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ORIENTING NEW INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: SPATIALITY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO STAFF WORK PRACTICES

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ORIENTING NEW INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: SPATIALITY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO STAFF WORK PRACTICES

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

ORIENTING NEW INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: SPATIALITY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO STAFF WORK PRACTICES

U.S. colleges must increasingly respond to a wide range of complex forces and simultaneously fulfill their missions and support students. To address many of these forces, some have turned to internationalization efforts like recruiting and enrolling international students. In light of these efforts, critics have called for institutions to better, more appropriately support these students, given their challenges and needs. This call has amplified during the recent COVID-19 global health pandemic.

Traditional student support services tend to center around Tinto's Theory of Student Departure. Examples of support programming are frequently shared, yet rarely detail how institutional staff actually perform them through everyday work within the institution as a complex organization. This study addresses these critiques by drawing upon alternative lenses to explore how spatiality contributes to how staff work to produce a new international student orientation event, as form of student service. To do so, this dissertation utilizes concepts of relational space, spatiality, and events, which situate orientation work as a network of diverse social and material relations.

A mini-ethnographic case study permitted the tracing of different sociomaterial relations between several staff members and the objects with which they interacted at Southeastern Urban University. Following observations, participant interviews, and artifact review, several central, material actors shaped staff work practices within the orientation-network: U.S. immigration policy, institutional policy, technologies-in-use, uncertainty, and risk. Analysis revealed that the pre-COVID-19 orientation-network remained stable over time, due to the power and agency of certain actors to hold it together. The fall 2020 orientation-network was disrupted, though still yielded an event, due to fluid actors and staff improvisation.

Findings suggest that the event during the pandemic required a unique assemblage of people and materials, much due to a constant presence of uncertainty and risk. Staff adapted work practices to maintain their ability to produce the orientation. With these findings, this study offers recommendations that challenge dominant notions of space, materials, and other actors as possessing inherent qualities. Utilizing a relational view of practices like *orienting*, as consisting of messy actor-networks offers a way of opening up student support services and (re)imaging how they could transform to enable U.S. colleges to fulfill their priorities while optimally serving their students.

KEYWORDS: International Students, Student Services, Higher Education, Relational Space, Spatiality, Actor-Network Theory, New Student Orientation

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ORIENTING NEW INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: SPATIALITY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO STAFF WORK PRACTICES

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DEDICATION

To my Dad, Tommy, for always being so proud of me for achieving new heights and trying new things. To my Grandmother, Katheryn, for instilling in me the Spirit which guides me in knowing that no task is too great and that all is possible with a little faith. And to my dear friend and mentor, Scott Van Der Meid, who kindled the spark in me that is now a flame of passion for international education, not to mention shared the best meals and company.

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This dissertation, while on the surface appears to be individual work, is the effect of complex actor-network that would not be possible without the contributions of a myriad of actors. Despite a variety of external forces that threatened to dissolve the network at various points in time, these actors have been strong and enabled me to persist along the way to accomplish the long-held goal of mine to complete this work. While hard to make visible all of those who made some impact on this journey, I wish to highlight several key individuals and express my sincerest gratitude.

Firstly, I have been blessed to be guided by a phenomenal dissertation committee. My Dissertation Chair, Dr. Jane Jensen, has been here since the beginning, from when I first worked with her in Education Abroad, to when I was considering doctoral coursework, and when I encountered bumps in the road toward the end of this journey. Throughout it all, she generously shared her warmth, wisdom, and support. Dr. Jungmin Lee has been my cheerleader and encourager. She has always listened to my ups and downs, and even took a chance on the developing researcher in me. Dr. Susan Roberts has continuously shared her positivity since that 2015 site visit to China. This dissertation is largely geographical and could not have unfolded in this way without her guidance. These women are passionate about international education and could not have been a better fit for me. To Dr. Kelley Bradley, thank you for stepping in at the last hour to help see me through. You each are exceptional role models, and I can never repay you for your generous support. I'd also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Beth Goldstein, for sparking further love for international education and stewarding me throughout my journey's beginnings.

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Finally, I am eternally grateful to my family, friends, and colleagues who in any way supported me along this adventure. To Momma, Amanda, and Alex, you have tirelessly and effortlessly shared your abiding love across time and space, it is more than anyone can ever ask for. To Evan, I could not have done this without you. Your patience, heart, and positivity have been a godsend, and I cannot tell you how much I appreciate you. You have given me the time and space to pursue my work, sacrificing moments we could have spent together to invest in us. And through it all, our love has continued to flourish. To Nina, the best friend, classmate, and co-dissertator anyone could ever ask for. Thank you for always talking me off the proverbial ledge, for encouraging me, for keeping me on track, and for demonstrating how exceptional grad students rock a dissertation. To Marianne, Serenity, and Elizabeth, you ladies are phenomenal. Thank you for our phone chats, texts, and impromptu conversations. Your enthusiasm and love shines through in this work, and your mentorship and friendship are invaluable.

Walt Disney once said that “If you can dream it, you can do it.” I have spent countless hours during this journey listening to music from the movies that were inspired by his dream-come-to-life. His music made me whistle while I worked and was the spoonful of sugar that I needed to keep going. But more than that, it reminded me that “If you keep on believing, the dream that you wish will come true.” Thank you, Walt.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANT	Actor-Network Theory
CPT	Curricular Practical Training
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ISA	International Student Advisor
ISO	International Students Office
ISS	International Student Services
OPT	Optional Practical Training
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SEUU	Southeast Urban University
SEVIS	Student and Exchange Visitor Information System
SEVP	Student and Exchange Visitor Program
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics
TA	Thematic Analysis
USCIS	U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting the Scene

Every day, colleges and universities in the United States make decisions that influence not only how they are perceived by external stakeholders, but how effective, successful, and notable they are. Frequently, these decisions are made to respond to issues that are driven by forces, like demographic trends, movements within economics and markets, political climates, and event global health trends (DePietro, 2020). Moreover, the ways in which higher education institutions behave and act with their wider environments involve an array of different stakeholders across and beyond their campuses. As Tierney (1987) states "colleges and universities are not two-dimensional, but are complex, highly interrelated collections of people…" (p. 67). These institutions as organizations "exist in socially constructed systems," where individuals' reality "is defined through a process of social interchange in which perceptions are affirmed, modified, or replaced according to their apparent congruence with the perceptions of others" (p. 64). To this end, colleges and universities as organizations not only respond to their environment, with its myriad forces, but help define it "through selective attention and interpretation…" (p. 65).

Take, for example, recent trends of decreasing federal and state educational appropriations to U.S. institutions. In response to the limiting of funding, institutions must now generate more of their own revenue, though during a period when American student enrollment is in decline. By consequence, U.S. institutions have turned to initiatives intended to increase their quality and prestige, attract more students, and also generate the revenue needed to fulfill their institutional missions and goals. Such

initiatives require action from an array of individuals, from university leaders to on-the-ground staff, with each of their work connecting to one another. However, studying a college's organizational behavior and the work people do is challenging. It is messy, as an organization "does not speak with one voice. It is always cacophonous and multivocal" (Tierney, 1987, p. 66). To that end, researchers must strive to implement holistic research, seeking to account for various coexisting connections and multiple voices, to understand how individuals within the organization come to understand and construct their realities, as well as perceive the wider environment within which these forces circulate (Tierney, 1987).

This dissertation is an attempt to understand how those connections and complexities to better understand how higher education organizations work in practice. I selected international student services as a case for exploring institutional organizational behavior, because of its uniqueness as a cadre of student services. That is, because of its label "international," it has historically appeared to be contained within one institutional unit. Though, in reality, these services pervade the institution, and students are supported by all parts of the campus. This nuance makes for an interesting case because on the surface international student services seem simple: go to the international center or office. However, as this dissertation will describe, it is not.

1.1.1 *Internationalization & International Student Mobility*

International student services is a timely institutional phenomenon to explore, not only given the aforementioned decline in institutional funding and U.S. student enrollment, but the increasing prevalence of an additional "force", internationalization. This force is the process "of integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the goals,

primary functions and delivery of higher education at the institutions and national levels" (Knight, 2012). According to Hudzik and McCarthy (2012, p. iv), internationalization:

> not only impacts all of campus life but the institution's external frames of reference, partnerships, and relations. The global reconfiguration of economics, systems of trade, research, and communication, and the impact of global forces on local life, dramatically expand the need for comprehensive internationalization and the motivations and purposes for driving it.

Internationalization acknowledges an interconnectedness between local and global issues, recognizes how colleges mediate between wider forces and local impacts, as well as how these institutions become more inclusive. To more successfully internationalize our institutions, we must "continually realign" our mission, values, and "strategies within this constantly evolving global landscape" (Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012, p. 2).

Internationalization can produce positive benefits, like economic gain, intercultural competency, and increased competitive advantage in terms of innovation and research capacity (Hudzik, 2011; Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012; Knight 2012). U.S. institutions have gradually acknowledged internationalization's importance and implemented initiatives to internationalize their campus communities such as: integrating international or comparative content into the academic core curriculum, engaging in research and institutional partnerships abroad, increase enrollment in language courses, and even incorporate internationalization into mission and values statements (Hudzik, 2011; Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012; Knight 2012).

Another common element in institutional efforts to internationalize their campuses, while responding to other external forces, is the aggressive recruitment of international students from other countries. U.S. institutions have realized the increasing value of these students as a revenue source in a time when more traditional ones have

considerably diminished, as international students often pay higher tuition rates and fund these costs out of their own monies. Moreover, international students are seen to stimulate the intellectual well-being of the institutions they attend, invigorate local economies with their purchasing power, and contribute to campus diversity and inclusion initiatives (Altbach, 2004, Banks & Bhandari, 2012; Bird & Turner, 2014; Marginson, 2006; Peri, Basso, & McElmurry, 2016).

As a result, in part, to increased recruitment efforts, since the 2008-2009 academic year the U.S. has witnessed general increases in enrollment and is currently the leading receiver of college-level students from around the world. At present, 1.07 million international students make up 5.5% of the total college student enrollment in the U.S., up 2% from a decade ago. Most international students tend to enroll in U.S. doctorate-granting universities with high research activities, though all types of institutions enroll these students (Institute for International Education, 2021e). As U.S. colleges continue to seek ways to meet their needs, fulfill their missions and goals, internationalize their community, and respond to wider forces at play, international student enrollment initiatives have been and will remain a key strategy for some time to come.

Such increases in international student enrollment necessitate student support services to help ensure these students are successful during college and graduate. They often encounter difficulties beyond those of their domestic peers, including language barriers, cultural and academic differences, maintaining immigration compliance, social isolation and homesickness. Moreover, staff interacting with these international students encounter challenges in serving them, some of which center around differences between U.S. academic, social, and linguistic cultures and those of students' home countries or

regions. Other challenges include international student support offices being isolated from their institution's larger mission, a lack of staff training and intercultural competence in working with this population across campus, and fewer international students utilizing different social and other support services (Bista, 2015; Chissoe, 2017; Matirosyan, Bustamante, & Saxon, 2019; NACE, 2020). Briggs & Ammigan (2017) note that international students generally encounter institutional silos. As a consequence of the significant increase of international student enrollment in the past decade, along with related student and staff challenges, many scholars and practitioners argue that U.S. institutions do not adequately or commensurately support them. They share that a majority of institutions "struggle and must do more to allocate adequate resources and expertise needed to work with this diverse population" (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017, p. 1083). These critics, in turn, call for more developed and appropriate student services if American colleges are to keep up with this population's enrollment, retention, and success (Andrade, 2006; Banjong, 2015; Glass, Buss, & Braskamp, 2013; Madden-Dent, Wood, & Roskina, 2019; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010).

As a support staff member in at least three different university units on university campuses, I have witnessed first-hand the challenges of working with international students, and the need for more developed services to optimally and appropriately support them. Having worked much with international students, I remember when colleagues would immediately assign me to work with them, using the assumption that since I had previously worked in "international", I could best assist them. I can recall the siloing that sometimes occurs across campuses, in that some units appear reticent to interact with others in relation to international students due to either feelings of

intimidation and a lack of understanding, or sense that it was not their role to do so. To these ends, and hearing comments from my international student services colleagues, I recognized a pain point in supporting these students. Little did I know that 2020 would exacerbate this perceived pain point due to the emergence of a new disruptive force.

1.1.2 *COVID-19 Global Health Pandemic*

In late December 2019, health officials in Wuhan, China indicated that a small cluster of atypical pneumonia cases of unknown cause had been discovered, initially linking them to a wholesale "wet" market, (Petrikova, Cole, & Farlow, 2020). In early January, Chinese and WHO researchers attributed the outbreak to a novel coronavirus, later named COVID-19. Soon thereafter, the coronavirus spread, and the U.S. confirmed its first case on January 21st in Washington. Less than a month later, what started as a small unknown respiratory illness had spread across three continents, with the common link being travel to and from Wuhan (World Health Organization, 2020; Whitworth, 2020). Scientists learned that the virus spread by respiratory droplets, close contact between people, and on certain surfaces.

In early February, countries began to restrict global air travel and institute varying levels of quarantine for travelers from China. On February 3rd, U.S. President Donald Trump declared a public health emergency, and a national emergency on March 13th (AJMC, 2020). In early March, the first U.S. college, the University of Washington, canceled in-person classes due to the spread of the virus in the Seattle area. Other institutions convened emergency planning teams to consider and plan for possible shutdowns (Baker & Hartocollis, 2020). By mid-March, U.S. colleges began cancelling face-to-face classes or closing completely (Burke, March 2020).

On March 9th, the U.S Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), who oversees the monitoring of international student immigration compliance, released guidance to higher education institutions concerning COVID-19 and F-visa status for affected students. They confirmed the continued monitoring of the pandemic and acknowledged that schools could report "adaptations" regarding students' status so that they could continue making "normal progress in a full course of study as required by federal regulations" (SEVP, March 2020, p. 1). While international students could remain in the U.S. during this time, if they traveled outside the country there was no guarantee of return, due to air travel restrictions and suspension of routine government services like visa appointments (NAFSA, October 2020).

The COVID-19 global health pandemic caused major disruptions to U.S. higher education, altering most elements of college life for students, faculty, staff, and those beyond school campuses (Smalley, 2020). When most colleges canceled in-person classes, they also put into place remote and hybrid work arrangements for faculty and staff to minimize risk of virus transmission on campus. Consequently, aside from some essential services, such as dining and residence halls, health resources, etc., many individuals began to work and teach virtually from their homes, utilizing a variety of virtual tools to facilitate interactions that previously took place in physical settings (Johnson, Veletsianos, and Seaman, 2020). From late spring into the summer, institutions began to plan for the fall 2020 term, engaging committees, surveys, and town halls to inform their paths forward (Burke, April 2020). Despite evolving developments regarding COVID-19, changing policies from federal, state, local, and institutional officials, many

institutions chose to bring back their students to campus. Course formats varied from entirely online, to a mix of online and hybrid formats (part online, part in-person), etc.

However, as developments of these plans began to circulate across the country, the U.S. SEVP published new guidance on July 6, 2020 indicating that the temporary international student adaptations permitted during the spring and summer terms would be modified for the fall. SEVP stipulated that F-visa students attending colleges operating courses entirely online could *not* take a full online course load and remain in the U.S. Further, the U.S. government would not issue visas to any student be enrolled in a school or program that was fully online for the fall, nor allow them entry into the country. Students who were currently in the U.S. and in one of these categories would have to leave the country or transfer to another institution offering some in-person instruction. If attending an institution operating under normal in-person course formats, they could still attend. Students attending schools with a hybrid model could take more than one online course as long as their entire course load was not online (SEVP, July 6, 2020). This guidance provoked intense frustration and backlash from higher education institutions and advocates, particularly in the form of lawsuits which caused SEVP to rescind it on July 24th and reinstate the earlier March 9th guidance. Although, new F-visa students granted status after March 9th could not enroll in U.S. institutions for the fall term if pursuing fully online course loads (NAFSA, August 2020; SEVP, July 24, 2020).

During this time the U.S. Department of State began to gradually reopen consulates and embassies, and their services, according to local situations (NAFSA, October 2020). Though, while international students could be eligible to attend universities in the fall, they could not be guaranteed to get their visas in time for the start

of their fall term (T. Beard, personal communication, July 2020). Throughout this period, the call for better, more appropriate support for international students grew exceptionally loud. As institutions had to make decisions for how to support all current and incoming students, practitioners and advocates alike urged decision-makers to not forget international students (Cheng, 2020; West, 2020).

1.1.3 *International Students and Services*

Already interested in how university staff members implement services to this population, the magnification of challenges that partially arose from COVID-19 furthered my curiosity. My interest evolved into exploring specifically what staff did to serve and support these students, particularly during the pandemic. The literature concerning international students, their mobility, and support services tends to revolve around themes like international students' acculturative stress and social support, English language proficiency, academic and social involvement, academic and cultural transition, student satisfaction, and college experience (OJED, 2021). Other topics among the literature include students' sense of belonging, faculty and classroom issues, student challenges and success, and health and well-being (Bista, 2016; Chissoe, 2017; Jing et. al., 2020; Lind, 2014; OJED, 2021; Spencer, 2016). Therein, scholars seek to answer questions like "Does X phenomenon contribute to students' academic or social integration?", "Will Y phenomenon negatively or positively impact international students' stress and success?", "What are primarily challenges and needs of international students?", "What is different about the experience of international student persisters as opposed to non-persisters?", or "Does Z phenomenon contribute to student retention or success?"

Upon reviewing a large swathe of literature, I noticed that despite their findings, recommendations about opportunities for improving student services, these works did not speak to the details about how to implement such services or programs, what staff would need to specifically do to enact them. That is, much of the reviewed literature rarely asked questions related to the daily operations of student support staff and specifically how they worked to serve international students. As such, I recognized that the *doing* of international student support services seemed to be underdeveloped.

1.1.4 *An Alternative Perspective*

In my personal and professional observations, as well as through conversations with colleagues, I began to notice different connections staff possessed with others, as well as different tools and materials, to accomplish student service work. Moreover, many of these connections or associations appeared to be configured in particular ways. These observations led me to the concepts of relational space, researched extensively by geographer Doreen Massey (1991, 1992, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006), and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), developed significantly by Bruno Latour (1987, 1996, 1999, 2005) and John Law (1992, 1999, 2004, 2007). Further, I discovered educational scholars Jan Nespor (1994, 1997) and Jane McGregor (2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d), who incorporated both approaches into their work on the spatiality and construction of the school, student and teacher identity, and schooling practices. I recognized that these literatures accounted for the kinds of questions that interested me, as well as methodological tools to explore them. Described as "the product of intersecting social relations" (McGregor, 2004c), spatiality involves both human and material entities that

associate with and among one another. As such, with their different intersection relations, international student support services possess their own spatiality.

To that end, given the continued calls for better and appropriate international student services, but the scant amount of literature exploring the *how* of *doing* this work, I believe an alternative frame may provide a new way to approach. This dissertation serves as an exploration of one such alternative frame, of relational space and spatiality, and the ways in which they contribute to how staff members at one Southeastern, research-one, public, urban university work to constitute and implement international student support services. In particular, this study focuses on the university's new international student orientation event programming as an instantiation of these services, within the context of the COVID-19 global health pandemic. Just as international student services are spatial, so too are the events and programs they generate.

1.2 Overview of the Study & Research Questions

This dissertation is a mini-ethnographic, organizational case study of the everyday work practices of staff members at one Southeastern, research-one, public, urban university. A specific group of staff who serve international students in some capacity, and their practices in designing, preparing, and enacting a revised, new international student orientation program, was this study's focus. I sought to examine staff members' everyday practices to illuminate the complex and dynamic ways people, objects, and spaces come into relations with one another in times of flux, and the result or effect of that constellation of relations. The revised orientation program event for new

international students at this university, which I call Southeast Urban University (SEUU), served as a case to explore these practices.

This dissertation was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does spatiality contribute to how staff to work to produce a new international student orientation event during a global health pandemic?
2. How does the orientation work that staff did prior to the global health pandemic contribute to what they are currently doing to revise the orientation event?
3. How does the global pandemic shape staff views of the orientation event, its goals, construction, and its enactment?
4. What role does materiality and online-technology play in the formation of the orientation event's spatiality?

Neither fully ethnography, nor case study, the mini-ethnographic case study blends the best attributes of each design, while also mitigating their limitations (Fusch et. al., 2017). Similar to McGregor (2004d) in her study on spatiality of two secondary schools in England, this dissertation does not try to map SEUU as a whole social or cultural system, nor focus on particular processes or systems. Instead, this study aims to explore what constitutes the spatiality of the school's staff work practices and represent the findings using a series of spatial themes. Mini-ethnographic case study design enables researchers to generate rich data during limited periods of time, and engage *in situ* with study sites and participants whenever possible to understand the everyday activities and practices that represented staff members' work (Fusch et. al., 2017; McGregor, 2004d).

I utilized a variety of qualitative methods to generate data for this dissertation. First, and continually throughout, I collected and reviewed over 45 artifacts to situate

SEUU within local and wider contexts, to better understand the complex actors that circulate within the networked spaces in which university staff members work to serve international students. I also conducted virtual participant-observations of orientation-related activities. Last, using data gleaned from these first two phases, I conducted and recorded a total of 17 interviews with nine participating university staff members, which were subsequently transcribed and coded. I wrote field notes to document what I observed and created a report to summarize and document my reflections. I frequently created analytic memos to process and make sense of the generated data, all of which contributed to the basis of my analysis, from which I developed this study's findings.

1.2.1 *Significance of the Study*

This study contributes to the developing field of spatial and geographical research in education, by threading together concepts from workplace learning and teaching studies (McGregor, 2004a, 2004d; Mulcahy, 2006; Scoles, 2017; Thompson, 2010, 2012), relational space scholarship (Knox et. al., 2015; Massey, 2005; Murdoch, 1997, 1998, 2006), and event studies research (Getz, 2012; Page & Connell, 2012), to offer alternative ways to consider how staff can work to serve international students. While much research concerning these areas in relation to education tends to focus on student learning, understanding educational policies, and teaching and curricula (Gulson & Symes, 2007; Edwards, 2011, Nespor, 1994, 1997; McGregor, 2004a; Roth, 1996), few to no works address student services, much less those geared toward international students. Lowenstein (2005) argues that advisors, who are frequently staff members, may be considered teachers since the nature of their roles are similar to that of faculty. He articulates that "learning transpires when a student makes sense of his or her overall

curriculum just as it does when a person understands an individual course" (p. 69). In other words, students who interact with service staff members, whether via advising, instruction, or programming, are intended to learn from those interactions.

This study extends the notion of the importance of space, and its influence in shaping education practices around teaching and learning. Adapting Lowenstein's concept of advising as teaching permits us to reimagine and open up the different spaces in which staff work to serve international students, such as through orientation programming, as well as the work practices themselves that these individuals perform. This exploration intends to inform how staff practices are assembled and enacted, and support endeavors to develop better services, especially during times of uncertainty and disruption. Higher education is no stranger to these periods, given its experience trying to support students during Hurricane Katrina and the Virginia Tech shooting. Findings from this study can not only be utilized to (re)imagine international student services, but also translated to other areas of the university organization. Prior to presenting an overview of theoretical resources, I return to summarize the case in which I situated this study and discuss important issues facing staff members working to serve international students.

1.3 Introducing the Case: International Student Services

In this section, I discuss what student services are and clarify how I work with the terms service and support. I then explore the background of student and international student services, introducing some of the important actors who influence the practices of staff who work with international students. Last, I provide a general description of international new student orientation.

1.3.1 *Student Services & The People Who Provide Them*

As U.S. colleges have recruited international students, they have developed different services to address their needs and provide support. Some are intended for all students, given common student development issues. Others are specifically for international students and the unique considerations they face in their transition to U.S. higher education (Lieb, 2016; Perry, 2016; Perry et. al., 2017). Merriam-Webster dictionary provides multiple definitions for the term "service", though in two instances, defines it as "the work performed by one who serves" and "a contribution to the welfare of others." When someone serves, they are furnishing or supplying something "needed or desired" (Merriam-Webster, 2020). According to Magolda and Quaye (2011), student services were traditionally professional roles geared toward "supporting the academic mission of the university by providing high-quality services to students in nonacademic functional areas" (p. 388). Lind (2014) describes support as "information and services provided by one party in order for the other party to function in and outside the university. These information and services may also be sought" (p. 30).

Student services staff generally appeared in the years after the passing of the Morrill Land Grant Act in the 1860s, when U.S. higher education underwent massification (Dalili, 1985). While faculty managed most aspects of institutions in the at during that time, as enrollment increased they realized that they could not manage everything (Lu, 2001) and staff entered to oversee these services. Throughout the 20th century, student services developed and became more specialized. The staff performing these services began to gather into formal organizations, like the National Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education (NASPA) and the American College Personnel

Association (ACPA) (Chissoe, 2017). With the publishing of reports like the *Student Personnel Point of View*, scholars and practitioners collectively and formally expressed the importance of student personnel work (Roberts, 2012). Institutions were encouraged to not only emphasize students' academic performance and management but provide services supporting each college's mission, and staff to facilitate them.

With continued enrollment growth and diversity, U.S. institutions began to organize student services into specific functional units, such as admissions and registration, financial aid, student activities, student health, and advising. By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, women's centers, multicultural centers, as well as those for LGBTQ students became staples on many college campuses (Chissoe, 2017; Eaton, 2014). Today, student services reside throughout institutions. With initiatives like the Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1996) and publication of *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling et. al., 2004), student services practitioners tend to view themselves as educators. Their focus in many institutions is to use service and development foundations with which to provide opportunities for situated student learning within the co-curriculum (Lowenstein, 2005; Magolda & Quaye, 2011).

1.3.2 *International Student Services*

International student participation in American higher education is not a recent phenomenon; these students have enrolled in U.S. institutions for 200+ years (Akanwa, 2015; Chissoe, 2017). It was not until the turn of the 20th century that the pace of international student mobility to the U.S. accelerated, due much to an increase in American institutional prestige for research and innovation. American organizations and

schools also viewed educational exchange as an opportunity to promote and build peace (Akanwa, 2015; Dalili, 1986; Deschamps & Lee, 2015; Garcia & Villarreal, 2014).

Though the first record of an international student in a U.S. college dates back to the late 1700s, the first documented "foreign student advisor" only appeared in 1910 (Bista, 2015; Deschamps & Lee, 2015). With the end of World War II, and America's increased global recognition as an educational power, the U.S. experienced significant international student enrollment increases. As a result, international student services quickly developed, from single-staff providers to formal international student service (ISS) offices (Chissoe, 2017; Dalili, 1985; Deschamps & Lee, 2015). Like NASPA and ACPA with general student affairs, international student services personnel established NAFSA: National Association of Foreign Student Advisors, which aimed to support personnel assisting international students (Chissoe, 2017; The History of NAFSA, n.d.).

On campus, the primary personnel within international student service (ISS) offices are often called international student advisors (Bista, 2015; Lu, 2001). Whereas the first documented international student advisor (ISA) was a faculty member (Bista, 2015; Deschamps & Lee, 2015), ISS offices have come to be operated by staff members. These individuals generally assist international students with problems they may have, and advise them on immigration and employment regulations (Lu, 2001). Bista (2015) and Wang (2007) note that ISAs also perform other roles, like coordinating international student orientations and providing some forms of academic advising. Furthermore, ISAs often collaborate with faculty, domestic students, other staff, government entities, and community members to provide resources and programs (Wang, 2007). Despite an expansion in the scope of their responsibilities, ISAs still primarily focus on immigration

advising and government compliance. As such, attention has shifted further away from students' cultural adjustment toward regulation monitoring and reporting (Bista, 2015). Though ISS staff are primarily responsible for the presence and well-being of international college students, they are not the only staff who support them. Throughout the 20th century, international student services diversified and expanded alongside the wider student services movement. Today, one can find staff members from across university campuses engaging with international students including: admission, registrar's offices, recruiting, academic advising, student involvement, and counseling, and human resources (NACE, 2020; NAFSA, 2020a; NACADA, 2020).

1.4 Key Issues Present in International Student Service Work

This section explores three frequent issues in international student service work.

1.4.1 *Needs of International Students*

While similar to their American student counterparts in some ways, international students often encounter distinct challenges upon arrival to and during their U.S. college tenure. Challenges they uniquely experience include adjusting to and navigating entirely new societal and educational cultures, language differences, and new socio-cultural environments (Bista, 2015; Hegarty, 2014; Lieb, 2016; Perry, 2016; Spencer, 2016). Students whose home cultures are more "distant" from U.S. culture tend to experience more intense difficulties in academic and social settings. As a result, feelings of isolation, a lack of belonging, and psychological stress are not uncommon (Arthur, 2017; Zhou, Frey & Bang, 2011). Comparatively, international students from culturally similar home countries generally experience easier adjustments and less stress. Much of the literature

addressing international student challenges, emphasize those pertaining to English language proficiency, U.S. cultural and academic differences, as well as personal and logistical issues. Such challenges impact their ability to communicate and interact effectively with fellow student peers, faculty, and staff both in and outside the classroom (Arthur, 2017; Cho & Yu, 2015; Hegarty, 2014; Heng, 2017; Perry, 2016; Rao, 2017; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012; Spencer, 2016). Engagement with domestic students, as well as faculty and staff, is crucial to student adjustment and success. In addition to cultivating this group's understanding of American societal and institutional cultures, these interactions can help increase international students' sense of belonging, since they often lack access to close support systems (Lieb, 2016; Perry et. al., 2017; Spencer, 2016).

1.4.2 *International Student Services Staff Tensions*

In one conference paper presentation McGregor (2002), notes an orthodoxy present in education, where teaching is "treated as a property of the individual teachers rather than of the faculty as a whole or of the relationship between the teachers and the community." To that end, there is a tension present with regard to whom the "property" of international student services belongs. For many, these population-specific services appear to be relegated to staff members in ISS offices (Bista, 2015; Lu, 2001). However, researchers and practitioners urge for collaboration between units across campuses, along with local communities and different levels of government (Agnew & Kahn, 2014; Akanwa, 2015; Bista, 2015; Briggs & Ammigan, 2017; Wang, 2007). This encouragement is especially salient against the backdrop of internationalization efforts.

1.4.3 *International Student Services & Their Theoretical Underpinning*

Much of the research on international students and services is grounded in Tinto's (1975, 1988) College Student Departure Theory (Arthur, 2017; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). Therein, he found that students' persistence and retention to graduation is partially influenced by their personal background characteristics (e.g., social status, community of residence, etc.) and their individual attributes (e.g., sex, ability, race, ethnicity, etc.), and their educational expectations and commitment. These characteristics influence students' integration, academically and socially, into their college communities that lead to new levels of commitment. Tinto articulated that "the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion" (1975, p. 96). The lower the commitment to the institution or goal of completion, the more likely students may be to drop out from the institution. The less students interact with others within the university community, the more likely they may be to drop out due to an absence of integration. Given its wide appeal, many scholars researching international students refer to Tinto (1975, 1988) to support calls to enhance or create services for this population. For these students, successful integration relates to their adjustment to society and U.S. higher education culture, and also their academic and social development (Arthur, 2017; Glass, Buss, & Braskamp, 2013).

Tinto's work does not exist without critique. William Tierney (1992) argued that Tinto's theory relies on students abandoning their pre-college attitudes, behaviors, norms, values, etc. for those of the institution, which tends to be based on a White, dominant culture. Moreover, he believes Tinto places the onus on individual students to adapt to

institutional norms and that they become problems if they do not succeed per dominant expectations. Tierney calls for alternative theoretical developments to re-envision student participation in college; one that conceives universities as "multicultural entities where difference is highlighted and celebrated" (p. 604). And institutions should be contributors to such issues due to their inability to operate in a multicultural fashion (Kwai, 2009).

In their study exploring the extent to which Latino students' backgrounds and early institutional experiences in college contributed to their sense of belonging later on, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that not all activities in which Latino students participated during college led to feelings of institutional belonging. For these students "who attend predominantly White universities, feeling at "home" in the campus community is associated with maintaining interactions both within and outside" it (p. 338). This finding runs contrary to Tinto, who primarily studied the college involvement and stressed abandoning pre-college behavior patterns, norms, and memberships.

The implications of Tinto's work, as well as its critiques directly relate to international students, given most of them in the U.S. are considered racial, ethnic minorities, and/or cultural minorities. Maureen Andrade (2005, 2006), for example, indicated that this student population has received little attention in the student persistence literature. However, in one study of international students, she found that integration does not "imply assimilation for permanent rejection of the home culture," as Tinto's theory may suggest. Cultural integrity was maintained despite efforts to integrate into the community. However, she called for further study of international student persistence and departure, in addition to understanding the complexities.

Given the current state of research related to Tinto and international students, his theory is at present too limited to adequately inform researchers and practitioners' efforts for enhancing support efforts. Critics' encouragement to consider alternative possibilities parallel those of Massey (1991, 1992, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006), McGregor (2004a, 2004d), Nespor (1994, 1997), and Fenwick and Edwards (2010, 2011) which lay beyond dominant worldviews and ways of approaching challenges. This dissertation seeks to bring these scholars' works into conversation with higher education and international student services, as a way to open them up to new possibilities.

1.5 Evolution of a Professional Inquiry

My interest in issues related to international student services, spatiality, and staff work practices began after taking a position at the University of Kentucky (UK) as an Education Abroad Advisor. In that role, I began to work and develop relationships with colleagues from the institution's ISS office. I collaborated with them on projects, volunteered at their student events, and even co-presented with ISS staff at conferences on topics which intersected education abroad and international student support. Upon transitioning into an academic advising role within one college at UK, I began to work more directly and intimately with international students, as well as different resources on campus who served them. Throughout my 10+ years working in higher education, I recall repeatedly hearing comments at conferences or in office break rooms about international students and how they don't get served like they should. Staff, faculty, and other professionals around the country would say on listservs, in presentations, or through personal communication that they felt international students should be served better across their entire institution, or that support offices should receive more funding.

In 2016, I formally enrolled part-time in the UK higher education Ph.D. program. During my last term of coursework, I had to complete a qualitative research project. Wanting to focus on an international education topic, in thinking about possible research questions, those related to these calls and comments about international students kept creeping back to my mind. I could not help but wonder why they were still being made after so many years. So, I chose this wondering and explored ways in which organizational and administrative structures facilitated international student support. In part, I sought to learn which staff members supported these students and how structures might be adapted to elicit better support. That research project inspired this dissertation, as one of the primary themes resulting from it was an emphasis on space. I noticed more than just the physical aspects of space in my study-- virtual, social, and materials within space as well. However, the spatial literature I used at the time could not account for the different forms of space, and the unique ways they all come together to influence the outcomes of learning, teaching, or student support. Consequently, given a dearth of literature concerning wider notions of space and their role in staff's production and facilitation of student services, particularly international student services, I decided to continue on a journey to explore answers to this literature gap and my questions. This dissertation represents an account of that journey, from the wading through of theoretical, methodological, and reflective terrains, to the generation of findings and conclusions, and even commentary on the ups and downs along the way.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature is structured to outline a conceptual context underpinning the need to address spatiality as it pertains to constituting and enacting international student services, like new international student orientation. First, I address international student mobility and factors that have influenced the flows of these students to the U.S. within the past decade. I then discuss themes discussed within the literature concerning international students and support services. To address a gap in the literature of detailed understandings of how international student services are enacted, I introduce key concepts that support three premises grounding this study: that space is relational, dynamic, open and performed; that spatial study should incorporate a sociomaterial approach; and that the new international student orientation is an inherently spatial event.

To flesh out these premises, I first present the notions of relational space and spatiality. I outline its use within Education to connect to international student services, particularly emphasizing related notions of the increasingly used Actor-Network Theory and "After-ANT" sociomaterial approaches. Last, I situate this alternative frame within the Event Studies literature, and its focus on the event design and management, given this research study's centering around a spatial orientation event.

2.1 International Student Mobility

According to the Institute for International Education (2021a), during the 2019-20 academic year, 1.07 million international students participated in U.S. higher education, via full-degree, exchange, and short-term programs, and post-graduation practical training, and contributed $44 billion to the U.S. economy. While absolute enrollment

figures denote positive growth in the last decade, these statistics alone do not capture the entire picture. Scholars agree (Choudaha, 2017; Schulmann, 2018) that no one factor can explain student mobility patterns over time. Rather, this phenomenon results from multiple trends that interplay with and mutually influence one another. These "push" and "pull" trends illuminate global mobility patterns that can be analyzed and capitalized upon according to stakeholder needs (Choudaha & de Wit, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). A few intertwining trends contributing to fluctuating college international student enrollment stand out as impactful: shifting demographics among the global population, U.S. government policy and image, evolving economic developments, and unexpected global health disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1.1 *Politics*

The ebbs and flows of international student enrollment in the U.S. are partially impacted by trends related to its government's policies, structure, actions, and globally projected reputation. Helms (2015) argues that federal immigration policy plays a key role in international students' ability to study in American colleges. For example, in the 2000s and 2010s, visa application processing was simplified and expedited (She & Wotherspoon, 2013) and the STEM Optional Practical Training period was extended from 24 to 36 months (Peri, Basso, & McElmurry, 2016; Sa & Sabzalieva, 2018). International student enrollment responded, in part, to these policy shifts, increasing significantly until the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. While total international student enrollment has generally increased in the last decade, first-time student enrollment has decreased since 2016.

A second policy trend impacting U.S. international student enrollment centers around U.S. funding policy for initiatives that facilitate global student mobility. For instance, the U.S. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) oversees programs that support the college student recruitment efforts, like EducationUSA (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). As enrollments have fluctuated, so too have requested funding amounts; when requested amounts increased, the U.S. experienced higher percentage increases in enrollment, and vice-versa, possibly impacting program recruitment abilities (Institute for International Education, 2021a; U.S. Department of State, 2010, 2014, 2019).

