students' can face in maintaining their well-being, participants shared informal strategies they utilized to promote their well-being

within an adverse political-economic, socio-cultural, and academic environment. These strategies were both used in conjunction with, and as a replacement for, institutional services that targeted well-being and academic success. The section does not provide a complete list of strategies, but rather highlights those most frequently shared by participants.

Striving to maintain a balanced lifestyle, which included considerations for exercise, diet, and sleep, was greatly impacted by the financial and academic stresses international graduate students experienced. The high workload of graduate school, coming from both academic and work responsibilities, demands a lot of time from international graduate students, so many found they needed to be conscious about dedicating time to hobbies and relationships in order to support their well-being. Racialized international graduate students were also willing to seek out formal counselling services for acute and chronic mental health conditions, suggesting that cultural variations did not have an impact on help-seeking behaviour, a variable that has an inconclusive impact in the literature (Chen et al., 2020; Clarke, 2023). Many participants found that the opportunity to both address acute and chronic concerns through culturally competent professional counselling services was vital to promoting their mental health (Kim et al., 2019; Shadowen et al., 2019).

The creation of social bonds within the new environment was highly emphasized as important for racialized international graduate students to enhance their well-being, as well as build a sense of place and belonging within the University of Victoria, and Victoria community generally. Pre-established ethnic networks were used by international graduate students before and during their arrival to ease the transition to a new country, city, and academic institution. These networks also provided a reprieve from the cultural and linguistic adaptation that inundates daily life (Bunjun, 2021; Collins & Callaghan, 2022; Gomes, 2020). Among the

services provided by the university, those that facilitated opportunities for social connections with both domestic and international peers, such as the UVic Global Community and Graduate Students' Society were viewed favourably. However, participants felt there were limited opportunities within and beyond their daily non/academic life to make meaningful connections with peers, so organized spaces became a crucial place of connection.

International graduate students who had more challenges accessing these social spaces on-campus remained more isolated throughout their degree. Barriers included financial precarity and high workloads, living far from campus, and experiences of social alienation due to an accent or other forms of 'Othering' due to racial characteristics. Maintaining connections to family and friends back home, or in online spaces, was important, but was sometimes hindered by time zone differences and the change in lifestyle. A lack of local social community also reflected a lesser engagement with university services, in part due to a lack of awareness about services that were available, stressing the importance of peer networks for help with promoting access to services (Fu et al., 2022; Mori, 2000; Sato et al., 2022). Students who were able to develop and maintain strong social connections felt an overall stronger sense of belonging within the institution (Kaul & Renzulli, 2022; Penman et al., 2021).

## **6.2 Recommendations**

The final objective of this research aimed to identify institutional actions and initiatives that can help promote the well-being of racialized international graduate students. This research was undertaken with the intention of providing institutional-level recommendations for the University of Victoria (UVic) specifically, and academic institutions generally. Racialized

international graduate student participants were directly asked for their recommendations, which have been further developed through the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this research.

Recommendations arising from the experiences and reflections of racialized international graduate students are compiled into four target areas reflecting the themes that arose from a thematic analysis of the findings: *Affordability and Access to Education*; *Improving Academic and Work Dynamics*; *Meaningful Inclusion in the Campus Community*; and *Enhancing Student Services Provision*. In this section, I will identify the existing barriers and challenges that racialized international graduate students experience while suggesting practical recommendations with accompanying actions to guide institutional modifications. These recommendations along with a summary of the findings will be presented to participants, international and domestic students, faculty, UVic administrators, and relevant institutional service providers in a brief summary report after the completion and defense of my thesis.

### **6.2.1 Theme 1 - Affordability and Access to Education**

*“So, if you really want to do it, make sure you can actually stay committed for at least two years because you're going to be poor. You'll probably be broke, financially. So, choose wisely.” - D*

The theme of *Affordability and Access to Education* speaks to the financial barriers that exist for racialized international graduate students, limiting their ability to fully engage within the UVic community. From the start, tuition and funding models disadvantage international graduate students while rising costs of living leave many in financially precarious circumstances (Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Guo & Guo, 2017). International graduate students need to realistically assess the financial requirements of pursuing a degree at UVic in order to plan appropriately

financially. This would be easier if UVic provided incoming international students with accurate information regarding current costs of living along with expanded financial support resources.

### **Call to Action 1 - Re-examine Funding and Tuition Schemes**

*“When I first came to Canada, the economic crisis was lower than it actually is right now. But right now, it's very difficult to live on a budget and live on your stipends [...] it's just that you live in bare minimum” - Josh*

Current tuition models create a distinction between domestic and international students, charging different fees on the basis of national origin, encouraging a large fiscal and labour flow from the Global South to the Global North (Stein & Andreotti, 2016; Walia, 2013). Without holding citizenship or Permanent Residency, international graduate students also have more limited opportunities to be awarded federal and provincial funding to support their academic pursuits, making them more reliant on institutional and private funding to support their education (Calder et al., 2016; Firang & Mensah, 2022). Increasing financial supports for international graduate students creates a more equitable learning environment where all students can freely participate in academic pursuits without struggling with economic precarity.

**Table 3:** *Recommendations for Call to Action 1 - Re-examine funding and tuition schemes*

#	Recommendation	Action
1.1	Increase transparency around how international graduate student tuition fees are being used by the institution.	Establish: <i>Transparent communication around the institutional budget, including the contribution of international student fees</i>
1.2	Expand the institutional funding opportunities for international graduate students.	Allocate: <i>Designated funding to strengthen international student financial supports</i> Allocate: <i>Funding to support racialized international graduate students</i>

1.3	Establish awards and scholarships unique to international graduate and racialized students.	<p>Establish: <i>More financial awards for international students</i></p> <p>Measure: <i>The median funding amount provided to international students and increase to equitable levels</i></p> <p>Increase: <i>Outreach to potential donors</i></p> <p>Increase: <i>Promotion of awards and scholarships</i></p>
1.4	Increase flexibility for payment of tuition and ancillary fees prior to program commencement.	<p>Establish: <i>Flexible payment policies for international students who lack access to necessary banking infrastructure</i></p>
1.5	Provide clear and transparent guidelines to international graduate students around cost of living and funding packages.	<p>Increase: <i>Communication of information relevant to financial planning</i></p> <p>Update: <i>Information regularly to accurately reflect current economic conditions</i></p>

## Call to Action 2 - Increase Access to Affordable On-Campus Housing

*“I don't know how many graduate students are at UVic, but I believe it's more than 50. But 50 are the only places that we [have in] Graduate Housing, and that's insane because I need to live somewhere.” - Mino*

Housing is a human right and major determinant of health (Raphael et al., 2020). The lack of housing supply for students in the Greater Victoria Area is exacerbated by the limited housing UVic provides for graduate students. The current housing crisis has made it difficult to obtain off-campus housing and is a greater challenge for international graduate students who cannot easily produce relevant references, a credit check, and/or proof of income. International graduate students are also more vulnerable to unsafe housing conditions and tenant abuse (Calder et al., 2016). The university should take greater responsibility to provide a greater number of safe and stable accommodations for international graduate students. For international graduate students choosing to live off-campus, there is a large information gap to understanding the

housing market in Canada. Racialized international graduate students would benefit from resources providing detailed procedures for housing applications, including items that need to be prepared such as references and/or a credit check.

**Table 4:** *Recommendations for Call to Action 2 - Increase access to affordable on-campus housing*

#	Recommendation	Action
2.1	Increase the number of placements in on-campus housing for international graduate students.	Expand: <i>Graduate housing to accommodate a minimum of 10% of the graduate student body</i> Prioritize: <i>Incoming international graduate students to allow them to get settled safely</i>
2.2	Align the cost of on-campus graduate and family housing to affordable levels based on typically graduate funding amounts.	Measure: <i>The median funding amount provided to graduate students</i> Establish: <i>An affordable housing model based upon graduate funding</i>
2.3	Expand access to information for finding housing off-campus.	Increase: <i>Communication of information relevant to securing safe off-campus housing</i> Establish: <i>A directory of international student-friendly landlords</i>
2.4	Provide international graduate students with comprehensive information on tenancy rights.	Establish: <i>Hub for resources relevant to housing and tenancy rights</i> Measure: <i>Impact on international graduate students' housing security</i>

### **Call to Action 3 - Address Rising Food Insecurity**

*“If I don't take any lunch with me from my home, I can't take anything from here on campus. I actually have nothing to eat [because it is too expensive and not culturally appropriate].” - Alex*

Food costs on-campus are prohibitive, while options are rooted in Western diet norms also leave international graduate students feeling alienated from food services due to a lack of cultural inclusion. The cost of food also creates a barrier for international graduate students to engage in social activities, hindering their integration into the campus community. Providing more affordable food options reduces financial stress for international students, while positioning the campus as a space of greater social engagement (Tozini & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022). Being able to access foods that are culturally relevant increases a sense of belonging for international students, as well as promoting cross-cultural engagement for the entire campus community (Campos et al., 2022).

**Table 5:** Recommendations for Call to Action 3 - Address rising food insecurity

#	Recommendation	Action
3.1	Expand affordable food options on-campus.	Establish: <i>Subsidize on-campus food prices in line with median graduate student income</i>
3.2	Consult with international students to expand access to culturally relevant foods.	Expand: <i>Cultural diversity in food offerings</i> Evaluate: <i>Potential of privatizing on-campus food service sites for non-Western restaurant services</i>
3.3	Expand the on-campus food bank to serve a more diverse student population.	Allocate: <i>Resources to expand food bank capacity</i> Increase: <i>Visibility of the food bank to encourage donations</i> Measure: <i>Use of the food bank by international students</i>

## 6.2.2 Theme 2 - Improving Academic and Work Dynamics

*“Not everyone could fully understand what the international students have to go through.” - D*

Successfully navigating academics, work, and community relationships on-campus is a primary concern of racialized international graduate students. Obtaining a degree relies on international graduate students having sufficient funding and support to accomplish their objectives as a student. Having access to academic-oriented supports, and increased mentorship from faculty and supervisors smooths the transition of international students into their new academic environment, bolstering academic performance and reducing stress (Moore-Jones, 2022; Thomson & Esses, 2016). Providing greater opportunities for relevant work has benefits for international graduate students to maximize their time at UVic for long-term career growth as well as benefiting the dynamic environment at UVic (Choi et al., 2021a).

#### **Call to Action 4 - Promote Early and Broad-based Targeted Academic Support**

*“If there was any way, or free opportunity, [for UVic to] teach me how to deliver a presentation, how to speak [in class], it would be great actually.” - Alex*

Racialized international graduate students are in a state of adaptation, particularly at the start of their program, which may require extra attention to ease the transition into a new academic system (Johnson et al., 2018; Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Marinenko, 2021). Transitioning into a new academic environment comes with many challenges for international students that are heightened by the adaptation to dominant Western pedagogies (Collins & Callaghan, 2022; Heng, 2018; Karkour & Jusseaume, 2020). Institutional services exist to provide academic support for students, yet international graduate students are not feeling supported within and outside the classroom to strengthen the necessary academic skills to be successful (Brayboy, 2007; Gong et al., 2021; Kerr, 2014). Additionally, services are typically

geared towards undergraduate students, leading to more generic support than the technical, discipline-specific expertise required of graduate students.

**Table 6:** Recommendations for Call to Action 4 – Promote early and broad-based targeted academic support

#	Recommendation	Action
4.1	Establish a graduate student peer mentorship program to match incoming international graduate students with another senior domestic and/or international graduate student.	Allocate: <i>Resources to establish peer mentorship framework and training</i> Implement: <i>Pilot peer mentorship program with domestic and international students</i> Measure: <i>Impact on international graduate students' sense of belonging and uptake of institutional services</i>
4.2	Equip professors to provide international graduate students with institutional academic support and resources.	Facilitate: <i>Sharing of academic and institutional resources with faculty</i> Increase: <i>Referrals to the Centre for Academic Communication (CAC)</i> Measure: <i>Awareness and use of CAC among international graduate students</i>
4.3	Expand the array of technical expertise and guidance offered at CAC	Create: <i>More opportunities for graduate student learning and shared expertise, i.e. powerpoint presentations, writing a research proposal, etc.</i> Increase: <i>Tutors expertise in a variety of graduate disciplines</i>
4.4	Promote the English Conversation Café to international graduate students.	Evaluate: <i>Impact on international graduate student class participation</i>

### Call to Action 5 - Strengthen Mentorship of Graduate Students from Supervisors and

#### Others

*“There is no system [that] takes you through this whole journey apart from the supervisor.” - Dan*

Supervisors and other mentors play a major role in the academic and professional growth of international graduate students (Ankomah, 2022; Manathunga, 2014). Establishing clear expectations around how the student-supervisor relationship will unfold during the duration of the program can lead to increased satisfaction and academic progress. This relationship dynamic is strengthened when racialized international graduate students feel supported, while interactions focused purely on academic progress limit the ability to build trust and mentorship (Bolotnyy et al., 2018; Bunjun, 2021; Fu et al., 2022). Overall, a lack of regular connection with a supervisor prevents early intervention of academic roadblocks, subsequently harming degree progression and directly impacting stress and well-being.

**Table 7:** Recommendations for Call to Action 5 – Strengthen mentorship of graduate students from supervisors and others

#	Recommendation	Action
5.1	Encourage a practice of minimum monthly check-ins between graduate supervisors and international graduate students.	Establish: <i>Protocol for regular student-supervisor meetings</i> Measure: <i>Contact hours between international graduate students and supervisors</i>
5.2	Assist international graduate students to develop academic and career goals.	Monitor: <i>Progression towards goals with refinement throughout the program</i>
5.3	Create a mentorship program for racialized international graduate students to receive personalized support.	Establish: <i>Mentorship program to provide comprehensive support from faculty members, domestic and international students</i> Measure: <i>Impact on well-being</i>

### Call to Action 6 - Expand On-Campus Work Experiences

*“I don't see a lot of opportunities to work on-campus, and then they're only recruiting for volunteers to show people around the campus. I feel like a lot of international students*

*may already have the qualification to do some higher-level jobs but then there are very limited offerings for those positions that force students [to] do entry[-level], labour intensive jobs outside campus and on-campus as well.” - Jenny*

International graduate students contribute a lot to the institution through work, primarily as Research Assistants (RAs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs) (Tran & Soejatminah, 2018). These opportunities are dependent on program structure, but help many international students fund their studies and gain valuable work experience while building upon their strengths and areas of competency. Outside of these roles, there are limited job opportunities that are available for international graduate students on-campus that utilize their vast array of knowledge and skills, while providing financial support for students (Ellis, 2023).

**Table 8:** *Recommendations for Call to Action 6 – Expand on-campus work experiences*

#	Recommendation	Action
6.1	Expand the variety of on-campus work opportunities that utilizes the skills and experiences international graduate students bring to UVic.	Identify: <i>Collate and identify on-campus work opportunities suitable for graduate students in a variety of disciplines</i>
6.2	Investigate possible institutional services that can be complemented by international graduate student staff.	Establish: <i>Paid positions for international graduate students on-campus</i> Allocate: <i>Resources to fund paid work</i>
6.3	Build institutional accountability to the labour standards for students employed as RAs.	Establish: <i>Fair and accountable labour standards for RAs</i> Measure: <i>Student performance and satisfaction</i>
6.4	Consider providing compensation for international graduate TAs that require additional time to mark assignments.	Allocate: <i>Resources (monetary and non-monetary) to compensate additional time needed to complete TA work</i>
6.5	Bolster advocacy for graduate students' labour standards.	Establish: <i>Avenues for support to manage supervisor relationships</i> Measure: <i>Student satisfaction and academic progression</i>

### **6.2.3 Theme 3 - Meaningful Inclusion in the Campus Community**

*“I am coming to a very different world. And coming into this different world, I need you to tell me where I should stand in this unknown world. It's like I'm coming to a different planet.” - Aziz*

For racialized international graduate students, the process of transitioning into a new educational environment comes with pressure to quickly adapt and succeed in their studies (Can et al., 2021; Krsmanovic, 2020; Rai et al., 2021). It can take a while to be comfortable with changes stemming from a new institutional context, a process which is eased with orientation for new students. There are still gaps that remain in ensuring that information is adequately conveyed, including awareness of the resources and services that are available. Improving education around anti-racist decolonial practices, and building social connections are other vital parts of the transition process for international graduate students (Chen, 2021; Qi et al., 2021).

#### **Call to Action 7 - Improve Orientation Delivery**

*“I think if in the orientation they explain [the services] it is so great. So, we can be aware of all of these opportunities, and we could use these opportunities.” - Swan*

Initial orientations are an important time for incoming students to learn about their new environment. The experience can also be overwhelming, with information being presented in a highly condensed manner that hinders comprehensibility and retention (Johnson et al., 2018; Shokirova et al., 2022). Many international graduate students that attended an orientation were still unaware of the institutional services that are available to them, which inhibited their access

to services in a timely manner. Knowing where to reach out is a key step to bridging the gap to accessing institutional resources and services.