Last, while U.S. government policy contributes to patterns of international student mobility, so too does the image it projects abroad. Since before the 2016 presidential election, overseas viewers have observed the U.S President's behavior and perceived the country to be anti-immigrant, racist, and unfriendly towards others (Altbach & de Wit, 2018; Choudaha, 2017; Lee, 2019). Many higher education professionals reported the political climate deterred students from seeking U.S. education. Others noted that their students felt unwelcome, some wishing to leave the country (Schulmann, 2018).

2.1.2 *Economically Speaking*

As Marginson and Rhoades wrote (2002), what happens nationally simultaneously shapes and is shaped by both local and global dynamics. Over the past two decades, the developments that affected international student flows to the U.S. were not simply political in nature, but also economic.

In 2007, following the collapse of the U.S. financial market, auto, and banking industries, a recession ensued, and by the end of 2008 most of the world had succumbed

to a financial crisis (Duignan, 2019). During this time, state and local funding for higher education significantly decreased, as did the size of university endowments from currency devaluation. Declines in domestic enrollments occurred, due in part to rising tuition costs (Choudaha, 2017; Macrander, 2017). Consequently, the U.S. and other countries realized the increasing value of international students as a source for generating revenue in a time when more traditional sources sizably diminished. As such, Choudaha (2017) states that the global financial crisis triggered a new wave in international student mobility, where these students were recruited more for their added revenue.

During the 2009-10 academic year following the global financial crisis, enrollment growth dropped to 2.9% (from 7.0% previously), as many students around the world felt the effects a global economic downturn (Choudaha & de Wit, 2014; Institute for International Education, 2021b). From 2012-2016, however, international student enrollment growth rebounded to pre-crisis levels, thanks to the rising wealth of an emerging Chinese and Indian middle class, and home government-sponsored funding for students from Brazil and Saudi Arabia (Institute for International Education, 2021c).

However, economic stability on a national scale tends to influence citizens' financial mobility at a local scale. Should a country find itself navigating economic challenges, the ability of its citizens to financially afford pursuing studies abroad becomes more difficult, as in Brazil's case. Due to unstable economic and political conditions, the government could no longer sustain its student sponsorships. Consequently, its student enrollment in the U.S. quickly declined, and has only recently begun to rebound (Institute for International Education, 2021c; Schulmann, 2017).

2.1.3 *Demographics*

Intertwined with political and economic shifts, the landscape of global student mobility is changing demographically as well (Deardorff, 2014). The world's leading economies, often Western countries, are aging and their college-age population growth is declining, and fewer domestic students are going to college (Choudaha & de Wit, 2014; Hudzik & Briggs, 2012). Conversely, the population of college-going students in many developing countries is rapidly expanding, as is their financial mobility. With increasing desires for higher education, these students consider "push" factors, like home-country political and social dynamics, educational quality, work opportunities, etc., and look to institutions in other countries to determine an ideal fit. Traditionally, students' assessments have led them to developed countries, in part because of the quality of their higher education institutions, opportunities for work or skilled migration, and overall quality of life (Banks & Bhandari, 2012; Macrander, 2017).

This phenomenon has led to recent significant increases in students from countries like China, India, Vietnam, Nigeria, and Nepal. Asian countries have contributed to the largest share of international students in the U.S. for some time now (Hudzik & Briggs, 2012; Institute for International Education, 2021a). U.S. international student recruitment is partly an effort to respond to dynamic political, economic, and demographic realities that have materialized in the past decade. Though, from an institutional perspective, recent spikes in international student enrollment may also be partially due to an effort to internationalize U.S. campus communities.

2.1.4 *Unexpected Health Events*

After appearing in late 2019, by early 2020 the coronavirus (i.e., COVID-19) had developed into a global health pandemic (Petrikova, Cole, & Farlow, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020; Whitworth, 2020). Since this time, the world has witnessed governments, businesses, and economies implement a wide range of actions to curb and "beat" the virus including implementing total shutdowns or on-again, off-again partial closings, closing physical state borders, beginning testing and tracing efforts of varying quality, manufacturing significant amounts of PPE, and developing several promising vaccines (AJMC, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020; Whitworth, 2020). Effort made by many governments has been to isolate individuals exposed to or contracting the virus. All peoples and societies have been significantly impacted by COVID-19.

Global student mobility has been no exception, and the coronavirus has adversely impacted international student enrollment into U.S. higher education institutions (Martel, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; World Education Services, 2020a, 2020b). Despite a sustained interest in studying in the U.S., a large proportion of summer 2020 international student survey participants expressed extreme or moderate concern over theirs and their family's health if able to travel to the U.S (World Education Services, 2020b). This level of concern grew between June and August, though was less than the level of concern for securing a visa to enter the U.S. 88% of higher education professional survey participants were extremely or moderately concerned that travel restrictions may impede student movement (World Education Services, 2020a). One report shared similar concerns for Chinese students, worrying that they may not obtain academic paperwork for admission and enrollment due to Chinese school closures (Martel, 2020a).

Consequently, by fall 2020 international student enrollment in the U.S. decreased by 16%. New student enrollment fell by 43%, with over 10,000 individuals deferring admission to a future term (Institute for International Education, 2021a). Such developments left some institutions scrambling to identify recruitment strategies, including hastening program application processing to buy more time to secure visas, creating new spring admission "intakes", extending application deadlines, offering virtual communication and webinars, and waiving testing requirements (S. Swan, personal communication, November 2, 2020; Martel, 2020a). According to one survey, 83% of respondents reported implementing new measures to recruit students (Martel, 2020b). When communicating with prospective students, many schools shared their COVID-19 response plans and course models, realizing that students needed to be able to make informed decisions about college choice and enrollment (Martel, 2020c).

2.2 International Student Literature

Most of the literature concerning international students centers around themes like student adjustment, acculturative stress, second language acquisition, international student challenges, and international student teaching and learning. Outside of works around these themes are others concerning student services and support. These pieces of literature, I believe, relate in some way to students' adjustment, not only to the U.S. education system and American culture, but their development and integration into it. Further works seek to understand international students' retention and success as a result of their experiences related to many of the above topics (Bista, 2016; Chissoe, 2017; Jing et. al., 2020; Lind, 2014; OJED, 2021; Spencer, 2016; Wang, 2007).

2.2.1 *International Student Development Issues*

Lu (2001) argues that ISAs play vital roles in supporting international students' overall adjustment to and success in U.S. higher education. For these students, success relates to their adjustment and integration into society and U.S. higher education culture, and also their academic and social development (Andrade, 2006; Arthur, 2017; Glass, Buss, & Braskamp, 2013; Tinto, 1975, 1988). Hegarty (2014) articulates that "the plight of the international student in the U.S. university educational system is well documented in terms of language… and cultural barriers" (p. 225). These are two key issues that can significantly impact international student development, adjustment, and integration.

2.2.1.1 **Linguistic Proficiency**

To be admitted to most U.S. colleges, international students must complete a standardized English language proficiency exam, like the TOEFL, and attain a certain score. If students meet or exceed that score, they are considered proficient enough in English to be successful. However, Ren & Hagedorn (2012) note that such scores do not necessarily measure students' ability to understand academic lectures or understand informal slang spoken by domestic peers, for example. Relatedly, Rao's (2017) survey of international student learning challenges and needs, revealed that 50%+ of respondents identified difficulty with academic writing skills, while 36% noted how their accent made it difficult for others to understand them. Both challenges negatively influenced their engagement in the academic environment. Andrade (2006) noted how participants who studied in English (as a second language) spent more time and concentrated energy on their coursework, and away from more social engagements. She also articulated that

some participants earned lower grades for some class assignments and participation due a lack of confidence in their English proficiency and classroom interaction.

Moreover, research indicates that engagement with domestic students, faculty and staff, is crucial to student adjustment and success, as they can help increase international students' sense of belonging and understanding of American societal and institutional cultures. Conversely, a lack of these interactions because of limited language proficiency may contribute to loneliness, homesickness, or stress (Arthur, 2017; Cho & Yu, 2015; Perry, 2016). Cho and Yu (2015) focus their study on the importance of international students developing a social identity and how it facilitates a sense of belonging. When students develop a sense of belonging, they may experience increased psychological support and emotional satisfaction, less stress, and positive academic achievement. Active interactions can positively contribute to developing social identity and belonging. Though, with limited linguistic skills and fewer interactions, some may face challenges that negatively impact academic and social adjustment and success (Lu, 2001).

2.2.1.2 U.S. Cultural Knowledge and Understanding

Similarly, students' cultural knowledge of American society and higher education impacts both their adjustment to and development during college (Spencer, 2016). Academically speaking, in U.S. classrooms professors often possess particular expectations of their students, such as actively engaging in discussions, working together in groups, and asking questions. However, some international students come from cultures and educational contexts that operate differently (Lieb, 2016; Rao, 2017). Those from collectivist, group-oriented cultures may encounter difficulties with U.S. education's emphasis on individuality and self-sufficiency over interdependence and

relatedness (Gautam et. al., 2016; Perry et. al., 2017). As such, these students may refrain from participating or asking questions in class due to concerns about questioning the professor's authority. International students' cultural differences in classroom expectations behaviors may lead some domestic students and faculty to consider them as deficient or incapable of succeeding, resulting in being left out or seen as invisible (Arthur, 2017). Socially, domestic students may avoid contact with international students because of the ease of interacting with people who seem most like them (Arthur, 2017; Heng, 2017). Such academic and social responses may also adversely impact international students' sense of self and belonging, along with their adjustment to U.S. culture (Arthur, 2017; Heng, 2017; Perry, 2016; Rao, 2017).

It is important to understand, however, that international students are diverse and should not ever be considered as one homogenous group (Glass, Buss, & Braskamp, 2013; Perry et. al., 2017). Some international students, particularly those who generally speak good English and are more familiar with U.S. culture, are likely to interact more often with others and better adjust to college (Urban & Palmer, 2016). Others from more culturally distant countries may experience academic and social difficulties in and out of the classroom (Arthur, 2017; Gautam et. al., 2016).

2.2.2 *Student Support and Service Use*

Researcher Sonja Lind (2014) shared that there is no widely agreed upon definition for the term "support." She labeled support as "information and services provided by one party in order for the other party to function in and outside the university. These information and services may also be sought" (Lind, 2014, p. 19). To that end, universities generally offer support to students in relation to the challenges they

encounter in their academic and social transition and adjustment to the U.S. Many institutions who host international students offer support services around six themes: English language programming, academic support and student success initiatives, targeted writing support, social and cultural events, professional development workshops, and family member programs. Forms of support within these themes include English classes and conversation hours, advising and counseling, tutoring, and workshops on U.S. academic life, writing consultants, financial management or tax preparation sessions, family support programs, global festivals, and buddy programs (Matirosyan, Bustamante, & Saxon, 2019). Such programs are echoed in other works as well (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017; Madden-Dent, Wood, & Roskina, 2019; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Spencer, 2016).

Though different forms of international student support services are frequently offered across many colleges and universities, the extent to which international students use them varies. In their study of international students at one Australian institution, Roberts, Dunworth, and Boldy (2018), found that support services like the library, international office, and campus security services tended to be used more, whereas others less so. Beyond not feeling like they needed them, reasons that students offered for not using some institutional support services included not knowing how to access the support or being able to find information about it when it was needed. Similar results were found in Perry et. al.'s (2020) U.S.-based study comparing the knowledge of and use of student services between international and domestic students. They cited that students in general tend to underutilize student support services, though international students were less likely to have knowledge of the resources available to them. And in some instances, campus units do not offer programming to support certain areas of adjustment to the new

college environment, especially those compounded by language and cultural differences (Andrade, 2005), so students may not use them in the same way as their domestic peers.

With regard to retention, Andrade (2005, 2006) argued that many international students' graduation rates are similar to those of the total population, as well as the rates from first to second year. However, these rates mask variations within a diverse international student population, citing Evans (2001) and Stoynoff (1997) as demonstrating such variation. In another study, Mamiseishvili (2012), found that GPA, degree goals, and academic integration all had significant positive effects on these students' persistence. Some of his findings mirror Kwai's (2009) dissertation results, that GPA and cumulative credit hours attempted can positively impact persistence. However, Mamiseishvili found in his study that social integration had negative effects on persistence, cautioning that this finding could be due to how social integration is measured or considered by students. Despite their efforts, these authors call for more international student retention research and available data. Recently, studies have appeared seeking to understand factors that enhance or adversely impact international student persistence. Examples include comparisons of student and institutional professionals' perceptions of drop-out (Rubin, 2014), and explorations into the experiences of subgroups like those from Arab countries (Rabia, 2017) or graduate students (Terrazas-Carrillo et. al., 2017).

In the literature that is available on international student persistence, support services, and international student experiences, many authors recommend various types of programming that could benefit these students, as mentioned above (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017; Madden-Dent, Wood, & Roskina, 2019; Mamiseishvili, 2012;

Matirosyan, Bustamante, & Saxon, 2019; Spencer, 2016). Some even share examples of "best practices" or cases of what some institutions are doing to support their students (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017; NAFSA, 2019). However, despite sharing examples or making such recommendations, these authors rarely if at all elaborate in detail about how these programs, events, and services are enacted into reality, from a work practices standpoint. Without knowledge of what it takes to *do and perform* such things, we may continue to call for the same service improvements and reiterate similar recommendations and suggestions. Therefore, I recommend an alternative framework incorporating relational space and ANT be considered to help us respond to these calls, and further consider how we (re)imagine international student support services.

2.3 Relational Space & Spatiality

The first premise of this study is that space is relation, open, dynamic, and performed. Agnew (2011) mentions that the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides over two pages of definitions for the term "space". Though, he indicates that space is mostly seen as a concrete entity in itself but separate from the things contained therein and from other spaces (Agnew, 2011; Castree, 2004). However, in the mid to late-1900s a "spatial turn" occurred where scholars began to view space as more relational and interactive (Agnew, 2011; Castree, 2004; Larsen & Beach, 2014). Space was created by "diverse (physical, biological, social, cultural) processes; in turn, these processes are made by the relations established between entities of various kinds" (Murdoch, 2006, p. 19). Such a perspective could open up ways to better understand complex, real-world situations, like those related to globalization, immigration, politics, and education (Agnew, 2011;

Castree, 2004; Gulson & Symes, 2004; Larsen & Beech, 2014; Murdoch, 2006; Robertson, 2009).

2.3.1 *Relationality, Simultaneity, and Multiplicity*

Whereas earlier perspectives viewed space as closed, contained, and independent from others, relational viewpoints argue that space is open, active, and engaged with other spaces and places (Agnew, 2011; Massey, 2005; Murdoch, 2006). Doreen Massey described a relational approach to space via three primary proposals (Massey, 1992, 2005, 2006; Murdoch, 2006). Space is produced through social interrelations, which permeate through different scales from the local to the global. Space is "the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity…as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity" (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Multiplicity implies the existence of more than one thing; without space, this existence could not happen and vice versa. Space and multiplicity are co-constitutive. What makes social relations and connections particularly spatial is their simultaneity (Massey, 1992, 2005, 2006). In *For Space* (2005), Massey discussed how simultaneously all around the world, there are a multiplicity of interactions and connections occurring "there" relative to our own locations "here". As such, space undergoes continuous construction, due to its being created by social "relations between" which are always in a process of being made.

2.3.2 *Space and Place*

Inherent in and related to discussions of space is the concept of place. In his chapter for the *Handbook for Geographical Knowledge*, Agnew (2011) extensively discusses place and how its meaning has evolved over time, particularly in relation to

space. For example, he articulates that some have adopted an implicit view of a place being a particular "location on a surface where things 'just happen'", whereas others view space in more holistic terms as "the geographical context for the mediation of physical, social, and economic processes" (p. 3-4). Many view place(s) as static and possessing particular properties, characteristics, and ways of living that evoke feeling, nostalgia, and a sense of identity. Agnew describes entities such as the nation-state, territories, and even a Thomas Kinkade painting to illustrate more static notions of place.

Massey refuted more traditionalist views of place as closed, static entities. For her, if we understand space as a simultaneity and interrelation of trajectories, of stories-so-far, then places are collections of these trajectories and stories within wider geometries of space. That is, while we have been away from a place, like a city, just as our stories/trajectories have developed and changed during that time, so have theirs (Massey, 2003). When we return to the city, we reinsert ourselves in it and integrate our refashioned stories with its own. Doing so, we create an ongoing, newer story of "here and now." Thus, place becomes open, a "particular constellation within the wider topographies of space, and as in process, as unfinished business…" (Massey, 2005, p. 131). In this instance, place is and integration of space and time; a spatio-temporal event.

2.3.3 *Space and Time*

Some scholars view space and time as holding opposing positions at the ends of a binary. On one end, space is conceived as a static, frozen entity and a negation of time, which is associated with change and movement at the opposite end (Massey, 1992; Sergot & Saives, 2016). Consequently, these scholars tend to subjugate space to time, turning spatial differences into temporal sequences, or as Massey (2006) puts it, turning

space into time. She illustrates this argument in her various works (Massey, 1992, 2005, 2006; Christophers et. al., 2018), utilizing the example of country comparisons in terms of development. That is, when comparing countries on issues like poverty, inequality, or economics, some nations might say that others like Mozambique, are "behind." These less developed nations need time to "catch up" with their more developed, richer counterparts, like the U.S. To Massey, these comparisons label all countries as spatially similar and beholden to one developmental narrative. As such, she says, "We are not to imagine them as having their own trajectories, their own particular histories, and the potential for their own, perhaps different, futures" (Massey, 2005). With this perspective of time and space, utilizing singular narratives of space-as-time denies less "developed" countries' sense of "coevalness," that is to say their existence as distinct equals, and displays a lack of respect (Massey, 2005, 2006). Given Massey's definition of space as constellations and evolving patterns of coexistence and interrelations, she argues that space and time should be considered together and necessary for one another. Within this position, space is "imbued" with time and space-time is thought of as the simultaneity of unfinished, ongoing, trajectories" or "stories-so-far" (Massey, 2001, 2005, 2006; Christophers et. al, 2018). Consequently, within these patterns some stories become privileged over others, opening the possibility for politics and power.

2.3.4 *Space, Politics, and Power*

In her work, Massey argues that because space and place involve a constellation of interactions, flows, and interconnections, they are inherently political (Sergot & Saives, 2016). As a result, space and place embody different power-geometries depending on the stories/trajectories that meet together around a particular place or node.

Massey points out that "…different social groups, and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections" (Massey, 1991, p. 25). Within the flows and movement, different social groups encounter distinct relationships. For instance, some groups develop abilities to initiate mobility and communication, while others reside on the receiving-end of those initiations. In other words, some groups are able to control space-time to their advantage to increase power and influence, whereas others may become imprisoned by it. In discussing her theoretical positioning of space, politics, and power, Massey provides examples to illustrate their presence, like during a conversation of developing countries in speaking of space-time (Massey, 2005, 2006), or undocumented Mexican migrant workers attempting to cross the border into the U.S. in search for a better life (Massey, 1991). Expounding upon the former, avoiding the political nature of space "ignores" effects of contemporary forms of "connectedness," that is, of space as relations and practices as they structurally contribute to global inequality being formed in the present-day. By consequence, such evasion conceals the implication of actors who contribute to inequality (Massey, 2006).

2.4 Relational Space & Education

Another discipline that increasingly uses theories of relational space is education, particularly in studies related to school effectiveness, literature, and policy (Gulson & Symes, 2007). In particular, British geographer Jane McGregor studied ideas of how "school" and "schooling" were constructed and enacted. For instance, in *Spatiality and the Place of the Material in Schools* (2004a), McGregor focused on the "mutual implication of the social and the material in the construction of the everyday interactions that constitute the school" (p. 348). Specifically, she sought to understand the social

agency of physical objects/materials and their relationship to humans in the construction and ordering of schooling, including spaces of workplace life, teaching, and learning. As a guiding framework, McGregor utilized Massey's relational space as a conceptual lens. To McGregor, social interactions create social space.

McGregor noted several findings. For one, material equipment and technologies are important in influencing pedagogical practices that teachers enact. For instance, objects found within a space, such as a science teachers' departmental office, serve as catalysts for social interactions within the office by becoming the subject of consistent conversations among those in attendance. McGregor found that one school's science department office was not just a context *within* which interactions transpired. Rather, the office facilitated certain types of interactions that served to construct the space as one of both formal and information interactions among the teachers. This forming of relational space served to reinforce staff members' identity as science teachers, as well as their teaching practices toward students. McGregor (2004a) stressed that understanding school contexts as either a physical or social container does nothing to acknowledge the "reciprocity of the mutual construction of physical and social space" (p. 367). Her work helps to better consider how conditions of teaching are established within contexts of teaching, as well as how policy can constrain or enable them. Considering space in a more relational sense, as a network of interrelations that constantly change, enables us to better see the world of the school, and consider possibilities for better workplace relations, as well as school reform.

Drawing upon the work of fellow educational researcher Jan Nespor (1997), who studied an elementary school in Virginia to understand how school and society relate to one another, McGregor (2004b, p. 13) elsewhere stated that:

> space is fundamentally implicated in the creation and maintenance of 'the school'…rather than a pre-determined *place*, schools may be seen as a constellation of ongoing relations and everyday, materially-embedded and enmeshed practices, which extend beyond the school in space-time.

Nespor (1997) had found that educational spaces, like schools and classrooms, consist of a nexus of multiple social networks which shape not only communities but also school pedagogies and student and teachers' practices. Looking only within school or classroom's walls "obscures how political, cultural, and economic forces shape school practice…" (p. xiii). Nespor argued that by viewing its spaces as insulated from the world beyond its walls, schools play a part in constituting that world, and vice versa. As such, Nespor (1997) explored "flows of practice that organize widespread social relations" found within networks and intersections of social relations.

2.5 Actor-Network Theory

Massey's (2005) first proposition of relational space posits that space is produced through social interrelations. Frequently, scholars have taken the term 'social' and placed primary emphasis on humans as the primary constructors of the social world and what occurs therein (Latour, 2005; Law, 2007; Murdoch, 1998). While researchers like McGregor and Nespor draw upon Massey for much of their work, they also utilize the related concept of Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This varied approach generally concerns exploring and tracing relations and connections between different actors that allow entities, processes, and events to become what they are as "network effects".

Actors may be human, material, or discursive in nature (Bosco, 2006; Law, 1992), and ANT illuminates the importance of non-human elements which contribute not only to relational formations of space, but the performance of its resulting action or phenomena (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 2005; Law, 2007; Mifsud, 2020). The network, which is composed of the stable relations and transformations among the actors, determines the placements and functions of the actors, thereby contributing to the production or performance of something (e.g., a process, event, object, etc.). Since actors may be human and non-human, I offer the second premise of this study: that spatial study should incorporate a sociomaterial approach.

Actors and networks are co-constitutive, whereby a particular configuration of actors form together to take on the characteristics and attributes of the network they create as network effects (Bosco, 2006; Law, 1992, 2007). Through their formation, actor-networks form different "space-times", which extend as they draw other locales and networks within their own spheres through translation (Latour, 1987; Murdoch, 2006). ANT seeks to understand how networks and organizations form, as well as what processes generate order to keep them in place, by focusing on interactions that stabilize or reproduce themselves through the juxtaposition of human and non-human material, and strategies (McGregor, 2004a, p. 353). ANT raises questions about how networks generate power, organization, and order, as well as how those elements operate.

Initially used in Science and Technology Studies, ANT is not so much an applied "theory" as it is a "sensibility, an interruption or intervention, a way to sense and draw nearer to a phenomenon" (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Gad & Jensen, 2010). Latour (1999) articulated that ANT is not a theory because it cannot precisely explain practices

and instructs individuals not to take any actor characteristics for granted. John Law (2007) calls ANT a "disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities and methods of analysis that treat everything the social and natural worlds as continuously generated effects of the website of relations within which they are located" (p. 2). ANT has evolved over the past three decades, as scholars have brought this sensibility into conversation with different frameworks and theoretical perspectives. Earlier perspectives of ANT utilized widely by Bruno Latour (1987, 1996, 1999, 2005), are somewhat different than more recent, reflexive iterations espoused by John Law (1999, 2007), Annemarie Mol (2002), Susan Star (1991). The ongoing development of this "toolkit", speaks to ANT's openness and revisability rather than an objectified "it" or "thing", given its emphasis on the continuous generation of effects based on relational configurations (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Gad & Jensen, 2010; van der Duim, Ren, & Johannessen, 2017). Within the literature, researchers describe ANT in two general phases: ANT and "After-ANT" (Fenwick & Edwards, 2011; Gad & Jensen, 2010; Law, 1999). In the following sections, I describe each phase, as well as relevant concepts salient to this dissertation's work.

2.5.1 *Traditional ANT*

Despite ANT's evolution over the past 30 years, its earlier iterations center around concepts of symmetry, agency, translation, power, and order, which contribute to keeping organizations and order in place over time.

2.5.1.1 Symmetry

Whereas some scholars view social relations as occurring primarily among human actors and their contributions (Latour, 2005; Law, 2007; Murdoch, 1998), ANT

analytically treats human and non-human entities the same, viewing them each as relational effects (Latour, 2005; Law, 2007; McLean & Hassard, 2004; Mifsud, 2020; van der Duim, Renn, & Johannessen, 2017). Latour (2005) explains that social ties and relations zigzag among human and object connections within a network configuration, resulting in the production of an event, process, policy, space, etc. To him, the social is inseparable from the material, and there is no "purely human" society, only heterogeneous assemblages (Latour, 2005). Highlighting non-human actors is typical of ANT, despite some critics who point out that it may at times "over-grant" reality and potency to these entities (Mifsud, 2020). Moreover, ANT operates counter to the idea of entities, objects, people, etc. possessing inherent *a priori* embodiment or characteristics. Rather it is the coming together of different actors in particular ways, through the process of translation, that results in the characteristics and identities we see in these entities (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 1999, 2005; Law, 1992).

To some scholars, equally emphasizing human and non-human entities neglects human capacities for expression, morality, non-repetitive action, and imagination (Jensen & Gad, 2009; Whittle & Spicer, 2008), which as Thrift (2000) shares in one critique, seems "really important in understanding what is possible to associate…" (p. 215). To others, ANT highlights the associative nature of networks and importance of non-human actors, in an attempt to downplay some disciplines' overfocus on humans in creating action, that they appear to neglect or underplay humans' unique nature and capacities altogether (Gad & Jensen, 2010; McClean & Hassard, 1994).

2.5.1.2 Translation & Order

Within ANT, a transformation occurs when human and non-human actors circulate among, connect to, and relate with one another. A process known as translation, one actor may work upon another, changing it, to form links and become part of a network of coordinated things and actions (Callon, 1986; Fenwick & Edwards, 2011; Latour, 2005; Law, 1992; Mifsud, 2020; Murdoch, 1998). When an actor is translated to perform in part of a network, it tends to behave with what appears to be certain intentions, subjectivities, and consciousness (Latour, 1999). Fenwick and Edwards (2010, 2011) and Murdoch (1998) contend that translation is the unpredictable and uncertain result of negotiations between actors that come together through four specific moments: Problematization, Interessement, Enrollment, and Mobilization (Callon, 1986; Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011). As actors are successfully enrolled and mobilized, network configurations grow and extend themselves through space and time, becoming more stable, durable, and able to translate other actor-networks into their own (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011). The more connections and actors a network has, the stronger, more durable, and powerful it becomes (Law, 1999).

The translation process begins with *problematization*, when an entity tries to establish itself as an actor that frames an idea or problem, and related entities, in particular ways. In doing so, the entity attempts to become an "obligatory passage point" (OPP) through which all relations in the actor-network must flow at some time (Callon, 1986; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 1987). Subsequently, in *interessement*, separate actors are attracted to or invited into this framing and negotiations occur as to what the actors' connection and role will look like in the network. To negotiate, actors may use "persuasion, force…resistance, pretence, and subterfuge, etc." (Fenwick & Edwards,

2010, p. 10), which in part determines which actors will be included or excluded from the network (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011). Fenwick & Edwards (2010) offer a teacher curriculum guide as an example of an OPP, in that teachers' lessons, including their decisions about which texts and assignments to incorporate, must be aligned with the guide or at least are partially translated by it. Moreover, the teachers' knowledge and activities, those who assist them, and materials involved in teaching practices must all pass through the curriculum guide in some way to subsequently form their own networks. Following interessement is *enrollment*, whereby actors identified to be included in the network become engaged in their new identities and behaviors, becoming increasingly translated in particular directions (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011). Herein, Callon (1986) articulates that there is a folding of "social agendas" into material entities where social relations, values, etc. are delegated to them for the enforcement of the network. And in *mobilization*, these newly formed networks may become more durable over time and their translations extended to other locations.

When recurrent patterns of network configurations generate and maintain relations through translations between their human and non-human actors, order results (Law, 1992; McGregor, 2004a). Patterns that succeed in remaining stable, and reproduce themselves over time in different situations, may normalize a certain order, and produce particular forms of knowledge and power. Some actors serve to hold network relations and orderings in place, while moving into new spaces and networks to translate other actors to perform in particular ways. Called immutable mobiles, because the can maintain their relational configurations, they often get taken for granted or "blackboxed," where people only see them as the resulting *performance* of the networked actors, not the actors

themselves (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 1987). A school bell can be an immutable mobile because its component actor-network tends to remain stable, allowing it to translate actions of students and staff across the school during the day. However, many only see the school bell for what it *does* and not for *what constitutes it*. Other examples include textbooks and also formal or informal policies (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, 2011; Latour, 2005).

2.5.1.3 Agency & Power

Another general concern of ANT are concepts of agency and power. Some social theory imbues these qualities to humans as innate properties. ANT does not view agency as an individual source rooted in "conscious intentions that mobilize action." Rather, it is an "effect of different forces including actions, desires, capacities and connections that move through" an actor in addition to forces exerted by actors like technologies and texts (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011, p. 104). Law (1992) describes agency as a network effect; one is an agent because they inhabit "a set of elements…that stretches out into the network of materials…that surrounds each body" (p. 384). He wouldn't have the agency to be a sociologist, for example, and produce knowledge if his computer, colleagues, books, etc., were taken away from him.

Similarly, power, a central concern for ANT, is a network effect resulting from the particular configurations of networks and their relational positioning among different actors therein (McLean & Hassard, 2004). ANT helps researchers to trace how some actor-networks solidify and distribute certain relations of power, which can serve to translate other actors and networks across space and time (Bosco, 2006; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Law, 1992). Because networks are composed of a variety of different

actors, they must be enrolled and mobilized to create any effective resulting performance or action (Murdoch, 2006). If any of actors or entities leave the network, "the whole operation is threatened. Thus, all enrolled entities have 'power' of some kind" (p. 70). However, the mutability, stability, and durability of any actor-network results from component actors' ability and power to hold it together. Should another actor come into contact with it and enroll and mobilize any of its components, then the original actor-network could fail (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, Law, 2007).

While some traditional ANT researchers contend that viewing actions, events, and entities, through translation helps understand how their resulting networks become (or do not become) stable and durable over time, others argue that such views prove problematic. For one, if ANT espouses symmetry between humans and non-humans, and that agency is the network effect of a configuration of different actors, then one could assume that everything possesses some form of agency or intentionality. However, Bosco (2006) raises a point made by Latour (1996) whereby an actor can be considered an *actant* or "something that acts or to which activity is granted by others…" Such an entity implies no particular motivation made by individual human actors; though it can be anything that is granted to be a source of action (p. 373). With ANT, agency is decentered, not residing within humans or non-humans alike, and is a network effect (Bosco, 2006; Law, 1992). On this contentious issue, Latour (1999) cautions considering this approach within similar frames as social theory; actors are not to play a role of agency themselves, nor the network a role of structure or society. Rather, ANT "underscores the many ways in which actors bestow agency on one another, thereby enabling subjectivity, intentionality, and so forth to emerge in network processes" (Gad

& Jensen, 2010, p. 61). Latour believes the social is a type of constant circulation able to travel endlessly. ANT asks us to think about these circulations (Bosco, 2006).

Second, some critics believe that traditional ANT tends to center around "strong actors," their allies, and the network itself. Such foci lead these other scholars to see traditional ANT as controlling, managerial, and Machiavellian, and thereby leading to interest in building strong networks through focusing on force or privileged actors (Gad & Jensen, 2010; Law, 2007; Star, 1991). Scholars, like Star (1991) and Lee & Brown (1994), and Mifsud (2020) contend that such traditional views of ANT neglect the "other" in considering how networks may develop. Star's (1991) work explores marginalized actors within networks in an attempt to understand those networks look and are created. She advocates that networks might look different for these actors compared to those that may traditionally be privileged in earlier ANT works, and that there can be other ways to form networks outside of force or control.

2.5.2 *"After-ANT"*

Traditional ANT centers around actor-networks, and how their heterogeneous actors are translated into performing some network effect. Emphasis is placed more on the durability and stability of *the network itself*, how power comes into being and is dispersed to hold the network in place (or not). However, "After-ANT" questions and ventures beyond these themes, exploring alternative concepts in the process, like multiplicity, fluidity, complexity, and unpredictability. In part, After-ANT scholars seek to open up network conceptions and account for occurrences which traditional ANT notions do not or ignore altogether (de Laet & Mol, 2000; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Gad & Jensen, 2010; Law, 1992, 2007; Mol, 2002; Mol & Law, 1994).

2.5.2.1 Multiplicity & Complexity

Frequently in traditional ANT, researchers speak of an actor-network as if it is the only one possible for the particular phenomenon it performs, and that if it's unique constellation of actors do not possess enough power to hold it together, then it may fail. However, in her work around arteriosclerosis, Anne Marie Mol (2002) invites us to understand how this is performed in different ways in practice, by illuminating how actors with different aims enact arteriosclerosis, like the surgeon and the rehabilitation staff member. Whereas the surgeon performs it *on* the patient through surgery, the rehabilitation staff member performs it through rehabilitative treatment *with* the patient and their participation. Per Mol (2002), each performance of arteriosclerosis is different in that it involves different objects, people, physical locations, education, language, etc. Therefore, she expresses that there may be several different networks and orderings that exist and produce multiple versions of phenomena, though those phenomena may appear singular from the outset (Mol, 2002; Gad & Jensen, 2010, Law, 2007). Part of Mol's (2002) argument is that arteriosclerosis as a phenomenon is "articulated in practices", which reveals the kind of entity it is, as well as the courses of action that may be offered to navigate it (Gad & Jensen, 2010).

Though there may be a multiplicity of realities for seemingly singular phenomena, they do not always completely overlap with one another. Rather, they are complex in that they may remain apart from, contradict, be partially connected to, or include one another (Gad & Jensen, 2010; Law, 2007). Mol's (2002) arteriosclerosis of surgery and walking rehabilitation are independent of one another but connected in some ways. To this end,

"After-ANT" scholars, like Mol, seek to explore questions like, "What is it to treat?" and explore the researcher's role in contributing to those answers (Gad & Jensen, 2010).

2.5.2.2 Fluidity: Spaces and Technologies

Critics argue that the network concept of traditional ANT tends to "colonize all domains" so nothing can exist outside of actor-networked spaces, and that too much focus is placed on powerful "network builders", such that more marginal actors are excluded from network relations (Murdoch, 2006; Star, 1991). However, Mol & Law (1994) respond to these critiques by offering the additional concept of fluid space. Summarized by Murdoch (2006), fluid space is "spatial relations that are constantly 'becoming,' constantly shifting, constantly moving," (p.88) fitting in well with spaces of multiplicity. This form of space operates contrary to networked spaces. If we were to remove an actor from a network, the network could fail, and the performed effect may not occur. However, fluid spaces are more "viscous" and held together by actors that tend to inform instead of depend on each other, mostly because there is no OPP whereby all else must file or be translated (Mol & Law, 1994; Murdoch, 2006).

In their study of anemia and how tropical doctors handle this illness across different locations, Mol and Law (1994) argue that fluid spaces help researchers to understand how some entities may be both similar and dissimilar across locations. They studied the ways in which healthcare professionals clinically identified and diagnosed anemia in their patients, comparing practices in both the Netherlands and parts of Africa. They found that there is no one way to perform the clinical diagnosis and treatment of anemia, for if there was then it may be likely to cause failure if only viewed through a strictly network-based lens. But since we can see similar success in the ability to identify

and diagnose anemia in locations around the globe, despite for example, different local environments, clinicians' training for illness indication, and presence of laboratory equipment, as well as the ability of staff from one country to still function in another, some other form of space must be present. "...if we are dealing with 'anaemia' over and over again, something that keeps on differing but also stays the same, then this is because it *transforms itself from one arrangement into another without discontinuity"* (Mol & Law, 1994, p. 664). Müller and Schurr (2016) succinctly capture Mol and Law's (1994) fluid spaces: "Entities may move in and out of the network, new relations may be forged, and existing ones cut, but instead of disrupting the whole network, this just transforms the resultant actor" (p. 222).

Similarly, Law (2007) raises the question of how multiple realities relate to one another and answers it by saying "in complex ways" (p. 14). One way realties may maintain solidity is to relate to one another through discontinuity or by "othering" one another. Alternatively, though, realities might hold together by flowing into one another, through the use of fluid technologies, entities or objects that are mutable and capable of reconfiguring themselves. Their successes resulting from their performances may be "malleable", resembling one indicator in one instance, and another in others.