**Table 9: Recommendations for Call to Action 7 – Improve orientation delivery**

#	Recommendation	Action
7.1	Extend orientation activities throughout the first month of each semester.	Measure: <i>Information retention and impact on access of services within first semester</i>
7.2	Boost the promotion of institutional student services during the orientation period.	Increase: <i>Social media presence promoting institutional services</i> Facilitate: <i>Sharing of academic and institutional resources with faculty</i>
7.3	Establish a key lead in every program for orientation/transition questions	Identify: <i>Faculty or staff member in each program to provide transition support for international graduate students</i>
7.4	Create easily accessible information packages that remain available virtually to students.	Evaluate: <i>Accuracy and revise current comprehensive orientation packages clearly detailing resources and services</i> Increase: <i>Promotion of institutional services</i>
7.5	Provide information regarding the conditions and regulations of study permits.	Include: <i>Information and resources related to immigration policy in orientation packages</i>

### **Call to Action 8 - Broaden Decolonization and Pedagogical Interventions**

*“Before I came here, I didn't even know the word Indigenous. So, I was not exposed to any kind of information about Indigenous people.” - Krystal*

UVic’s Indigenous Plan (2017-2022) does not target international students as a key demographic for education, however international students typically come to Canada without having received any education on the specific colonial history of Turtle Island, also known as Canada (Bunjun, 2021; Mousavi, 2020). This gap can be maintained throughout their program

without intentional intervention within and outside the classroom (Dei, 2016; Chen, 2021; Gomez, 2020). Providing this education early on in the transition into the campus community allows international graduate students to engage more fully with the broader institutional goals of reconciliation through the embodiment of decolonial practice and allyship.

**Table 10: Recommendations for Call to Action 8 – Broaden decolonization and pedagogical interventions**

#	Recommendation	Action
8.1	Provide anti-racist decolonial education (e.g., Indigenous Cultural Acumen training) for all international graduate students.	Increase: <i>Decolonizing education targeted at international students</i> Measure: <i>Participation and engagement</i>
8.2	Contextualize decolonial practices, such as land acknowledgements, through education.	Increase: <i>Education on decolonial practices utilized by the institution across disciplines</i> Measure: <i>Knowledge and engagement with institutional Indigenization and reconciliation initiatives</i>
8.3	Create closed critical spaces for racialized international students to discuss and reflect on their position as racialized settlers.	Establish: <i>International graduate space to engage in anti-racist decolonial work and allyship</i> Identify: <i>Appropriate mentors to engage international graduate students in anti-racist decolonial work</i>

### **Call to Action 9 - Enhance Community Engagement and Belonging**

*“When it comes to social well-being, kind of social connections, [building] relationships and a sense of belonging, these are very vital for well-being. You need to understand the fact that you have a friend. You know you have [a place] where you belong.” - Mars*

Racialized international graduate students felt there were limited opportunities to spontaneously build peer connections across departments and faculties and wanted to have more

dedicated spaces to build community among graduate students. Services such as the Graduate Students' Society, International Centre for Students, and Global Community that offer social events are meaningful and important. Development of stronger communities would increase well-being and sense of belonging for racialized international graduate students (Calley, 2021; Daddow et al., 2020; Karkour & Jusseaume, 2020; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). It was also suggested to diversify the types of events, including exploring the local urban and natural environment off-campus or holding cultural meals to expand engagement among students.

**Table 11:** Recommendations for Call to Action 9 – Enhancing community engagement and belonging

#	Recommendation	Action
9.1	Expand quantity and variety of social events for international graduate students.	Allocate: <i>Resources to host social events</i> Increase: <i>Social media presence to promote events</i> Measure: <i>Participation and engagement</i>
9.2	Consider establishing a central hub for international graduate students.	Allocate: <i>Physical space on campus for use by international graduate students</i> Measure: <i>Use of space and impact on community-building</i>
9.3	Establish an international student representative for each department or faculty at minimum.	Establish: <i>An international student leadership position within each department</i>
9.4	Highlight the contributions and accomplishments of international graduate students.	Increase: <i>Acknowledgement and celebration of international student achievements across the institutional community</i>

#### **6.2.4 Theme 4 - Enhancing Student Services Provision**

*“I think Canadians in general tend to be more culturally aware, or at least conscious that the world is a big place and people come from all over. There are many different ways and styles of living, so I do actually feel that a lot of Canadians I've met [are] genuinely curious, or they don't have malign intent even if the outcome is patronizing or racializing in one way or another.” - Lily*

International graduate students are active in seeking out services and resources that can enhance their student experience. The institutional services that are available demonstrate a strong commitment to serving undergraduate students but can lack relevant support suitable for the graduate level or international student body. Initiatives to make the campus a more inclusive space have made limited efforts towards addressing the particular service barriers that exist for the racialized international graduate student population.

#### **Call to Action 10 - Facilitate Cultural Safety and Inclusivity**

*“I wish [the staff] was someone] who can relate or understand what it means to be a person of colour in this environment.” - G*

Efforts being made at UVic towards equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives (EDI) and cultural safety training need to explicitly address the marginalization experienced by racialized international students. Increasing faculty and staff awareness of the barriers racialized international graduate students face is key to cultivating more empathetic engagement with all students at all levels of the institution (Anandavalli et al., 2020; Starr-Glass, 2018).

**Table 12: Recommendations for Call to Action 10 – Facilitate cultural safety and inclusivity**

#	Recommendation	Action
10.1	Increase education on intersectional international intercultural competencies in annual EDI training for university faculty and staff and students.	Establish: <i>Mechanism for anonymous feedback regarding service interactions</i> Allocate: <i>Resources to share existing EDI resources, expand EDI training, specifically in regard to racialized and international students</i> Measure: <i>Participation and engagement</i>
10.2	Improve staff competency to address marginalization of linguistically diverse (non-Anglophone) individuals in the classroom and while accessing services.	Establish: <i>Mechanism for anonymous feedback regarding service interactions</i> Implement: <i>Staff training on working with English as an Additional Language learners</i>

### Call to Action 11 - Improve Access to Quality On-Campus Services

*“I saw what they said about it online, but I needed clarification, so I went there and the [only] explanation that I got was the [staff] person just read the information on the Internet to me.” - Tom Jones*

While there are plenty of student services offered by UVic, racialized international graduate students face barriers to accessing these services, as well as receiving relevant help. A lack of awareness of the unique needs of international graduate students limits institutional support, reflecting negatively on student’s experiences of engaging with institutional actors (Bardill Moscaritolo et al., 2022; Uday, 2021). Taking conscientious steps to integrating feedback mechanisms is necessary to continue enhancing in-person and human-oriented services (Johnson et al., 2018).

**Table 13: Recommendations for Call to Action 11 - Improve access to quality on-campus services**

#	Recommendation	Action
11.1	Annual experience survey for racialized international students to inform future institutional actions.	Allocate: <i>Resources to the creation and implementation of survey</i> Measure: <i>Participation</i> Establish: <i>Metrics for measuring improvements in service delivery</i>
11.2	Create a regular flow of feedback to highlight international student experiences in engaging with institutional services.	Establish: <i>Mechanism for anonymous feedback on service interactions</i> Measure: <i>Use of institutional services by international graduate students</i>
11.3	Address staffing issues limiting access to the Student Wellness Centre.	Allocate: <i>Resources to ensuring a consistent standard of care and access</i> Increase: <i>Communication about accessible alternative (off-campus) resources for physical and mental health</i>
11.4	Facilitate reliable access to mental health support for more complex issues.	Establish: <i>Connections with psychiatry and therapeutic services that students can be referred to for long-term mental health care</i>
11.5	Improve transparency about the procedures and potential outcomes of engaging with the Equity and Human Rights office.	Establish: <i>Reporting procedures based on trauma-informed principles</i> Implement: <i>Anonymous reporting for on-campus experiences of discrimination and harassment</i> Measure: <i>Incidents over time and identify and implement interventions</i>

### **Call to Action 12 - Expand Career Building Services**

*“[Work opportunities] reduce my stress and tension for the future because the more job experience I have during my studies, it is more [likely] that I [will] get a good job after graduation.” - Swan*

Choi et al. (2021b) found that 79% of international graduates remained in British Columbia five years after graduating. During the migration process, the skills and experiences international graduate students hold are diminished, requiring them to rebuild their professional experience locally (Ellis, 2023). Significantly, the work experience international graduate students obtain during their studies is vital for integrating into the Canadian labour market upon graduation, by enabling them to find work relevant to their studies as well as having higher potential future earnings (Choi et al., 2021a). International graduate students are also impacted by the lack of a professional network to connect them to potential employers (Kim, 2011). Most international graduate students intend to seek local work opportunities during and after their studies, yet they are not provided with adequate services to support their long-term professional development.

**Table 14:** Recommendations for Call to Action 12 - Expand career building services

#	Recommendation	Action
12.1	Provide improved co-op and off-campus work opportunities that are relevant to international graduate students.	Consult: <i>Improve understanding in Career Services of international graduate students' professional goals</i> Establish: <i>Coordinator position to support international graduate students in co-op</i> Allocate: <i>Resources to research and expand graduate-level co-op job offerings</i>
12.2	Hold career skill building workshops specific to international graduate students.	Allocate: <i>Resources to developing workshops on relevant career skills</i> Measure: <i>Participation and engagement</i>
12.3	Provide practical career counselling appropriate for graduate-level students.	Allocate: <i>Resources to expand staff training</i> Measure: <i>Impact on service quality</i>
12.4	Increase opportunities for international graduate students to build a professional network.	Allocate: <i>Resources to hold networking events for graduate students</i> Measure: <i>Event attendance and engagement</i>
12.5	Evaluate the possibility of providing international graduate students with an	Measure: <i>Impact on employability and earnings post-graduation</i>

employment letter (for work positions on-campus) to contribute towards Permanent Residency requirements.

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### **6.2.5 Summary**

Despite the many positive and rewarding experiences of racialized international graduate students, there are ways that the institution can be improved in regards to promoting international student well-being. The recommendations presented in 6.2 reflect suggestions for institutional-level modifications that arose from experiences and reflections shared in interviews with racialized international graduate students. The practical Calls to Action target a range of institutional services and resources, exemplifying the importance for post-secondary institutions to consider how to maintain access to quality services for all members of the student community. A complete table of all the recommendations is available in Appendix D with the addition of a column specifying if the recommendation is currently being addressed within an existing UVic policy document.

In order to share these findings with the broader institutional community, the findings and recommendations will be provided as an infographic to the international student community. The recommendations will also be presented to key decision-makers and service providers in the UVic community, including the professoriate, Dean of Graduate Studies and Associate Deans, Vice-President Academic and Provost, International Centre for Students, and the Graduate Students' Society.

## 6.3 Research Limitations

This qualitative case study research was guided by critical race theory and a decolonial approach to engage with racialized international graduate students' experiences of well-being within a research-intensive mid-sized Western Canadian university. The approach and process of conducting the research is discussed through the strengths and weaknesses, researcher positionality, and future directions.

### 6.3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

Engaging with critical race theory and decolonial approaches provided valuable analytical frameworks for critical engagement within the subfield of research with international students (Mittelmeier et al., 2024; Uдах, 2024). Decolonization of academia is a complex and ongoing process that requires commitment from all institutional actors to address injustices occurring across multiple axes of power (Moosavi, 2023; Thobani, 2022). Critiquing structures of power must be accompanied by engaging in work that shifts structures of power, going beyond the efforts of “good intentions” (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 9). Engaging in critical work is strengthened through recognition of the agency and resiliency of marginalized groups who made immense contributions to this research (Bista, 2018; Larcombe et al., 2024; Uдах, 2024).

There are other ways this research could be expanded, for example, strengthening engagement with the participants by building relationships over a longer period of time, which would incorporate additional elements of community building that would further align this research with anti-racist decolonial principles (e.g. Bunjun, 2021; Snelgrove et al., 2014). The original research plan included using focus groups as an additional method of data collection to have participants collaboratively contribute to the development of recommendations (Cameron,

2021). As a method, focus groups would have created a space to develop recommendations while building relations among the participants, while also acting as a feedback mechanism for the researcher during the initial stages of data analysis. The large volume of data that was procured during the interview stage included receiving recommendations directly from the participants, which along with aforementioned concerns about anonymity led me to not pursue additional methods. In the end, the research relied on interviews and member-checking for how interview themes were interpreted without compromising confirmability (Motulsky, 2021).

Recruitment for this research occurred over three weeks, where 22 interview participants were secured. Fourteen of the participants were studying at the master's level, 8 were completing a PhD. The sample was diverse, and participants had a vast array of experiences within the institution that contributed to the development of well-rounded recommendations. International graduate students that responded to recruitment voiced their appreciation and seemed overwhelmingly happy to have a space where they could share their experiences and feel heard, as they felt there was limited institutional outreach to elicit feedback from the international student population. Creating such a space for participants to have their experiences heard and validated was powerful. An honorarium was gifted to the participants, which could have been an incentive to participate in the research, but due to the financial precarity and political devaluing of this population, I wanted to thank participants for sharing their time and knowledge with a gift, which was supported through the Guru Nanak Institute award funding.

In order to make participation more accessible, participants were presented with the option of being interviewed in-person or over Zoom. A vast majority, 19 out of 22, opted for a virtual interview. This had additional benefits for participants such as minimizing the time commitment due to travel and being in an environment that felt comfortable for them. However,

there were sometimes challenges with internet connectivity that affected the quality of the recording. Thus, taking notes during the interviews was valuable for the accuracy and reliability of the transcription and interpretation (Carcary, 2020).

The preservation of anonymity was very important to participants, which created some additional limitations around the extent to which identities the participants held could be specified and used directly in the discussion of these research findings. These personal identities - namely nationality, race, and gender identity - were collected from each participant, which was invaluable for the data analysis, however many participants brought up their concerns around potentially being identified. Some of those participants were even uncomfortable to show their face to me during interviews held via Zoom as it felt too exposing due to the topics being discussed, namely any potential criticisms they gave of the institution. There was some hesitancy to speak “against” the university by recounting gaps in services or outright harmful experiences on campus as international students have a particular vulnerability as academic outsiders with precarious status (Marginson, 2012; Sherry et al., 2010; Tran & Hoang, 2023). Based upon these interactions with the participants, I did not feel it appropriate to include an appendix with detailed information summarizing key identities of each of the participants as this had a high likelihood of compromising anonymity.

The limited sample size did not allow for the research to also include a substantial quantitative analysis (see 6.3.3) to assess the overall quality of institutional services used by racialized international graduate students. Using qualitative data was still a satisfactory approach to gather deeper, more personal accounts to try to understand the well-being of racialized international graduate students in a manner that afforded participants agency and was critical of

how the institution created conditions of marginalization in many instances (Mittelmeier et al., 2024; Page & Chahboun, 2019).

### **6.3.2 Researcher Positionality**

The process and analysis of this research was influenced by the researcher's positionality (see 4.1). In the methods I spoke to the ways my experiences were influential in coming to this research topic and shaped the research process and analysis. As a racialized non-international student, I am limited by my lack of personal experience within the Canadian immigration system as an adult, and subsequent forms of discrimination directed at those who do not hold a form of permanent status in Canada (e.g. Walia, 2013). Yet, my experience migrating to Canada for the purposes of pursuing a post-secondary education as a racialized non-binary person has left me with many experiences that feel distanced from domestic students.

Questions of subjectivity and bias are frequently navigated through qualitative research through the binary of insider/outsider positioning of the researcher. Istiko (2024) speaks to the need to complicate and transcend this binary, both as an act of epistemic disobedience and a tool of curiosity to produce more critical research. The use of labels simplifies differences for the purposes of neat categorization within social structures, however labels convey assumptions that need to be thoroughly interrogated and critiqued to avoid reproducing harmful narratives (Adriansen & Spangler, 2024; Bennett et al., 2024). The importance of sociocultural and political contexts for shaping identities, particularly when working across a globally positioned population, belies how labels, such as 'international student' cannot follow linear assumptions to shared experiences as it hides the heterogeneity inherent within a population (Bennett et al., 2024; Jones, 2017).

Reflexive engagement with positionality at every stage of the research is necessary to unpack the relational construction of identity that directly influences the construction of knowledge (Adriansen & Spangler, 2024; Spangler, 2023). Examining positionality and lived experience through an intersectional lens created more points of connection for me with participants, that I used to build transparency about how this subjectivity was incorporated into the research process.

### **6.3.3 Future Directions**

This research was conducted in a manner that established how macro, meso, and micro level factors influenced racialized international graduate student well-being. That is only the first step to taking efforts to adapt the policies and practices of post-secondary institutions to incorporate racialized international graduate students more meaningfully as members of the institutional community. There is the need to reexamine the structural reliance on the monetary value of international students that is shaping contemporary post-secondary policy as these models position international students as mass consumers of education rather than students, which neglects consideration for their well-being through strength-based narratives (Ankomah, 2022; Firang & Mensah, 2022; Page & Chahboun, 2019).

There are further actions that UVic and other post-secondary educational institutions in Canada can undertake to enhance the well-being of racialized international graduate students. The institutional recommendations provided in 6.2 summarize the most pressing concerns of a sample of racialized international graduate students at this point in time, however, efforts to improve student experiences requires institutional initiative that further engages with all students to establish a collective vision for the promotion of well-being. Participants expressed that there is a great need for post-secondary institutions to increase their engagement with international

graduate students to elicit regular feedback to improve service delivery (Call to Action 11.1). Many participants stressed that limited outreach from the university contributed to feeling disconnected from institutional resources (Bardill Moscaritolo et al., 2022). At the same time, some students found that the services available did not meet all their needs.

At the institutional-level, there is the possibility of establishing meaningful metrics for evaluating services that targets areas of growth as determined by student need. Developing rigorous quantitative metrics to track awareness, engagement, and satisfaction with institutional services is necessary to keep a high-level perspective on how different student groups are being supported. Identifying areas where low-budget adaptations can be made, such as through staff training and graduate student inservices, can allow for more immediate institutional shifts that create a safer and more inclusive environment for international graduate students. Other large-scale initiatives, like expanding graduate student housing, will require greater institutional planning but hold long-term benefits for students. Some of these findings and recommendations from this research may hold true for racialized international undergraduate students, non-racialized international graduate students, and many other student populations due to the inherent heterogeneity and complex fluid constructions of identity within all labeled student populations (Bista, 2018; Ploner, 2024).