One of the more prominent studies that open up the concept of fluid technologies is de Laet and Mol's (2000) piece about the Zimbabwe Bush Pump. The scholars discuss the *fluidity* (their emphasis) of this water pump and its ability as a technology to move from one site to another, which can be difficult with technology transference. Such transference, particularly one that is rigid in composition and requires the translation of actors in one unique location based on that of another, can result in the collapse of a built

network of machines, social relations, and skills (de Laet & Mol, 2000; Law, 2007). Having an adaptable technology that is flexible and responsive, not too rigidly bounded, and transports well most anywhere, may be more ideal than one that embodies the opposite (de Laet & Mol, 2000). The water pump is not only a mechanical object, but also a community installed device, promoter of health, and even a community/nation-building apparatus. With these multiple identities come different boundaries and a variant of its larger social environment. In traditional ANT, actors and actor-networks are often examined for their success or failure, though with fluid technologies, such an answer is not as simple. For instance, while the water pump may be successful in providing needed water to remote villages, it may not always bring health. Likewise, it may work for smaller groups within a community, but not between multiple communities. Therefore, the de Laet & Mol submit (2000, p. 252)

> Good technologies...may well be those which incorporate the possibility of their own break-down, which have the flexibility to deploy alternative components, and which continue to work to some extent even if some bolt falls out or the user community changes.

With fluidity and fluid technologies, we learn that some actors may be objects that can reconfigure themselves, different realities (i.e., actor-networks) can be loosely and partially associated, and we do not have to imagine one, single network (Law, 2007).

2.5.2.3 Uncertainty, Disruption, and Risk

Within the relational spatial framework, space is ever-changing and dynamic. Nothing ever remains the same and consequently, it is the constant (re)circulating of different entities that tends to inhere some sense of uncertainty among them (Getz, 2004;

Massey, 2005, 2006; Neisser, 2014). Since spaces and actor-networks undergo such change, researchers contend that it is impossible to completely predict how networks *will* form and hold together.

While traditional ANT acknowledges some sense of uncertainty (Latour, 2005), some critics argue that it cannot handle the "virtual", or forces waiting to unfold and enter into spatial circulations (Müller and Schurr, 2016). Müller and Schurr (2016) provide shape to the concept of the virtual, describing it in one manner as an "ever-present potential for breakdown and disruption in the complex but invisible infrastructure systems" that make life possible (p. 222). They contend that network fluidity is crucial in maintaining common outcomes or effects when associations that bring them about constantly shift. They raise as an example, the global fertility industry and how the outcome of producing a baby is the same across countries. Though some consider the business system and practices that bring about such an outcome to be standardized and immutable, Müller and Schurr (2016) argue the opposite for staff in Mexico or Georgia, where surrogate pensions or access to electricity or Internet may be unpredictable. Further, there is always the unpredictability of the biological processes occurring within the human body. As such, the authors state that while assisted reproduction is an assemblage constantly at the brink of failure, clinicians and business staff in each country improvise to anticipate and prepare for some unpredictability within their local networks (i.e., carrying multiple Internet devices, utilizing multiple sources of heat to do work). Considering the "otherness" or "outside-ness" of the virtual contributes to the actual.

This sense of uncertainty and the virtual can itself become an actor and contribute to the performance of other actors and actor-networks. Michael Schillmeier (2008, 2011)

discussed how the unpredictable Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus contributed to a reassembling of relations and actions between people, objects, policies, and more. The effects of SARS's introduction into the different, multiple networks of actors, as well as their relations to one another were life altering, much of which could be linked to the uncertainty surrounding the virus. Governments around the globe enacted policies restricting the flow and movement of people, which adversely impacted businesses and economies, and how people perceived and interacted with each other. Many of these effects came about because of risks different stakeholders took to account for uncertainty surrounding the virus at the time. Each effect mediated and translated other actions among different communities, albeit frequently in different ways.

The concept of risk goes hand-in-hand with uncertainty and disruption, be it in response to a respiratory virus (Schillmeier 2008, 2011), electrical outage or flood (November 2008, 2011), a natural disaster (Neisser, 2014), urban planning initiative (Beauregard, 2018), or even shooting on a college campus. November (2008) notes varying definitions of risks from "the likelihood of a range of possible outcomes resulting from a decision or course of action" to simply "a probability multiplied by a consequence" (p. 1524). Neisser (2014) acknowledges that the term risk is generally diffuse across disciplines; some encompass elements such as perception, decision-making, and communication (p. 91). However, he argues that making decisions is an attempt to deal with uncertainty and "unforeseeable future consequences", whereby that uncertainty reveals itself in responses made to risks.

Neisser (2014) further discusses that with the ever-contingent nature of different configurations of entities and their relations to one another, risk and uncertainty are

inherent qualities therein. To manage risks and lessen adverse impacts and possibilities of disaster, he instructs that risk management approaches involve "corrective risk management" and "prospective risk management", wherein the former concerns mitigating or reducing present disaster risks, and the latter with strategies and activities designed to avoid new or increased risks (p. 90). When managing disasters, he argues, one wishes to blame either an individual or the failure of some technology. Though, blaming just one component fails to acknowledge the interactivity and networking configurations of which both people and objects are a part, which play a role during disasters. Using ANT-related approaches in risk management can open up understanding of disasters and risks in terms of reasons, not just causes.

Robert Beauregard (2018) echoes Neisser's notion of the omnipresence of uncertainty, sharing that "humans are neither alone in the world nor "masters of the universe" but are participants in enacting reality with numerous others" (p. 7). In his field of urban planning, uncertainty can accompany planning and design projects can never be "erased", though can be negotiated and managed. To do so, we must acknowledge that particular types of actor configurations and relationships must be created to combat uncertainty's disruptive potential. They must be strategic, and must shore up reliable, reciprocal human and non-human relationships, and collaborate to develop a plan that is compatible with such actor flows to be successfully implemented.

2.5.3 *Spatiality & Online Technology*

From a relational-spatial perspective, the workspace can be considered a "hybrid space", both temporally, spatially, and relationally (Thompson, 2012). In her study exploring self-employed individuals' work-learning in online communities, Terri

Thompson (2012) cites Suchman's (1996) definition of workplace as a "complex but habitual field of equipment and action, involving relations of technology and practice, body and person, place and activity (p. 252). It is fleeting and shifting and involves partial connections between people and objects. Such descriptions also apply to how Thompson (2012) conceives of the ways of working and of work-learning, particularly with regard to knowledge making. Unlike other scholars who view knowledge as residing within people themselves, Mol (2002) believes knowledge can be created and found within performed daily practices, such as activities, instruments, procedures, and events. Fluid spaces and technologies are useful in considering workplaces, work-learning, and work practices (Mol, 2002; Thompson, 2012), in addition to ANT notions, like relational entanglements and tracings of humans and objects within networks. The increased use of web-based technologies in these performances amplify their fluid and distributed nature. Thompson (2012) argues that we must attend to these "technologies-in-use" to better understand their connections to other network actors, human and non-human, and the work that goes into enacting, and maintaining or disrupting those connections. Thompson (2010, 2012) provides examples of technologies-in-use, like a posting in an online community forum, Listservs, email, and blogs.

Other research on web-based technologies has been conducted concerning their impact on and contribution to networks of work, teaching, and student learning practices, such as virtual learning environments (VLEs), Google, and Blackberrys (Habib, Johannesen, & Øgrim, 2014; Hustad & Bechina, 2010; Johannesen, Erstad, & Habib, 2012; Orlikowski, 2007). VLEs are online systems that possess different e-learning tools, which are integrated and accessed through a shared interface. They generally permit

educators to place course content online in a structured manner, automate time-consuming processes, as well as synchronously and asynchronously communicate with different constituents through elements like discussion boards, chats, email, and video meetings (Hustad & Bechina, 2010; Habib, Johannesen, & Øgrim, 2014).

In their 2012 exploration of how a VLE influences teaching practices, Johannessen, Erstad, and Habib found that VLEs and their components, such as email and news applications, multiple choice assessments, and statistics functions, supported teachers by creating more efficiency in parts of their teaching, compared to if they had no VLE. Moreover, they highlighted that the educators' agency is negotiated through the VLE and its myriad applications as a tool, as well relationships with other actors, like institutional administration, government and educational policies, students, and parents. As such these components reveal a sociomaterial network effect focused on technology.

Somewhat relatedly, Habib, Johannesen, & Øgrim (2014) studied the patterns of VLE use among a group of diverse international students in a mostly monocultural Scandinavian university. They found that several participants acknowledged receiving a large amount of email in Norwegian, attempting to first translate it all into their native language for better comprehension. However, because this act consumed so much time, and most emails were irrelevant, they began to blackbox and ignore all emails, assuming that they would be given any important information verbally by their instructor. In some cases, they were correct. In others, these students missed important information due to the sheer volume of VLE-provided information in a non-native language. The authors posited, "that technology as a socio-material assemblage may encapsulate cultural codes

that can be alienating for international students and that there is a need to 'open the black boxes' of technology to cater" to their needs (p. 196).

Each of these works highlights the importance of sociomateriality and the ways in which humans and non-humans, like web-based technologies, come into relations to enact translations and performances of some kind, be they teaching, learning, communicating, etc. Wanda Orlikowski (2007) extends this concept to bring to the forefront the materiality in organizing, and its contributions to the manifestation of performed organizational practices. She offers an example of a Google Internet search to illustrate how a researcher's search results are composed by the performances of different materials, like computers, software, databases, algorithms, as they're "enacted by the human agencies entailed in their design, construction, and operation" (p. 1445). She argues, the assemblage involved in producing Google Internet search results shifts over time, based on interests of the researcher, networks, algorithms, and other assemblage components, thereby causing it to be (p. 1445)

> Fleeting, fragile, and fragmented, entailing uncertainty and risk, and producing intended and unintended outcomes. Focusing on these sociomaterial aspects of everyday practices will open up important avenues for examining and understanding the ongoing production of organizational life.

One such element of organizational life is the planning, developing, and implementing of events, which consists of several, multiple actor-networks.

2.6 Event Studies and Spatiality

An event is "a temporary experience based on a unique combination of timing, location, theme, design and ambiance created and complemented by participants,

spectators, and organisers" (Page & Connell, 2012; p. 11-12). Planned events happen by "human design...with specific goals in mind...focusing on mobilizing resources, transforming processes, management systems and professionalism" (Getz, 2012, p. 34). Donald Getz (2012) created a diagram to illustrate the different themes to consider when exploring a planned event, at the core of which is its experience and meanings. Around this core, he places themes that contribute in some way to an event's unfolding, experience, and meanings, including antecedents to attending an event and choices made about it, outcomes, management elements, and spatial patterns and temporal processes present that represent broader influences and "dynamic aspects" of an event system.

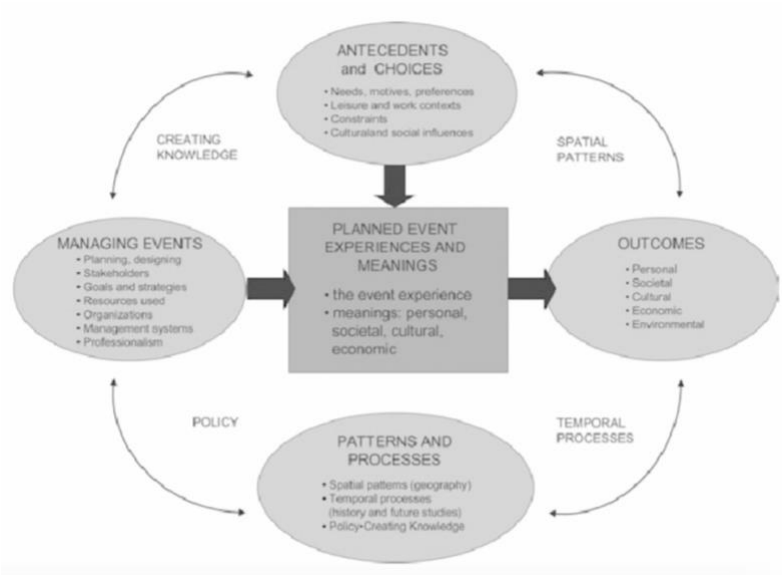


Figure 2.1 Event studies: major theme, as shown on p. 31 of Getz (2012).

For Getz (2012) human geography and spatiality play key roles in the study of events, particularly in the questions that can be asked, like "Where do events come from?", "How are they distributed in time and space?", and "What forces shape events?" (p. 35).

Thus, planned events' connection to the spatial support the third primary premise grounding my study, that the new international student orientation is a spatial event.

Graham Berridge (2012) supports Getz's planned event illustration, arguing that creating planned event experiences should be part of a purposeful and integrated "design-based process" that considers a careful mapping of each event element, ranging from the development of the event's initial concept to all subsequent elements required to implement the experience. Part of this process requires some degree of insight into the nature of interactions between and relationships among people, as well as that of the physical environment. However, Berridge acknowledges Pettersson and Getz's (2009) contention that experiences cannot be entirely designed, for there are personal, social, and even cultural constructs that may influence the individual and social nature of events. Herein, Berridge reminds us of the dynamic, non-static nature of events and their experiences, expressing that they are multi-dimensional, multi-faceted across time periods, and open to effects of people's interactions.

When designing planned events and experiences, Berridge (2012) discusses Rossman's (2003) advocacy for developing a tool for designers' use that is based on events possessing six elements: physical setting, objects, interacting people, rules, relationships, and animation. To apply and understand such a tool, designers must consider a few points, including the nature of different objects, the ways in which meaning is derived, and the ways in which interaction may unfold and permit an ongoing interpretation of meaning. Berridge (2012, p. 280) specifically stresses:

> "During the course of designing the experience any single element may constantly change as a result of participants' interaction, as they interpret for themselves the meaning of the elements they encounter, and so the nature of the experience itself

may constantly change”

Such characteristics of planned events and their design highlight the characteristics of Massey’s relational space (Massey, 1992, 2005, 2006). Therefore, a planned event’s spatiality is continuously being constructed through and by social relations, which constantly undergo a process of being made.

2.7 Relational Space, Actor-Networks, and International Student Services

Viewing student support and staff work practices from a spatial, human geography perspective works well for higher education and student affairs, as it explores people, place, and the environment, the interrelationships between these elements, and how they spatially and temporally vary between locations (Human Geography, 2019). Therein, spaces may be studied through special organization and processes with regard to how they mold peoples’ activities and lives, as well as their interactions with places and nature (Human Geography, 2019). While many people use the term “student services” to define the services and resources that staff provide to students, others prefer the term “student affairs.” Both terms are often interchangeably used (Long, 2012; Seifert, 2011), and inherent within them are different peoples, environments, and places. How they interrelate to one another in ways that organize their lives and actions for serving students across space and time is both social and spatial (Human Geography, 2019).

If higher education institutions are made up of sociomaterial networks consisting of these peoples, environments, and places (i.e., actors), and entities like knowledge and learning can become effects of particular network configurations, so too might international student support service practices, like the new international student

orientation event and its related activities. After all, a variety of entities must come together in particular ways to perform international student services, including people, objects, physical spaces, and policies. However, while there is a richness of spatiality studies on to topics such as teaching, learning, knowledge-generation, and even identity construction (Gulson & Symes, 2007; Edwards, 2011, Nespor, 1994, 1997; McGregor, 2004a, 2004d; Mulcahy, 2006; Roth, 1996), only one to date could be found that explores any sense of spatiality of international student services in higher education (Habib, Johannesen, & Øgrim, 2014). No studies have yet explored spatiality's impacts on staff work practices to enact new international student orientation event programming.

Given recent increased international student recruitment initiatives and accompanying calls for better support services, especially during the disruptive COVID-19 global health pandemic, colleges and universities must explore how staff currently serve these students, and how these services may be (re)imagined and contribute to reform efforts (McGregor, 2004a). As such, spatiality and relational space become useful frames through which to explore how international student services are constituted and enacted by staff, with the hope of implementing innovations to not only thoughtfully support these students, but also fulfill other institutional missions and responsibilities.

In the chapters that follow, I describe the new international student orientation as an actor-network prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the "revised" orientation enacted for the fall 2020 term during the pandemic. Using actors like U.S. immigration and SEUU institutional policy, the coronavirus, and Microsoft Teams, I trace what different staff members and objects were *doing* to enact the orientation. Concurrently, I discuss the abstractions made from these observations and how they contribute to

answering the study's research questions. In the final chapter, I bring these discussions into conversation with one another, share recommendations for professional practice, and suggest areas for subsequent research.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research design I utilized to conduct and present a spatial, sociomaterial, and event-based study of the work practices involved in university staff members' preparation and enactment of a new international student orientation during a global health pandemic. Herein, I discuss the methodological assumptions drawn upon to design the study, and different tools I engaged to generate and analyze data. My purpose with this design was to untangle and understand the complex "messiness" of staff work practices and the spatiality contributing to them. Additionally, I present the research setting and participants, how I negotiated access to each, and challenges I encountered throughout the study. Last, I share my role in the research and considerations for how my positionality and reflexivity may have contributed to it.

3.1 Research Assumptions & Design

To conduct this study, I utilized a blended research approach, through a constructivist, epistemological lens, called mini-ethnographic, qualitative case study. This design blends ethnography and case study, enabling researchers to explore and understand participants' everyday activities, roles, cultural norms, and values that relate to a specific area of inquiry (Burawoy, 1998; Kennell & Sitz, 2010; MacLeod et. al., 2019; McGregor, 2004d; Seloni, 2012, Verd et. al., 2020). It also affords linkages between micro-level action on the ground and macro-level social relations within which they are embedded (Burawoy, 1998; Fusch et. al., 2017; Wadham & Warren, 2013). Mini-ethnographic case studies are ideal for researchers with limited amounts of time to

spend in the field, as they enable generating rich data in shorter time frames (Fusch et. al., 2017; Verd et. al., 2020).

3.1.1 *Research Assumptions*

Relational space, ANT, and Event Studies all tend to focus on interactivity and relationality among people and objects, and how they coalesce to constitute and enact phenomena. How networks are formed, which of their elements are privileged over others, and how stable they become over time, each contribute to "network effects." They may not be universal across space and time, as the world consists of multiple realities rather than a one fixed state (Fusch et. al., 2017; Massey, 2005; Law & Mol, 1994). Given this key facet of the study's conceptual framework, a constructivist approach is apropos. Constructivism accounts for the relative nature of knowledge creation, its subjective interpretation, as well as its reproduction through communication, interaction, and practice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hatch, 2002, Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Constructivism emphasizes actions, places, and times, as well as the construction of activities that transpire within the research context (Ridder, 2017).

In such approaches, researchers involve themselves within the context, interpret what they experience and their data, and consider positionality and reflexivity (Burawoy, 1998; Fusch et. al., 2017; Kennell & Sitz, 2010; McCleod et. al., 2019; Stake, 1995, 2005). This perspective aligns well to relational space, ANT, and Event Studies, as researchers within an environment contribute to its real-time construction and unfolding (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010; Kennell & Sitz, 2010; McGregor, 2004d; Scoles, 2017).

3.1.2 *Ethnographic Inspirations*

A prominent qualitative research approach, Fusch et. al. (2017) define ethnography as "an in-depth study of a culture and studies everyday behavior of participants" (p. 924). Therein, researchers immerse themselves for extended amounts of time in a group's cultural system and conduct fieldwork to learn the "feelings, beliefs, and meanings of relationships between people as they interact within their culture or as they react to others in response to a changing phenomenon…" (p. 925). The researcher is the research instrument. They try to understand the cultural system from the participants' perspectives, as well as the meanings, culture, and behaviors present among them.

3.1.3 *Case Study Inspirations*

Evolved from ethnographic design (Fusch et. al., 2017), case study is the "empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon…set within its real-world context…" (Yin, 2011, p. 18). Cases tend to be embedded within a wider environment so researchers can examine interactions and links over time, between events and multiple variables, to inform a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Ellinger, Watkins, & Marsick, 2005; Fusch et. al., 2017). Case study design lends itself to questions seeking to describe what is happening (or has happened) or explain how something happened. Studying phenomena in their present contexts affords the collection of data in naturalistic settings. Case studies using more qualitative approaches may generate data through participant observation, individual or focus group interviews, and document analysis (Fusch et. al., 2017; Stake 1995, 2005, Tracy, 2013).

3.1.4 *A Blended Approach*

According to Fusch et. al., (2017), "one can blend study designs to be able to use the best of each design that can mitigate the limitations of each as well" (p. 926). A primary benefit of using a blended design is that it incorporates methods for generating data from both case study and ethnographic perspectives but attempts to bound the research in time and space. Instead of attempting to study an entire culture, using micro-ethnographic methods with case study permits researchers to study smaller, particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practices of social groups (Kennell & Sitz, 2010; Seloni, 2012). When using relational space and network perspectives as part of a study's framework, it can be difficult to determine how to select a focus and where to "cut", as relationships and networks can extend ad infinitum, (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, McLean & Hassard, 1994; Strathern, 1996). This blended approach bounds the study, narrows its scope, and enables exploration of where a "cut" can be made.

Constructivist approaches, as can be used in both of these research designs, involve the researcher and participants co-constructing reality. Therefore, being able to recognize their personal worldviews and lenses can improve the researcher's ability to see and interpret the perspectives and behaviors of others. To that end, scholars advocate for incorporating reflexivity into data generation and analysis processes, and engaging in triangulation or crystallization techniques and member checks (Burawoy, 1998; Fusch et. al., 2017; Ridder, 2017; Stake, 1995; Wadham & Warren, 2014).

Studies in Education that incorporate relational space and ANT frameworks generally utilize a case study approach (Baur et. al., 2014; Edwards, 2011; McGregor, 2004a, 2004d; Mulcahy, 2006; Nespor, 1994, 1997; Roth, 1996; Scoles, 2017). Although,

some utilize ethnographic methods to make familiar, taken-for-granted practices "strange," to learn about phenomena and their roles in the resulting network (McGregor, 2004d; Roth, 1996; Scoles, 2017). McGregor's (2004d) work exploring spatiality and teacher workplace cultures, for instance, specifically situates itself between ethnography and case study. She did not map each case school as entire social or cultural systems, nor focus on specific events, processes, or individual people. Instead, she wanted to learn about "what constitutes the spatiality of the school...exploring the situated interactions between staff" and, thus, called her research design a "microethnography" (p. 58). Some scholars argue that when combined with case study, better research outcomes may be achieved since the latter reinforces microethnography's strengths, like targeted data collection and a focus on key variables that may be highlighted in the literature (Verd et. al., 2020). They combine together to become mini-ethnographic case study.

3.1.5 *Mini-Ethnographic Case Study Design Limitations*

Like all approaches to research, this particular design is not without its own limitations. This design's limitations include embeddedness, few participants, and the transferability of results (Fusch et. al., 2017). In ethnography, the researcher embeds themselves within the culture of study, attempting to become a member of that culture to generate data. This process can take significant amounts of time. Since timing can be limited for those conducting mini-ethnographic case studies, Fusch et. al. (2017) encourage seeking other signals of embeddedness and community belonging. Signs may be explicit, such as in the form of a membership card or physical look, or they may be implicit like having a parking spot saved, though not being employed at the study site.

In qualitative research, some scholars believe that data saturation cannot be achieved unless a certain sampling of participants is obtained (Sim et. al., 2018; Terry et. al., 2017). However, sampling techniques may be more purposeful to obtain participants possessing a set of skills, knowledge or experiences to answer the research questions (Fusch et. al., 2017). Others do not necessarily seek a particular quantity of participants, and believe that sample size does not always guarantee data saturation. Rather, it is what or who constitutes the sample that contributes to it (Fusch et. al., 2017; Sim et. al., 2018).

Moreover, scholars often look to see how studies can be generalizable to other situations, sites, and populations. While generalizability tends to be more quantitatively oriented, qualitative research does look to see how one study might be transferable. However, researchers often leave issues of transferability up to readers' naturalistic interpretations (Fusch et. al., 2017; Stake, 2005), given the unique context and situatedness in which the study was conducted. Though, Michael Burawoy (1998), in his discussion of the extended case method, a blended ethnographic and case study approach, emphasizes the method's ability to venture from the micro to the macro, to explain a study's findings in reference to a wider context. Discussing such venturing, Wadham and Warren (2013) contend that in using general concepts, "we can understand how a particular empirical situation is shaped by wider structures…by opening up the 'black box'…and in turn extending it" (p. 9). Inherent in this process are the connections that are present between the micro and macro, which contribute to the shaping of both. In understanding these connections, and actors involved, we can take what we learn about external, wider structures and extend them to different cases and contexts, as a means of how they may help us make sense of differences within them, as was the case with

Burawoy's study of Zambianization (Burawoy, 1998; Warren & Wadham, 2014). Such is the goal in exploring extensions of spatiality and ANT into international student services.

In sum, implementing a qualitative, mini-ethnographic case design for this study aligns with both its research questions and guiding conceptual frameworks. This approach enables deeper exploration of a complex phenomenon within a situated context to understand how it came to be. Moreover, this approach accounts for the researcher as the research instrument and their need to reflexively consider how they contribute to the phenomenon in question within its situated context.

3.2 Case & Participant Selection

I selected SEUU as a case site because of its history of welcoming international students to its Main Campus. The first international students enrolled in 1949 and the International Center celebrated its 70th anniversary during the 2019-2020 academic year (International Center History, n.d.). As of Fall 2019, SEUU's international enrollment reached almost 600 students, two-thirds being graduate students. The university also worked with just over 130 individuals completing OPT (Countries Represented, n.d.).

Less than nine months after their 2018 inauguration, SEUU's newest president called for a new institutional strategic plan. Unveiled in fall 2019, the 2019-2022 strategic plan outlined new university priorities, and included an expressed interest to expand the school's global footprint and international student enrollment. Additionally, the plan encouraged the university community to "inspire a student-centered culture by improving the efficiency and user experience of our systems…" which includes "adequate, safe and healthy learning environment that meets academic and personal

needs…is afforded to every student" (Strategic Plan, 2019, p. 21). Being an SEUU staff member who directly interacts with international students, I had access to relevant staff for in-depth interviews and observations. I define staff as SEUU individuals who hold administrative positions. Staff members may teach as a part of their position, but do not possess a formal, full-time faculty appointment.

Table 3.1 Descriptive Information of Study Participants

SEUU Staff Name	SEUU Staff Title	SEUU Staff Unit
Geoffrey	Director	International Student Office
Trisha	International Advisor	International Student Office
Walter	Director	Graduate Enrollment
Madeline	International Manager	Business College
Sarah Jane	Internship Manager	Business College
Diane	Student Services Manager	Business College
Katie	Director	Undergraduate Orientation
Heather	Assistant Director	Residence Life
Dan	Recruitment Manager	Business College

3.3 Data Generation Techniques

To generate data for this study, I conducted participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and artifact analysis. Though SEUU comprises two campuses, I situated my study around the Main Campus, using the International Student Office (ISO) as the primary access site due to its responsibility for liaising with all international students and being the primary hub for their programming and activity. I also included other Main Campus units due to their relation to activities led or co-sponsored by the ISO or partner units. Secondary sites include academic colleges, Graduate Enrollment, and Residence Life, with some being selected based on feedback from participants.

This study is an effect of a complex and messy network of actors, whose spatiality contributed to how I approached each step of the research process. While originally I planned to generate most of the data in-person among campus physical spaces, actors such as COVID-19, government and institutional policies surrounding health and safety, including institutional IRB policy forbidding in-person research, translated my actions. As a result, I pivoted to virtually generate all the data.

3.3.1 *Participant Observation*

With regard to participant observation, I sought to enter into virtual spaces where I could see relevant institutional staff engaging, synchronously or asynchronously, in practices related to orientation programming. From the outset, I envisioned these opportunities including participation in live virtual staff meetings or orientation sessions (prior to or upon students' arrival) or viewing their recordings. I anticipated that these opportunities would either directly involve ISO or other relevant SEUU units. Furthermore, since part SEUU's orientation programming was and has continued to be

facilitated asynchronously online through the Blackboard VLE, I sought to participate in it as if I was an international student. Such observation settings were private and required special access. Therefore, I worked with primary and secondary gatekeepers to obtain it. Upon completion of the study, I attended a total of nine synchronous staff meetings, across three different SEUU units. Six meetings were conducted via Microsoft Teams, and I "attended" from my home utilizing my computer's microphone and webcam. Three meetings were conducted in-person in a physical office space lacking in computer technology. To attend, I called in to the meeting organizer and was placed on speakerphone so that I could "observe".

Beyond staff meetings, I completed the online asynchronous portion of orientation via the Blackboard VLE over a period of two to three sittings. Further, I corresponded via email throughout before and during the study with primary gatekeeper, Geoffrey, attempting to negotiate access to meetings and interactions with students. Together, these emails formed a sort of "observation site," replete with actors and relational spaces in which Geoffrey worked that shaped his responses to me.

Throughout the study, I recorded field notes about observations, as well as topics or moments that struck me. I completed a journal entry about each observation period, which I adapted from Scoles (2017) and Spradley (1980 in Page & Connell, 2012) (see Appendix #3), recorded what I noticed, what people and materials were involved, and noted relations that circulated among observed interactions. I also documented breakdowns, improvisations, or innovations the appeared to take place where objects were involved. Thompson (2010, 2012) advocates for such heuristics when 'interviewing objects' as a way of speaking with, by, through, and as such entities. Using this strategy, I

traced different actors that played key roles in the relational spaces related to staff work practices. At the end of each entry, I noted analytical and theoretical ideas that came to mind, items to consider or do, and what surprises or mistakes I noticed. Given my role as the research instrument, and the importance of reflexivity, these entries enabled me to remember my role in this project.

3.3.2 *Artifacts*

Additionally, I examined over 45 artifacts that were sponsored or utilized by SEUU units to serve international students. Including artifacts within this study permitted me to better acquaint myself with the research site, its history, rules and policies, and familiarize myself with forces beyond the Main Campus that contribute to its spatiality (McGregor, 2004d; Tracy, 2013). I procured most artifacts via publicly accessible websites, while obtaining others from participants in the form of electronic images and files. Artifacts included: office spaces, PPE, signage, participant emails, institutional and governmental documents and reports, websites content, and online orientation content. I interacted with artifacts throughout the study, though gathered most early on, and they sensitized me to actors, concepts, and practices I could follow through further fieldwork.

3.3.3 *Interviewing*

Beyond participant observations, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with most consenting SEUU staff participants. Each interview protocol incorporated themes present in the relational space, ANT, and Event Studies literatures, as expressed in the works of Scoles (2017), Edwards (2011), and Fenwick, Edwards, and Sawchuk (2011), McGregor (2004d), and Page and Connell (2012)(See Appendix #2). Borrowing from

Roth (1996), I utilized purposeful sampling techniques and followed interesting actors who provided international student services, broadly speaking, to incorporate a diverse voices and perspectives (Forbes-Mewett and Nyland, 2013; Roth, 1996). I began with ISO staff, given their professional roles and responsibilities, and sent them an invitation email with permission from my ISO gatekeeper (see Appendix #1). Using snowball sampling (Noy, 2008) I asked ISO participants to share my email invitation with other SEUU staff they considered related to the orientation. Additionally, a few SEUU colleagues familiar with my dissertation invited me to staff meetings or asked me to share my invitation with them so they could forward it to their Main Campus colleagues.

Upon receiving word from interested staff, I scheduled a time and date to meet with each one individually and synchronously via Microsoft Teams, and shared my informed consent form (see Appendix #4). I utilized Teams to simulate an in-person interview experience and maintain compliance with SEUU's security recommendations. Physical, in-person interviews are advantageous in terms of the information provided, such as non-verbal communication of individuals and physical contextual environments. However, when conditions occur that render this format impossible, mediated interviews like those via Teams can prove an extremely valuable alternative (Tracy, 2013).

Given me and my study participants were scattered across the city due to varying unit remote work policies, Microsoft Teams enabled us to simulate a face-to-face interaction, including rapid turn-taking and a conversational format (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I saw facial expressions and some non-verbal communication interviewees used, as well as a portion of their work-spaces. We also virtually shared resources, like website URL links, documents, and photos. Interviewees sharing such items was crucial because

each interview involved an activity. Teams facilitated more organic interaction compared to interviewees mailing hard copies of their items to me. I recorded all interviews and submitted them to Rev.com, a secure and reputable service, for transcription, and personally verified each for accuracy. I also conducted member checks with each interviewee to further ensure accuracy and fairness. To protect interviewees' privacy, I assigned each a pseudonym and altered identifying information, like titles and offices.

3.3.3.1 First Interview: Relational Mapping

The first interview with participants focused on understanding their backgrounds, how they came to serve international students, and choices they've made in their journey to this point. To learn about each participant's role in serving international students and the relationships they are entangled in with other actors in this network, I utilized a relational mapping exercise (MacLeod et. al., 2019; Scoles, 2017) that asked them to create a diagram identifying each person, object, space, technology, policy, etc., they use to successfully accomplish their everyday job.

A sociomaterial strategy used by Bagnoli (2009) and Scoles (2017), and mentioned by MacLeod (2019), this exercise helps to open up participants' interpretations of questions as a means to be more responsive to their meaning-making. Prior to engaging in this activity, I noticed when asking participants about what they did in their professional roles, they offered explanations that appeared vague and superficial. They seemed unaware of the practices, processes, and objects they utilized to complete their work. Mapping out their work enabled them to more comprehensively and concretely recall what, when, how, where, and with whom they do what they do. Interviewees had more time to thoroughly consider their work, rather than simply asking

them to verbally recall it like in a traditional of interview (Scoles, 2017). Similar to the "mental map" activity used by McGregor (2004d), this exercise permitted us to "see" the spatiality present within participants' work practices, which may have appeared differently in a traditional interview.

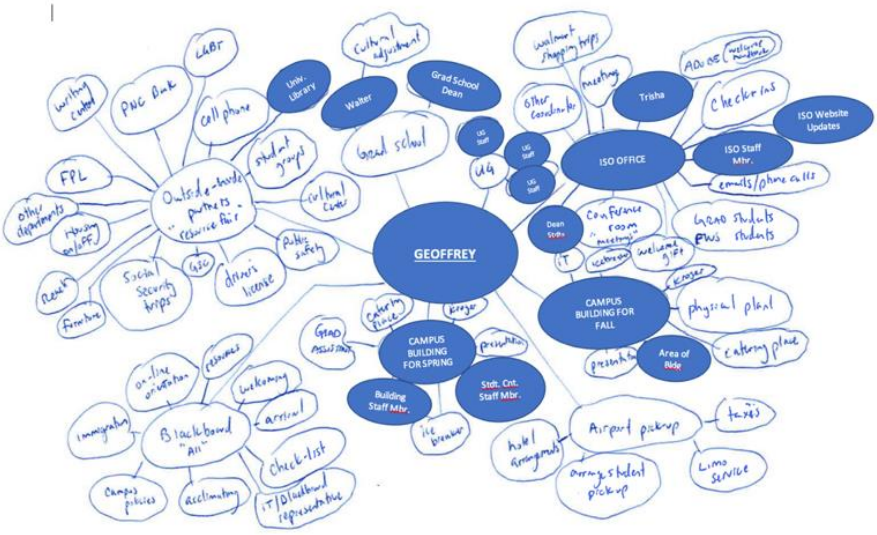


Figure 3.1 Geoffrey's Relational Map for Interview #1

The relational mapping exercise was mostly successful. As participants drew their maps and we conversed, they began to understand my interest not just in who they worked with but also with what, where, how, and when. Some maps were more detailed, and some interviewees took longer than others to complete their maps. Regardless of what they looked like or how long it took to create them, the maps provided an additional way of triangulating data generated by the other methods in this study.

3.3.3.2 Second Interview: Photo Elicitation

The second interview aimed to better understand the materiality present within staff members' relational spaces and how it may contribute to orientation-related work

practices, particularly during the COVID-19 global pandemic. I started by asking participants to share or send to me in advance, photos of objects or "things" they believe helps or inhibits how they complete their work.

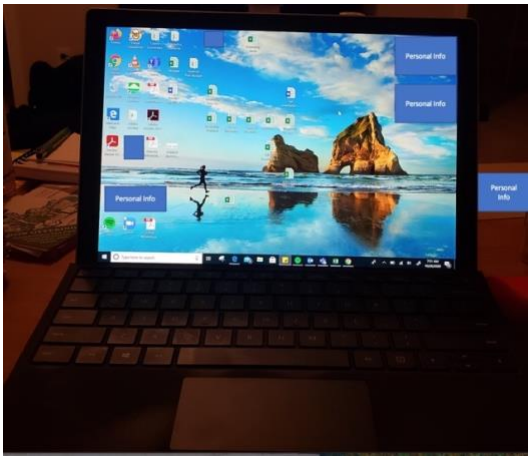


Figure 3.2 Laptop Computer

Figure 3.3 Login Screen of Zoom Web Conferencing Application

I also shared a few photos of items I believed to be key actors in staff members' work based on previous artifact review and participant observations.

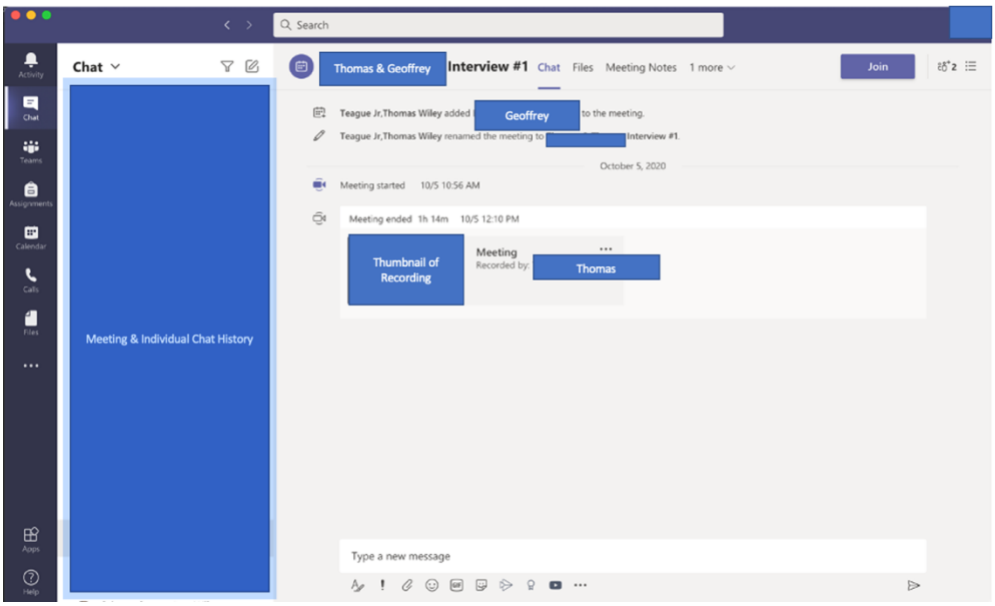


Figure 3.4 Chat Box Transcript Tool in Microsoft Teams Application

Broadcast Message: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Potential Procedural Adaptations for F and M nonimmigrant students

To: All SEVIS Users

Date: March 9, 2020

Supersedes: Broadcast Message: 2019 Novel Coronavirus and Potential Procedural Adaptations for F and M nonimmigrant students; Jan. 29, 2020; Number 2001-05

Number: 2003-01

General Information

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) continues to monitor developments with the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Concurrent with other federal agencies, SEVP provides the following information.