At the same time, this research does not claim to be representative of all racialized international graduate students. The tendency to categorize international students by national or ethnic origin can further stereotypes and prejudice and misses out in explaining how individual and systemic factors shape international student experiences (e.g. Jones, 2017; Starr-Glass, 2018). Developing more expansive understandings of international students using an intersectional approach within institutional practices is necessary to consider how institutional

supports and resources can be accessible and relevant to all students (Bennett et al., 2024; Deuchar, 2022; Ploner, 2024; Tran & Hoang, 2024). Institutional services can be enhanced by increased engagement with the diverse perspectives of different groups of students, to identify inclusion modifications that are informed by student need.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

I began undertaking this research with the goal of centering the experiences of racialized international graduate students when it came to institutional-level decisions affecting their well-being. What emerged was evidence that the policies and practices directly affecting international graduate students, from federal to institutional levels, are being made in a top-down manner that is not necessarily reflective of the priorities, goals, and desires of racialized international graduate students. The primary approach to international graduate student well-being still maintains dominant internationalization narratives of intercultural harmony by promoting superficial inclusion of diverse marginalized groups in service of economic interests.

Throughout their studies, racialized international graduate students experience complex influences on their well-being, from political and economic policy to interactions with service providers. This research contributed to the development of institutional-level recommendations that aim to advocate for a sector of students that are not frequently given space to voice their diverse experiences (Page & Chahboun, 2019; Tran & Hoang, 2024). In creating research-based recommendations, the hope is to see an increase in specific and appropriate interventions that can better consider the needs of racialized international graduate students, contributing to the development of stronger campus communities to enhance well-being and sense of belonging.

Overall, the recommendations point to enhancing institutional supports and service delivery with the recognition that all students are diverse learners with unique needs.

Despite highlighting some of the challenges and gaps that exist, racialized international graduate students felt more or less positively about their experiences at the University of Victoria, as it was a space where they could realize their academic and professional goals, obtain a more secure politico-economic future, build community, and achieve personal growth. Recognizing the immense contributions that international graduate students bring to post-secondary institutions, and their practices of resiliency, is a step to building a more reciprocal relationship that fosters a diverse and inclusive environment.

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## Appendix A Participant Consent Form



## Participant Consent Form

### **Enhancing the Well-Being of Racialized International Graduate Students in a Canadian Post-Secondary Institution**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Enhancing the Well-Being of Racialized International Graduate Students in a Canadian Post-Secondary Institution that is being conducted by Sahana Kanabar.

Sahana Kanabar is a graduate student in the Social Dimensions of Health program at the University of Victoria and you may contact them if you have further questions by email ([sahanakanabar@uvic.ca](mailto:sahanakanabar@uvic.ca)) or phone (902-237-6217). As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Social Dimensions of Health. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Denise Cloutier. You may contact my supervisor at [dcloutier@uvic.ca](mailto:dcloutier@uvic.ca).

This research is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canadian Graduate Scholarship – Master’s program and the Guru Nanak Institute of Global Studies.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

This research aims to draw upon racialized international graduate student's knowledge and experiences at the University of Victoria to identify institutional barriers and protective factors for well-being, which will contribute to the development of institutional-level recommendations for enhancing international graduate student well-being.

#### **Importance of this Research**

Internationalization initiatives make international students desirable to post-secondary institutions to increase revenue, build domestic cultural competency, and foster global relations. Research of this type is important as international students are a rapidly growing portion of the post-secondary student body, yet post-secondary institutions have not adapted to provide comprehensive support services that are appropriate racialized international students. The experiences of international students in Canada are understudied generally, with limited research being driven by international student perspectives. It has been established in the literature that international students experience more adverse effects transitioning to a Canadian post-secondary institution than domestic students, however, on-campus support services receive limited uptake by international students, which severely restricts their effectiveness. Despite an apparent desire to increase the presence of international students in Canada, significantly less consideration has been given to their actual experiences as an international graduate student, and the implications for well-being.

### **Participants Selection**

To be eligible to participate in research, you must: (1) be an international student (foreign national who does not hold Canadian citizenship or PR, and is in Canada on a student visa); (2) self-identify as racialized/person of colour/visible minority; (3) be enrolled in a graduate program at the University of Victoria; (4) have completed a minimum of eight months full-time study by September 2023; (5) have lived in Greater Victoria for at least a portion of your studies. You are being asked to participate in this study because I am purposively sampling from this population to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of racialized international graduate students. Within this group, I would like to determine how institutional priorities and support mechanisms, as well as their individual identities influence their experiences and well-being as international graduate students.

### **What is Involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a face-to-face semi-structured interview taking approximately 60-90 minutes on the University of Victoria campus. Interview questions will be provided to you ahead of time, and you may decline to answer specific questions. The interview will be audio recorded and the interviewer will take written notes. A transcription of the interview will be made, coded, and analyzed to contribute to the findings of this research. You will be provided the opportunity to review the interview transcription and may request that responses be removed, or provide additional comments or context as necessary.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience for you as the time participating in this study takes away from your daily activities.

### **Risks**

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research such as recalling harmful experiences, particularly incidences of racism or exclusion within the academy, which may cause distress. If this does come up, you may choose to discontinue your participation. To help mitigate these risks, a list of campus and community resources compiled by the faculty of Human and Social Development will be shared with you prior to the interview. The interviewer is also trained in peer support.

### **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include contributing to a better understanding of the factors influencing racialized international graduate student well-being, which will be used to produce recommendations to enhance their well-being through changes at the institutional level. International graduate student experiences have been understudied in Canada, therefore this research is helping to fill that knowledge gap while producing knowledge to contribute to a more equitable treatment of international students within the University of Victoria.

### **Honorarium**

Upon completion of the interview, you will be gifted an honorarium of \$100. If the participant chooses to withdraw and the interview is not completed, the honoraria value will be determined based upon the proportion of the interview that was completed.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used. If the participant chooses to withdraw after the completion of an interview, the monetary compensation for your knowledge and time is unaffected.

### **Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity, upon completion of the interview you are able to pick a pseudonym that will be used in all transcripts, coding, and analysis. Identifying factors, such as nationality, race, and academic department will be generalized to the highest possible degree when extracting quotations or utilizing your data in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The data will be accessed only by the researcher and data from this study will be saved and stored securely on a password protected computer and on a secured network drive at the University of Victoria for five years after the completion of this study. Physical notes and consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home.

### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: thesis; presentations at scholarly meetings; academic publications; the internet; and directly to participants. A public information session will be held at the University of Victoria for racialized international graduate students and relevant staff (ie. International Centre for Students) to share the findings from the research. Additionally, the recommendations to enhance the well-being of racialized international graduate students developed from this study will be made available in an infographic and plain text format to be shared with the participants and community.

### **Future Use of Data**

PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT:

I consent to the use of my data in future research: \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant to provide initials)

I **do not** consent to the use of my data in future research: \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant to provide initials)

I consent to be contacted in the event my data is requested for future research: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant to provide initials)

**Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be saved and stored securely on a password protected computer and on a secured network drive at the University of Victoria for five years after the completion of this study, after which all digital data will be permanently erased. Paper files will be shredded.

**Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Sahana Kanabar (Researcher), and Dr. Denise Cloutier (Supervisor). Contact information is provided at the beginning of this consent form.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study (#23-0094), or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

**COVID-19 Risks**

Face-to-face sessions: Participants will be advised if they have or may have come into contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. Contact information for participants will be stored in a separate file from research data in the event that follow up is needed.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## **Appendix B Interview Guide**

### **Part 1: Perceptions of Canada**

- Before coming to Canada, what were your perceptions of the country?
  - How has your knowledge changed over time?
- What were your main motivations for studying in Canada?
  - Why/how did you end up at the University of Victoria?
- Where did you get information about being an international student?
  - What were your expectations about the international student experience?
  - What is some useful advice you wish you had been given to better prepare you for attending UVic?

### **Part 2: Promoting Well-being**

- What does well-being mean to you?
  - Follow-up on the various spheres of well-being the participant mentions.
- Has your support system changed since becoming an international student?
  - How so? Who/what are your main sources of support?
- What strategies do you use to promote your well-being?

**Part 3: Positive Experiences and Challenges (within Institutional Support Systems)**

- How have your experiences with university services helped or hindered well-being?

*University services include: International Centre for Students; Graduate Students' Society; Student Wellness Centre; Residence Services; Campus Security; CARSA; Centre for Accessible Learning; Writing Centre, etc.*

- How effective were the university services at addressing your needs?
- Have staff demonstrated a sufficient understanding of the international student experience?
- How could these services be improved for international graduate students?
- How has the social and academic environment at UVic helped or hindered your well-being?
  - What relationships do you have with members of the UVic community that have positively influenced your well-being?
  - How could the UVic environment be changed to better support your well-being?
- Do you feel that international students are treated differently by the University of Victoria?
  - How so?
  - Have you had experiences of discrimination or stereotyping?
- What have been your more rewarding experiences as an international student?
- Do you have any recommendations for changes at UVic to promote the well-being of racialized international graduate students?

## Appendix C Coding Dictionary

*Table 15: Complete coding dictionary providing descriptions for the codes used in the thematic analysis of the data*

<b>Theme / Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Political-Economic Determinants</b>	Political and economic conditions are key motivators in migration decisions and play a key role in influencing structural determinants of health. These determinants function at the global/international, national, and local level.	
Temporary Migrant Experience	Broadly encompassing the challenges and barriers that come with being in Canada in a temporary capacity, including regulations and limits on student visa, detrimental federal and provincial policy, and finding means for advocacy as political outsiders.	“Being a grad student means you have to advocate for yourself a lot, and being an international student means that you have to advocate for yourself in a political system you did not grow up in. And so there may be things you're not used to, or things you're just not aware [from] not being in the system.” - Lynn
Motivation to Study in Canada	The main factors and key influences that led participants to choose to pursue graduate studies outside of their home country generally, and to choose Canada in particular.	“You know, actually, I really love Canada from the start. I always wanted to study here.” - Junior
Applying for Permanent Residency	Discussions by participants around their intention to or experience of going through the immigration process of becoming a Permanent Resident of Canada. Includes benefits, meeting prerequisites, financial costs, and wait times.	“It’s going to open more doors. Yeah, I know that for a fact, you know, that's one of the reasons why I want [PR], you know. It's definitely going to open more doors because I do have plans to work in Canada and it's much easier to do it well, if I was a Permanent Resident or Canadian citizen rather than being an international student. It's much easier, more funding opportunities, more [...] it's just more opportunities overall.” - Victor
Building a Career in Canada	For those who intend to settle more permanently in Canada, this code covers their strategies for building a more secure future in Canada through access to education and work experience.	“[Work opportunities] reduce my stress and tension for the future because the more job experience I have during my studies, it is more [likely] that I [will] get a good job after graduation.” - Swan

Professional Networking	Another aspect of career development, a lack of a professional network was identified as a barrier to professional opportunities.	“[I don’t] have a professional network anymore because [my] professional network is in [home country]. If you're not working part-time or full-time, and you're not able to get a Co-op program, once you graduate you don't have a professional network. You have to end up building up on your own. I think maybe that's another thing that I would want to see offered more strongly to students. I want there to be more opportunities for international students to network with peers in their industry.” - Lynn
Identity as a Racialized Settler	How participants navigated their complex positionality as (temporary) settlers, being both harmed and benefited by settler colonial governance and institutions.	“The journey of Indigenous peoples in Canada is, to me, parallel to where I came from, to African colonization. It makes my understanding and my passion for Indigenous sovereignty a lot higher, in my understanding and my passion for reclamation of land and reclamation of resources a lot higher because I understand how these things were. I understand how systematic they were, [...] and I understand the ongoing generational effects of these things.” - Adam
Financial Security	One of the largest stressors for participants' well-being, this code encompasses anything related to financial precarity.	“I needed more financial security because the amount that we received [...], any amount that we receive is not that much, especially because I have a family here. And considering my age and everything, it's not feasible to live with the funding [that] I receive from UVic. I do have to work. No matter what, [as an] TA or RA. If it's not a TA or RA, I [have] had to work [off-campus] to secure my finances.” - Dan
Student Sources of Funding	Covers the means in which participants covered their tuition fees and costs of living in Victoria, BC.	“Whenever there are personal situation changes that require an academic leave the problem is [that] when students are on academic leave, the scholarship is not paid. Yet they may still need to live here. So that bureaucratic rule for stopping scholarship when you are [on] academic leave is a little bit nonsense I feel because

		that's actually when the student needs extra help.” - G
Employment Experiences	Experiences of participants while employed off-campus, usually in minimum-wage or service industry jobs. Includes navigating the workplace, and interactions with colleagues and customers.	"I was really shocked [when I worked] at Tim Horton's [as] I really was the odd one out. Then one customer also happens, I was speaking to him. He was asking where I am from, and I said oh, I am from [-]. He said oh, you speak very good English. And in my mind, I'm like what does that mean?" - Tom Jones
Coping with Cost of Living	As the cost of living is on the rise in Canada, participants experiencing financial precarity describe the challenges they faced, as well as resourceful ways they met their basic living needs.	“When I first came to Canada, the economic crisis was lower than it actually is right now. But right now, it's very difficult to live on a budget and live on your stipends [...] it's just that you live in bare minimum” - Josh
Access to Safe and Secure Housing	Covers the quality and affordability of the participant's housing situation in the Greater Victoria Area on- and/or off-campus. This includes finding housing, managing roommate and landlord relationships, and how their living environment impacted health.	“After I moved out of that place, I moved into another apartment near downtown. And then again, I had a very bad allergic reaction because people were able to smoke cigarettes and weed in that apartment. And the smoke was pretty intense because I could smell [it on] my clothing. I think the smoke has even infiltrated my wardrobe and even my body smells like smoke, so it was not a healthy environment for me.” - Krystal
<b>Academic Institutional Conditions</b>	Covering the experiences of participants within an academic institution. This theme is concerned with all levels of institutional governance, supports and services provided for students, pedagogy, and interactions with faculty and staff members.	
Institutional Supports and Resources	This code captures the institutional supports and resources that racialized international graduate students interact with, including their relevance and effectiveness.	“The counsellors were mostly Canadians. They [aren't] aware of different cultures, which totally makes sense, but I think as a counsellor, a good counsellor, should be aware of the [different] cultures and try to talk to people based on their own culture.” - Swan
Academic Environment	Broadly incorporates the experiences of participants as graduate students within a mid-size, research-intensive university in Western Canada.	“It's great that I reached out to these different departments and resources available and again, UVic was actually pretty good at providing all these different support systems so, I felt great. I was just

Access to Academic Support	The resources and services offered by the university to support the academic endeavours of international students from the moment of transition into a new academic environment to completion of their program. These supports could include improving technical writing skills, English proficiency, and academic accommodations.	<p>sort of disappointed with the fact that my department should be more responsible for its grad students because I feel if you are brave enough to accept these students, then you should be able to offer the same kind of support.” - D</p> <p>“My original intention was to have technical writing support help, but in the end, I got both sides of help because the questions they ask make me see my research and see my proposal in another way. I think the question they ask constantly goes back to what I value, what I care about, why I want to do this. It's like the questions open up more possibilities for a deeper understanding of me and my project. [...] I guess I felt the respect and encouragement [from staff]. They have a constant sense of encouragement, of really not diminishing my sense of writing ability, but helping me to see how I can better express my original ideas.” - G</p>
Experiences Within the Classroom	The experiences of international students within their coursework and the classroom environment are reflective of dominant pedagogies and power relations. This code encompasses how participants navigate classroom materials, teaching faculty, and peer relationships.	<p>“Because there are some friends, I'm thinking, OK, if I ask anything if I'm wrong or [have] wrong pronunciation it would be fun[ny] to everyone, maybe. So sometimes I want to ask something, but I can't because of this hesitation.” - Alex</p>
Student-Supervisor Relationship	A highly important element of the graduate student experience, this code characterizes the relationship that an international graduate student has with their primary supervisor(s). A supervisor is responsible for overseeing academic work, and may also assist a student in accessing funding, securing employment (within and outside the university), and achieving professional goals.	<p>“I feel very grateful for my supervisor. They know my situation and they respect me and [...] they understand me and maybe empathize and respect me. But also, they sometimes advise me [...] but they are doing that kindly, they are not blaming me [...] or criticizing me. No, they want me to succeed.” - Christina</p>