Figure 3.5 SEVP Non-Resident Student Immigration “Broadcast Message”

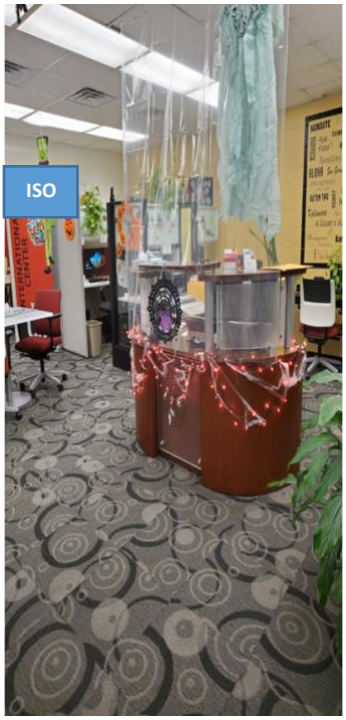


Figure 3.6 ISO Front Desk with PPE and Halloween Decorations

Photo elicitation is an increasingly popular method in the social sciences, Education (Harper, 2002; McGregor, 2004d; Pink, 2007), and even hard sciences (MacLeod, 2019). Photos enable researchers to understand the world as it is defined by the participant (Riessman, 2008). Moreover, discussing photos with interviewees, allows them and researchers to co-construct meaning and connections in relation to research questions, which may not always be possible in verbal-only interviews (Scoles, 2017). Photos can provide a means of accessing cultural knowledge to highlight "*'the interconnectedness between places, rooms, areas and feelings, emotions, and associations'*" (McGregor, 2004d, p. 80).

In total, I conducted 17 individual interviews with nine SEUU staff members; two participants were not able to complete two interviews, so I modified my approach and

incorporated questions from both protocols. Among those interviewed were both SEUU staff directly responsible for new international student orientation event programming, and other key Main Campus partners who serve international students.

3.4 Data Analysis

Spatiality studies in Education tend to involve a variety of empirical and analytical methods. Some draw from other disciplines, like feminist and curriculum theory, as well as ethnographic and arts-based approaches (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Because these studies often generate large amounts of data from a myriad of sources, researchers must determine how to organize, describe, reduce, compare, and synthesize the data to interpret findings (Barab et. al., 2001; Edwards, 2011; Leander and Lovvorn, 2006; Logdlund, 2010; Page & Connell, 2011; Roth, 2006). To make sense of this study's data, I utilized thematic analysis (TA), as described by Braun & Clarke (2006) and Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun (2017). TA generally focuses on what is "told" in the data, such as participants' accounts of events or experiences, rather than elements of the telling of that information. With TA, "Data are interpreted in light of thematics developed by the investigator (influenced by prior and emergent theory...the data themselves...and other factors)" (Riessman, 2008, p. 54). Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 6) describe TA as

> a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.

While some analytic methods are more theoretically bounded, TA is more flexible, can be used within different frameworks, do different things within them and is suitable for analyzing a variety of data types (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et. al., 2017). It can be

implemented using an inductive, constructionist approach, wherein researchers "unpick" the surface of "reality" to explore how events, meanings, realities, and experiences "are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9). TA intends to "theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided" by socially producing meaning and experience between study participants and the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 14).

TA relates well to ANT studies, which eschews *a priori* notions of reducing or determining the character of actors and their relations related to the social world (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 1999, 2005; Law, 1992; Murdoch, 2006). Just as relational space and actor-networks do not always retain stable properties, exploring phenomena as they naturally occur in those spaces requires us to treat our data similarly, without predetermined and essentialized notions as much as possible. TA's inductive capabilities provides the opportunity to do just that and focus on coding and interpreting data without attempting to fit them into some pre-existing frame.

3.4.1 *Thematic Analysis in Six Steps*

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a six-step process to conducting TA: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for, reviewing, and defining, and naming themes from the generated codes, and producing the scholarship report. Though appearing linear, TA is recursive, and its analysis is iterative throughout the study, informing subsequent data generation and vice versa (Terry et. al., 2017).

3.4.1.1 Data Familiarization & Coding

Upon generating the data, I immediately began to carefully review them. I familiarized myself with their breadth and depth, creating initial thoughts and impressions and taking note of potential ideas for codes and patterns in next steps. No matter the format, I carefully looked over each datum searching for emerging meaning, patterns, or quirks (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et. al., 2017), noting codes that identified interesting features. I not only wanted to consider what the data might indicate at face value, but to also the latent content underneath the surface, like potential underlying ideas, conceptualizations, assumptions, and oddities.

To keep track of each code, I created a coding chart in Microsoft Excel where I could move them as needed, collate similar ones together into categories, and compare them against one another to determine which ones might fit under which category, if at all (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Code examples included people, objects, challenges, and instances representing time or duration. I considered some of these as "tracers", observing and following them over time to connect paths of events and actors within the orientation-network (Barab et. al., 2001; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Roth, 1996; Scoles, 2017). Throughout, I created analytic memos to explore codes, tracers, and categories, and their relation to one another. These reflections were useful sensitizing tools for approaching future interviews, observations, coding and analysis (Terry et. al., 2017).

3.4.1.2 Searching For & Reviewing Themes

Upon reviewing all generated data and codes into meaningful groups, I returned to comparing the codes and groups against one another to determine which may combine

into overarching themes. This development involved “combining, clustering or collapsing codes together into bigger or more meaningful patterns” (Terry et. al., 2017, p. 93). I created visual mind-maps to depict staff work practice network relations and develop themes, and reflected on relationships between codes, themes, and different levels of themes that emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Upon developing initial “candidate themes”, I reviewed them more deeply, considering which might fall under one theme and which may not have enough data to warrant standing alone as a theme.

Next, I completed two levels of thematic review to ensure that each theme was different from one another and that data made sense being grouped together. First, I examined the codes and associated data extracts under each theme to determine if they formed a “coherent pattern.” For themes whose codes and extracts did not appear coherent, I revisited them, compared them against others, and determined if they fit better elsewhere or should be discarded. Second, I re-read the data, not only to verify if the themes made sense, but to code missing data and refine the analysis as needed. I sought to confirm the interpretations’ validity vis-a-vis the entirety of data generated. Doing so, I developed a sense for what themes fit together, and the story they told about the data.

3.4.1.3 Defining Themes & Generating A Report

During the fifth step, I further “defined and refined” the confirmed themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), determining the core meaning of what each one was about and identified which data elements it captured. In doing so, I again reviewed the data to determine what story each theme told and how it contributed to the overall story to answer the research questions. I sought to clearly and succinctly define what each theme was and what it was not (Terry et. al., 2017). Each following chapter is an account,

supplemented by data extracts, that illustrates key themes that that answer the research questions of this dissertation.

3.5 Conducting Research During a Global Health Pandemic

This study is the network effect of an assemblage of actors that came into relations with one another over a period of time. As with any other network or assemblage, some actors became mediators that translated other actors in the unfolding of the project (Latour, 2005). The most prominent actor in this work was the coronavirus. COVID-19 served as an obligatory passage point (Callon, 1986; Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011; Latour, 1987) that shaped what work could be done in relation to the dissertation's goals, when it could be done, and in what formats. As a result, my work was in a constant state of becoming, as at any point different actors came into a unique constellation of relations to shape the dynamic unfolding of effects, which in turn contributed to other networks over time to eventually result in this dissertation.

Having to pivot to a virtual study was not without its challenges. Predominant among them was attempting to connect to and virtually interact with participants. Much of my correspondence with them occurred over email, which further extended our interactions over time compared to in-person conversations. Such extensions occurred in part due to some offices being understaffed at different points of the study, leaving remaining team members to take on additional roles. Magnifying staffing effects was the additional challenge of working within a mostly unfamiliar context. During the pandemic, most staff were largely confined to their homes. They had to juggle work and home/life responsibilities, and interact through computer screens to produce orientation

event programming, all without stable policy guidance. It often took up to two weeks or more, subsequent follow up emails, Microsoft Teams chats, and even telephone calls, before I received participant responses. This abrupt change may have also limited the number of staff who received word about my study or chose to participate in it.

Another challenge resulting from the pandemic revolved around the technological tools used to facilitate participant communication and interaction. Interviews via Microsoft Teams worked best when everyone possessed a microphone and webcam to simulate the in-person experience. While these tools are often built into computers, some participants had to borrow webcams for interviews. What is more, the Internet speed, simultaneously running computer applications, or different facets of Teams (e.g., screen sharing, chat, file transfer), together impacted our ability to have an organic conversation, evidenced by slight delays in speech and turn taking, or skipping audio feeds, and delays in screen sharing. Such issues led to requests for individuals to repeat themselves to ensure understanding. In a rarer instances, Teams' recording feature failed, leaving only part of the interview recorded. Similar challenges were amplified during observations of staff meetings, particularly when more than three staff members were present.

3.6 My Positionality

My positionality influenced how I approached this study, the decisions I made, and why I chose this work. As part of my current professional role as a staff member at SEUU, I empower and support international students in pursuing their personal, academic, and professional goals. Such goals include pursuing academic success, graduating on time, exploring career options, and considering high impact experiences

like internships. In my role, I often observe students navigating unique challenges that influence their adjustment to U.S. higher education, their classroom performance, and their persistence to graduation. Discussion of these challenges has led to calls for improving the support provided to internationals students (Andrade, 2006; Banjong, 2015; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). Because of my professional experience, as well as the trend of colleges and universities recruiting more international students, I want to better understand what SEUU international student services look like, and how that understanding can be used to (re)imagine how these students could be supported differently through initiatives like new international student orientation.

My current position and prior international education experience provides a unique perspective for this study. Through my role, I have developed positive, trusted relationships with campus staff members who interact with international students in a variety of ways, including those in the International Center. These relationships I believe, contributed to a willingness to share honest feedback and provide artifacts to review. Furthermore, my background sensitizes me to concepts that contribute to this study's conceptual framework. As a former education abroad student and advisor, I am familiar with global student mobility and adjustment, having personally experienced adjusting to a new educational system and culture. Additionally, after working in higher education for more than 10 years, I understand how U.S. colleges generally operate.

While my positionality provides advantages to this project, it has required me to exercise an increased caution. My professional roles, as well as my personality, tend to center around interactions with people within physical spaces. Therefore, I consciously paid attention to non-human actors or objects and reflected on how they may contribute

to how staff constructed and enacted orientation event programming. Additionally, because most of my prior work experience has almost entirely taken place in physical settings, I had to be conscious of the shift to a virtual setting, particularly what circulations took place among people and material actors. Technologies-in-use, like email, Microsoft Teams, and videos can often be blackboxed. I avoided urges to blackbox these and other actors, many of which I used in the past.

Relatedly, I was reflexive when conducting data generation and analysis. Because of my prior experience, as well as the influence of coworkers, colleagues, and the media, it can be easy to operate with assumptions about the study population or relationships between different actors. Using such *a priori* considerations can contribute to biased interpretations. Proceeding with reflexivity and self-questioning, particularly when writing memos and analyzing data, helped guard against making assumptions and ensured that I accounted for participants' perspectives. Last, I considered how my relationships with participants might affect interviews and observations with them. Because I knew some participants, I did not wish for our connection to make them assume that I already possessed knowledge required to understand them. Therefore, during interviews when participants used terminology that they may have assumed I knew, I asked them to clarify or elaborate.

3.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the assumptions I used to approach this project, and its design as a mini-ethnographic case study. I discussed the case site and study participants, addressed the ways in which I generated data, and detailed how I used TA to code,

analyze, and interpret that data. Given the unique nature of this study, I shared the challenges present in conducting a dissertation during a global health pandemic. Last, I reflected on my positionality and delineated issues I kept in mind to minimize potential for bias and strengthen validity and trustworthiness.

The following chapters recount noteworthy, on-going SEUU staff activities that produced both interest and tracers during fieldwork and data analysis. Within each chapter, I use thick description and anecdotes to analyze work practices assembled in these activities and describe key ways that spatiality contributed to them. By paying attention to the human and non-human actors and their associations within the activities, I illuminate materiality's role in the orientation's development and implementation. Acknowledging change and the primary actor responsible for it within the COVID-19 context, I explore how it has contributed to the shift in staff work practices related to "revising" the orientation event programming for the fall 2020 term.

CHAPTER 4. SPATIALITY OF SEUU'S NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ORIENTATION

As mentioned previously, ISS offices frequently provide an array of programming to support international students. Perhaps the most important program for this population is the new international student orientation, which tends to occur around the beginning of each term when students arrive at their college's campus, prior to the start of courses. This chapter profiles SEUU's new international student orientation prior to the COVID-19 global health pandemic. I argue that this orientation, as seen primarily by those closest to it, is considered an event, and as such possesses its own spatiality that shapes staff practices in event planning and implementation. In the first section, I present a composite picture of the orientation, including its component elements, goals, conceptions of success. I follow by introducing this event as sociomateral constellation of entities which result in staff members' conception of "orientation." In the second section, I further explore the orientation event as an actor-network and discuss how the process of translation contributes to its unfolding, and ordering of staff work practices, particularly through network effects of agency and power. In doing so, I highlight key human and material actors who serve as obligatory passage points and immutable mobiles to mediate subsequent translations among the orientation actor-network. This section focuses mostly on notions associated with variations of "traditional ANT" and its purpose to understand both how the new international student orientation comes together and into being, as well as how it becomes both stable and durable over time (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 1987, 2005; Law, 1992; Mifsud, 2020; Murdoch, 1998, 2006).

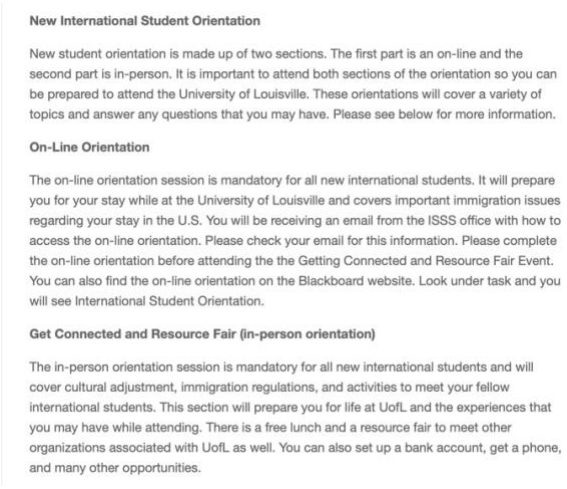
4.1 New International Student Orientation Event

Thomas: ...talk to me a little bit about...what the international orientation was...

Madeline: What I've understood it to be is that the students get some pre-arrival presentations to do, and they have to take a quiz and then there's a couple hour meet and greet with lunch. And I think they still do the...resource fair...I think they [ISO Office] had a formula that they just used and had no...it's not changed in 11 and a half years, except for the fact that it's less than it used to be.

This shared description by Business College staff member, Madeline, represents one general understanding of SEUU's new international student orientation, as it was prior to the Fall 2020 term. Indeed, according to SEUU's ISO orientation webpage, the orientation consisted of two mandatory portions, a pre-arrival, virtual piece and a post-arrival, in-person piece on the Main Campus. This information is consistent with ISO Director Geoffrey's description:

> So, we would do the online orientation. We've done that for quite a while now, several years, maybe five or six years. And then, there was an in-person part, which I think is important. And really, that's orientation, but we call it a "Get Connected."



New International Student Orientation

New student orientation is made up of two sections. The first part is an on-line and the second part is in-person. It is important to attend both sections of the orientation so you can be prepared to attend the University of Louisville. These orientations will cover a variety of topics and answer any questions that you may have. Please see below for more information.

On-Line Orientation

The on-line orientation session is mandatory for all new international students. It will prepare you for your stay while at the University of Louisville and covers important immigration issues regarding your stay in the U.S. You will be receiving an email from the ISSS office with how to access the on-line orientation. Please check your email for this information. Please complete the on-line orientation before attending the the Getting Connected and Resource Fair Event. You can also find the on-line orientation on the Blackboard website. Look under task and you will see International Student Orientation.

Get Connected and Resource Fair (in-person orientation)

The in-person orientation session is mandatory for all new international students and will cover cultural adjustment, immigration regulations, and activities to meet your fellow international students. This section will prepare you for life at UofL and the experiences that you may have while attending. There is a free lunch and a resource fair to meet other organizations associated with UofL as well. You can also set up a bank account, get a phone, and many other opportunities.

Figure 4.1 ISO 's New International Student Orientation Webpage

For many colleges and universities across the U.S., new international students must participate in an "orientation". While they may differ from one another, they frequently involve a purpose, set times, durations, location, and various people and materials in order to occur (NAFSA, August 2019). SEUU's orientation aligns with NAFSA's definition in that it has two times, durations, and locations, as well as more than one set of people and materials. Given these attributes, I believe SEUU's orientation can be considered an "event" and utilize Page and Connell's (2012) definition to ground my work in this dissertation. I believe the orientation can be seen as a planned meeting or convention type event in that it assembles "people for the purpose of exchanging information, debate or discussion, consensus or decisions, education, and relationship building, schedule alone or in conjunction with other events" (Berridge, 2007).

4.1.1 *Pre-Arrival, Online Orientation Component*

The pre-arrival portion of the new international student orientation was housed and presented online via SEUU's Blackboard VLE. To access the online orientation content, students must have already received their university username and password upon being admitted to the institution. Students were instructed to complete the online, asynchronous portion of the orientation prior to arriving to the U.S. and Main Campus. Upon logging in to Blackboard and selecting the appropriate organization from a menu of items, students would be taken to a landing page where upon they would see an announcement posted, welcoming students to the university, describing the orientation content, and instructing students to select "orientation" from the menu to begin. Within the orientation menu, were a set of sub-menus including a "How to Get Started" menu and a menu for each of topics to be covered in the orientation, including Welcome,

Arriving to the USA and [SEUU city], U.S. Immigration Laws, Empowerment and Finances, and a Virtual Tour [of SEUU's campus]. Each module contained an embedded five-to-six-minute video and a quiz containing questions designed to assess students' comprehension of the module content. For example, in the Welcome module video, students would see a host of friendly-looking faces, beginning with SEUU's President.

In their brief message, the President shared how they were an international student who came to the U.S. for higher education and also said, "...like you...I am part of the [SEUU] family…" While showing photos of international students across campus, the President stated, "You're welcome, you're embraced, and you're made to feel like you've always been here," and provided advice based on their own experience as an international student years ago. In the subsequent portions of the Welcome video, other international-oriented individuals introduced themselves. A current international student greeted students and shared that "we're one big family who helps each other succeed." Standing outside in the video, she then introduced the Main Campus building where international students would find the ISO, the camera panning to include the building's name sign, and explained how the ISO could be a resource for students.

Following her portion were separate brief clips of each of the three current ISO staff members, who each introduced themselves and their professional role. In his clip, Geoffrey expressed to students that the ISO is responsible for issuing F-1 and J-1 immigration documents, and that the office would act as advisor and advocate on behalf of the international student population, helping them navigate institutional and immigration systems while at the university. They also offer programming to assist students in acclimating to SEUU.

Upon watching the video, students proceeded further in the module to click on the Welcome Quiz. In the Welcome Quiz, questions were free response oriented and asked, “What is your major?” and “Why did you choose to come to [SEUU]?” In other module quizzes, questions were primarily multiple choice and based on content from module videos, as one method to assess student comprehension. According to the “How to Get Started” section, students could watch the videos and take the quizzes as many times as they wished but needed to pass the quiz to be able to proceed to subsequent modules.

When students finished one module, they could click the “Orientation” link on the left navigation menu and then click the link of the next module displaying in the sub-menu. Alternatively, except for the Welcome module, when students finished with one module, they could simply click a hyperlink at the bottom of that module to be taken to the next one. Upon completing all modules, students were re-routed to the last module’s landing page, where they were notified that they had completed the International Student Online Orientation and could view and print their certificate.

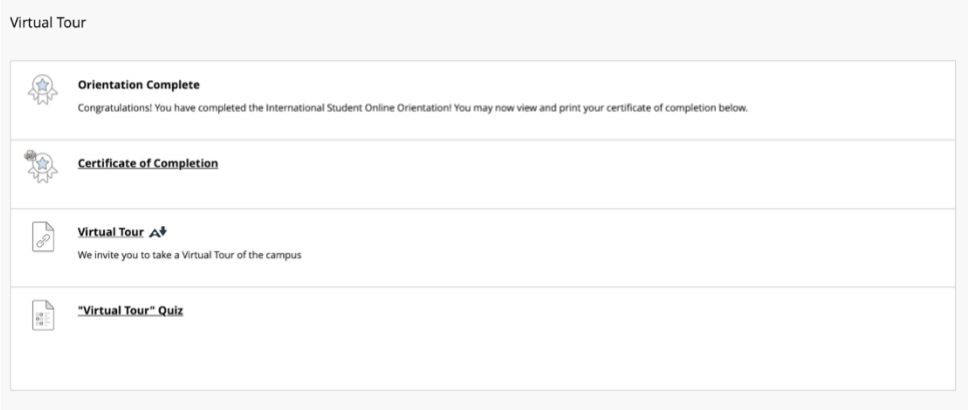


Figure 4.2 Online Orientation Certificate of Completion in Blackboard VLE

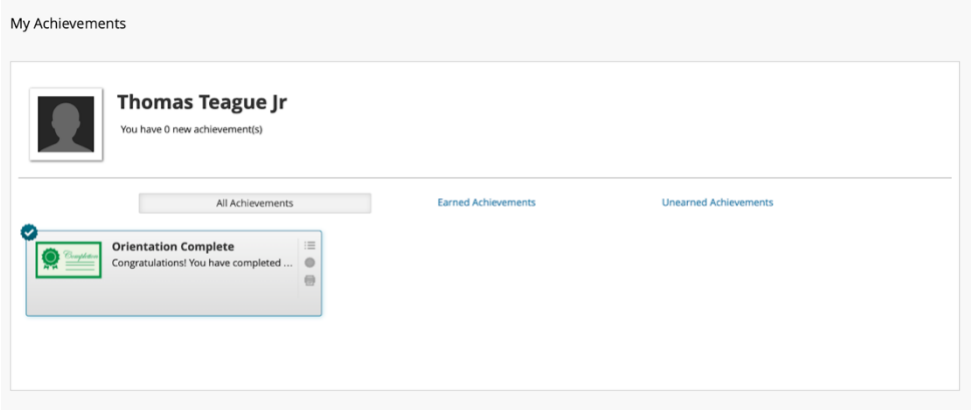


Figure 4.3 Downloadable Certificate of Completion in Blackboard VLE

The purpose of this online portion of the orientation, according to the ISO website, is to prepare international students for their time in the U.S., and provide information about immigration issues and documentation. Admitted international students receive instructions for how to access this information prior to arriving to campus, as the ISO must work with the university's Online Instructional Office to assign students to the orientation organization in the Blackboard VLE. Without the pre-assignments, the organization would not appear on students' Blackboard. All online orientation content is asynchronous and not time-zone dependent, meaning students can review and complete them anytime and anywhere according to their own schedules.

4.1.2 *Post-Arrival, On-Campus Orientation Component*

Shortly after international students arrive in the U.S. and the university, the ISO requires them to attend a four-to-five hour, in-person orientation event prior to the official start of the academic term. The ISO calls this event "Get Connected" and per Geoffrey:

> It just allows them [international students] to meet resources on campus, meet their counterparts, their colleagues, meet faculty and staff in other departments, meet resources such as... We help them get their cell phones set up, social security cards they may need, all those kinds of things we do during that. We do an

> icebreaker, so the students get to work together, try to meet each other. And then, the cultural adjustment piece...and the past two years have actually been [Walter], come in and give a small presentation, walk through them. They do a small activity with him and do a couple things like that….We'd get them lunch.

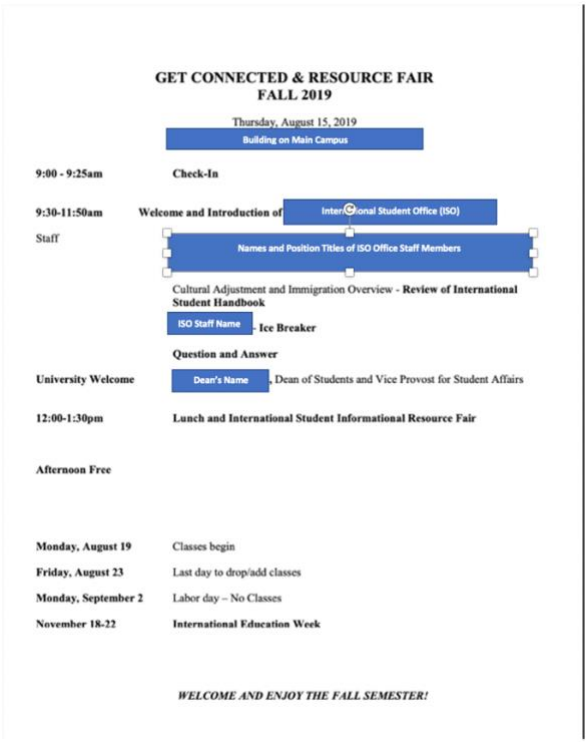
This in-person event occurs on the Main Campus each semester, typically in a large room ahead of the fall term and in a smaller room before the spring term, given SEUU generally admits more international students before the former versus the latter. During the event (see Figure 4.7), there are several activities involving different university staff, including all ISO members, and even the Dean of Students. Whereas the online, pre-arrival orientation portion appears unidirectional in interaction (i.e., staff presenting to students with no embedded interactive elements), the Get Connected event provides for multi-directional interaction, be it staff to students, and vice versa, or students with each other. During the event, students hear from ISO staff and hear about the function and services of the office. They also engage with former international student and current staff member in Graduate Enrollment, Walter, about cultural adjustment. Prior to lunch and an informational resource fair, students hear words of welcome from a member of the university's administration and leadership team, the Dean of Students.

At the Get Connected event, students sit with each other around round tables, which is preferred by some staff like Walter, given the way his presentation unfolds:

> ...I need to... I have separate tables so that... I mix people to sit together. And I always prefer a round table, I never prefer seating like a Tetris style because Tetris style, you're just a monologue and everybody's looking at you. But round table your body language changes, you're looking at other person. You cannot talk but still you're looking at the person and what the person is doing. And you're only learning from other people. And then you present the presentation then they can easily introduce. If it's a Tetris table, we turn back and say, "Hello, this is me.

This is Thomas." But when you're already at a round table, then you could do.

During his interview, Walter, conveyed how round tables better facilitate interaction given the way their shape configures student posture and sight of one another. Such a configuration makes it easier for students to turn to and interact with each other, such as when introducing themselves, while also being able to view and interact with presenters.



GET CONNECTED & RESOURCE FAIR
FALL 2019

Thursday, August 15, 2019
Building on Main Campus

9:00 - 9:25am	**Check-In**
9:30-11:50am	**Welcome and Introduction of** International Student Office (ISO)
Staff	Names and Position Titles of ISO Office Staff Members
	Cultural Adjustment and Immigration Overview - **Review of International Student Handbook**
	ISO Staff Name - **Ice Breaker**
	Question and Answer
University Welcome	Dean's Name - Dean of Students and Vice Provost for Student Affairs
12:00-1:30pm	**Lunch and International Student Informational Resource Fair**
Afternoon Free	
Monday, August 19	Classes begin
Friday, August 23	Last day to drop/add classes
Monday, September 2	Labor day – No Classes
November 18-22	**International Education Week**

WELCOME AND ENJOY THE FALL SEMESTER!

Figure 4.4 Fall 2019 ISO In-Person New International Orientation Agenda

After the more presentational portions of the Get Connected event, students have lunch and interact with each other, as well as visit different resource tables to learn about resources and offices on campus, student organizations, and also consult external resources including the city's Social Security Office, local banks, and the city's Department of Public Safety office for driver's license information. Business College

staff member, Madeline, likes the resource fair and visits it with her arriving international exchange students each term:

> There'd be multiple banks, multiple phone companies…there's a lot of campus offices...sometimes it'd be really big... There's just a lot of people that if they had questions, I could walk the student up to say, "We've had this conversation, they have this question." And if they couldn't answer it, they could redirect me. Or they could say, "Send me an email so when I get back to the office, I can handle that"...We could take care of things immediately, versus me being like, "Okay, we've got to get you to this office, or you've got to go talk to this person. Or I can't help you with that because of privacy things now."

For Madeline, students could address immediate priorities that could impact their ability to easily function in a new country and ask questions all in one place. Moreover, she could assist students by liaising between them and resource staff, since students may not be familiar with what questions to ask or steps to take to obtain information or complete any necessary items, like opening a bank account or obtaining a U.S. cell phone.

4.1.3 *Orientation Goals*

When asked about the orientation's goals, staff members shared a variety of responses. ISO staff designed their orientation around goals such as creating student awareness about support resources, as one member, Trisha put it:

> Trisha: Well, if we have a clear goal in the piece of orientation, we were able to create a network within that university that the students will know who support them…
>
> Thomas So…the goal of the orientation right now is to really create that network between students and all offices so that they know who's supporting them and who they can reach out to and vice versa.

Trisha: Yes. And the other piece about online orientation that I think is very important is how this office creates a network…

ISO Director, Geoffrey shared similar, yet broader goals that have shaped the orientation's format:

> Usually, our goals are something like...compliance with the federal government and university policy. That would probably be number one, let's get that correct. Number two would be programming, how do we acclimate students, how do we make them feel welcome?...

However, staff outside the ISO, with varying experience interacting and working with international students, expressed more variant conceptions of orientation goals. Beyond ensuring students arrived safely and are all in compliance with immigration regulations, Heather, a current staff member in SEUU's Residence Life department and former ISO student worker, believes the orientation's goal is to have international students:

> integrate into the campus community...any kind of connection is going to impact their first few days here and even their academic experience. If they're less stressed because they made a new friend who just went through the same process as they did to get here, they're going to do better academically and likely socially.

Business College staff, Sarah Jane, believes the goals are to make students feel comfortable and included, and provide them with information at their fingertips about what is needed to be successful in their studies and in the U.S. Her colleague, Dan, who worked in international student services at a previous institution, thinks the goals of any orientation are acculturation and retention. However, Madeline, who works with international students within the same college, believe ISO's goals are more uni-faceted:

> I think the goal of our orientation is solely to take care of all the legal nuts and bolts. Everything they need to cover with them, I think that's what they do. And

> then I think the little in person meeting they have is just so that they can meet people quickly.

Consequently, the staff perspectives of new international student goals vary among staff members, both within and beyond the ISO, who creates and coordinates orientation event planning, development, and implementation. Staff hope that the orientation will do everything from providing information, fostering student interaction, and spreading awareness, to facilitating social interactions, and lessening student stress levels.

4.1.4 *A Sociomaterial Constellation of Orientation Actors*

In conversing with study participants and reviewing related artifacts, I noticed that the term "orientation" seemed to be used in a way that attributed inherent properties and attributes to the event. They appeared to refer to "orientation" as if it were an objective *thing*. However, when asking participants to draw a map of all the "entities" they work with to accomplish their everyday work with international students, I noticed that they began to unpack the "thingness" of orientation and the work they do related to it. This taking-for-granted is not unheard of to relational spatial researchers, particularly those using ANT-like concepts. They argue that many people often "blackbox" entities, like events, objects, and even other humans, seeing them more for what they *do* rather than what *constitutes* them (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 1987).

After asking participants to take note of what and who is involved in helping them to accomplish their work with international students, a few took a long pause before beginning to draw. To that end, participants' relational maps were very revealing, illuminating a vast constellation of objects, people, and other "actors" involved in

contributing to the orientation. Relational maps varied in shape and detail, with ISO staff members' being the most nuanced compared to those who worked in tangential offices of varying relevancy. Observing this difference in mapping by staffing units, appeared to relate to direct work efforts expended in planning, developing, and implementing the orientation. Trisha and Geoffrey's maps were the most detailed. However, Trisha is primarily responsible for coordinating the orientation from start to finish. And Geoffrey, her supervisor, regularly interacts with her and invites her to share her work with the ISO office staff so they can discuss it together. In his words:

> The first thing I think about when I think about…basically anything honestly in the office is the team...and we're all trying to reach for the same goal. Orientation's a big program…For me, it's giving everyone a voice and everyone knowing their role…We may sit down and say, "Hey…what food are we getting? Who's presenting? What are you doing?...Who do we need to invite? Who are the primary folks that would be responsible to acclimate international students to the university? What does the resource fair look like? What do we need?"

Staff members in other units, like Sarah Jane, tended to produce less detailed maps, much due to their more limited involvement with the orientation. Sarah Jane works mostly with the ISO through seeking counsel on immigration and visa related issues, since she works with new graduate Business students planning to participate in internships during their academic program. Nonetheless, whether more or less directly involved in the orientation event, staff members interact with a myriad of human and non-human actors, each contributing in some part to a sociomaterial constellation, from which the unfolding and becoming of the new international student orientation event results.

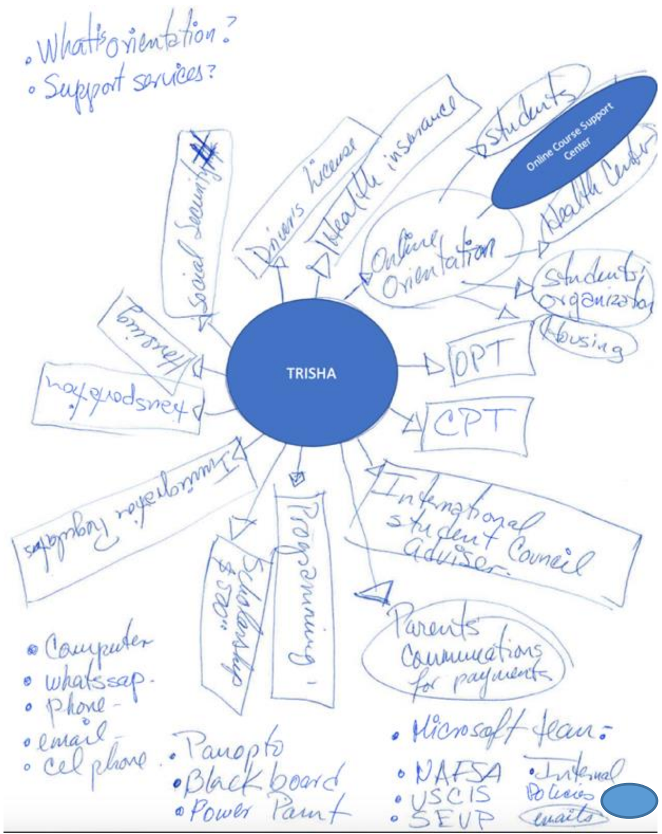


Figure 4.5 Trisha's Relational Map for Interview #1

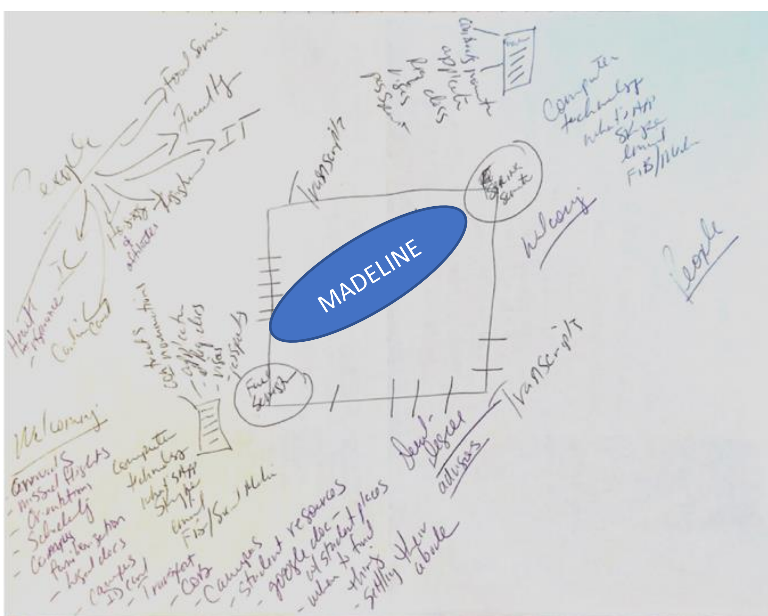


Figure 4.6 Madeline's Relational Map for Interview #1

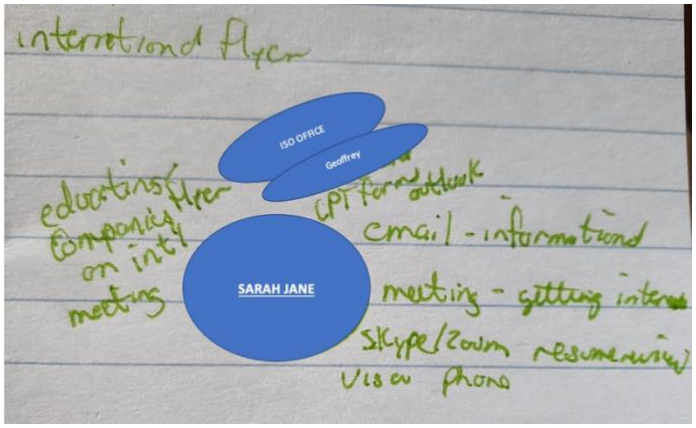


Figure 4.7 Sarah Jane's Relational Map for Interview #1

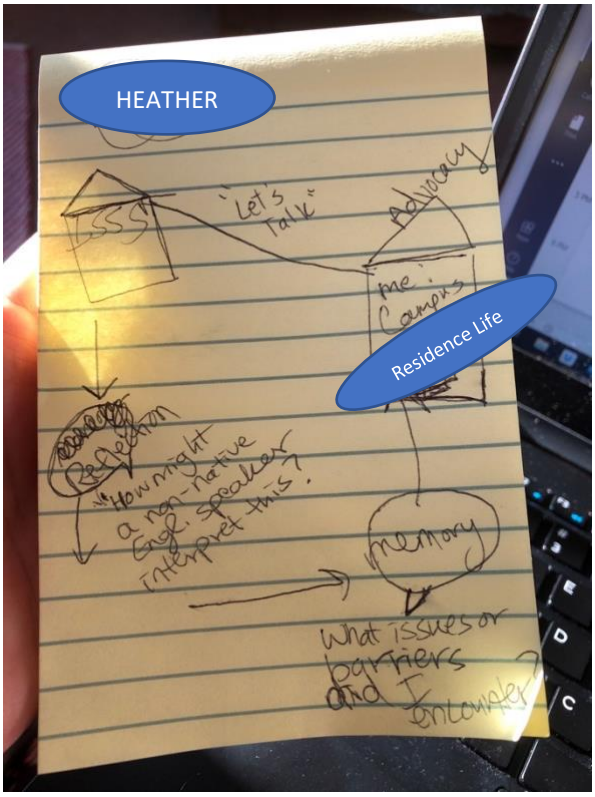


Figure 4.8 Heather's Relational Map for Interview #1

4.1.4.1 Human Actors

Despite the ISO being responsible for the new international student orientation, their staff members are not the only people whose work contributes to the planning,

development, and implementation of the event. Participant relational maps hinted to staff in other units as supporting orientation efforts in some way, shape, or form. For example, Trisha, noted on her map several units with whom she worked, particularly to gather information to include in the orientation content to present to students:

> Thomas: With the orientation piece, who all have you interacted with in trying to either prepare or plan or to actually implement the orientation?
>
> Trisha: … the [Online Instructional Office] because they help us to load it [the online orientation content] into Blackboard...What else? Also, with the Health Center, the health insurance.
>
> Thomas: Is that from an informational helping to update information?
>
> Trisha: Yes, and how they [international students] need to log into it, create their account, how they're going to be charged...And also, what else? Let me see. [Residence Life]. Oh, the student organizations because what I'm trying to do is present it during the orientation so the students can also reach to other organizations so they can create some connection. That has been the purpose, for them to get involved in some ways. And who else? Let me think…Health, transportation and [residence life].