Graduate Student Labour	This code covers the work graduate students frequently do while employed as Research Assistants (RAs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs), including experiences working within academia (at UVic or another institution), labour expectations, compensation, and professional development.	“But in reality, I'm not treated as a research assistant, I'm treated as a student and all the work I'm doing is not because it's ‘work’. It's considered like it's part of your life. So, because kind of there's a loophole there that they're exploiting in a bad way for international students specifically.” - Victor
<b>Socio-Cultural Influences</b>	This theme covers all the elements of being within a community in the context of a Western Anglophone academic institution.	
Cultural Navigation	As international students are not coming from the dominant euro Canadian culture, this code encompasses how participants navigated their experience as cultural 'Others'.	“I think Canadians in general tend to be more culturally aware, or at least conscious that the world is a big place and people come from all over. There are many different ways and styles of living, so I do actually feel that a lot of Canadians I've met [are] genuinely curious or they don't have malign intent even if the outcome is patronizing or racializing in one way or another.” - Lily
Sharing Cultural Heritage	Describes the opportunities that participants had to engage in culturally-relevant traditions and activities with members of the institutional community.	“I introduced them to [my food] and they really enjoyed it as well, and it's like one of those moments that I felt very glad that I was able to share my culture with other people.” - Krystal
Embracing Cultural Diversity	The attitudes of the institution and its members when talking about and interacting with international graduate students from non-dominant cultural groups.	“I'm not trying to demonize them, but it's just like when you're from a dominant culture it doesn't matter what the minority tells you to change your mind, the stereotype remains there. It's a collective thought and it never changes.” - Aziz
Socio-emotional	Broadly including the relationships that participants maintained and created during their time as an international graduate student.	“When it comes to social well-being, kind of social connections, [building] relationships and a sense of belonging, you know, these are very vital for well-being. You need to understand the fact that you have a friend. You know you have [a place] where you belong.” - Mars
Ethnic Networks	The use and integration into pre-established networks of co-	“It's more like a [nationality] base here they have already established. So, when I

	nationals from the participant's home country, or among groups members that share racial or cultural similarities.	came here as a newcomer, I just began to know a circle of maybe 10 people at the same time. Then we regularly had gatherings, and also I rented a room from this landlady and my roommates, they're also students at UVic, so it's a very familiar cultural environment. And also we are not only roommates we are also very, very good friends.” - Christina
Relationships with Family	How participants' time as an international graduate student impacted relationships with family. Includes family members in the home country, other countries, and that migrated with the participant.	“The existence of my [partner] has considerably help[ed] me. And to be honest, I think that immigration for a person who is alone is considerably harder than a person like me, who at least has someone in Canada.” - Swan
Relationships with Friends	How participants' time as an international graduate student impacted relationships with friends. Also including how they developed and maintained friendships in a new context.	“Most of the students, which I actually interacted with at a session, were international students, and it was quite fun because it was quite easy to understand each other.” - Jonny
English Linguistic Proficiency	Anything related to experiences of being in an Anglophone environment. Includes experiences where participants felt marginalized due to a lack of English proficiency, and how they adapted to be successful in academic and social contexts.	“I made my own curriculum of learning the [English] language for myself. I used the idea of mirroring, like when kids are mirroring, and they learn language, body language, culture and everything that comes with it. So, I started using that every time I was in a public sphere, I was just listening to people and seeing how they were talking and not talking, how the performances between people [differed depending on the setting]. I was spending more time reading books and going through the dictionary.” - Aziz
Personal Identity Factors	Identity influences how individuals are perceived, and how they perceive the world. This research considered how the different positionalities of participants influenced their well-being.	“Who you are a lot is based on how you fit into the society and where you're like you're from and you don't fit into this society, you fit into the one you came from, and so if you forget how you fit and you allow people to tell you, oh yeah, this is who you are. You're not good at this. Or you're good at, yeah, then it doesn't go well.” - Adam

Gender Identity	Concerning participant experiences that were centred around their gender identity.	"[Now] living in a country that I don't have to fear for my life every single time that I go out, because [I don't have] a normative gender expression or whatever also plays a big role in that." - Mino
Racial/Ethnic Identity	Concerning participant experiences that were centred around their racial or ethnic identity.	"Being a person of colour, being female, and being a female coming from East Asian culture I think all of this can somewhat be a heavy burden. It's who I am. I totally accept who I am. But I see the intolerance in academia." - G
Sexuality	Concerning participant experiences that were centred around their sexuality.	"Also I get to explore, because back home I was questioning [...] my sexuality and it wasn't really safe to do that." - Tom Jones
<b>Personal Wellness</b>	Referring to well-being at the individual-level. Also including the strategies and practices that participants used to maintain their mental, physical and spiritual health and well-being.	
Managing Mental Health	This code broadly covers how participants' experiences influenced their mental health.	"Resources do matter a lot. Having resources [and] support does matter a lot, because that would [help me] keep a positive tone mentally." - Junior
Navigating Mental Illness	Experiences related to diagnosed and non-diagnosed mental illness, including help-seeking behaviours and practices to maintain mental well-being.	"But actually, mentally it's something, I'm depressed because sometimes I feel so lonely." - Alex
Handling Stress	The strategies that participants use to manage stress originating from any and all aspects of their life.	"When things started, you know, making more sense in terms of how it worked physiologically, you know, it's like, alright, I'm going to try to do all these things [to get better]. It was not an easy one because you know, I was just super depressed and anxious. So, I felt like it was so hard to even leave my own bed every morning." - D
Physical Health	Concerning the physical aspects of well-being, connected to health of the body.	"[To] have the double whammy of I'm not feeling well, and I also feel bad that I have not been feeling well. Even though it's something that I couldn't [help], like I'm controlling my condition with medication, I'm controlling my condition with diet. I'm

Nourishment Through Food	Well-being practices related to food.	<p>not 100% perfect, but I'm better than I used to be and I'm doing the best I can. It's OK if even despite all of my precautions, my condition worsens anyways. Like learning how to be OK with that, it's been one of the major things I struggle with when it comes to my well-being." - Lynn</p> <p>"But now you actually have to make it yourself. It's a fun way to as an international student to connect, or just to remind your ties with your home, I would say not to have too much fast food, but then you still have food from your home. Then it's also the kind of way to connect with your [heritage] and then share it with my classmates and then they liked it and then they will ask more questions about it." - Jenny</p>
Movement and Exercise	Well-being practices related to physical movement and exercise.	<p>"[Exercise is] a ritual you do every day, it takes time. When you're done, you're tired. You sleep well. So, no matter where you're going through, having a ritual really helps." - Adam</p>
Rest, Relaxation, and Sleep	Well-being practices related to rest and sleep.	<p>"I think sleep is very important for me and I was just in a very tense and stressed state for like [a whole] year, so my sleep quality hasn't been very great. [...] Starting from my first semester I would play [intramurals] every week and it was the biggest stress reliever for me because not only were I able to play with my friends, [but] I've made some new friends." - Krystal</p>
Maintaining a Work-Life Balance	The ways in which participants balanced their time to meet their responsibilities. Obstacles and stressors were discussed, as well as activities and hobbies that were used to promote well-being.	<p>"[Doing] coursework, just pulling like a bunch of all nighters. Maybe like five nights out of seven days a week. I had to do that. There were nights where I had to stay in the lab because I felt like there's no way I can actually drag myself home. I was just too tired, and mind you, I live pretty close so I could have walked, but I just didn't have the strength to do that because I really, really worked hard. I would say [I worked] maybe up to like</p>

Spiritual Fulfillment	As another component of well-being, some participants shared their experiences of religious and spiritual faith.	75-80 hours a week combined.” - D “Also, [while] adapting to the new environment my mental health could be at the lowest state so, I reached out to the Multi-Faith Chapel to ask help from the spiritual care provider.” - Christina
Finding Faith-based Community	Mentions of participants using faith as a way to find community and build belonging.	"The thing that it takes away is religious communities are another way to integrate to society, right?" - Adam
Avenues of Spiritual Expression	This code covers the ways that participants practice and express their spirituality.	“Yeah, I do have the urge inside me to kind of look into what kind of spiritual growth that you can [have] if you don't believe in any religion. But I'm still searching for it.” - Jenny

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## Appendix D Recommendations

**Table 16:** Complete list of recommendations for institutional-level modifications to enhance the well-being of racialized international graduate students at the University of Victoria

#	Recommendation	Action	Action at UVic <sup>1</sup>
1.1	Increase transparency around how international graduate student tuition fees are being used by the institution.	Establish: <i>Transparent communication around the institutional budget, including the contribution of international student fees</i>	X
1.2	Expand the institutional funding opportunities for international graduate students.	Allocate: <i>Designated funding to strengthen international student financial supports</i> Allocate: <i>Funding to support racialized international graduate students</i>	X
1.3	Establish awards and scholarships unique to international graduate and racialized students.	Establish: <i>More financial awards for international students</i> Measure: <i>The median funding amount provided to international students and increase to equitable levels</i> Increase: <i>Outreach to potential donors</i> Increase: <i>Promotion of awards and scholarships</i>	X
1.4	Increase flexibility for payment of tuition and ancillary fees prior to program commencement.	Establish: <i>Flexible payment policies for international students who lack access to necessary banking infrastructure</i>	X
1.5	Provide clear and transparent guidelines to international graduate students around cost of living and funding packages.	Increase: <i>Communication of information relevant to financial planning</i> Update: <i>Information regularly to accurately reflect current economic conditions</i>	X
2.1	Increase the number of placements in on-campus housing for international graduate students.	Expand: <i>Graduate housing to accommodate a minimum of 10% of the graduate student body</i> Prioritize: <i>Incoming international graduate students to allow them to get settled safely</i>	X

<sup>1</sup> Some of these recommendations are addressed in UVic governance documents, with institutional action being taken or planned. These recommendations are marked with a 'Y'. Others are marked with an 'X' if there are no relevant actions mentioned, or the actions do not address international/graduate students. It falls outside the scope of this thesis to identify and expand upon these specific documents. Initiatives are more frequently targeted towards undergraduate students and were not considered as sufficient if they neglect the unique circumstance of graduate and/or international students.

2.2	Align the cost of on-campus graduate and family housing to affordable levels based on typically graduate funding.	Measure: <i>The median funding amount provided to graduate students</i> Establish: <i>An affordable housing model based upon graduate funding</i>	X
2.3	Expand access to information for finding housing off-campus.	Increase: <i>Communication of information relevant to securing safe off-campus housing</i> Establish: <i>A directory of international student-friendly landlords</i>	Y
3.1	Expand affordable food options on-campus.	Establish: <i>Subsidize on-campus food prices in line with median graduate student income</i>	X
3.2	Consult with international students to expand access to culturally relevant foods.	Expand: <i>Cultural diversity in food offerings</i> Evaluate: <i>Potential of privatizing on-campus food service sites for non-Western restaurant services</i>	X
3.3	Expand the on-campus food bank to serve a more diverse student population.	Allocate: <i>Resources to expand food bank capacity</i> Increase: <i>Visibility of the food bank to encourage donations</i> Measure: <i>Use of the food bank by international students</i>	Y
4.1	Establish a graduate student peer mentorship program to match incoming international graduate students with another senior domestic and/or international graduate student.	Allocate: <i>Resources to establish peer mentorship framework and training</i> Implement: <i>Pilot peer mentorship program with domestic and international students</i> Measure: <i>Impact on international graduate students' sense of belonging and uptake of institutional services</i>	X
4.2	Equip professors to provide international graduate students with institutional academic support and resources.	Facilitate: <i>Sharing of academic and institutional resources with faculty</i> Increase: <i>Referrals to the Centre for Academic Communication (CAC)</i> Measure: <i>Awareness and use of CAC among international graduate students</i>	X
4.3	Expand the array of technical expertise and guidance offered at CAC	Create: <i>More opportunities for graduate student learning and shared expertise, i.e. powerpoint presentations, writing a research proposal, etc.</i> Increase: <i>Tutors expertise in a variety of graduate disciplines</i>	X

4.4	Promote the English Conversation Café to international graduate students.	Evaluate: <i>Impact on international graduate student class participation</i>	X
5.1	Encourage a practice of minimum monthly check-ins between graduate supervisors and international graduate students.	Establish: <i>Protocol for regular student-supervisor meetings</i> Measure: <i>Contact hours between international graduate students and supervisors</i>	Y
5.2	Assist international graduate students to develop academic and career goals.	Monitor: <i>Progression towards goals with refinement throughout the program</i>	X
5.3	Create a mentorship program for racialized international graduate students to receive personalized support.	Establish: <i>Mentorship program to provide comprehensive support from faculty members, domestic and international students</i> Measure: <i>Impact on well-being</i>	X
6.1	Expand the variety of on-campus work opportunities that utilizes the skills and experience international graduate students bring to UVic.	Identify: <i>Collate and identify on-campus work opportunities suitable for graduate students in a variety of disciplines</i> Establish: <i>Paid positions for international graduate students on-campus</i>	X
6.2	Investigate possible institutional services that can be complemented by international graduate student staff.	Allocate: <i>Resources to fund paid work</i>	X
6.3	Build institutional accountability to the labour standards for students employed as RAs.	Establish: <i>Fair and accountable labour standards for RAs</i> Measure: <i>Student performance and satisfaction</i>	X
6.4	Consider providing compensation for international graduate TAs that require additional time to mark assignments.	Allocate: <i>Resources (monetary and non-monetary) to compensate additional time needed to complete TA work</i>	X
6.5	Bolster advocacy for graduate students' labour standards.	Establish: <i>Avenues for support to manage supervisor relationships</i> Measure: <i>Student satisfaction and academic progression</i>	X
7.1	Extend orientation activities throughout the first month of each semester.	Measure: <i>Information retention and impact on access of services within first semester</i>	X
7.2	Boost the promotion of institutional student services during the orientation period.	Increase: <i>Social media presence promoting institutional services</i>	X

		Facilitate: <i>Sharing of academic and institutional resources with faculty</i>	
7.3	Establish a key lead in every program for orientation/transition questions	Identify: <i>Faculty or staff member in each program to provide transition support for international graduate students</i>	X
7.4	Create easily accessible information packages that remain available virtually to students.	Evaluate: <i>Accuracy and revise current comprehensive orientation packages clearly detailing resources and services</i> Increase: <i>Promotion of institutional services</i>	Y
7.5	Provide information regarding the conditions and regulations of study permits.	Include: <i>Information and resources related to immigration policy in orientation packages</i>	Y
8.1	Provide anti-racist decolonial education (e.g., Indigenous Cultural Acumen training) for all international graduate students.	Increase: <i>Decolonizing education targeted at international students</i> Measure: <i>Participation and engagement</i>	X
8.2	Contextualize decolonial practices, such as land acknowledgements, through education.	Increase: <i>Education on decolonial practices utilized by the institution across disciplines</i> Measure: <i>Knowledge and engagement with institutional Indigenization and reconciliation initiatives</i>	Y
8.3	Create closed critical spaces for racialized international students to discuss and reflect on their position as racialized settlers.	Establish: <i>International graduate space to engage in anti-racist decolonial work and allyship</i> Identify: <i>Appropriate mentors to engage international graduate students in anti-racist decolonial work</i>	X
9.1	Expand quantity and variety of social events for international graduate students.	Allocate: <i>Resources to host social events</i> Increase: <i>Social media presence to promote events</i> Measure: <i>Participation and engagement</i>	Y
9.2	Consider establishing a central hub for international graduate students.	Allocate: <i>Physical space on campus for use by international graduate students</i> Measure: <i>Use of space and impact on community-building</i>	X
9.3	Establish an international student representative for each department or faculty at minimum.	Establish: <i>An international student leadership position within each department</i>	X

9.4	Highlight the contributions and accomplishments of international graduate students.	Increase: <i>Acknowledgement and celebration of international student achievements across the institutional community</i>	X
10.1	Increase education on intersectional international intercultural competencies in annual EDI training for university faculty and staff and students.	Establish: <i>Mechanism for anonymous feedback regarding service interactions</i> Allocate: <i>Resources to share existing EDI resources, expand EDI training, specifically in regard to racialized and international students</i> Measure: <i>Participation and engagement</i>	Y
10.2	Improve staff competency to address marginalization of linguistically diverse (non-Anglophone) individuals in the classroom and while accessing services.	Establish: <i>Mechanism for anonymous feedback regarding service interactions</i> Implement: <i>Staff training on working with English as an Additional Language learners</i>	X
11.1	Annual experience survey for racialized international students to inform future institutional actions.	Allocate: <i>Resources to the creation and implementation of survey</i> Measure: <i>Participation</i> Establish: <i>Metrics for measuring improvements in service delivery</i>	Y
11.2	Create a regular flow of feedback to highlight international student experiences in engaging with institutional services.	Establish: <i>Mechanism for anonymous feedback on service interactions</i> Measure: <i>Use of institutional services by international graduate students</i>	Y
11.3	Address staffing issues limiting access to the Student Wellness Centre.	Allocate: <i>Resources to ensuring a consistent standard of care and access</i>	X
11.4	Facilitate reliable access to mental health support for more complex issues.	Increase: <i>Communication about accessible alternative (off-campus) resources for physical and mental health</i> Establish: <i>Connections with psychiatry and therapeutic services that students can be referred to for long-term mental health care</i>	X
11.5	Improve transparency about the procedures and potential outcomes of engaging with the Equity and Human Rights office.	Establish: <i>Reporting procedures based on trauma-informed principles</i> Implement: <i>Anonymous reporting for on-campus experiences of discrimination and harassment</i> Measure: <i>Incidents over time and identify and implement interventions</i>	Y

12.1	Provide improved co-op and off-campus work opportunities that are relevant to international graduate students.	Consult: <i>Improve understanding in Career Services of international graduate students' professional goals</i> Establish: <i>Coordinator position to support international graduate students in co-op</i> Allocate: <i>Resources to research and expand graduate-level co-op job offerings</i>	X
12.2	Hold career skill building workshops specific to international graduate students.	Allocate: <i>Resources to developing workshops on relevant career skills</i> Measure: <i>Participation and engagement</i>	X
12.3	Provide practical career counselling appropriate for graduate-level students.	Allocate: <i>Resources to expand staff training</i> Measure: <i>Impact on service quality</i>	X
12.4	Increase opportunities for international graduate students to build a professional network.	Allocate: <i>Resources to hold networking events for graduate students</i> Measure: <i>Event attendance and engagement</i>	X
12.5	Evaluate the possibility of providing international graduate students with an employment letter (for work positions on-campus) to contribute towards Permanent Residency requirements.	Measure: <i>Impact on employability and earnings post-graduation</i>	X

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