Later in her first interview, Trisha spoke about how she interacts with staff from external organizations, like the Social Security and Driver's License offices, who may not always treat international students well. Therein, she talks with her connections in these offices, developed from her previous role working with immigrants within the local community, to understand their experiences with international students and to establish direct lines of support. So that, in her words, they can create "a network to work together" so they support each other in their work and make it easier for students by providing direct information for whom they can refer to when needed. Other people she interacted with in some capacity related to orientation were current students, as well as new students and

their parents. It appears that Trisha attributed much of her relational map primarily to the online, pre-arrival orientation component via Blackboard, as well as information gathering for planning and developing orientation content.

While noting similar individuals and units on his own relational map, Geoffrey mentioned additional individuals he or other ISO staff interact with to help further the orientation into being. For example, he specifically noted individuals from Undergraduate Admissions Office, including an undergraduate recruiter and the international admissions officer, inferring that they are closely related to the orientation event.

> Geoffrey: [Recruiter] does a lot of the recruitment over in undergraduate currently, and he does global initiative things at the university as well…And then, [International Admissions Counselor] is the primary person responsible for admissions of international students...Their application, all the regular kind of materials even a domestic student would need goes to Admissions first, either graduate or undergraduate. And then, we get a referral. And then, we get the documents we need to process immigration documents.
>
> Thomas: Okay. So, part of that is informing them of the orientation programming information through their packets.
>
> Geoffrey: Yep. And then, it's not uncommon for maybe [International Admissions Counselor] to walk over on our day of orientation because she works closely with them as well. So, for her to meet them and say hello and those kinds of things.

Furthermore, he mentioned two staff members from the Graduate School, the Acting Dean and Walter. In addition to these units and their staff, Geoffrey included other individuals that he or his office works with in some way, such as: the Dean of Students to share a welcome message with new students, campus building staff to assist with reserving and setting up the physical space and its technologies, and catering staff. He

even mentioned other campus partners, such as the tutoring and cultural centers, and external partners like hotels and taxis to assist with temporary transportation and lodging.

While ISO staff shared a variety of human actors with whom they interacted in some fashion to create the orientation event, conversations with staff external to that office provided additional examples of human actor involvement. For instance, when preparing for his cultural adjustment presentation and related materials, Walter in Graduate Enrollment consults colleagues at other institutions to ensure he is implementing best practices and up-to-date information. Alternatively, Madeline interacts with her exchange institution partners to identify which students will be attending SEUU, ensure contracts are up-to-date, and advise on the student nomination and admission process. Sarah Jane interacts with prospective and current employer internship providers to advise them on opportunities for hiring international students as interns, sharing with them important immigration and visa regulations that she confirms prior with ISO staff. Last, Dan spoke of other individuals who relate in a minor way to orientation programming work- those who sit on the Global Recruitment Committee. This committee is actually a subgroup of a larger university-wide committee responsible for implementing SEUU's current strategic plan, of which an increase in international student enrollment is a goal.

> Dan: It's led by [the Dean of Students]…I would say there's someone from most corners of campus on that committee and our whole goal is, how do we one, bring in all of the efforts that are going into recruitment outside...How do we share these resources, but also what's the strategy? What are our goals for international recruitment? I think it's just a place to articulate those ideas...
>
> Thomas: …Where do conversations that you're a part of at the university intersect with this idea of orientation for international students?...

Dan: ...I guess really only in the recruitment committee is where I've heard these conversations.

4.1.4.2 Non-Human, Material Actors

While interview participants' relational maps and conversations noted a variety of human involvement relating to orientation planning, development, and implementation, they also revealed a diverse array of non-human actors. These material entities can be grouped primarily around three distinct themes: Communication-related technologies, informational, content-based objects (including policies and procedures), and physical spaces. Many of these materials mediated the efforts of different staff members and their interactions with others, thereby shaping their work and its outcomes. For instance, the majority of interview participants recalled how technologies like computers, email, and telephones enabled them to complete their work, and placed these items on their relational maps. Moreover, several staff members, particularly those who work more closely with international students as a significant part of their professional role, also mentioned utilizing Internet-based softwares like Skype, Zoom, Power Point, Panopto (for video creation), WhatsApp, or Blackboard. These technologies enable staff to directly communicate with international students, either asynchronously or synchronously, across time zones and geographic locations.

What is more, staff members shared informational resources they consulted to guide their work practices. These entities included different professional organizations' websites, government and university policies, and even staff members' own personal experiences. For instance, Trisha and Walter often consulted professional organizations, like NAFSA: the Association of International Educators, NAGAP: the Association for

Graduate Enrollment Management, or governmental websites which provide guidance specifically for international students, like USCIS: United States Citizen and Immigration Services. Walter explains his intention behind consulting these resources:

> I go to various data centers…NAFSA…NAGAP…NACAC, ICAC, their websites. It's important for me to just make sure that if a student goes outside our orientation, is he getting a different message? And that means we're doing something wrong…I don't want the students to come...So, I say, "Hey, USCIS says this because of these conditions, and we don't have these conditions in the institution, so you cannot work." We are preparing ourselves.

Building consistency in messaging, as well as providing the most accurate, up-to-date information tailored to students' needs is essential to contribute toward facilitating students' acclimation to the institutional and local communities. SEUU Residence Life staff member, Heather, who was a former student working in the ISO during her undergraduate studies, stressed the importance of localized, need-based information:

> To me it's a very localized thing...Materials need to have specific information about what you foreshadow to be specific information needs of students…So, one thing that we did…was...we foresaw that a lot of students would have English language issues so showing them resources like the free public library, giving them contact information, emails and even directions. Those kinds of things I think of when I think of orientation. How do I orient you through particularized information about your local community?

It appears that much of the particularized information that staff members use to shape the new international student orientation comes directly from their personal experiences and backgrounds. In her relational map delineating the work that she does related to orientation, Heather noted her memory as a crucial player in how she proceeds with creating messaging content for ISO staff to use with international students. Having spent several years teaching English as a Second Language in the Middle East, acclimating to a new culture and learning a foreign language, she uses her experience as a guiding light:

> ...if I'm crafting a particular email or... responding to an inquiry from an international student…I reflect on my experiences...how might a non-native English speaker interpret this? How can I make it more clear? What kind of jargon am I using that could be confusing?...What issues or barriers did I encounter there…For example, the Internet café concept, how might that impact an international student who says, "Well, I didn't get my assignment email. I missed the deadline to cancel and it's too late. I already got a fee."…So, trying to reflect on what could've ... what kind of exceptional circumstances could cause their issues and then it goes back to housing and advocacy, so I try to just articulate those issues and advocate to the [unit] director and to my supervisor.

Similarly, Trisha uses her own experience to design the content for the orientation. Years ago, she came to SEUU to pursue doctoral studies as part of the U.S. Fulbright Scholar program and has remained in the country working in various professional roles. In her first interview, Trisha explained that she is in charge of new international student orientation, and as an international student at SEUU herself, she experienced how it was perceived from someone outside of the ISO. Her experience and perspective sensitizes her to any gaps present in the event, and ways in which those gaps could be filled.

Lastly, staff members also consult available relevant research, as well as institutional initiatives, and balance those with their personal experiences working with international students, as Geoffrey articulates:

> ...if we were to look at the research, which we do often, it's telling to some degree, but it's not telling to others. And what I mean by that is you work with a certain population long enough; you get the bill of what works for them and what doesn't…And we hear a lot of language about coming into a university and feeling this community, and I think that's important. But what I think is even more important is just setting them straight and giving them the answers quickly…they have more to juggle than their domestic counterparts, and they had to have that information disseminated faster, if that makes any sense. So, I think that's always a priority. That's not really ever talked about in the literature.

In his relational map, Geoffrey noted the word "welcoming" around the "Blackboard" bubble, referring to the online, pre-arrival portion of the new international student orientation. Reviewing that orientation content, there is a Welcome module, whereby the SEUU's president, a current international student, and all ISO staff mention words of welcome, family, and community in their video messages to these new students. The content of these messages appear to reinforce and flow from larger institutional sentiments, as represented in key university documents, such as current SEUU's strategic plan and diversity plan. Within these documents, the university emphasizes "inclusiveness" in its mission and values, as well as being a community of care, where everyone is a part of the university family and is celebrated irrespective of their identity.

Lastly, some staff members listed physical spaces on the Main Campus that contributed to orientation-related work. In his relational map, for example, Geoffrey listed three key physical spaces important to the new international student orientation: the ISO and the buildings where the Get Connected orientation event is held for the fall and spring terms. In their email communication with students, as well as on their website and in the International Student Handbook, ISO staff reference these buildings and for what purposes students should visit them (i.e., ISO for guidance or questions, and checking in upon arrival to the U.S.; subsequent buildings for Get Connected events). Moreover, Geoffrey listed "Conference room meetings" on his map, indicating its importance as a space where ISO staff, student workers, graduate assistants, and volunteers regularly gather around a large table to discuss relevant initiatives.

4.1.5 *Sociomaterial Constellations of Work Performance*

In discussing the characteristics and elements of SEUU's new international student orientation event and describing the human and material entities involved in enacting it, I argue that without them both the event would not come to exist in and of itself. That is, the orientation is not some entity that possesses inherent *a priori* qualities. Rather, it is a "heterogeneous assemblage", or network, of human and non-human actors, which associate into a particular constellation of relations to produce what we identify as "orientation" and its spatiality. As Bruno Latour (2005) noted, social ties and relations zigzag among both human and object connections within a network configuration, thereby resulting in the production of an event, process, policy, etc. That is, the social between people is inseparable from the material, and many entities as we see them could not exist without non-human objects (Latour, 2005). Therefore, the new international student orientation is "performed" into reality through a vast web of heterogeneous material and social practices (Law, 2007). This performance can be traced through a series of translations, whereby human and material "actors" are enrolled and mobilized into specific configurations to produce the orientation as a "network effect". I now turn to explore translation and its generated network effects, as they relate to the orientation.

4.2 Translations & Geometries of Power, and Their Role

As mentioned above, new international student orientation may be blackboxed in that some people may take for granted all the components required to come together to produce what we frequently see at face value. However, viewing the orientation event from a relational, spatial perspective can enable us to better understand how it unfolds

and comes into being. One process useful in approaching the orientation from this perspective is translation.

Not only does this process help us trace the actors and actor-networks that get translated into action, but it provides for the opportunity to identify particular effects like agency and power. When we understand the translations involved in staff members' enacting the orientation, we can identify which actors within the network contingently emerge as powerful and have more agency to enroll and mobilize others into particular action. To explore the notion of translation and its role in the orientation as an emergent performance of associated human-material relations, I present a composite vignette of ISO staff member Trisha, the work she enacts to plan, develop, and implement the pre-arrival, online portion of the orientation. While more traditional notions of ANT view actor-networks and their component entities as working to create a sense of order and stabilized organization that durable over time, in constructing this vignette, I acknowledge that Trisha's actions may not necessarily take place in a particular order, but rather may occur as different actors circulate to and from across the network.

To reiterate Connell and Page's (2012) perspective, the new international student orientation is an event. It is a temporary experience, based on a unique configuration of location and timing, design, and themes, which are "created and complemented" by participants, spectators, and organisers" (p. 11-12). To that end, much of the work practices Trisha performs both impacts and is impacted by other human and non-human actors, represented in several of the themes Getz (2012) refers to in his Event Studies model. For instance, Trisha is primarily responsible for the orientation event's management, which includes driving initial planning and design efforts, incorporating

different stakeholders, and identifying and utilizing various resources and management systems. To aid her in the decisions she makes and actions she takes, she considers different antecedents that, in turn, play into how the event can be managed and designed. Such antecedents could be international students' needs, the work contexts in which staff find themselves, and even cultural or social influences present among different societies (e.g., proliferation of digital consumption of and interaction with information within higher education orientation spheres). Trisha also considers different patterns and processes, like new students' locations across time zones, government guidance and policy trends, and even how orientations may have been organized in the past.

The following composite vignette details much of Trisha's work in her own words:

> I'm in charge of the online orientation…as an international student, I've experienced how it's perceived from somebody outside the office…Having an online orientation, particularly for [new] international students, is important because they can also learn about immigration regulations that affect…them.
>
> We use videos, pictures and emails pretty much…We use Panopto…or even on the PowerPoint, easier to update the info and create something very short... So, in that manner has been very good but we need to keep updating the information. So that's something that is time-consuming but at the same time when the students are requesting or make an incentive they also teach us what is needed, or what is changing…
>
> We also work with the [Online Instructional Office] because they help us to load it [online orientation content] into Blackboard. They support us in the process of using Panopto. Furthermore, we work with the Health Center, the health insurance, from an informational stance to help with updating information and content: how they need to log into it, create their account, how they're going to be charged, why they have to use it…What else?...That's pretty much…We work with quite a few people on campus to create the information for our orientation… we look at NAFSA…Also, USCIS website and SEVIS.
>
> …the videos, so the students will have access to them when they also have access on Internet or anytime when they can do it…if they are here, or they are in their

> countries. So that's the benefit…We also do a welcoming international student handbook for which we may use Adobe, Microsoft Word and Publisher.
>
> Geoffrey assists where he can, asking "How can I help? What do you need from me? So, the introductory video for the online orientation, do we need to update that? Let me know. I can do that." He sends out a welcoming note to…all the new students…And then…wherever he can fill in and help basically is what he tries to do, thinking "What do they need from me to be successful?" And some of that may be reaching out to someone higher up. Maybe we need a specific day, it's booked. How can he help work this out?

In this vignette, several translations are simultaneously occurring across space. For example, Trisha speaks to the topics and themes that are generally covered in the online orientation materials: Immigration regulations, as well as information concerning student housing, health and health insurance, transportation, and student connection. Much of these topics relate to compliance issues international students must understand in order to avoid deportation and remain in the U.S. to continue their studies. Trisha mentioned how she refers to resources, such as USCIS website, and also SEVIS to gather information for the online orientation component. USCIS oversees the U.S. government's immigration system, often through the use of tools like SEVIS to track and monitor non-immigrant and exchange students in the country (USCIS, 2021). Student support staff, like Trisha, must maintain accurate records for each of their enrolled international students in SEVIS, so that the U.S. government is aware of them at all times and, if needed, needs to take particular actions concerning them, such as denying them benefits or admission, or removing them from the country. As Bista (2015) mentioned, staff who work in offices like SEUU's ISO are generally known as those primarily responsible for maintaining international student compliance with the U.S. government. Therefore, this theme remains at the forefront of all practices they perform related to their student support roles.

Much of the content of the online orientation module content pertains in some way to immigration law compliance, as seen in topics from arrival logistics, immigration and travel documentation, traveling within and beyond the U.S. during enrollment, student employment and work authorization (i.e., part-time work, CPT, OPT, etc.), and taxes. As such, U.S. immigration policy, itself the result of a particular configuration of people and material entities, is a key actor that mediates Trisha's work practices, through the process of translation, to align with its goal of maintaining governmental compliance.

4.2.1 *Governmental Compliance: A Translation of Staff Work Practices*

The U.S. government uses its immigration policy to *problematize* the notion of students maintaining compliance to remain in the country to start and continue their academic studies at SEUU, thereby framing particular ways to fulfill compliance. In this way, this policy becomes an obligatory passage point through which all other relations and actors must flow at some time. Otherwise, the network might collapse; in this case, the U.S. government may observe widespread non-compliance, to which Trisha and other SEUU staff may contribute, resulting in the removal of SEUU international students from the country. To that end, the immigration policy *interesses* or attracts actors, like Trisha and her staff colleagues, into the compliance actor-network. To enroll international students on campus and enjoy the benefits that can occur from their presence, staff must follow the law and students must maintain compliance. Therefore, the policy persuades Trisha and her work by providing insight into the result of her not following the policy. Director, Geoffrey, succinctly summarized potential results of non-compliance:

> ...which could result in the effect of either a potential student being banned from the United States forever or 10 years or three years or you could lose all of your

> students…So really, those are specialized roles…we issue the documents…on behalf of the university to sponsor those individuals here in the US...So within that role...you would be responsible for primarily immigration regulations within the SEVIS database, keeping up with immigration regulations as it pertains to the US Department of Homeland Security. That's going to be your primary [role].

Trisha is *enrolled* into the immigration policy's translation, and is *mobilized* in particular directions, according to its goals as an intermediary or a mediator, to attempt to enforce the compliance network while also accomplishing her own goal of creating and implementing online orientation content for SEUU new international students. Explored by Bruno Latour (2005), intermediaries and mediators are things that circulate throughout actor-networks to convey or transport meaning or force in the elements it is to conduct. They contribute to the interessement, enrollment, and mobilization of actors, as well as resulting performance of their configurations. In this instance, it appears that Trisha uses immigration policy as an obligatory passage point, which mediates planning, development, and implementation work for the online orientation component.

4.2.1.1 Planning

Given that immigration compliance is the ISO office's primary responsibility for the university, Trisha reviews the current U.S. Government's immigration policy to guide her in planning for the online orientation component. Since this policy is often dense and can be applied differently for international students based on their visa status, and other criteria, she consults several resources to understand what elements are most important for SEUU students to know, like health insurance and OPT. In her first interview Trisha indicated that she often consulted original immigration policy sources, USCIS and SEVIS. She also shared consulting the NAFSA website and text-based chat-

conversations that occur between fellow international student services professionals within a certain section of that site. The NAFSA website is geared specifically to these professionals and provides helpful summaries, frequently written in layperson's terms in an attempt to clarify and dispel policy legalese, as well as training materials to help staff in their campus-specific support endeavors. One such material is a document titled "International Student Orientation: A Common Thread" (NAFSA, August 2019), that gives an overview of key themes that most new international student orientations across the U.S. tend to have in common, as well as examples of how some institutions implement their orientations. Moreover, given the intricate complexity and nuanced nature of immigration policy, relevant staff often ask questions or provide advice based on their professional knowledge and experience. Such resources provide staff examples of how immigration policy has been interpreted and applied in different manners, as well as offer examples of other institutional stakeholders who might be key actors in implementing activities that are policy compliant (NAFSA n.d.). Trisha's mobilization to compose an online orientation that is foremost informed by immigration compliance resulted in her consulting particular resources to set groundwork for the content that needed to be presented to SEUU's new incoming international students.

4.2.1.2 Creating & Developing

Because it contains themes that may differ based on academic institutions, the immigration policy mobilized Trisha to identify key SEUU units and staff with whom to partner to compose the orientation content, as well as develop and implement the orientation itself. In her interviews and on her relational map, she specifically identified the SEUU health center, residence life department, and transportation department. For

instance, she would contact SEUU's health center to obtain specific information related to student health insurance, such as why international students have to have it, how to create their account to access their insurance, how to use their insurance, and how they're going to be charged. Trisha also listed external actors on her map, such as the social security office and state department of motor vehicles. She mentioned that she would contact individuals in these units, especially her connections via past immigration work experiences, to discuss the kinds of information that she needed.

Furthermore, U.S. immigration policy appeared to serve as an OPP through which Trisha identified who could assist her with crafting and delivering the orientation content itself. Specifically, in her interviews Trisha highlighted recruiting and organizing current international students to orally and visually present orientation content in each module video. She also mobilized other ISO staff, like Geoffrey, to assist with content creation in videos like the Welcome video. In each of the ISO staff meetings I observed, not only were ISO staff members present, but also two or more international students. Trisha indicated in one interview that "Having an online orientation, particularly for international students, is important because they can also learn about immigration regulations that affect particularly to them." To this end, when viewing the orientation content online, I noticed that most of the video presenters were ISO staff, who have significant experience working with immigration regulations, or international students who have personal experience with such regulations themselves. This observation creates the perception that Trisha, in part, selected these individuals for their knowledge of and experience with the policy, to minimize any miscommunication or mistakes that could

result in negative consequences like U.S. government denial of student entrance to the country or their removal from the country due to non-compliance.

In the vignette, Trisha stated how they use a VLE called Blackboard to host and present their online orientation content so students can view them anytime and anywhere they can access the Internet. She indicated enrolling the Online Instructional Office to take the orientation content and load it into Blackboard and assist with any technology issues related to creating the content (i.e., videos). Though perhaps not recognizable on the surface, Trisha's decisions and efforts to reach out to this campus unit can, in part, be attributed as a work practice that resulted from the effects of being translated by U.S. immigration policy. Delineated within this policy are specific guidelines for how to legally and appropriately navigate the U.S. immigration system as a part of the SEVP program. Included therein are instructions that delineate student and staff action by particular points in time, such as before and upon arrival to the United States. One example stipulates how students should enter the U.S. through the Customs and Border Patrol area upon their arrival to U.S. airports, and what travel documentation they need to have to do so (U.S. Customs & Immigration Enforcement, 2020).

Such information introduces both time and space as actors, which translate the options available to Trisha for presenting the information in ways that permit international students to review and absorb the information and be able to lawfully enter the country. Herein, Trisha's decision to connect with the Online Instructional Office, SEUU's unit responsible for the creation and development of online learning. Housing the orientation content in text and pre-recorded, video-based formats, in an online VLE, could result in students' ability to access the content asynchronously at any point, from

wherever they are in the world, so long as they have the Internet access and permissions to do so. While Online Instructional Office staff are not proficient in the content used in the orientation, they are experts in the vehicle through which it is conveyed. Therefore, they were enrolled and mobilized to assist in setting up the orientation within an asynchronous learning module format, as well as pre-loading the students' identifying information so that they could access it upon logging in to Blackboard from their home countries. Once fully created and loaded into Blackboard, Trisha could then turn to officially deploying the online orientation and notify the new international students. She collaborated with Geoffrey to communicate the online orientation deployment message via email, which immediately and simultaneously disseminated information to all new students. As such, students would not have to conform to a singular place and time to view the online orientation materials, thereby freeing them more to consume it and make their preparations in ways that might work best for them.

4.2.1.3 Implementing

During Trisha's efforts to create, develop, and implement the new international student online orientation component, she and other actors utilized and were translated by key materials, one of which was U.S. immigration policy. However, I highlight additional materials that translate or are enrolled into other translations that result in both the immigration compliance and online orientation networks. These entities take the form of Internet-based technologies-in-use and contribute to university staff members' enactment of work practices geared toward the new international student orientation.

Two of the technologies that I first observed as key to the online orientation component's development and implementation was the SEUU member username and

password, and user's Internet browser. All university staff members and admitted students are provided a login username and instructions to create their password, and these credentials are used to access all secure university systems such as email, university information management system, and even campus wireless Internet (e.g., wi-fi). ISO staff attach international students' SEUU usernames to their I-20 or DS-2019 visa document, which gets mailed to them upon their admission to the university. In their correspondence prior to students' arrival, the ISO specifically instructs new international students to login to Blackboard using their SEUU username and password to complete the mandatory online orientation component. This is because the ISO has worked with the Online Instructional Office to manually load the students' usernames into the Blackboard VLE so that only they, and others with permission, could access the content.

I was granted access to review the online orientation component as if I were a new international student and, upon arriving at the university's Blackboard landing page, was required to login with my SEUU university username and password to access it. Upon logging in, I was able to locate the online orientation and began with the first module. Each module within the orientation included a video, created with the technology Panopto, and a quiz. When I clicked on the first video, I found myself being asked to login once more to view it.

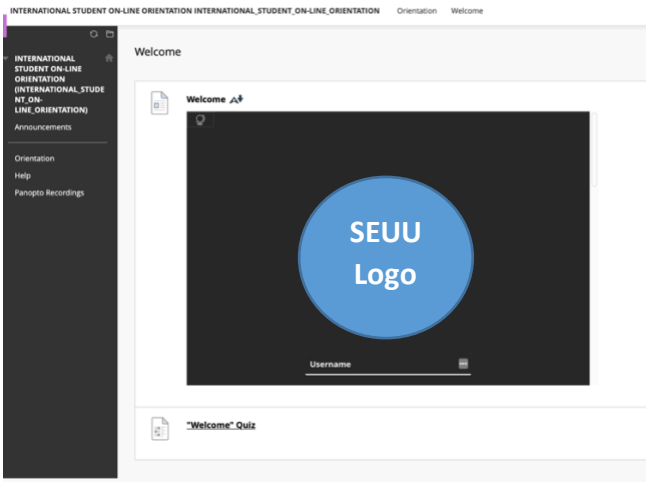


Figure 4.9 Login Window to View Video within Welcome Module

However, upon logging in once more, I then received an error message indicating “We were unable to sign you in because your browser is not accepting cookies. Click “here” to sign in. To open this page in a new tab, click “here.””

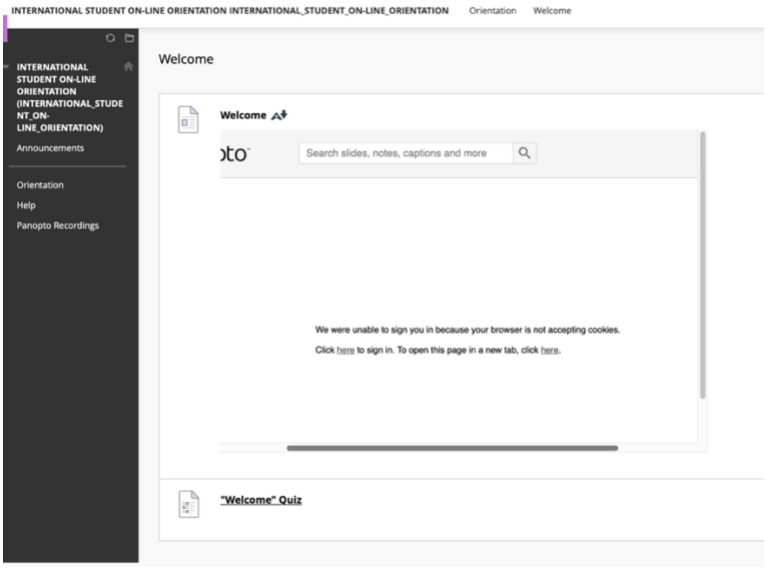


Figure 4.10 Log In Error Message

I tried clicking the first hyperlinked “here” to login a third time, and saw a window appear, but with nothing in it. It was not until clicking the second “here” did a new

Internet browser tab open and the video appeared for me to view. I encountered the same experience while trying to access the second orientation module video.

The second technology that I observed as key to developing and implementing the online orientation component was the Internet browser I used. To access the orientation and review the videos, I used the Safari Internet browser on my Apple computer. In doing so, I encountered an error message that explained I could not be logged in because of my choice of Internet browser. When I tried to follow the directions provided by the error message, and click the first "here" hyperlink, I did see a window appear, but it was empty, and no login page appeared. I realized at this moment that international students may experience similar issues depending on what Internet browsers they may be using or if they have activated their SEUU username and password.

The SEUU username and password, as well as users' Internet browsers, have the capacity to mediate provision of the online orientation content. How the login page or Internet browser performs, and other actors it enrolls into its network, can impact the resulting performance. In the present instance, the login prompt within the Blackboard module enrolled my Internet browser into its network to enable me to view the video. However, due to my Internet browser's configuration, it was not easily compatible with the login prompt, and I spent several minutes trying to troubleshoot the matter until I somehow was able to view the video. While it may not seem like a truly significant matter, when considering the student population and their potential lack of knowledge about VLEs, institutional usernames and passwords, or even their cultural or personal etiquette in how they troubleshoot challenges, such translations can impact how they choose to act in relation to obtaining the embedded content. This challenge could be

exacerbated if students encountered the same issues multiple times. In such instances, would they act like the international students in Habib, Johannesen, & Øgrim's (2014) Norwegian university and forego accessing the content altogether, assuming they would get it somewhere else? As staff members, we may blackbox even such practices as "troubleshooting" or logging in, much like individuals in Orlikowski's (2007) study blackboxed the Google search. However, we must keep in mind that even the smallest aspects of our practices may entail components that unintentionally contribute to different results than we expect, due to additional translations that occur in the "background" but are not always visible in the resulting action.

A third technology-in-use that participated in translating staff members' work in enacting the new international student online orientation was the hyperlink. According to Dictionary.com (Dictionary.com, n.d.), a hyperlink is an "object, as text or graphics, linked through hypertext to a document, another object, etc." Hyperlinks can be used to refer viewers to pieces of information, serving as a sort of bridge which eliminates the need for the viewer to find the reference themselves. In this way, hyperlinks can act as intermediaries within the orientation actor-network. They convey information that is meant to translate actors to perform certain roles (i.e., click the link to access the referenced information), though do so without changing the information itself. I quickly noticed hyperlink usage while participating in the online modules within Blackboard, as they were used to move back and forth within the orientation modules. For instance, in the Virtual Tour module, to access the university website that housed the virtual tour of SEUU's campus, activities, and other information, I clicked the underlined "Virtual Tour" phrase. Upon completion of the orientation, to see my Certificate of Completion, I

clicked the underline respective phrase and was immediately taken to it. Having these hyperlinks made navigating and accessing the orientation quick and efficient, resulting in less time being spent trying to locate the required content to review and complete.

However, hyperlinks do not function alone. They are a sociomaterial assemblage of different actors that come together in ways that result in the hyperlink's action of bridging from one virtual item or location to another. For example, as mentioned in the earlier vignette, the ISO creates an international student handbook for incoming new students. In her first interview, Trisha spoke about the need to provide consistency in messaging, so as to not miscommunicate or misinform students. Hyperlinks are one way to promptly provide consistent, clear, and accurate information.

In this handbook, created using technology tools like Microsoft Word and Publisher and Adobe applications, ISO staff share important content regarding immigration regulations, getting involved on campus, living accommodations, academic life, and frequently asked questions. The content tends to be organized in short paragraphs, wherein each one is a description of a campus or external resource followed by a hyperlink to the resource's website or a contact person's email address. Therefore, if students wished to read more about particular handbook content, they could access either the source information from where the content originated or a relevant contact person.

However, unlike in the online orientation in Blackboard, where clicking hyperlinks brought me to the referring objects, when I clicked on some hyperlinks in the handbook, the referring information did not appear. In some instances, the hyperlink linked to a page on the referring resource's website that either no longer existed or was moved. In others, an error message window appeared indicating "There is no application

set to open the URL…Search the App Store for an application that can open this document…" In such instances, I was not taken to the appropriate referring information and was required to search for it on my own, which took considerable amounts of time given there were more than 5-10 "broken" hyperlinks.

Hyperlinks do not function on their own. Rather, they translate and are translated by other actors. For instance, hyperlinks do not appear by themselves; they must be created and activated. Individuals, be they Online Instructional Office staff members who develop the orientation shell in Blackboard or individuals who create the international student handbook, must select the text or item to be hyperlinked, click the appropriate buttons to apply the hyperlink, and insert the correct URL address to inform the computer and Internet where to go once the hyperlink is clicked. If they enter or misspell the wrong URL, then the hyperlink will break and will not be mobilized for its original purposes.

What is more, not only are hyperlinks contingent on their creator, but they also depend on other actors to successfully perform their function: to link to the correct referring information. Hyperlinks are only stable and successful, in part, as long as the target information is still present and correctly placed. Should someone remove or move that information over time, the link would no longer work depending on when it was clicked by the user. Furthermore, should the user's computer not possess the appropriate application to access the information, be it in a document or other form of media, the hyperlink will not be successful. To that end, students' inability to successfully utilize hyperlinks according to their intended purposes, and access important information, can translate what they learn from the orientation itself, which could further contribute to their experience and success at SEUU.

4.2.2 *Power, Agency, Durability, and Stability in Staff Work*

Massey (1991, 2005, 2006) stated that because space involves configurations of interactions and interconnections, they embody different power-geometries depending on the 'stories' that come together around certain points. As a consequence of these different constellations, different people are placed in specific ways in relation to others, creating different flows of power. While Massey's notions of power relate more to human-to-human interactions, ANT ventures further to describe how networks can solidify and distribute power in a network across space and time (Bosco, 2006; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Law, 1992). In doing so, they can translate other actors and hold the network intact. With the orientation event, and work practices and actors that constitute it as a network, we can trace different relations of power present within it. For example, in the vignette, Trisha speaks to how the online orientation component is particularly important because it presents information about immigration regulations and laws that pertain particularly to international students. Since U.S. immigration policy governs the presence of these students in the country, it can be considered an actor with immense power in the orientation network. It dictates what international students can and cannot do in relation to their time in the U.S., and how staff should act to maintain that student records and compliance. Therefore, this policy places Trisha in more of a reactionary, less powerful position vis-a-vis the law. We see this power dynamic in the practices that Trisha performs, such as consulting resources like the NAFSA and USCIS websites, and SEVIS system, so that she does not make any mistakes that could misinform students and lead them to fall out of immigration status. During her second interview, Trisha mentioned that she had to update the online orientation information and that it was time consuming.

Had immigration policy not been so complex and with the potential to change, based on a variety of actors like political agendas, current events, etc., Trisha would likely not have had to take time to update it, nor be so much of the focus of the online orientation.

Another flow of power that arises from the vignette pertains to Geoffrey, ISO director. Therein, Geoffrey often asks how he can assist Trisha with the orientation. And sometimes he may have to reach out to someone "higher up" to speak on a specific day. In his first interview, Geoffrey described how he would sometimes get asked the "harder questions" as a director, like if he could invite SEUU's Dean of Students or President to speak to the students, given the staff thought that students would "feel welcome from top administration." These excerpts allude to a particular constellation of power within the orientation network. For one, they allude to the presence of university "higher ups" as constituting some form of value to international students within the orientation. Indeed, in some countries' cultures, authority and the perception of hierarchy is important and carries with it honor and legitimacy. Therefore, having university leadership take time to be present at such an event, in-person or virtually, could create as effects a sense of honor and belonging on the part of students, and increased identification with the university. Cho & Yu (2015) discussed that university support increased international students' school-life satisfaction, while reducing their psychological stress. Moreover, when international students positively identified with their universities, and built a sense of belonging, they tended to perceive positive university support and satisfaction. Cho & Yu (2015) provided examples of university support in the form of orientations, student financial aid, buddy programs, and student clubs. However, using ANT, we can come to see how institutional leadership is connected to these university supports, and even in

some ways can appear as a blackboxed representation of that support when they use language like “family” and “you’re welcome here”, or “you’re part of our community.”

Involvement of this form from administrators enables ISO staff to showcase new international students and international efforts at the university. Such demonstrations could result, as Geoffrey later said, in administrators continuing to attend orientation each year because they like to speak with the students. Therefore, though not explicitly stated, the power granted to administration by their relationship within the university and orientation networks is important. If they were to not attend any of the orientation, their absence could perhaps have an effect on students’ sense of belonging and identification with the university. Moreover, upper-level administration tends to control budgetary matters, thus if not involved in or aware of important programming like orientation for new international students, how might such events be impacted financially or in other ways, given the positioning of these administrators across multiple institutional networks? In such scenarios, would staff be able to obtain the funding needed to develop programming that meets the needs of their students within given contexts, and contribute to their success and well-being in ways like Cho & Yu (2015) describe?

Trisha may be considered by some to be the primary agent in the above vignette, given how she describes what she does in her work to plan, develop, and implement the online orientation component. For example, she updates information, creates the orientation videos, connects with the Online Instructional Office to assist in loading the content into Blackboard, consults diverse information resources to plan orientation content, communicates to other staff to request assistance or content from them, etc. As the creator of and responsible staff for the online orientation portion, some may venture

to assume that she carries the innate knowledge, skills, and values to accomplish her orientation work as an inherent part of her identity. Therefore, with her knowledge and attributes, she acts with particular intention to perform different work practices.

To that end, however, Trisha's capacity to act (i.e., to be an agent) is not solely innate, but can be traced back to a network of different human and material entities that interact with her, and vice versa, to co-constitute her identity as the orientation coordinating actant. During her first interview via Microsoft Teams, I saw her sitting in her physical office on the Main Campus, wherein she had next to her a desktop computer and a telephone. These tools, she shared, were helpful to her in completing orientation work because she used them to connect with different staff members on campus, as well as with students. She also discussed in the vignette how she used programs like Panopto for videos and PowerPoint for presentations, all to be uploaded to Blackboard. These latter tools are electronic and accessed via the computer or the Internet. Moreover, Trisha shared in her interview that she gathers feedback from her international students, and they teach her about what is needed or is changing. This reception of feedback, in turn, informs how she acts to put shape to the orientation content, socially connects with and enrolls others for assistance, and even possibly deploys the online orientation component itself. Remove each of these entities, all the tools and programs, her physical office, the student feedback, the partnering staff, all the informational resources, even her background as an international student and former immigration support staff person, and Trisha would no longer be the orientation creator. Therefore, it is not she herself that creates the agency to perform her work. It is the resulting effect of her relationships with

the different humans and materials with whom she comes into contact at different times and places. On the matter of agency, John Law (1992, p. 384) perhaps articulates it best:

> If you took away my computer, my colleagues, my office, my books, my desk, my telephone I wouldn't be a sociologies writing papers, delivering lectures, and producing "knowledge."...Thinking, acting, writing, loving, earning-- all the attributes that we normally ascribe to human beings are generated in networks that pass through and ramify both within and beyond the body. Hence the term, actor-network-- an actor is also, always, a network.

In McGregor's aforementioned study (2004a, 2004d) of two English secondary schools, she argued that the teacher in the Science department was not a teacher in and of herself, but due to the relations she encountered with her classroom, students, personal experience, as well as the physical school building architecture, equipment, and vice-versa. Her interactions with these other actors within her network, and vice-versa, co-constituted not only her identity as the teacher, but the work that she performed in that particular role. Similarly, Trisha's performance and sense of "agency" is the product of her relationships with the different people with which she comes into contact.

The same notion can be said of other "agents" within the online orientation component actor-network, like the Blackboard VLE. Blackboard as a tool performs not because of some inner attribute that it possesses, but rather because of both a network of circulating and interacting components. That is, Blackboard partially consists of algorithms, codes, softwares, and other web architectures that are created with computers over the Internet. It is a "set of roles played by technical materials but also by such human components as operators, users, and repair-persons" (Law, 1992, p. 384). Without some of the actors that come together in particular ways, at particular times, and in particular places, Blackboard would not be what it is nor perform the actions it does. The

ability of different actors to act, and the ability of some to organize others in powerful ways, is the result of their positions and connections relative to one another at particular points in time and space through translation. When powerful actors within the network mobilize others in ways that create the same "network effect" over time and without significant disruption, the network stabilizes. In part, this process is how organizations and institutions come into being and gain their character or identity (Law, 1992).

Such has been the case with the SEUU's orientation event, including the online orientation component. Trisha and Geoffrey, as well as Madeline, each commented on how the new international student orientation program had generally remained the same for years, with both online and in-person components. Even Residence Life staff member, Heather, recalled how when she was an undergraduate student (at least 3-5 years prior to her interview) and ISO student worker, the orientation consisted of each component. Each of these staff members has worked at SEUU for varying lengths of time in professional roles, from 1-2 years to 10+ years. Their similar recollections of the orientation and its format reflect its durability and stability as a network over time and allude to some of the more powerful actors that help keep it together.

4.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have explored the new international student orientation, pre-COVID-19 global health pandemic, as a planned event and noted its component elements. The orientation is widely known to consist of two components: one online via the Blackboard VLE and one in-person on the Main Campus. A plethora of heterogeneous human and non-human actors interact and circulate among each other in

particular ways to organize the orientation's planning, development, and implementation activities into reality. Drawing from ANT's notion of translation, I demonstrated through a composite vignette about how one ISO staff member became entangled with other actors, such as U.S. immigration policy, partner SEUU campus units, and even technology tools, in certain configurations to enact different orientation work practices. I focused on notions of agency and power to describe how some heterogeneous actors, both human and material, act in certain ways to solidify and maintain networks; to achieve the same result (i.e., an event, performance, characteristic, embodiment, text, etc.) over time and across space. As mentioned earlier, a network's ability to maintain its stability and durability over time, depends on its component actors' power to maintain their present configuration, despite other actors or actor-networks that might interact with it, disrupt it, or try to enroll any of those components. Should the latter occur, the actor-network could collapse, and the resulting effect no longer be performed...or could it?

In the next chapter I turn to explore the orientation as it has been revised due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 global health pandemic. Specifically, I focus on concepts drawn from "After-ANT" and relational space, to describe how the orientation network did not collapse, despite it possessing different component actors which appeared to circulate among one another in a different configuration; resulting in different staff views and work practices as network effects.

CHAPTER 5. A "REVISED" ORIENTATION

In Chapter four, I described SEUU's new international student orientation and ways in which staff generally planned for, developed, and implemented it. This event remained largely the same in format over several years in format, content, primary staff persons, and event physical spaces involved. However, during the early spring of 2020 the COVID-19 coronavirus came into contact with the orientation-network. This actor required U.S. institutions and staff to pivot in how they planned, developed, and implemented student services to support students for fall 2020 term (Burke, April 2020). International student services staff were challenged to develop revised programming that not only abided by new policies and public health practices, but also provided appropriate, quality information and support important for students encountering new social and educational environments, perhaps for the first time. As one international student raised, such challenges that rose to the forefront included considerations about time zone differences, differences between synchronous and asynchronous content delivery, and opportunities for face-to-face interaction (Yamakuma, 2020). These shifts in considerations and challenges required staff to approach their work and spaces differently to facilitate student programming, like new international student orientation.

Drawing from a composite conversation with ISO staff participants about the fall 2020 new international student orientation, in this chapter I discuss several ways in which the coronavirus moved through the orientation-network enrolling and mobilizing different actors, including staff members. I delineate how these translations shaped work practices, resulting in a "revised" orientation event for a COVID-19 period.

5.1 "Revising" the Orientation

The following composite conversation with two ISO staff describes the recent SEUU new international student orientation event, as it occurred in the fall 2020 term.

Thomas: As far as the orientation program itself...can you tell me a little bit about how was it organized this year and what does it look like?

ISO Staff: It was a terrible thing. I would use the word, piecemeal. We put it together ad hoc, pieced this thing together...At this moment, our office is under employed because we all are only three and we are...three down. So, it has been a challenge. And this has probably been the hardest year I've ever been here just because everything was changing so quickly, but at least we are surviving.

If we're closed, what would that look like? If we're open, what would that look like? We look at the research and we get them [international students] acclimated, we get them in, we get them meeting their fellow students, we get them resources, resource fair and all the things we normally would do. How can we do that, or can we do that? Is that even possible? What offices that we work with, are they working remotely? Can we get them involved? What are they doing differently?...To be honest with you, my first initial thought was, how can I keep my staff safe…and how can I still serve these students?...that was the first conversation that we had.

And then, from there, it was…we're going to have to do this virtually because...physical space wasn't even available. The university was not giving it out. As we started getting answers as far as how the university wanted to handle things, immigration was changing, how many students we thought we might be able to get and how many we would be able to serve, then we can start looking at, let's start building this from the ground up. The good thing is we already had an online portion available for students. So, we already had that built in…And then, we expanded it from there. Now, we didn't do much…just because…it becomes very difficult to do certain things, to me, virtually. And then, when you put out feelers to students, specifically because we had a higher number of transfer students, [they] tend to not want to do the…orientation.

I was expecting probably no more than 20 students initially when COVID first struck just because embassies were closing, there

were no given dates, regulation was changing, it wasn't as friendly for international students. So new students, we had 66.

Thomas: So, it sounds like you got feedback from students. Did you email them or how did you…?

ISO Staff: Because things were changing so quickly, we kept on putting out emails. "Hey, we're still open. We're doing this. This is the current policy. This is potentially how the fall will look. There's still the online orientation. Please complete that. If you have any questions, let us know." It was online through Blackboard and we record some of the videos, short video clips, but there was not the connection that the international students need. And then, as we got closer to the semester, it was more like, Okay, we've identified at least 60 of you that are here. We can either do this by appointment, which we put out, “Hey, contact us, we'll do appointments. You can come in. We'll go through things." We asked the students to send us everything electronically…we also have done…two [virtual Microsoft] Teams meetings with a group. Dr. Dean of Students…and…the President join in as well…

Thomas: Gotcha.

ISO Staff: Just so they [students] could feel welcome from top administration. Dr. President is fantastic in those kinds of situations…having them on board, welcoming the students, and saying we're here for you, I think helps out a lot.

Thomas: ...How was your attendance to your Teams meetings?

ISO Staff: So, the first one, we had about 20. I think the second one, we didn't have very high participation. It was only eight.

Thomas: Gotcha.

ISO Staff: There is a challenge in this office because I think there is no strategy planned to create it…there is no clear function, a clear way we're supposed to function. So, some people think that we do even counseling when we don’t, and some people want to only concentrate on documentation and compliance. So, I think we need to have a conversation with the administration. What is the vision that they have? Because right now, we don't have it.

Thomas: And it sounds like you're floundering, trying to figure out, "Okay, let's just do what we know we can do and see what happens…"

ISO Staff: So, we are in the crisis mode. We are reacting based on what is needed. And that most of the time, is not good. We need to be proactive, and we need to act, but we do whatever we can.

Thomas: ... you mentioned having one-on-ones with students. So, since you couldn't have the interaction that you would've liked in-person, as it sounds was happening previously, was it that you were encouraging students to have the interactive piece with you, one-on-one, or as they wished?

ISO Staff: Both. We ask them to set an appointment with us…Because we needed to keep track who was in the building, just in case something happened. And…if they didn't want it, at least have a conversation in [Microsoft] Teams. If not, it was okay because there are some students who are very clear what they want…But for the ones who came and they needed to talk while we were available, yes…students, they respond more through email.

Thomas: Have you found it's been successful with their email response…? You said you're pushing a lot of information out via email.

ISO Staff: Sometimes, yes, but they respond better when there's a student from the International Student Council. And the International Student Council is doing a meet and greet, but only for 10 or 15 students every other week...And the students are the ones who are supporting themselves.

Thomas: Okay. And then are you finding that students are coming to these meet and greets?

ISO Staff: Yes...And keeping track and connected, and create a sense of community that they belong, and somebody will be there for them.

Thomas: So that's really like part of the orientation.

ISO Staff: Yes…We can try to build that community…which is why I think in-person is much easier to do that than virtually, specifically in this case because I found it very difficult reaching out to…[partner SEUU campus] offices and a lot of offices will say, we may not be able to do it because at that same time…it was the individuals that would do that type of programming that were being furloughed. So

that became very difficult to get other offices involved…so, we try to keep our programming a little bit more open…

Thomas: It sounds like a lot of your orientation programming was via email.

ISO Staff: Yep, it was. A lot of it...And then, we've talked about in this office, just giving them a phone call, just saying, "Hey, how are you? These are the things going on," trying to make it more personal, more welcoming if we can.

This conversation reflects a seemingly different orientation event compared to previous years. Many of the same individuals were mobilized in the orientation actor-network, like ISO staff, the SEUU Dean of Students and President, and current international students. Even Walter from Graduate Enrollment still interacted with the network by providing cultural adjustment information to new students. Conversely, several material actors that helped to create the orientation in the past are no longer mobilized during the global health pandemic, such as the in-person orientation buildings and rooms, or the individuals who reserve them. New actors enter into the network and shape its unfolding, like Microsoft Teams and its component elements (i.e., chat function, virtual meeting, message board, file storage and transfer capabilities, etc.).

Moreover, in the conversation we see how COVID-19 contributed to the spatiality of the work practices staff performed to enact the event, in relation to other individuals and material entities. Two themes frame several COVID-19 spatial contributions, and their resulting network effects: Space-time and powerful actors that held central positions within the orientation actor-network.

5.2 Space-Time

Massey argued that space and time were not separate entities, but rather a "simultaneity of unfinished, ongoing, trajectories" (Massey, 2001, 2005, 2006; Christophers et. al., 2018), and should be considered in tandem with and necessary for one another. In other words, one could not consider phenomena in spatial terms without accounting for temporality infused with it. In the composite conversation, ISO staff alluded to space-time, and how it was markedly different because of the entrance of COVID-19 and other linked actors into the orientation-network. In hearing their comments, I noticed how they spoke about space-time differently than when describing previous orientations. For instance, ISO staff stated how everything was changing so quickly, referring to U.S. immigration policy, federal, state, and local public health guidance, virus case and infection rates, and even new international students' decisions regarding fall term attendance (i.e., attending versus deferring to a future term). Staff mentioned specific work practices in which they engaged that were imbued with temporal markers, which did not appear so visible when discussing the previous orientation format. Specifically, ISO staff mentioned putting out feelers to students to gather feedback from incoming international students to inform the orientation's formation, particularly given greater numbers of transfer students coming to SEUU, because of immigration issues related to their original institutions' academic course delivery.

While enrolling transfer students, ISO staff were also waiting to see which entirely new students that could attend SEUU and worked collaboratively across campus to get these students to the U.S. Whereas in previous years, most international students

would need to arrive by the start of their academic programs and classes for the term, the fall 2020 term saw a different effect due to COVID, as Geoffrey explains:

> …a student can make it, but they're going to be late because they're not getting their visa until September 1. How do we get them in the country on September 15th, although the semester's already started? And believe it or not, our latest person came in…early October. And that gave us the 66. So, working through all those different kind of procedural things, it took some effort.

And part of this effort for the orientation event programming involved determining what it would look like. That evolving format did not appear to resemble anything concrete until close to the beginning of the fall term, once ISO staff received clearer enrollment figures, and reached out for feedback on how students wished to engage in some orientation components, like those that would have occurred in-person. I observed this evolution first-hand through email correspondence with Geoffrey over a period of many weeks while working with him to understand their orientation plans and arrange to conduct participant observations. In response to my first attempt to ask about the orientation programming in week one around early May, he responded:

> Currently, we are planning the fall semester as if everyone will be on campus. However, due to COVID-19 we are approaching with some goals to...limit the number of people at events...we will also do small focus groups early on to try and make that connection in person as well.

His office's plan to meet with small groups of students in-person, as a substitute for the traditional in-person orientation component, continued through at least early June, though Geoffrey did indicate that his staff would also frequently use Microsoft Teams in an effort to social distance due to health concerns. By late July, when asked for any orientation updates, he shared "COVID has slowed a lot down at [SEUU]...We have had to make some adjustments on our end as well, and needless to say, this semester is

turning into a band aid until we get back to normal." By mid-August, Geoffrey's last update about the orientation events, that traditionally would be in-person on campus, evolved into "We had a meeting with students last Thursday, but unfortunately, Microsoft Teams messed up and did not record the meeting. We will be setting up further meets with students." And finally, up to two weeks after when the traditional in-person orientation would have occurred, I received a final email from Geoffrey in response to the last update request, since I had not received word regarding any of the subsequent meets he had mentioned in previous correspondence. To that last request, Geoffrey shared "We are trying to work through who is here and after that point we will hold some potential one on ones with students. I will keep you posted on that." Comments about constant changes in the composite conversation, supplemented by subsequent exchanges with ISO staff about anticipating enrollment figures, and acknowledgement of a university slowdown all speak to marked changes in the sense of time in relation to enacting orientation programming, specifically components traditionally held in-person.

The ISO was not the only unit on SEUU's campus impacted in such was with regard to orientation and related work practices. In an interview with primary SEUU undergraduate student orientation director, Katie, she articulated that they typically have their entire fall term orientation event programming planned and solidified by January. However, this year, after COVID closed much of the Main Campus in March, in April she and her office were told that the traditional orientation was no longer possible, and they decided to turn everything virtual. Once that decision was made, Katie, got on a Microsoft Teams virtual "call" with all the orientation program's related unit partners, from those who handled the "business pieces, all the student life pieces, all

the...everything, every piece." From that point in time, they all began from late spring through the summer to replan the entire undergraduate university orientation.

As time acted in this network, it did so in association with space. Prior to 2020's coronavirus pandemic, work performed to enact the new international student orientation frequently took place across Main Campus physical spaces. While participants mentioned using email and telephone to meet with each other and campus partners, several shared how they met in-person, with their own staff or those in other units. Moreover, the orientation event component took place each term in one or more Main Campus buildings, wherein new students, staff, and fair representatives would interact. However, after March 2020, the orientation's physical spatial elements changed.

In the composite conversation, ISO staff commented on how they had to think about if the university would be closed or open, how university physical space was not available for programming, if campus partners were working remotely or were furloughed, and how they would have to do the orientation virtually. These work practices, particularly in planning and developing orientation event programming, came about due to COVID-19's translation of other actors. In early to mid-March, SEUU almost entirely shut down its campus due to threat of virus spread and transmission. At that time, the university president sent an email to all campus constituents about the closure, specifying that all courses would immediately transition online and requiring all but essential university personnel to switch to remote working. In the weeks and months that followed, the president, or delegated upper university administrators, sent dozens of subsequent emails updating the SEUU community on latest COVID and institutional-

related developments, including several extensions of the staff remote work guidance. Geoffrey mentioned in an interview how his office navigated this guidance:

> Thomas: Talk to me about the different settings that you're working in or have been working in recently.
>
> Geoffrey: So within this office, specifically when the university shut down the first time...It was mid-March...So, for about those two weeks…I was having staff work remotely. I generally came in just because…you never know what's going to hit your desk…it's easier because I keep all my things on my desktop...And…you never know when you're going to have a student with an immigration issue or what we consider a mini crisis...
>
> Thomas: And then, everybody else, have they been in, the other staff members?
>
> Geoffrey: …once it started to ease up a little bit, we did it to where we were trying to stay below that 50% capacity, where we might have a few folks here on a specific day...And then…I would probably say since mid-summer, we've all been here. It's too difficult not to be.
>
> Thomas: Because of the traffic coming in and out?
>
> Geoffrey: Yeah, traffic. International students are still coming in…We're only on appointments, but they're still coming in, needing those immigration things that are hard to do either virtually or online, through email or even phone...But I think we're also here as a statement that we are still here for international students.

While Geoffrey and his staff recognized the "essential" nature of their work and returned to their physical offices on the Main Campus, not all of their partner staff members in other units could do the same. Some staff members, like Madeline, Dan, Sarah Jane, and Diane, could not return to their offices for months, due to COVID and damages to many of their offices resulting from HVAC issues that occurred while working remotely.

Lastly, ISO staff mentioned that when approaching the fall new international student orientation, part of their planning involved auditing which offices they worked with, where those staff may be working during the pandemic, and how they were enacting their work. Some staff members, like Walter in Graduate Enrollment, still came to Main Campus to keep up with tasks like urgent student issues and daily mail deliveries. Others, like Heather and Katie, worked in their offices on a rotation schedule with other unit staff. Still others, like those in the Business College, worked almost exclusively in their off-campus homes, using the Internet, Microsoft Teams, and other tools to interact with SEUU staff and students. Therefore, if more staff members worked remotely and did not come into campus, it could be more difficult to host particular in-person orientation components, like an involvement/resource fair, guest speakers, etc. After all, ISO staff alluded to the matter of safety as being foremost in their minds, particularly in reference to staff members, as well as students.

Beyond the difficulty of finding where staff were working, there was an additional layer of determining which partner SEUU staff members were even working at all, particularly during the summer months when much orientation development and implementation would occur. That is because due to the loss of essential revenue from COVID-19 impacts that the university would normally generate, SEUU wrote to university constituents about a projected $35 million+ financial shortfall between early April and the end of the fiscal year. As such, university administrators moved to implement temporary, targeted part-time and full-time employee furloughs, to help offset the negative financial impacts. At least one study participant was furloughed for one month, while other relevant staff members across SEUU were also relieved of their duties

for some period. In part, the timing of furloughs, along with the absence in space of key programming partner staff, resulted in ISO staff having to make decisions itself on what type of programming and content to develop and implement for the orientation. Consequently, the ISO attempted to keep the orientation focused on what they could confirm was "going on", what information they did have they believed was accurate and reliable. One example of adapting their orientation components due, partially, to temporal and spatial translations, was the cultural adjustment content. Traditionally, Walter, would present this information in-person with new students, guiding them through activities and interact with them to answer their questions. He would encourage them to interact with each other during his presentations. However, for the fall 2020 orientation, Walter was asked to take his one-hour or more presentation and condense it into an almost 13-minute asynchronous, audio-narrated PowerPoint video to be a part of the online orientation content. While Walter discussed an interview that he attempted to narrate his video as if he was presenting in-person, he acknowledged that it was not the same, particularly because of a lack of physical space and students with whom he could interact.

5.3 Powerful Actors

Another noted theme that emerged from COVID-19's contributions to the spatiality of staff members "revised" new international student orientation-related work practices, was the presence of powerful actors within the orientation-network. It was not just the mere presence of these actors during-COVID-19 period, but the virus's amplification of these actors' power to mobilize and enroll others in particular ways. I observed national, state, and institutional governments' policies to be key actors in shaping how staff prepared for and implemented the orientation, as mediated through

materials like SEVP Broadcast Messages to International Student Service professionals, Centers for Disease Control guidance and governors' executive orders, professional organizations' websites, university emails, and "pivot to fall" plan reports.

Like during the H1N1 global health pandemic in the early 2000s (Schillmeier, 2008, 2011), many of the above governmental actors instituted increased restrictions to minimize COVID-19 transmission and any potential negative impacts resulting from the virus. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control, and other public health institutes, created guidance for how to protect oneself from contracting the virus, such as social distancing, wearing masks, and washing hands. Some individual states move beyond federal policies and guidelines, by implementing mask mandates, and travel restrictions to states with elevated virus positivity rates. Some states even shut down businesses and economies to keep people home and limit virus transmission. Most colleges and universities took the pandemic seriously and either shut down or drastically altered their operations.

The U.S. government even closed its international borders and ceased visa and other travel document processing functions in its embassies and consulates around the globe for an extended period of time. In conjunction with these policies, the SEVP arm of the USCIS shared broadcast messages with all international student service professionals utilizing the SEVIS system, sharing updates regarding how to treat both current students in the country as well as new students planning to enroll in the fall term. Messages related to COVID-19 were initially sent in March to advise on how to account for students currently enrolled for the spring 2020 term. USCIS permitted current students to

remain in-country and continue fully online courses due to the pandemic, which would normally not be permitted (SEVP, March 9, 2020).

In early July, SEVP sent out updated guidance regarding the fall 2020 term and international student enrollment (SEVP, July 6, 2020), stipulated that new and current students could no longer take fully online course loads in the U.S., despite COVID-19's continued presence, and institutions pivoting to such course models. Should they be admitted to or enrolled in one of these colleges or universities, they must then either depart the U.S. or transfer to another American institution offering in-person instruction in some form. Institutions offering traditional in-person coursework or a hybrid model (i.e., mix of online and in-person courses) could continue to welcome international students to campus. However, should those latter institutions later move in the fall to fully online coursework, their students would have to either leave the country or "take alternative steps to maintain their...status such as transfer to a school with in-person instruction" (SEVP, July 6, 2020, p. 2).

In response, several universities, led by Harvard and MIT, filed suit against the U.S. government (Redden, 2020). They cited that international students enrolled in institutions implementing online only course models would be subject to deportation. Such a scenario puts the universities in a bind, having to choose between a carefully planned decision to proceed with fully or predominately online models or attempt, within only a few weeks before classes restart, to hold in-person coursework, despite the massive public health risks that pivot would entail. Harvard and MIT additionally argued that many higher education institutions had planned for their fall terms based on the

SEVP previous guidance stipulating that online learning restrictions would continue to be in effect for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency. They noted that the president's emergency declaration up to that point had not been rescinded, and coronavirus cases had continued to increase nationally beyond spring numbers (Redden, 2020). By July 14, the U.S. government settled the lawsuit with Harvard and MIT and agreed to continue operating under the March guidance. On July 24, USCIS posted updated guidance for the fall term, formally citing continued adherence to the March 2020 regulations. New international students, however, would still not be permitted to enroll in a U.S. school for the fall term and pursue 100% online coursework (SEVP, July 24, 2020). Even into early August, one to two weeks prior to many institutions beginning their terms, the U.S. government continued to send out updated guidance through (NAFSA, 2020b). NAFSA set up a special website related to COVID-19 oriented developments, including therein links to each piece of U.S. policy impacting international education, as well as their interpretations, information about chat conversations and town halls, to help with understanding evolving developments (NAFSA, 2020c).

The frequent shifting of U.S. travel and immigration policy, pertaining particularly to non-immigrant students participating in the SEVP program, as mediated through materials like broadcast messages and organizational resource websites, associated with other actors to mobilize staff practices in certain ways. Two of those actors were SEUU itself and its operational policies in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Like other U.S. institutions, SEUU modified its operations and modes of delivering academics, student support, and other crucial services. As early as mid-March, the university communicated in an email to its stakeholders that it was using ongoing

recommendations by "leading health experts and from local and state government leaders" to inform its decisions on how to proceed with everything from student instruction, to campus housing and dining, recreation and graduation, to faculty and staff matters. By late spring, early summer 2020, the university had apprised the community with continuing updates about "reopening campus." The email said:

> There are many committees currently developing plans for employees to safely return to work this summer and for all of us to safely welcome students back in the fall…We will continue to respond to the guidance of our public health officials and the governor of [the State], the latest science, advice from our researchers and faculty working on COVID-19 and input from our employees and students over the next two months. We are guided in our planning by our mission as a university and by the desire to balance four different and sometimes competing goals…

The email provided a draft of a Pivot to Fall report, which chronicled the plans developed to enable the institution to "reopen" in the fall term, and what actions would need to be taken by everyone for it to be successful. The document covered topics like COVID-19 testing and tracing initiatives, health and safety guidance while on campus, changes to the academic calendar, course delivery options, faculty, graduate student, and staff concerns, and additional information in the form of links to resources. SEUU's president, other administrators, and committee leaders held listening sessions and gathered feedback from a wide range of university community stakeholders to inform subsequent iterations of the report, and in late June published the final copy. This document, in conjunction with U.S. governmental policy, was instrumental in contributing to the planning, development, and implementation of the new international student orientation.

SEUU institutional policies and U.S. governmental policy circulated around and associated with each other to shape campus staff members' work, which resulted in the

unfolding of the "revised" new international student orientation that occurred for the fall 2020 term. ISO staff, for instance, frequently mentioned how everything had changed so quickly over the course of 2020, that it was difficult to nail down any plans, particularly with a lack of staff present to complete the work. But two elements they looked to most were immigration and university policy. When asked about what she had to think about differently when updating orientation content because of COVID-19, Trisha responded "The new way we have to follow the rules, or the internal process for university. First that one and so what will happen if somebody has COVID, although it's going to be the protocol…" In this instance Trisha recognized the power that such actors had. And it was their power and agency, as delegated through actors such as policy documents, reports, and emails, that contributed to a perceived change in approach toward the planning and development of the orientation.

In other words, the change in U.S. travel and immigration policy impacted who could enter into the U.S. and when, as well as who could enroll in and show up to the institution. For instance, while SEUU experienced an increase in international transfer student enrollment, they had a drop in enrollment among first-time international students, with many of these students choosing to defer admission to a future term. These results, coupled with simultaneous continued developments at the institution regarding operating procedures, based on health, scientific, and governmental recommendations, contributed to ISO staff believing that they needed to implement a primarily virtual format. After all, they would not be able to host a large orientation event on the Main Campus as done in previous years. Moreover, these results in part mobilized staff to reach out to students to solicit feedback for what they felt they needed to prepare for and transition to U.S. higher

education, and SEUU. Close to the start of the fall term, in speaking with ISO staff participants, they mentioned that outside the required online orientation component via Blackboard, much of their "orientation" was conducted primarily via email, with much advising occurring individually between staff and students.

5.4 Staff Views

While COVID-19 contributed to the shaping of the "revised" new international student orientation event as it was experienced by students, it also shaped staff views and their perceived goals. ISO staff in the composite conversation saw the orientation as constructed and enacted in an ad hoc and piecemeal fashion, stressing that they were working in a crisis mode and just trying to survive. They expressed disdain for the current state of affairs in which they were living. Lastly, they acknowledged that their work was abnormal, given different involved actors restricting their ability to enact orientation programming they believe would be beneficial to students. As a result, they performed as they were able, as Trisha mentioned "We are reacting based on what is needed...We need to be proactive and we need to act, but we do whatever we can."

Their perspective of their reality is an effect of the orientation actor-network, of which COVID-19, the U.S. government, institution, and other actors are a part. To that end, they form these perspectives, in some respects, by comparing their past orientation experiences, as well as their orientation goals and visions of student success to the unfolding present. For instance, when asked about their goals and conceptions of student success for the new international orientation, study participants responded in a myriad of ways. Trisha, believed that the general goal of the new international student orientation is

to “create a network within the university that students will know who supports them, and offices will understand their collaborative role that work.” However, COVID-19 has shifted the orientation’s goals to be more policy-oriented. She stated “So, we’re pretty much responding to what is needed at the moment...But keeping informed with students and also reminding them, ‘Please go and have [COVID-19] tests, get your flu shot…” As such, Trisha’s view of student success as an outcome of the orientation is for students to feel like they’re informed, to follow the “rules”, act on staff directions, and attend some orientation events, like the virtual Microsoft Teams group meeting or a smaller “meet & greet” hosted by the International Student Council. Last, she viewed student success as students not feeling alone, which they attempt to gauge by reaching out to them directly.

Director, Geoffrey, shared similar, yet more comprehensive goals for the orientation, in order of priority. Number one is to give students the information that they need, especially the immigration materials because “they have to have that. They are responsible for their immigration record while they are here...they have more to juggle than their domestic counterparts...” Number two is to make sure students are acclimated. To him, student success involves students being able to use the provided information and to “come into [the] university and feeling this community.” COVID-19 mobilized Geoffrey to recalibrate his goals, though. In the former in-person orientation portion, staff covered more acclimation-related information and activities with students, particularly through question-and-answer interactions. However, during the pandemic, he said

> PNC Bank did a video, so we had that ready for them. So, putting in place questions that we would get a lot anyway during a regular orientation that we would have covered...Getting it to them early, as early as possible. But also keeping it, our goal was to keep it somewhat broad. I hate to say that, but with

> COVID switching so much...we had to keep it broad in case something did adjust by the university as well because we may have gone online, we would have had to adjust even more quickly. So, I think just keeping the ship afloat.
>
> I think the problem there is that the goals will consistently shift for a while. We always want to say, "Hey, we want students to be engaged and we want them to have retention, and we want them X, Y and Z success factors or acclimate easier, or be enrolled in courses easier," whatever process to assist them. Some of that I don't think it's set yet, to be perfectly honest…Until I probably get some student feedback and we all live through this through some period, to me it's going to be trial and error a lot. And I just think those targets will move so much. We have all these goals that were set within the [SEUU] strategic plan or all these goals that were set for this office…and…my opinion at this point should be to go back and re-look at all that because all that's…going to change, and it's just not feasible anymore, some of it.

Last, graduate enrollment staff member, Walter, also believed that the main goal of orientation is to inform and educate students. A subsequent goal is to be able to assess their success of learning over time as they explore life in the U.S. and at SEUU, such as if they return to exchange questions with staff and have discussion. However, COVID-19 brought a shift to that goal. He explained:

> This year, [the goal was] just education. No one was clear on what to do...Now the goals have shifted more that we want to make sure that everybody adheres to the policies...it's more and more focusing...So here what we did was we share our experience through a portal, and still people might be going through that, "Okay, I understand this. I watched this," but still, there are lots of questions. So, people might have said, I completed a part of what was expected, but the other part is asking questions. Culturally, accustoming, talking to them, getting their question answered. That's what I would say is important.

Part of Walter's goals and ideas of student success for the new international student orientation tie back to how he defines orientation, as: exchange, explore, and exceed. That is, exchanging knowledge with students, allowing them to explore with questions, doubts, explore the community, "our education", and to ensure both of "us are exceeding in what we perform." Much of his view of orientation involves an in-person, face-to-face

component that serves to facilitate the interaction he views as key to exchanging, exploring, and exceeding. However, knowing that the orientation for fall 2020 was moved entirely online, in a mostly asynchronous recorded fashion, he sees the interaction missing. He also recognizes that because of COVID-19 and the amplified power of actors like the government and institution, through their immigration, health, and safety policies, adherence is essential. Not only could non-compliance impact students' ability to remain in the U.S., but it could also impact their health. Therefore, he and his ISO staff counterparts facilitated more online orientation content to these students.

Moreover, these staff focused on presenting the content they believed to be most urgent and important, like immigration, campus resources, arrival information, some academic details, and introductory cultural adjustment information. These topics represent a Maslow's Hierarchy-like format, in that Maslow (1943) argued that when we more or less satisfy a lower level deficit need, we move on to higher level growth needs. Lower-level deficit needs include physiological ones, like food, water, rest, as well as needs of security and safety. Once these sorts of needs are mostly satisfied, we can then turn our focus on higher level needs, such as belongingness, friends, feelings of accomplishment and self-esteem, and lastly our need to achieve our full potential. ISO staff member, Geoffrey, acknowledged as much during one interview:

> Thomas: So, it sounds like it's just the first one [orientation] was more of a, we need to cover the most bases that we could in a shortened fashion so that we didn't overwhelm you with everything else. And the priority was, if I think of it like a Maslow's hierarchy, we need to make sure you have a place to stay, you have the documents you need so you don't get sent home. And then the other pieces may be more like the integration or the social pieces, we'll have to put that

on a backburner because we just need to get you here and established.

Geoffrey: Pretty much, yep.

Indeed, during a period of constant change, due largely to COVID-19's entrance into so many actor-networks, SEUU staff acted to address their perception of students' most pressing basic needs first. After the beginning of the term, they hoped to work to implement other forms of programming to address more higher-level needs (i.e., belongingness, self-fulfillment, etc.) later in the term. I observed this ancillary work discussed during ISO staff meetings, when members like Trisha would provide updates on programming efforts she and the International Student Council were developing. Such efforts included continued student meet and greets, as well as virtual trivia meetings.

5.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have described what the fall 2020, "revised" new international student orientation looked like, and ways in which COVID-19 helped to shape it, particularly through space-time and powerful actors. COVID-19 contributed to different actors, like government and institutional officials, constantly modifying and enacting policies that yielded shifting results which SEUU staff had to manage while enacting orientation activities. Moreover, much of this work performed was remote, which mobilized staff to reconsider important orientation pieces like staff contributors, physical space, goals, and student success.

In traditional ANT, researchers tend to focus on who and what becomes part of a network, emphasizing central, powerful actors that contribute to its development.

However, as Star (1991) reminds us, such views of ANT fail to account for "other" actors who may also contribute in some way to the formation of the network, and its resulting effects. Heretofore, I have described way in which the orientation-network, including staff work practices, has come into reality. In doing so, I understand that I myself am an actor in this network and that my interpretation contributes to the depiction of the orientation's reality. I acknowledge that I cannot and have not accounted for all human or material actors contributing to its formation. However, through my fieldwork, I observed that some actors appeared to have been "othered" or were perhaps more present on the periphery of the orientation-network, though did not seem to contribute to it from the perspective of those closest to its unfolding, ISO staff. In the next chapter, I describe three of these such actors: non-ISO staff, uncertainty, and risk. I also describe how their contributions shaped (or did not shape) how SEUU staff worked to plan, develop, and implement the "revised" new international student orientation. With these actors in mind, I illustrate how the orientation-network did not fail, and the event was still enacted.

CHAPTER 6. THE ROLE OF FLUIDITY & MULTIPLICITY IN ORIENTING

In Chapter 4, I described how traditional notions of ANT generally hold that events, programs, objects, texts, etc., are the effects of particular configurations of material and human actors through the process of translation. Because space constantly changes (Murdoch, 2006, Müller & Schurr, 2016), more powerful actors attempt to enroll, organize, and mobilize others in ways that support their interests, thereby creating a sense or order that endures for some period of time. The new international student orientation is an example of this process in that it was ordered and organized in distinct ways. And the orientation became stabilized over time, its actor-network held together by powerful actors, so that it could endure for 5+ years in its largely same configuration and be recognized as such by multiple SEUU staff members across the Main Campus. However, it is not always easy to create and maintain stable networks that last. Any actor with enough power could enter into, or leave, the network, or enroll and mobilize another network actor in a different way and cause the network to fail. Thus, networks are sites of constant negotiation, resistance, and persuasion among component actors. To early ANT scholars, anything can happen to cause the fragile network to collapse and the network effect, like an orientation, as we understand it, to ceases to be.

The emergent COVID-19 virus and global health pandemic was one such powerful actor that encountered innumerable actor-networks, disrupting and impacting their configurations, in addition to their resulting performances. At SEUU, Madeline shared one specific example that significantly impacted her work:

> Madeline: I really get giddy when they [her students] get here, get excited, I miss that, they're not here this [fall 2020] semester.

Thomas: So, you don't have any international students here for a semester?

Madeline: No, I had several nominated and over the course of the summer, their universities pulled them back and I'm still waiting to see…

Thomas: What do you think is the reason for it? For the variables to this?

Madeline: ... the biggest is whether or not they can get a visa to get into the United States... and then I think course delivery is an issue…so explaining our hybrid model that we're using right now...and historically we've not allowed exchange students to take online classes, because of the visa stuff. So that's changed, too, but that changes right now every couple of weeks, our foreign policy and stuff like that...COVID has made everything really weird.

In her first interview, Madeline discussed how in her professional role she is responsible for advising both SEUU students' who wish to study abroad, and international students from global partner institutions wishing to study in her college at SEUU. In the exchange above, she refers to a variety of actors that come into relationship with one another, translate and are translated by each other, to result in the ability of those international students to successfully study at SEUU. However, Madeline affirms that the exchange process actor-network has failed; whereas in previous terms she would welcome some number of international students from partner universities to SEUU, for the fall 2020 term none came. Subsequently, she attributes the actor-network's failure to COVID-19, which "has made everything really weird".

Indeed, COVID-19 enrolled and mobilized many of the original actors in Madeline's actor-network in ways that prevent its original performance from unfolding as before: it contributed to constant changes among governments and the policies they create, academic course formats, and even the entire American college student experience that many international students seek to experience. Some of these actors interacted with

others to perform actions that impacted the performances of additional actors in the network. For example, COVID-19 and the global health pandemic prompted the U.S. government to close its international borders, as well as halt important visa processing practices in its consulates and embassies around the world. The government also frequently changed, over a period of months, the policies that govern which international students could enter the U.S. for study, how, and when. This information, mediated through and by actors like Madeline herself and institutional exchange agreement contracts, contributed to decisions on the part of her partner institutions to halt sending their students, resulting in her not receiving any for the fall term. This instance illustrates traditional ANT's notion of actor-networks and how they can fail when their configurations are disrupted and their geometries of power shift in different directions.

Borrowing from these earlier ANT perspectives, I expected to observe a similar trend with the fall 2020 new international student orientation program. If COVID-19 should also significantly impact the orientation's actor-network, including through staff work practices, then the resulting orientation may not occur. However, over time I noticed that this assumption did not come to fruition; international students did come to SEUU and there was a new international student orientation provided for them. Only, it appeared the be a "revision" of the previous orientation. That is, the actor-network that enacted the orientation, and staff work practices to plan, develop, and implement it, looked different. Below, I describe two actors that became more visible during this period, due in part to COVID-19, and helped shape work practices to enact the orientation. In doing so, I highlight the concepts of fluidity and multiplicity from the

"After-ANT" literature, to venture beyond traditional notions of actor-networks as set configurations that either succeed or fail.

6.1 Uncertainty

From a relational spatial perspective, space is open and dynamic. It undergoes an ongoing process of (re)formation as different entities circulate into and out of relationship with one another, in frequently unpredictable and uncertain ways (Getz, 2004; Massey, 2005, 2006; Neisser, 2014). Traditional ANT posits that different actors translate and are translated to create order and hold together in particular networks of association. This organizing performance is an attempt at stabilization and identity creation in spaces that are never guaranteed to be the same over time. When that stabilization is successful, we often assume an essentialization of the actor-network due to blackboxing, and in doing so may neglect or take for granted the ever-present uncertainty that prevents the network's ability to completely stabilize and essentialize itself (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

Frequently, it is during periods when certain actors come into contact with or leave those networks, thereby causing a disruption in it, we begin to see the component actors for themselves, rather than the blackboxed "embodiment" of the entire network's resulting performance. For example, we often understand what a television is and what it does. It displays images and can do so in the same way over time for different purposes, like entertainment and education. We don't tend to think about its component "parts": the pixels, the power cord, electricity, the casing that holds together the television, Internet to stream apps for viewing programs, the apps themselves, materials that allow pixels to display, etc. We just know what the TV *does* and take for granted that it will always

perform the same way when we turn it on. However, if there is an unpredictable power outage or if an internal component breaks, the TV ceases to function, and we begin to understand that it is made of a series of elements that *together* in *certain* formations, allow for the TV to work in the ways we associate with it. We may fail to recognize it, but these power outages or component failures could happen at any time, thereby disrupting the network that becomes our TV. The same sentiment can be applied to the fall 2020 "revised" new international student orientation. In this instance, instead of a power outage COVID-19 acted as the disruptor. And in introducing such an unpredictable disruption to the orientation-network, the coronavirus contributed to a foregrounding of uncertainty, that appeared to have been "othered" or taken for granted in years prior to the pandemic (Star, 1991). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, SEUU staff were impacted by the uncertain trajectory of the virus, and the constantly changing effects that unfolded from its association with other peoples and entities. As a result, staff acted upon and with those unfolding realities in their work to plan, develop, and implement the orientation event (Beauregard, 2018).

According to Robert Beauregard in his work *The Entanglements of Uncertainty* (2018), "uncertainty is a form of not knowing...The extended consequences of our actions and the full implications of not acting are unavailable to us. Simply put, the future is in doubt" (p. 1-2). He describes how that, although people can possess a sense of how entities function (a landscape, for instance) they cannot know what may specifically take place during a given time period. Nor can they know how people and entities will respond when other actors decide to intervene.

While Beauregard (2018) states that "uncertainty is inseparable from human engagement with technologies, landscapes, and human and nonhuman others," (p. 2), I offer that in this study's case uncertainty, as an actor contributing to the unfolding of the orientation event through staff work practices, is more consciously acknowledged by other actors compared to pre-pandemic periods. During this study, I did not perceive any acknowledgement of uncertainty present in the practices performed to enact past orientations. It is as if SEUU staff took this actor for granted and "othered" it, instead noting actors to which they granted more importance and power. In contrast, uncertainty was frequently acknowledged when referencing COVID-19, the global health pandemic, and how to continue operations during this period. SEUU staff most intimately involved with the orientation noted their uncertainty through frequent references to "constant changing" or "this is what we know now, but it could change." Much of their uncertainty and subsequent action appeared to be driven by uncertainty among other central, powerful actors who also expressed a concern for the unknown. Primary actors to which ISO staff referred were the U.S. government and SEUU administration, and these entities conveyed through various materials a sense of uncertainty. One U.S. immigration "FAQs" document (ICE, 2020), last updated in August 2020, stated in italics:

> Note: SEVP continues to actively monitor COVID-19 and provide up-to-date information to stakeholders, including designated school officials (DSOs) and F and M students. Due to the fluid nature of this situation, the answers in this document may be subject to change. Refer to ICE.gov/COVID19 for the most up-to-date version of this FAQ.

Additionally, throughout the pandemic SEUU emails from institutional administrators to students, family, and staff, reiterate the presence of uncertainty and its role in shaping the school's operational decisions. In one April 2020 email, the SEUU President articulated:

> Despite our collective wishes for…certainty, we simply do not know how long this situation will last or just how deep the financial pain may run. The actions that we are taking today are based on projections…If the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue for a longer period of time, or if we face an enrollment decline that results in a cut to our state funding, our financial position and budget may be altered further. The Leadership Team and I continue to work tirelessly to find alternative methods to reduce operating expenses and to protect as many jobs as possible. We are fighting to minimize the disruption to our family.

Later, in a May 2020 email, the President reinforced their message:

> While we anticipate the COVID-19 pandemic to influence our actions for the foreseeable future, we are preparing for the fall semester under what we expect to be a "new normal" environment...we are working diligently to ensure that [SEUU] will be prepared for any eventuality... thank you for your…continued support as we navigate this uncharted territory.

And in late June, when the final fall "Pivot" document was released by the Provost, in collaboration with several campus-wide coordinating committees, in one message, they expressed understanding in the yearning for answers amidst uncertainty:

> I want to acknowledge that many of you are anxious and understandably want answers to all of your questions today…I understand your anxiety about "reopening" campus, even as I ask your patience as we present our "final" plan for keeping us safe on campus while delivering our academic programs this fall. We have been planning for several scenarios in the face of what is still unknown about the virus' path. We do know, however, that some things in the "final" plan could still change—and we will be prepared to be agile and pivot again if need be.

Indeed, throughout the late summer and into the fall 2020 term, university administration continued to send emails to the SEUU community, with updates regarding what information they have learned, actions they are taking, and instructions for campus constituents to follow. In each one, they communicated how further updates could follow, as the pandemic continued to unfold and touch relevant institutional entities.

To that end, ISO staff mobilized the government and institution's notions of uncertainty, along with their own, through their work practices. In one instance, during an exchange with Trisha about how she created the fall 2020 orientation content, and what contributed to its formation, she acknowledged the realities that resulted in part from uncertainty's action.

> Thomas: With the [orientation] content that you're putting together within the PowerPoints or over [Microsoft] Teams, what kinds of policies or other kinds of things do you have to keep in mind that will shape that orientation content?...are there other kinds of things that you've had to think about and use as a filter to create your content?
>
> Trisha: One of the things that we told them is, "Everything is changing every day. So, the information that we are providing right now maybe is going to change tomorrow. So please, keep informed or send us an email. Ask questions to us directly. And if you're not sure of something, contact us." Why? Because…everything was so unstable. Nobody knew what's going on…

ISO director, Geoffrey, shared similar comments during his interviews.

> I think one thing that's caused the big change in orientation is because we weren't sure who was coming and who wasn't… Normally, you would put out 150, 250 I-20s for students to come in. And everyone goes through the same protocols as far as gaining a visa, traveling to the U.S…. But because we didn't know if they were coming in, because immigration was changing so quickly, it was a lot more…emailing and actually working with the student one-on-one...because in one person's country, it could be completely locked down, travel restrictions. Another person's, they may be able to travel to X country and they can wait there for 14 days and then travel to the U.S.…So, we had to work individually, one-on-one, each case to determine how we get them here....
>
> ...And once [ISO staff] started making it back to the office, we just do a social distance meeting because we have open space up here...So it would be more generalized conversations about, "look, this is where we are currently. This is university policy…We want to keep you in the loop. We want to be transparent. We want to welcome you and say we're still here for you. We are your resource. And these are the other resources on campus." We might point those out as well.

> But more just to be there, to listen and to hear any kind of concerns, to answer any kind of questions, and to help any way we can...

Both Trisha and Geoffrey's comments highlight the visible presence of uncertainty in shaping the work that they did in enacting the orientation for new international students during the COVID-19 global health pandemic. When able to do so, as stipulated by institutional policy, ISO staff frequently met in-person in their office to share latest updates from key stakeholders and policies, evaluate that information, and discuss how to proceed with it. One result of those conversations was the decision to strategically and frequently use email to reach out to students. For one, given the constant evolution of policy and decisions resulting from it, ISO staff wished to share that information with students to not only be transparent, but to keep them informed. Such a decision allowed students to make their own informed decisions and plans about whether to attend SEUU in the fall. Second, frequent email communication with the students permitted ISO staff to try and manage their expectations, as well as provide reassurance, given potential emotional impacts uncertainty could have on them. Trisha and Geoffrey both mentioned that students and their parents had some fear about studying in the U.S. at SEUU during the pandemic. Being open and transparent through email communication, about what is and is not known, and inviting questions from students, may have helped to allay anxieties or fears they may have. Moreover, the asynchronous format of email, and ability for it to be sent to a numerous people, enabled ISO staff to ensure they could reach all relevant students in the same instance, no matter where they reside around the world, and what time of day it may be "there". Tools like email provide for an increased

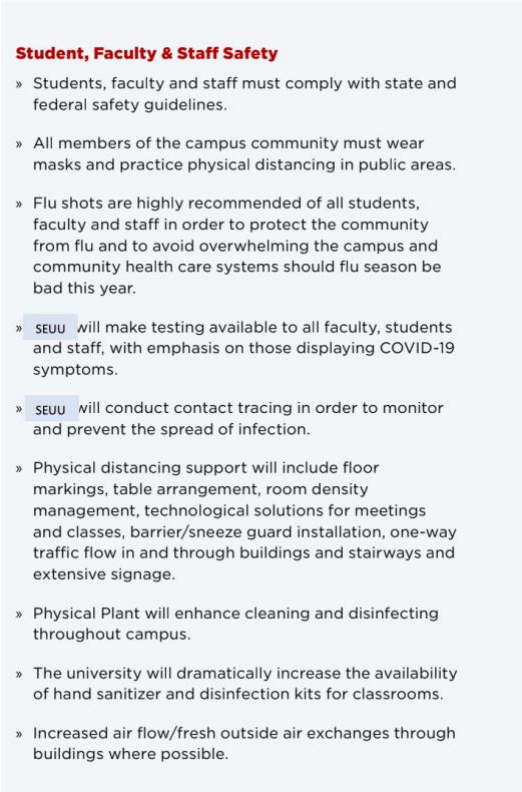
likelihood of students receiving and reading the communication, versus trying to organize everyone into a live, one-time, virtual meeting.

And last, they used email not just to communicate *to students*, but to encourage communication *with students*. The email software that ISO staff uses, Microsoft Outlook, permits students to reply to any email they receive, as well as permits staff to receive emails from most any email software students may use. Therefore, by encouraging students to reach out with questions via email, ISO staff were able to virtually communicate with them and answer specific questions about their individual situations. As Geoffrey mentioned above, email afforded the ability for ISO staff to work more one-on-one with students to provide more "orientation-like" support, in contrast pre-COVID-19 orientation planning and development from these staff members' comments.

6.2 Risk & Risk Management

While uncertainty contributed to how ISO staff approached staff meetings and utilized email to interact with students, it also contributed other work practices, which frequently become more visible in times of disruption or crisis: risk management. Per scholar Valérie November (2008), a risk is generally perceived as "the likelihood of a range of possible outcomes resulting from a decision or course of action" (p. 1524). Risks may involve the perceptions of consequences that could occur as a result from making particular decisions, which can sometimes unfold through communication with other people (Neisser, 2014). Individuals often act during disruptive occurrences to manage uncertainty and minimize any resulting adverse and unforeseen consequences. In the composite conversation in Chapter 5, ISO staff attempted to assess and manage risks

involved with COVID-19, particularly as it related to health and safety. Health and safety were most important because if any member developed COVID-19 they would no longer be able to work in-person. Working in-person was important to the staff, since much of what they do is immigration policy based and frequently involves signing travel documents or handling student compliance issues. To that end, they needed to consider how to manage the risk of exposure and possibility of staff absences, especially given their current understaffing. And based on institutional policies, informed by federal, state, and local health guidance, that were provided in the SEUU "Pivot" document, the ISO altered how they would work in the office, as illustrated in the photos below.



Student, Faculty & Staff Safety

- Students, faculty and staff must comply with state and federal safety guidelines.
- All members of the campus community must wear masks and practice physical distancing in public areas.
- Flu shots are highly recommended of all students, faculty and staff in order to protect the community from flu and to avoid overwhelming the campus and community health care systems should flu season be bad this year.
- SEUU will make testing available to all faculty, students and staff, with emphasis on those displaying COVID-19 symptoms.
- SEUU will conduct contact tracing in order to monitor and prevent the spread of infection.
- Physical distancing support will include floor markings, table arrangement, room density management, technological solutions for meetings and classes, barrier/sneeze guard installation, one-way traffic flow in and through buildings and stairways and extensive signage.
- Physical Plant will enhance cleaning and disinfecting throughout campus.
- The university will dramatically increase the availability of hand sanitizer and disinfection kits for classrooms.
- Increased air flow/fresh outside air exchanges through buildings where possible.

Figure 6.1 Sample policies from SEUU "Pivot" Document for Fall 2020

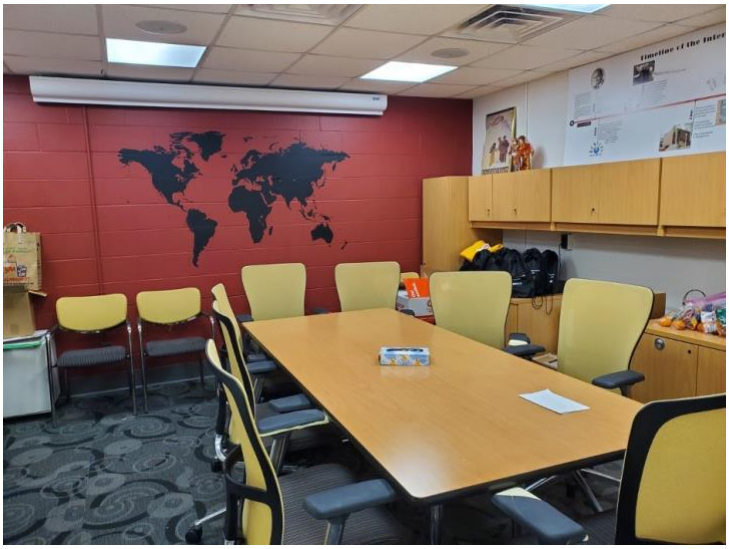


Figure 6.2 ISO Office Conference Room

Figure 6.3 ISO Office main common space and front desk; Facing entrance

Figure 6.4 Welcome sign posted at entrance to ISO Office on Main Campus

Following institutional protocols, as stipulated in the "Pivot" document, ISO staff reconfigured the physical office space's arrangement. They posted signage reminding occupants how to space themselves in relation to others, and opened all office doors during business hours to reinforce a sense of openness, since meeting in a small, closed office could facilitate virus transmission. When visitors came to the office, they would stop at the entry sign and an ISO staff member would address them through their open office door, and advise them where to go for further assistance. In some instances, an ISO staff member or student worker might work behind the front desk, around which hung a shower curtain to block virus transmission through individuals' respiratory droplets.

Moreover, staff decided to no longer use the office's conference room, since chairs could not be adequately spaced apart and to accommodate the number of staff and student workers who attend weekly meetings. To that end, ISO staff chose to hold their staff meetings in the main office space since it is larger in size. Meeting attendees pulled up chairs and sat in their office doorways, or near them, so they could remain socially

distanced but still interact with each another. Additionally, to comply with health and university policies, office occupants wore facemasks at all times. During the study, no ISO staff contracted the virus nor had to take sick leave, due in part to their efforts to maintain health and mitigate risks of COVID-19.

6.2.1 *Pivoting to the Virtual*

In addition to his attempts to manage risks related to health and safety, Geoffrey and other SEUU staff had to manage risks related to developing and facilitating the orientation. Much of these risks were impacted by health and safety policies related to social distancing, room capacity and density, and physical contact. In planning for the orientation, especially the in-person "Get Connected" component, Geoffrey and other ISO staff members quickly identified that the previous physical spaces and format would no longer be possible. SEUU administration during this period was advocating for more virtual programming, and if not possible, limited small gatherings. Given the traditional numbers of students and related individuals who attend the in-person orientation, holding it in its former fashion was not possible on the Main Campus, Geoffrey, explained as he noted which actors he did not interact with this year with regard (e.g., past orientation-holding buildings, their staff managers, and the space reservation process, etc.). Additionally, since they could not identify at any given point how many students would actually be attending the fall semester on the Main Campus, and when they would arrive, staff members had to identify other ways to facilitate the orientation.

In doing so, ISO staff landed on a virtual format for all orientation-related events and components, using institutionally accessible technologies, and began to enroll and mobilize other actors to help in this endeavor. Underlying participant interview

comments, a virtual orientation design appeared to not only minimize COVID-19 virus exposure risks, but also minimize the likelihood that students would not receive needed information to prepare for and weigh their decision to study on SEUU's Main Campus in the fall term. The technologies that SEUU staff used to develop and facilitate the orientation included email, Blackboard, and Microsoft Teams, in addition to physical computers, the Internet, and various softwares to create and transfer orientation content. In observing the online orientation via Blackboard, as well as speaking to SEUU staff study participants and participating in different staff meetings, it appeared staff members assumed that most international students possessed access to computers, Internet, email, and the virtual spaces that housed orientation information, such as Blackboard. With that in mind, it appeared they assumed that students knew about those technologies and could access the content (a)synchronously, depending on the orientation event.

I offer from these interpretations that SEUU staff assumptions contributed to a perception that proceeding with a virtual orientation format would minimize any negative effects from holding any components in-person. However, Residence Life staff member, Heather, upon reflecting on her time as a Fulbright scholar, raised a key point in one of her interviews while speaking about a technology used for the "revised" orientation:

> I feel like these technologies are another hurdle for international students...I think it depends on the country and the culture but at least in Turkey no one used Microsoft Teams prior to the pandemic. We didn't either though, but I think that we had used digital tools a little bit more in our classes and in our social lives than the students I encountered in Turkey. So, if I were to say, "Hey, I want to make your life easier, let's do everything on a virtual meeting." That would just be another task on their list. "Okay, what's a virtual meeting? What is Microsoft Teams? How do I work it? Do I have a computer to even access it?"

> A lot of students did not have computers in Turkey. They just had their cellphones and cellphones can impact the quality of your meeting experience…I'm skeptical towards online tools but I think there's a potential there...we think, "Well, it made my life a lot easier, surely they'll love it." And then from the perspective of some students it might be that way but from other students it may be, "Okay, now I have to think of all of ... as we said, "I have to think about getting a laptop, having to get an Internet connection."…they don't have wi-fi in their homes in some places so all of those different things you have to consider and it's easy to forget those because we think we've found the next best thing with online communication software or whatever.

Heather's comments illustrate that even when we consider the risks involved managing uncertainty, we may revert to blackboxing some actors with which we associate, like different technologies. Consequently, we may inadvertently contribute to adverse effects that result from our decisions. At some point during most of my interviews with study participants, which were held via Microsoft Teams, either I or the study participant encountered some video or audio glitch that impacted our interactions. Or sometimes one of our Internet connections would slow down and cause delays in speech being sent across cyberspace to the other's computer. These breakdowns in technology sometimes made it difficult to understand what the other said, impacted the meaning interpretation. Such was also the case in attending Microsoft Teams meetings for Business College recruiting and admissions staff, each one attended by no fewer than five staff. During these meetings, members frequently spoke about updates related to the admission of international students and whether or not they had communicated if they were continuing to enroll for the fall 2020 term or if they would defer enrollment. In response, some staff would encourage others to reach out to the ISO as needed to maintain communication and consistent monitoring of student developments.

I even experienced difficulty during meetings with ISO staff that were not held virtually. Due to technology restraints in the physical office space, in addition to issues of timing, staff knowledge to coordinate relevant technologies, and produce the technologized interaction, I alternatively called Geoffrey's mobile phone prior to the beginning of each meeting. Upon doing so, he patched me through to his speakerphone so that I could hear socially distanced staff members engage in their meeting discussions. Unfortunately, due in part to Geoffrey's mobile phone's inability to clearly pick up a few members' soft, masked, and distant voices, I encountered trouble hearing some comments of the comments expressed. As a consequence of the decisions that staff made and actions they performed, to respond to and mitigate both risk and uncertainty, still unknown results occurred. However, these results, which often take shape as actor-networks themselves, do not always cause so much disruption that they break the orientation-network and staff practices altogether. Two concepts can help us to understand that even in unknown, disruptive times, the overall goals and purposes we work toward do not always fall completely apart or cease to exist.

6.3 Fluidity's Role

The new international student orientation event continued to unfold leading up to and during the fall 2020 term, despite the disruptive presence of COVID-19, the global health pandemic, constant change among heterogeneous actors' decisions, actions, and materials, and a magnification of both uncertainty and risks. Using a more traditional ANT lens at first, I suspected that the orientation would not occur, especially the in-person component, based on the particularized configuration of networked space, which heretofore had developed some amount of stability and durability over time. It was the

disruption of that specific placement of actors, and their associations with one another, that supported my initial suspicions, for if a new actor were to enter into the network (or leave it), or translate another actor within the network, then the performed network effect could possibly not occur. However, though the orientation-network and its internal associations did change, the general performance of an orientation did take place, albeit differently compared to terms prior to the pandemic. As such, I generated further data, and ventured beyond traditional ANT to understand how this "revised" orientation could occur despite alterations to its network. What I noticed was that the orientation's persistence, was not due to its "network" becoming solely and strictly ordered around specific associations, but to a fluidity among spaces and actors associated with it.

The "After-ANT" notion of fluidity enabled me to deepen my exploration of the orientation-unfolding process and make further sense of the ways in which spatiality lent a role in staff members' contributions to this event. Whereas traditional ANT scholars view networked spaces as held together by a specific configuration of actors and associations among them, leading them to be (un)successful based on their ability to hold together and depend on one another, After-ANT scholars believe that such spaces that are more fluid in orientation and held together by actors who inform one another. Müller and Schurr (2016) articulate that if and when actors move into or out of these spaces, or cut or create new associations, the present networks do not always experience complete disruption. Rather, their resulting effects are transformed instead of ceasing altogether.

6.3.1 *Improvisation & Adaptation*

Traditional ANT notions center around the notion of translation, and Fenwick and Edwards (2010) underscore that actors negotiate their connections during this process,

which can include the use of force, resistance, persuasion, logic, or even subterfuge. They illustrate the idea of negotiation during translation by analogizing keys and locks. They offer "Keys break and get lost, locks are jimmied, locked doors become devices of sabotage, deals and thefts subvert the network...the connections produced through translation are diverse" (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 10). The resultant effects of such translations not only are influenced by other actors associated with those being translated, but the form of "negotiation" that takes place among the connecting actors.

Though, in interpreting the unfolding of staff work practices within the orientation-network to produce the "revised" orientation, I believe something else occurred at such connection points other than simple negotiations of persuasion, resistance, or sheer force. In the spaces around which some actors connected with others, adaptation and improvisation took place. That is, instead of being completely translated by one actor, as Fenwick & Edwards (2010) noted can occur, some appeared to be only partly translated. ISO director illustrates in a conversation about the use of policy documents to perform his work related to the new international student orientation during the COVID-19 global health pandemic:

> Thomas: If I'm hearing it correctly, it sounds like these documents help you because they at least give you some idea to ground yourself in...
>
> Geoffrey: They kind of give you that foundational piece. Now, anyone who deals with immigration policy and somewhat academic policy…It's not black and white, it's very gray. Although, a lot of people look at it as a negative, I never have looked at it that way. I think it's a positive because it gives you the scope of it, but it allows you to craft it…We use it as guidance, but we have to do what's best for the university…for this office, what we can handle, and how we can craft that policy to fit the needs of our students.

Thomas: It sounds like it gives you autonomy and some authority to do what you need to do.

Geoffrey: Exactly. And not a lot of people look at that that way…A lot of people in this profession start to look at it, especially when you've not been doing it for a long period of time…as a hindrance. Like, "Oh, well if they're not giving me all the answers." And…you never want the government to give you all the answers.

But we found we have to bleed these two together [immigration policy through broadcast messages and institutional policy through "Pivot" document], and that can be difficult…If I'm a student and I'm coming in, and I have COVID-related questions, a domestic student only has to worry about the academic policy or US policy, which are pretty consistent throughout wherever you go nationally…But an international student has…to understand U.S. policy and the federal guidance, and all the other steps that you have to work through. Sometimes they're not consistent…Those are the things you have to weave.

Geoffrey, and his office staff members were not completely translated by the immigration and institutional policies mediated through the broadcast messages and "Pivot" document for the fall 2020 term. Instead of fully acquiescing to these actors, Geoffrey and his staff improvised and adapted to them, interpreting them in association with other relevant actors such as COVID-19, and international student needs. Their power and agency permitted them to resist complete translation through adaptation and improvisation. Such a response unfolded through their email communications with students, and question and answer periods during their two synchronous Microsoft Teams meetings with students, wherein they shared important updates and denoted key specific instructions for students to follow based on their individual interpretations and recommendations.

Another way in which SEUU staff improvised to adapt to the realities present during the COVID-19 pandemic was through moving a large portion of the orientation

programming from a physical, in-person setting to a virtual one. Similarly, SEUU staff did not permit the coronavirus, governmental and institutional policy, nor geographical restrictions to fully translate them into not holding any sort of "Get Connected" programming at all since it could not be in-person for the entire incoming group of students. Rather, ISO staff improvised by switching to engage with students online through the Internet. As mentioned earlier, they gathered information through available resources to identify what information was most pertinent for their students to absorb, as well as the ways in which that information could be presented. Moreover, ISO staff considered what orientation components they enrolled and mobilized to enact prior orientations, such as materials and campus or external partners. Previous material orientation "actors" included the online orientation modules via the Blackboard VLE, a new international student "Get Connected" electronic PDF handbook, Microsoft Outlook for sending and receiving email, computers, and even Internet access. Previous human orientation partner actors included individuals like Walter in Graduate Enrollment, and staff from other campus units such as Undergraduate Admissions, Residence Life, Health Services, and the Online Instructional Office. ISO staff members, like Trisha, reached out to staff in these units, with whom she already enjoyed well-established relationships, to seek their assistance. Assistance often took the form of providing updated information from their own units in relation to COVID-19 and international students, for the already established student material resources, or deeper interaction, as in the case with Walter.

During orientation events prior to March 2020, Walter worked with the ISO to present information related to cultural adjustment to the new incoming international students at the "Get Connected" in-person portion or the orientation. During one

conversation, he described in detail how he enacted his presentation to the approximate 100-150 new international students in attendance. He would have students seated at round tables so that each one had a mix of students by nationality, to facilitate interaction among them. Walter's presentation included topics such as regional and cultural differences (i.e., Eastern vs. Western cultural trends, food habits, attitudes, etc.), and the phases of cultural adjustment. He formatted his in-person presentation like a dialogue, during which students could ask questions. He also incorporated role-playing activities and sometimes walked students around campus to demonstrate cultural differences, like greeting domestic students.

During COVID-19, ISO staff asked Walter if he would continue to present to the new international students about cultural adjustment, though in a virtual format in the form of a short, recorded audio-narrated PowerPoint video presentation. Walter consented and instead of abandoning his presentation style as some might be translated into doing in the absence of a physically in-person, synchronous format, he improvised.

Walter: I think for the fall...I looked into the whole presentation…I took it. I started presenting and recorded those presentations...instead of me reading the slides, I presented it to the audience and recorded it, and edited and sent it to [Geoffrey], so that the students, when they run through it, they're thinking it's a YouTube…

Thomas: So, with the presentation that you dubbed on video, you would normally have presented that in person and you would...have some media and then you talk about it, and then you move on, and some media, you talk about it, and you move on?

Walter: Absolutely, yeah... we had slides, and everything developed by me two years in the row. So, I put the slide and I'm talking behind the slides…I'm presenting it to them and saying, "Hey, what do you know about it?" What the cultural shock looks like? And probably this video will help you out to understand how people suffer. So

> that giving them just a half real life…because it's not fully live because they're still looking into Blackboard.

Walter highlights in this exchange, as with others during our interviews, the importance of creating an opportunity for *interacting with students*, and the connection that comes from it, not just *talking to them.* He facilitated this interaction through asking questions and encouraging student responses, as well as providing role play simulations. His value for student-presenter exchange comes from his belief that orientation is about exchanging information with students, allowing them to explore with that information so that they may exceed "why they came here". So, providing opportunities for interaction allows students the chance to explore the information that has been exchanged, via questions and personal reflections, and feel more confident in their ability to succeed while at SEUU.

In keeping with this value and his belief in how orientation should be defined, Walter improvised and attempted to adapt his interactive presentation style to an asynchronous, recorded video format. Reviewing his video presentation, which was eventually directly emailed to students instead of being embedded within the online Blackboard orientation component, I noticed similarities with what he described about his in-person presentation. For example, Walter embedded within his PowerPoint video, a small video clip about how internationals frequently view culture when they arrive in the U.S., saying to students "I'll give you guys a couple of minutes to view this video." After the clip finished, Walter's voice returned, and he switched to a new PowerPoint slide to connect the video content to the concept of culture shock. He used in his language terms like "us" and "we" to denote a more conversational and collegial tone, given he came to the U.S. years ago as an international student himself. In one slide, while discussing the iceberg analogy related to visible and invisible aspects of culture,

Walter asked the question, as if he was expecting a response from students, “Can anyone give an example [of an element of culture]?”, followed by a brief pause. After, he said “Yes! Right hand, left hand driving...rules…” He repeated this style of questioning at other points in the presentation to simulate a sense of exchange and interaction with students. While acknowledging that his improvisation was not a direct substitute for the in-person version of his presentation, Walter did allude to hoping it would help engage students more in better understanding its contents than if he had simply read the slides.

6.3.2 *Fluid Technologies*

Bruno Latour (2005) shared that the production of events, processes, policies, etc. are the result of relations and social ties that weave among human and object connections. Therefore, material entities are essential to understanding how network effects, like a new student orientation event, are enacted into reality. In instances where some realities may appear similar but different, as in the case of Mol and Law’s (1994) anemia, John Law (2007) proposed that they may keep themselves together through using fluid technologies. These are adaptive objects capable of reconfiguring themselves within different networked spaces. Whereas they may have failed without them, I offer that SEUU staff members enrolled and mobilized fluid technologies in their work to enact the “revised” new international student orientation event. The primary technology used in their activities was Microsoft Teams.

According to the Microsoft Corporation (Apple, 2021), Teams is an online, Internet-based technology that:

> Brings together everything a team needs: chat and threaded conversations, meetings & video conferencing, calling, content collaboration with the power of

> Microsoft 365 applications, and the ability to create and integrate apps and workflows that your business relies on...Teams provides a single hub to help you stay connected, get organized and bring balance to your entire life.

Scholar Terri Thompson (2012) reminds that individuals' workspaces are temporally, spatially, and relationally hybrid. They involve different people, equipment, activities, and actions which are distributed over time and across spaces. The particular increase in usage of web-based technologies, like Microsoft Teams, magnifies the distributed and fluid character of the resulting performances of different actors and their relations to one another across workspaces. SEUU staff members' use of Microsoft Teams during the COVID-19 global health pandemic, reinforces the notion of fluidity present in enacting a "revised" orientation for new international students.

Prior to March 2020, most staff members involved in orientation-related activities worked in-person on the Main Campus. While they did use email and telephone to connect with one another, they also frequently met with one another in-person to perform their work, be it one-on-one in individual staff offices or in small groups within office conference rooms. At times, meeting agendas or other material objects might be distributed to facilitate planning or other discussions. However, as SEUU administrators and staff became increasingly aware of the likelihood of a Main Campus "shut down" and possible staff remote work, they began to plan for how essential services and operations could be done off-campus. By mid-March the large majority of staff members were asked to work remotely and administrators across campus communicated next steps to their units. For instance, Business College Dean wrote to his faculty and staff, and laid

out college-specific plans and policies for implementing remote work, based on decisions made by the SEUU President's office. In his message the Dean stressed:

> The [university] and [Business College] are open and operational. Working remotely is only a change in physical location…Our goal in instituting a remote working practice to keep the College moving forward and try to keep serving our students, while simultaneously protecting the health and well-being of our faculty and staff...we are learning as we go. There may be changes to this guidance as we learn the ins and outs of moving to a remote work arrangement.

Subsequently, a manager of a large unit within the Business College followed with a separate email message stressing the use of Microsoft Teams, particularly for meetings. He encouraged staff to immediately begin practicing Teams to prepare for this work shift. The College's Admissions and Recruitment units organizationally reside under this manager and began meeting regularly each week via Teams to discuss plans regarding enrollment figures, recruitment strategies, and details related to international students' fall enrollment possibilities. Because each staff possessed mostly reliable Internet access, computer microphone and webcam, and speakers, they could project themselves on the screen in a virtual "meeting room" and interact as if in-person in a conference room, despite being distributed across the city in their homes. One staff member, residing in India, was even distributed across time, as he attended meetings late at night while the meeting occurred in the early morning for staff in SEUU's home city.

For ISO staff, Microsoft Teams provided an opportunity to remain connected to their intra-office colleagues, as well as those from other units and incoming students from around the world. Geoffrey, for example, describes how his staff utilized Teams during the pandemic to perform their work, when provided an image of the Teams' application:

Geoffrey: There were a couple times we did virtual [staff] meetings as well early on in Microsoft Teams...We've also done for orientation purposes; we did where we invited [new international students] to the Teams meeting to ask questions…[Trisha] and I led that conversation…We also had the President come…give a welcome, answer any questions from the administrative level...Some of those things are nice that we can do…Sometimes it's difficult to get the President to come to an event because [they're] so booked, but [they] can jump onto a virtual meeting and be okay…[they] can do that in the car…[Teams] does allow for a good platform for getting students on, getting information out there to a larger group…

Thomas: What are the other things you use Microsoft Teams for...?

Geoffrey: Well, the one thing I will say I like about Teams...is the chat function…Let's say I'm talking to Athletics and they have a question about an incoming athlete finding a place to live or whatever the topic may be, I'm pretty good friends with a couple of them over there and they'll just shoot me a text through Teams, and we can get that settled pretty quickly which is nice.

Thomas: So, like quick questions?

Geoffrey: Yep, quick questions. A lot of people put GIFs in there...and have a good time with it, which I think does help a little bit, kind of helps with the moods just to be a little bit goofy and still feel like you have that connection. I kind of like that aspect of it.

When asked about the live, synchronous Microsoft Team's sessions with new international students, at least one of which occurred prior to the start of the fall 2020 term, ISO colleague, Trisha, described their unfolding:

Thomas: So, during these sessions, was it just one of you or were the staff members also there and you took turns speaking? How did the sessions unfold, the meetings that you said you had?

Trisha: The facilitator was [Geoffrey] and then everybody participated in that capacity like, taking the charge, answering questions, so it was more organic...It was more like, "…we prepare ourselves,

whatever happens it will be okay, or we'll do our best and if we cannot answer we will let them know and see."

Thomas: It sounds like you were saying that while [Geoffrey] was talking, you all were looking at the chat and answering questions as well?

Trisha: Correct, like, "Okay, there's a question now." Yeah.

Thomas: Moderating it, I guess.

Trisha: Yeah.

In both exchanges, Geoffrey and Trisha, highlighted several components of Microsoft Teams that enabled them to serve students through orientation-related practices. They primarily utilized the virtual video conferencing tool within Teams to meet in small groups, like for staff meetings, or as a large group during a live orientation session with new students. This tool enabled everyone to see and hear each other from wherever they were, provided they possessed access to the Internet and the specific URL link distributed by the meeting organizer. ISO staff also utilized the chat feature within Microsoft Teams, which could be used synchronously or asynchronously to communicate with other staff across time and space. Geoffrey discussed how he utilized it in real time to answer questions from campus colleagues. Though, if he might have been in a meeting during the period the colleague sent the chat, Geoffrey could return a response afterward, as Teams saves the conversation history.

Other benefits to utilizing the chat and video conferencing functions is that individuals can share their screens to display information or materials or transmit them by posting them to the chat for others to download. Last, Microsoft Teams integrates with other web-based applications to streamline processes and create efficiencies. For

instance, Walter described that he liked Teams because it connected to his calendar within his Microsoft Outlook email account, whereas when he used other technologies for setting up virtual meetings, he'd have to first set up the virtual space, then add it to his Outlook calendar, and then send it to other staff. Microsoft Teams enabled Walter to complete all three steps within one application.

To this end, uncertainty and unpredictability are always present within networked and fluid spaces, and in some instances actors cause disruptions which impact those spaces. I frequently observed disruptions while utilizing Microsoft Teams to observe SEUU staff meetings or engage with interview participants. Particularly during rainy days, I noticed my Internet connection appeared to operate more slowly, and the video displays of members in the staff meetings I "observed" would either freeze or flow out of sync with their audio feed. Alternatively, their speech might even fade in and out or pause for a few moments before resuming, creating choppy communication. Similar instances occurred during interviews, either due to mine or my participant's Internet connection or bandwidth. In both instances, we might turn off our video feeds to increase the bandwidth so we could better communicate with one another, even if it was just via audio as if on a telephone call. Across the meetings I attended, I observed a spectrum of flexible usages of Teams. Some staff members attended using only their computer audio, if they did not have a webcam or their Internet could not support video. Other staff without either a webcam or microphone dialed into meetings with their mobile phone to listen and communicate. This method of accessing Teams worked also for staff members who were not near a computer, such as with Business College staff member, Dan, who led one meeting while driving in his car. Though some staff did not have strong Internet

access or the equipment to facilitate audio and video communication, they still accessed the Team's meeting and communicated via the chat box.

Microsoft Teams represents how fluid technologies operate. If viewing this object from a traditional ANT lens, and one of the specifically-configured components fails, then staff members would likely not be able to use the technology at all and would miss the opportunity to engage with fellow colleagues or students. However, Teams operates differently. Like de Laet and Mol's (2000) Zimbabwe Bush Pump, Microsoft Teams is able to move from one site to another and still function because it is not so rigid in its composition. Further, it does not necessarily require the translations of actors in one specific location based on that of others. So, if the Internet connection or bandwidth is not adequate in one staff member's location, the result does not always mean that others cannot still be mobilized to interact with that person. There are other Teams components that can facilitate communication in the event of another's failure.

Due, in part, to the fluidity of technologies like Microsoft Teams, workers constantly (re)negotiate relations. And as the relations and associations of the actor-network change, so too does that fluid technology (Thompson, 2010, 2012). Such performances occurred within the staff Teams meetings. As different staff members entered into those virtual spaces using different facets of the Teams applications, their colleagues shifted in how they communicated with them. In one Business College meeting, one staff member addressed another with a question and paused in expectation of a verbal response. However, a third staff colleague reminded them that the addressed staff member did not have good Internet access where they lived and could only communicate via the chat box. Therefore, the questioning staff member allowed for more

time so that the respondent could insert their answer in the chat box. Once the "exchange" finished and the answer was provided, staff switched to a new topic. Nonetheless, despite how the meeting was facilitated, each staff in attendance could still engage with others in real time.

To that end, when a staff member was absent from the meeting and wanted to review what was discussed, they could view a recording of it (as long as it was recorded) or the saved chat box conversations in Microsoft Teams at a later time. That is, Teams was mobilized to transport a compilation of the meeting. However, in the latter instance, the network was not the same as when it unfolded synchronously in real time. Drawing from Thompson's scholarship (2012), the recording and archived chat box comments became disjointed and not characteristic of an unfolding dialogue between staff members, as occurs when discussions happen live. She quoted one of her study's participants to reinforce her thought while discussing a similar technology, the virtual discussion board: "Amy declares, 'If you just check in...and suddenly you respond to everything, you're not really discussing. You're putting your input in after the conversation is done'" (p. 259). Thompson conveys that in these instances, since time has passed, the dialogue may have evolved. And to engage more actively in it, staff members may need to enroll and mobilize additional actors, like other staff members, documents, emails, etc., to reconstruct it. Thus, while fluid technologies can promote the ongoing performance of staff work practices, despite disruptive actors which may enter into or leave the orientation-network, they contribute to the network's (re)shaping over time and across space, including the actors associated within it and the effects resulting from it. Due to Microsoft Teams within the orientation-network, and their diverse utilization of it, SEUU

staff could work in alternative ways that resulted in a new international orientation network. Yet one that looked different when compared to the Pre-COVID-19 iteration.

6.4 New International Student Orientation: A Multiplicity

Despite both being identified as "new international student orientation," these events were enacted involving different objects, people, physical locations, background experiences, etc. Unlike traditional ANT, that tends to center around the idea that one particular actor-network configuration performs a certain phenomenon, which either fails or succeeds based on the ability of the network to maintain its international relations, latter ANT approaches offer alternative perspectives. "After-ANT" scholars (de Laet & Mol, 2000; Law, 2007; Law & Mol, 1994) highlight the concept of multiplicity, wherein there may be different actor-networks and orderings that enact multiple versions of a phenomena, despite initial appearances (Mol, 2002; Gad & Jensen, 2010; Law, 2007).

"After-ANT's" perspective of multiplicity aligns well with Massey's conception of the same term as it relates to relational space. Massey contends that multiplicity connotes the simultaneous existence of more than one thing across space. She suggests that there are a multiplicity of relations and connections occurring "there" relative to our own positions "here," and that the constant emerging of space, as co-constituted by such social relations and vice-versa, promotes a heterogeneous coexistence of differing trajectories. In turn, that is how Mol's arteriosclerosis (2002), Law and Mol's anemia (1994), and Müller and Schurr's (2016) fertility industry can all simultaneously exist in different locations around the globe, enrolling and mobilizing different (and sometimes overlapping) peoples and materials, in relation to distinct relational positions and

configurations. Even during the global SARS virus event of 2003, Schillmeier (2008, p. 189) alludes to multiple networks that came into being in particular locations around the world, despite all being identified as virus "control mechanisms":

> The SARS outbreak in Asia led to a series of local control mechanisms and practices that were compliant with global standardized infection precautions and norms. However, it also brought about the emergence of local techniques and technologies that did not fit universalized practice but did function locally.

Similarly, as SEUU administration-sent emails and policy documents reinforced some alignment with other peer institutions related to "pivoting" to the fall 2020 term, they also explained that they would enroll other actors to create a uniquely SEUU plan. Such actors included local and state governments, SEUU medical and public health officials, and SEUU constituents themselves. In turn, multiple units on campus began to create their orientations for new students, such as undergraduate orientation, geared primarily toward domestic students, graduate orientation, required for all graduate students, graduate teaching assistant orientation, and international student orientation.

Like their SEUU staff counterparts, ISO staff and colleagues interpreted these policies, as well as other relevant policies, in concert with engaging their own students, partners, personal backgrounds, goals, and resources, to produce a uniquely SEUU new international student orientation. Since time and space are interdependent and ever-emergent, the orientation that was created and implemented for the fall 2020 term likely would only work during that period and for new international students. Applying the same orientation prior to the pandemic, or even to another institution, would likely not guarantee similar results, as the actors and their relations would be differently configured.

To that end, the presence of different orientation realities does not mean that one is necessarily better than the other, for they exist in relation to different contexts and circulating actor-networks. In other words, like Massey (Christophers et. al., 2018; Massey, 1992, 2005, 2006) argues in her scholarship that we should not compare entities according to one particularly configured set of criteria, I contend that we should not do the same when comparing our orientation events in relation to previous or future iterations. To do so denies each one's "coevalness" and existence as an equal reality in the simultaneous multiplicity of realities, based on the particular constellation of actors and spaces, and their relations with one another, during a certain point in time. Approaching orientation programming as a network of heterogeneous component actors, uniquely associated with one another across time and space enables us to unpack this "entity" to understand how it comes into being. In doing so, we may be able to identify key people, objects, or relationships to (re)imagine yielding different outcomes and effects, such as orientation programming in times of flux and disruption. This understanding may prove extremely useful across higher education organizations, for disruption may not only occur in pandemics, but also in other natural or person-made occurrences, as has been seen historically at institutions like Virginia Tech after a shooting and Tulane during Hurricane Katrina.

6.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described that the new international student orientation for the fall 2020 term during the coronavirus global health pandemic did not fail, but succeeded in being implemented, despite disruptive actors entering into or gaining visibility in the orientation-network. This "revised" orientation resulted from a shift, in part, in SEUU

staff work practices as they associated with actors like uncertainty and risks. By enrolling and mobilizing fluid technologies, like Microsoft Teams and its component tools, staff members improvised to maintain some amount of network stability and adapt to COVID-19-related translations in the orientation-network's spatiality. I concluded by contending that the concept of fluidity enables us to venture beyond notions of entities possessing only one network of relations and actors that either succeed or fail when the network is disrupted. Alternatively, the appearance of simultaneous multiple "realities" of a phenomenon across space lend support to scholars' notions of multiplicity (de Laet & Mol, 2000; Law, 2007; Law & Mol, 1994; Massey 2005), whereby different actor-networks and orderings come together in different ways in various locations to enact unique versions of a phenomenon. For SEUU, "orientations" look differently across the institution, as they involve different staff members, policies, students, technologies, spaces, and moments in time, though they are all called orientation. And though the SEUU new international student orientation may overlap in some forms with others serving the same type of students across the U.S., attempting to transport it to and implement it in another school would not guarantee the orientation to "work." Multiplicity respects the "coevalness" of orientation events and promotes their usage within particular locations, times, and contexts that are likely never to exist in the same configuration again due to the dynamic openness of relational space.

In the next chapter, I provide a summary of this dissertation and discuss implications that it offers for international student services staff within U.S. higher education institutions. I also share recommendations for moving forward from this study, in light of its limitations, as well as noting areas of further research.

CHAPTER 7. THE DISSERTATION AS A NETWORK EFFECT

The purpose of this work has not been to create a grandiose new vein of theory, but enter into conversation with distinct bodies of research to offer an alternative way of approaching international student services, particularly in times of disruption such as during a global health pandemic. While much literature focuses on international students' adjustment to U.S. higher education, their stressors, satisfaction, needs, and challenges, little centers around the staff members who support these students and how they specifically organize themselves to do so. Through this study, I sought to extend the conversation into the sphere of student services, particularly international student services, since these areas have lagged behind education-based discussions like those concerning teaching and learning, and knowledge creation.

In this chapter, I summarize how this work contributes to the unfolding conversation within spatiality and higher education realms. First, I restate the study's research questions and provide a synopsis of how the dissertation unfolded to address them. Second, I share three significant insights that emanated from this exploration and their implications for practice. Then, I offer three recommendations for practice, followed by area for further research that enable us to make further sense of spatiality and its role in shaping how staff enact international student practices. Subsequently, I consider challenges that arose during this study, before closing with personal reflection about how this work may serve as a unique approach to address questions related to student services within higher education organizations.

7.1 Summarizing the Research Problem

In Chapters 1 and 2, I described how research literature and professional reports have argued for increased and more developed support services for international students, as recently as during the COVID-19 global health pandemic, resulting in ever-changing responses among institutions, governments, and other actors across the world.

I approached this study using three primary premises, each drawing from a different scholarship area. First, I considered space to be relational, dynamic, open, and performed. This understanding led me to incorporate Doreen Massey's (1991; 1992, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006) concept of "relational space," which links space and time as co-constitutive, considers space as created by relations "established between entities of various kinds" (Murdoch, 2006, p. 19), and contends that a multiplicity of space is continuously and simultaneously constructed and performed. Beyond relational space, I focused on the notion that spatial study should be sociomaterial, and drew upon ANT and related approaches to highlight the role of materiality, and its association with people in constructing space and the social. And last, new international student orientation is an inherently spatial event (Berridge, 2012; Getz, 2012; Page & Connell, 2012), based on a particular combination of attributes that are designed and complimented by different people with specific goals in mind. Events continuously undergo construction through and by social relations, which also undergo constant transformation.

I elaborated upon the relational space literature, making sense of its different concepts and highlighting those I found most useful in conducting this study, like relationality, simultaneity, multiplicity, power-geometries, and time. I then presented ANT and "After-ANT" literatures as a complementary lens, given their emphasis on

sociomateriality and foregrounding of materiality. This lens provided concepts which enabled me to trace how work practices were enacted and what effects they produced that contributed to the enactment of the orientation during the COVID-19 pandemic. I drew upon these concepts: symmetry, order, translation, blackboxing, agency, power, multiplicity, fluidity, technologies-in-use, uncertainty, and risk. Last, I drew upon Event Studies to center orientation as the instantiation of international student services.

With these resources, I articulated that in considering orientation "work" to include staff workspaces, time, technologies, processes, and interactions between people and/or objects as actors, we open up new ways to (re)imagine how that work can be accomplished to meet students' needs and calls for service.

The conceptual frameworks of relational space, ANT, and event studies guided this dissertation, and shaped how I explored and addressed its research questions:

1. How does spatiality contribute to how staff to work to produce a new international student orientation event during a global health pandemic?
2. How does the orientation work that staff did prior to the global health pandemic contribute to what they are currently doing to revise the orientation event?
3. How does the global pandemic shape staff views of the orientation event, its goals, construction, and its enactment?
4. What role does materiality and online-technology play in the formation of the orientation event's spatiality?

I utilized a mini-ethnographic case study to conduct this four to five month exploration, generating data by observing and interviewing nine SEUU staff members across five Main Campus units. Other sources of data included an array of documents,

websites, policy reports, photographs, and interview transcripts, daily journals, and analytic memos. With these data, I traced relations between SEUU staff and objects they utilized or encountered during their work, attempting to view objects as not static and with inherent attributes, but as complex assemblages being constantly enacted.

During data generation and analysis, I identified human and material actors that were being described or observed as staff worked to produce the orientation, and how they came into relationship with one another. I looked for instances of disruption or breakdown in that staff work, and negotiations that took place between actors to maintain or upset the orientation-network's continuity. I was particularly drawn to tracers, such as U.S. immigration and SEUU institutional policy, the coronavirus, and Microsoft Teams, which helped illuminate what different staff members and objects were *doing* to produce and maintain the orientation, like organizing, improvising, and stabilizing. I relied on Clarke and Braun's (2006) TA framework to construct detailed analyses of these performances in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. In the next sections, I bring these discussions into conversation with one another and share recommendations for practice and research.

7.2 Significant Insights & Their Implications for Practice

Below, I share three insights that emerged from this study and implications they have for international student support staff and those working with other populations.

7.2.1 *What is Orientation?*

One of primary key insights that arose from this study concerns the question "What is orientation?" When asked that question during interviews, participants shared diverse perspectives. For instance, Business College staff member Dan said:

> My understanding is that they're doing more remote or more online now. They might be providing the orientation in a virtual format...What are we [Business College programs] doing? The answer is we have our day of orientation.

Moreover, Residence Life staff member Heather shared that to her "...it's a very localized thing. So, orientation at [SEUU] is going to look totally different than orientation elsewhere…" Such depictions appear to refer to orientation as a *noun*, a static object or fixed entity in time that possesses certain qualities or attributes which provide it identity. Even on SEUU websites, orientation was described as distinct entities, like something to be checked off a list as having completed. The ISO webpage said that "New student orientation is made up of two sections. The first part is an on-line and second part is in-person...so you can be prepared to attend [SEUU]." This concept of orientation aligns with professional organization NAFSA's approach, which views it as a "program" that provides common threads of information and resources to incoming students.

Alternatively, Graduate Enrollment staff member Walter described orientation as "exchange, explore, and exceed", whereby knowledge is exchanged, exploration occurs with questions, and even physical exploration of the community and education, to "make sure that both of us are exceeding in what we perform." Elsewhere, Business College staff Madeline described orientation as "orienteering":

> ...But I think it's one of the things, this idea that it's [orientation] like this start-stop. I think it's got real gray boundaries because you should be orienteering your students towards coming to your university, when they're in the application cycle. And especially for degree-seeking, since they've committed cycle, but then it shouldn't be like, "We're officially welcoming you at this time, and then we officially stop welcoming you at this time." It should be this fluid time…

These staff members, both of whom have worked with international students for many years, appear to view "orientation" more as a *verb* or *process*, whereby performances occur and "doing" happens. Their views are more "practice-based", which situates orienting as "ongoing systems of action, as relational, mediated by artefacts, and always rooted in a context of interaction" (Nicolini et. al., 2003, p. 3). In her work, Scoles (2017) aimed to de-center traditional notions of knowledge as something independent to be acquired, rather utilizing metaphors of relationality, situatedness, and emergence to conceptualize "knowledge and learning as being performed...into reality, through relationships and connections" (p. 7).

I argue that we can extend such metaphors to *orienting* instead of the blackboxed orientation, to understand how it is performed, when, across what spaces, and with what actors interacting among one another. Many participants indicated that orientation happens across time, with some saying that it never really ends due to international students coming into contact with different, new environments and scenarios. To that end, how does a spatial, practice-oriented viewpoint enable us to reimagine what orienting looks like over time, especially during periods of disruption? I argue that a verb-based notion of orienting can help us to move beyond Madeline's "start-stop" format to a process that occurs and is ongoing and integrated, for international students never stop adjusting "to new ideas, new surroundings, and new circumstances. Such a viewpoint acknowledges emerging connections that occur before, during, and after orientation events, like past implementations, planning phases, possible people and objects involved beyond the ISO and Main Campus, and staff work enacted therein.

The implication that results is a complete reimagining of what *orienting* looks like and how it is enacted. Compared to pre-COVID-19 times, the fall 2020 orientation appeared to be implemented as an ongoing process through time, rather than simply as two events in time. That is, given the constant changes to policy and public health measures, virus developments, furloughs, varied workspace settings, etc., the orienting of new international students extended throughout the late spring, into the summer, and even through the fall. Since not all new international students made it to the Main Campus, by the start of classes, ISO staff had to think differently about how best to orient them, and who and what else on campus should be mobilized to accomplish that goal. Per ISO participants, such actors mobilized were individual appointments, either virtually, in-person, or via telephone, additional student touch bases, mobilizing current international students to conduct small group meet-and-greets outside, and enrolling assistance from Residence Life for temporary quarantine accommodations for some students.

Additionally, ISO and other international support staff were a part of university-wide coordinating committees to ensure diverse voices were represented in SEUU's "pivot" to the fall term, which underwent consistent revision. In some respects, these committees created some sense of vision for each representative to bring to their units to reinforce a consistent level of operation to maintain public safety and health, while working to serve their individual constituents. Herein, laid some sense of ongoing integration; in work practices, in safety protocols, and in common understanding of operations that facilitated individual unit action. These examples provide for us an opportunity to re-envision how *orienting* could include not just the offices with "international" behind their name, but anyone who contributes in some fashion to serving

international students. Increased integration of these efforts across campus into the ongoing programming for these students could reshape how we address their adjustment and integration into the university community and contribute to their success and retention. Perhaps such integration should not start just before these students arrive and stop after they attend one "opening" event. Such a viewpoint, that is frequently privileged across higher education, could potentially limit the general "co-evalness" of staff units, their work, and institutions for a dominant perspective that may not work everywhere.

7.2.2 *Opening Up Tinto's Theory of Student Departure*

Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1988) theory contends that college students will likely persist to graduate from college the more they experience academic and social integration into "college systems." Scholars who research international student-related themes (Andrade, 2005, 2006; Mamiseishvili, 2012), concur that academic and social engagement are important keys to these students' persistence. Madeline alluded to Tinto when discussing what she would do to change elements of the orientation:

Thomas:	If you could change anything related to how the orientation is planned, developed, implemented, what would that be? And what kind of examples or evidence…
Madeline:	So, using a student development theory about... Thinking about environments, thinking about retention methods that we know...
Thomas:	And what theory are you thinking about?
Madeline:	I'm thinking Tinto, I'm thinking Astin, I'm thinking Kuh, most of their work is normed on White men. So, we start with that. But I think conceptually, there's a lot of things there that translate to every student regardless…I think there's a human aspect to those.

While Madeline has held student services roles for 10+ years, and earned an advanced degree in the field, she echoes sentiments of others across the U.S. That is, much of the student support programming generally builds from Tinto's scholarship (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Spencer, 2016), and is a starting place for many staff as they consider how to reimagine their services and programming, even international student support staff.

Madeline's comments also reveal what some scholars have argued over the years, that earlier theories of persistence generally focus on a particular student population, White, traditionally-aged college students (Andrade, 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1992), and may not be entirely applicable for international students. Currently, there is little research exploring international student retention. Though, with what research is present, scholars generally make two wider recommendations. The first recommendation is that these students are not exactly like their White, traditionally-aged domestic peers, therefore, alternative approaches to serving them should be considered. The second recommendation is to provide specific interventions and programming for this population. Therein, researchers share examples like English as a Second Language courses, social events and buddy programs, mentoring opportunities, and tutoring resources. These suggestions often respond to challenges that international students encounter, which can impact their success (Spencer, 2016).

While these recommendations are useful, they somehow appear incomplete. That is, they appear to be tacked onto conclusion or implications sections and missing in details about *how* they can be organized and implemented in ways that could yield persistence. Works that do attempt to discuss the latter for international students (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017; Lieb, 2016) rarely focus on the connections between the different

human and material actors involved. Nor do they seek to understand these actors' roles and associations with one another in contributing to these initiatives' unfolding.

The current study attempts to trace such actors and connections, in an effort to prompt further consideration about *how* institutions *do* programming and services that reinforce retention and student success, down to a micro-perspective. Such understandings through a spatial, ANT-related lens can help to critically consider Tinto's theory and explore its adequacy or appropriateness for addressing our institutions' international student populations, their success, and their retention. Moreover, utilizing this lens may help to determine if particular actors or types of network connections and alignments might transcend space and time to effectively promote these goals.

7.2.3 *(Re)Envisioning Whose Work Is International Student Services Work*

Thomas: ...it sounds like you don't interact as much with the international piece unless they're [ISO] approaching you. Is that correct?

Katie: That's how it had always been in the past...they get coded as an international student in [the campus information system], and then they never pulled on any report that we got. So, I didn't even know who they were. They were not a part of us, because...and again, this goes back to…way before me, way before [Trisha], way before [Geoffrey]... but I think it was just a thing, and nobody stepped back to be like, "But why?" And so that's what we're trying to do now, is partner, because we're doing the same work. If they're putting together a program, telling them the same thing that I already made a program to do, then why are we...We can each be good at what we're good at. And I think, be better at what we're good at, if we don't have to worry about doing all the things that we maybe aren't the most skilled in.

I can do training to learn about visa stuff, I can help [international students] with some of the immigration stuff, but I'm not going to be as good at it…whereas [Trisha] and [Geoffrey] are really good at what they do… but…they're not orientation professionals. But I

> am, then why can't I help them do that? So, I think there's a lot of potential for partnership for us, to make that a more robust experience for international students and make them feel even more included in the campus community. And if the university is wanting to grow that population, I think we have to talk about it now, before we're too far into it…I don't like being reactionary.

This interview exchange with undergraduate orientation staff, Katie, illustrates the utility of exploring student support from a relational spatial, ANT-oriented lens. Prior, I learned that before the pandemic, Katie's unit appeared reluctant to collaborate with the ISO. Despite their contention that entirely separate orientations, international and undergraduate domestic, reinforces a "separateness" among students, and lack of social integration, the ISO did not receive interest in partnering to facilitate a more streamlined experience. This cooler reception reinforced a "separateness" among staff, supporting what Trisha and Geoffrey shared: that many SEUU staff automatically send international students to them, or assume that the ISO would handle "international" initiatives. However, during the pandemic the ISO's continued communication and interaction with the undergraduate orientation office unfolded in ways that are beginning to yield increased interest in future collaboration, particularly due to emergent changes in staffing, workplaces, technologies, and new associations among different campus units. Such developments contribute to the unfolding relationship between ISO and Undergraduate Orientation, who have each signaled a move to more deeply collaborate.

Utilizing a relational spatial and ANT-like lens can enable practitioners to explore how other staff and unit actors across and beyond campus can contribute to such services such as the orientation event programming. For instance, when interviewing most Business College participants, and asking them to describe how they mostly interacted

with ISO staff, they said that they generally only connected to them acquired needed information. When asked to describe what the new international student programming looked like for the fall 2020 term, not one Business College staff member could provide a definitive response. Rather, they shared responses like "I assume it's virtual this semester" or "I'm not quite sure." One staff member even said that they always have to reach out to the ISO to get any information about orientation, and never have a "seat at the table" when it comes to planning it, despite their role with international students. Another shared that when they send admissions letters with academic program-related information to their international students, they generally include details about the required program-orientation. However, they include no information about any other orientations that students must also. From a relational spatial and ANT-related perspective, these Business College actors appear to find themselves more on the periphery of the orientation-network yet could play a significant role in shaping its outcome. Deeper collaboration with these units, like that beginning to bud with Undergraduate Orientation, could provide for more integration of and participation in these initiatives across SEUU. Different actors associating and connecting more with one another may enable them to determine how they fit in to the overarching purpose and goals of the orientation programming and contribute to its facilitation on an ongoing basis- be it through student communication or establishing programming partnerships.

7.3 Recommendations Moving Forward

Considering the key insights drawn from this study, and their implications for institutions and staff practitioners, I offer three recommendations: think about actors on

the periphery of or beyond the orientation-network, align relationships among network actors (both human and material), and encourage university staff and faculty training.

7.3.1 *Think About Actors on the Periphery or Beyond the Network*

Jan Nespor (1997) argued that schools as educational spaces are constituted by multiple networks that each contribute to the shaping of the spaces' communities, as well as teacher and student practices. He contended that only looking within educational space boundaries ignores how wider, external forces help shape spatial practices. Within the ISO and SEUU as educational spaces, the same sentiment can be extended to new international student orientation event programming, as a representation of "teacher"/staff practices. Not only should university staff members consider the different materials and people involved in orienting new international students on campus, but they should also think about those beyond the campus, as well as their connection to on-campus actors. Heather alluded to such a consideration in her critique of utilizing technologies like Microsoft Teams. That is, only thinking of Teams in terms of how it is used on campus from a staff perspective may not align with how students conceive of or approach its utilization abroad, especially as it associates with actors like computers, mobile phones, the Internet, geography, backgrounds, etc. Trisha alluded to a similar thought:

> Thomas: What challenges did you experience? [Using Teams]
>
> Trisha: Using the system by itself...At the beginning, yeah. And for the students too...So getting more comfortable and then more familiar with that. Like today is very different, everybody can do it.
>
> Thomas: Sounds like we've had some practice.
>
> Trisha: Correct. Correct. Yeah.

Thomas: Did you have to walk the students through how to use it at all? Or they're just like, they'll figure it out kind of on their own?

Trisha: You know that is a good point, because we did not...And I think there is something that maybe we need to start assessing more. Definitely, because we assume things first. Second, because it's so easy for us, we assume too that there is no big deal, but we forget that they... And that's where compassion and empathy needs to keep in mind, we need to keep in mind that. Yeah, definitely.

Thomas: Well, I can remember the first time I used Teams too, and I just kind of said, "Well, we'll test it and see what happens." And you're right as time has gone on we've definitely... I feel like I'm a whiz at it. But it's hard to remember when I didn't feel like that.

Trisha: Yes...Maybe it's not so complicated, but the fact that you're doing it for the first time, it's a different feeling. And then you feel more comfortable, and you have more experience and everything. Yeah.

Above, Trisha came to consider actors beyond those centered around her. Elsewhere, she articulated how she and her colleagues began to consider other campus actors who could be enrolled in future orientation programming, such as Undergraduate Orientation, the Graduate School, and the software used for their virtual orientation content. Business College staff Dan shared another example, in that a campus-wide committee he sits on is working with cross-campus staff to develop a new website to act as an "international portal" and coalesce relevant student information into one virtual space. Included therein will be links to the ISO, relevant policies, resources, and orientation-like information.

7.3.2 *Align Relationships*

In his research, Robert Beauregard (2018) shares that "those best able to cope with uncertainty are those who have both resources and reliable relationships" (p. 6). Inherent in his statement is the notion of assemblages of different actors and strong

connections between them. He discusses the notion of "slack resources", that is those not designed for specific purposes nor overutilized. He argues that the "slack" allows for stability by allowing one part of the network (e.g.., project or mechanism) to fail but maintain overall network functioning. His point is that "some resources (including personnel) should be left underutilized and thus available to address" organizational malfunctions and help during unforeseen circumstances (p. 6).

Beauregard also argues that actors' relationships to one another should be reliable, wherein quality is more important than quantity. He defines quality relationships as ones that are reciprocal, not coercive or contractual, where people feel a sense of obligation toward one another. He expresses that "In a moment of crisis in one's personal or professional life, those with whom one has reciprocal relationships step forward to provide assistance" and help maintain stability during uncertainty (Beauregard, 2018, p. 6). Such a sense of stability should not necessarily be viewed through a traditional ANT lens, but one where actors can fluidly improvise to respond to changes. Therein, actors must attract and mobilize strong, heterogeneous allies who are committed to its existence into reciprocal relationships, and in a way that creates slack resources. Doing so, Beauregard (2018) states, can mean that "these many actors will mobilize resources to withstand trials of strength and negotiate the disruption of uncertainty" (p.7).

The COVID-19 global health pandemic is certainly a trial of strength, as it has caused several actor-networks to fail around the world. This study demonstrated some ways in which SEUU staff attempted to align relationships with other actors to create more slack resources and continue to enact a new international student orientation. For one, ISO and other SEUU staff enrolled and mobilized Microsoft Teams to not only

interact with each other to plan and prepare the event programming but facilitate portions of it that would have traditionally been in-person. Teams became a strong, fluid actor in this network because when portions of the network failed, like not being able to have in-person, large-group gatherings, the virtual technology became a partial substitute, simulating parts of what would have transpired during the former gatherings.

Moreover, ISO staff members' current practices in "interesse-ing" and enrolling the assistance of Undergraduate Orientation to streamline planning and implementation of orientation programming provides another example of aligning relationships. As such, each unit will be able to utilize their strengths to support one another, while in some ways freeing themselves of time and capacity to engage in other practices to support students. To this end, I recommend for practitioners to examine which human and material actors may already be, or could be, important to their orientation work. Further, I recommend that they explore the relationships that could be aligned between such actors in considering how that work could be reimagined, especially with the presence of uncertainty its potential to disrupt it. In other words, think about who and what is "at the table." What actors are being "othered" or relegated to the orientation-network's periphery? Relatedly, of the human and material actors within the orientation-network, where are they placed and how do they associate with one another? Which appear to have more power to enroll and mobilize others to perform in certain ways? These questions spur us to consider actors like university administration, unit managers, on-the-ground staff, the experience they have, and even their intentions. Do they want to be at the table and how essential might their presence be? When asked about what they might change if given a magic wand, one non-ISO staff member expressed:

Non-ISO Staff: I would change the attitudes of our leadership towards the relevance of engaging international students. For genuine reason, not for money and not for...I mean, that's a genuine reason, but for social…humanistic reasons, not for money or putting on a show that you're fulfilling a strategic plan.

Thomas: So more of a sincerity it sounds like.

Non-ISO Staff: Yeah. Like a genuine interest, curiosity, and compassion for any diverse student, but also international students.

At least financially, this participant's unit appeared capable of being more involved, beyond providing orientation content to Trisha. However, the participant commented that especially during the pandemic, their unit tended to operate using more of a business-minded model thinking in terms of revenue and cost-savings. To this end, if in an ISO staff members' shoes, I would think about in what ways *does* and *could* that participant's unit relate to the work performed to enact orientation programming. Further, I would consider how it could look differently, and what actors might be needed to enroll and mobilize a deeper relationship, if deemed necessary by one or both units. Such is the case currently happening with the ISO and the Graduate School. During one staff meeting, Trisha shared how she was beginning to engage in conversations with Walter in Graduate Enrollment to see if the two units could collaborate and incorporate international orientation content with the larger graduate student orientation, as a way to streamline student actions and provide further social integration. So far, Trisha indicated that Graduate Enrollment is not inclined to collaborate, but she recommended attempting to gather and mobilize student data to share as a means to try and deepen their relationship.

Aligning relationships becomes particularly important for risk management, particularly as it relates to times of disruption or disaster. Neisser (2014) stresses that

such forms of risk management "encompasses mitigation, preparation, response, and recover, and underlines reactive and proactive components" (p. 90). Reactive, or corrective risk management addresses mitigating or reducing risks already present. Proactive, or prospective risk management addresses activities geared toward avoiding new or elevated risks. Both forms of risk management were reflected in this study, such as in implementing health and safety practices to minimize virus transmission or beginning to work with Undergraduate Orientation for future orientation programming. Through the lens of risk management, the idea of aligning relationships can provide for opportunities to (re)imagine student services to minimize risks, be they a pandemic, low levels of international student integration, or decreased persistence.

7.3.3 *Encourage University Staff and Faculty Training*

In aligning relationships, I recommend for practitioners and scholars to consider staff members' backgrounds as an actor. Consistently throughout this study, I observed instances where backgrounds contributed to how some staff interacted with others. Trisha and Geoffrey articulated that they often observed SEUU staff referring international students to the ISO because these students were "international."

> How we can work in collaboration that will create a very different way to provide the services…but sometimes people [other SEUU staff] feel intimidated because they don't understand immigration, but it's okay. They don't have to. Just focus on how you can provide for this particular student because what is happening is, most of the time, they send him back because they think it's our office. So that is the gap. We send the students and they come back saying, "They told me that you are the ones." Okay. And then we do stuff. We call them. That's then the liaison.

Separately, Madeline shared her belief that some SEUU staff, particularly those without much experience working with international students or a background in student

development/higher education, do not appear enthusiastic to serve this population. She described how this perspective supported her observations of those staff members just doing the "bare minimum" with international students, when they could do much more. Madeline's comments appear to connect and align with those Walter made during one interview, wherein he made a specific suggestion:

Walter:	I would require training for all...faculty/staff who's involved with international students. Mandatory training...Thomas, you work with international students, right?
Thomas:	I do...
Walter:	Does your school give you an opportunity to learn cultural competencies? Do you have a class you took? Do you have certificate to work with international students?
Thomas:	Oh no.
Walter:	So that's a gap…schools are not providing any cultural competency training to the staff who's working with international students.

While research indicates that immigration services are not the only ones that ISOs provide, Walter's comments do reinforce calls by practitioners and findings by researchers over recent decades that international student support is, and should be, a campus-wide endeavor. His comments also align with international student scholarship (Ammigan, 2019; Briggs & Ammigan, 2017), that recommend implementing training initiatives for faculty, staff, and students to develop intercultural competence. Such training could serve as a means of understanding international students' experiences and "improving views of campus services for that community" (Ammigan, 2019, p. 279). While the literature often fails to detail *how to enact* these recommendations, this study attempts to fill the gap by bridging between scholarship and implementation.

7.4 Limitations

Like any work, this study is not without its limitations. Massey (2003) argues that space is open, dynamic, and changing, even as we move through it from one location to another. Not only are our movements spatial, they are also temporal. That is, when we leave one location like a city, it is never the same after we leave it. The city lives on without us, weather has changed, people have moved on with their lives. Therefore, each movement we make is a specific point in time and space. Such is the same with the present study. I defined the research case and location in rather discrete terms, as well as selected particular actors to follow. My tracing and reconstruction of the orientation-network and actors within it, based on the data generated, represent it in one particular time-space. I acknowledge that this is a "partial representation of network connectivity, which is mediated by our position as researchers…" (Ruming, 2009, p. 457).

Though some of the connections and associations I traced extended beyond SEUU's Main Campus, they are not the only ones and there may be others vital to the orientation-network. Indeed, one critique of ANT is that one could attribute almost anything to the network, and multiple networks could have been created through other networks, ad infinitum. As such, I had to "cut" the network somewhere, as Strathern (1996) argues, to provide some sense of boundaries for exploration. Doing so, leads to a particularized snapshot at one point in time, whereas the orientation-network moves on and continues to unfold despite my departure from the field and construction of this dissertation (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). As Massey notes, it is not "the arrival of an active voyager in an awaiting passive destination but an intertwining of ongoing trajectories from which something new may emerge" (Massey, 2003, p. 108). At all

times, different trajectories intertwine and contribute to new emergings. If this study were conducted differently, its findings, interpretations, and unfoldings might look different. Given the situated nature of this project and its particularized, emergent unfolding, generalizing its findings may prove challenging. What might be the performative realities at SEUU may not be the same at other schools, be they similar or different in size, scope, mission, or some other attribute.

Another limitation of this study arises out of the ways in which it unfolded over time and space, as well as different actors that mediated the resulting work. For one, due to the IRB process it was not until late summer that I received IRB approval from both SEUU and my home university to conduct the study, when much staff work surrounding the fall 2020 orientation had already been completed. Furthermore, I am both a doctoral student and full-time SEUU staff member. While I received gracious support from my supervisor to adjust work responsibilities so that I could conduct this study, I could not be available for all relevant engagements. These temporal limitations contributed to some missed opportunities, wherein discussions or work practices may have transpired concerning the orientation event. Such opportunities could have further deepened my analyses or contribute to different network unfoldings.

7.5 Areas for Further Research

I suggest three areas of further research that emerged from this study, which I believe will help to more comprehensively understand how services unfold, like new international student orientations, and how we can (re)imagine possibilities for them as time-space continues to change in unpredictable ways, such as during a pandemic.

7.5.1 *Affect and Actor-Networks*

Throughout this study, participants inferred feeling particular emotions while performing orientation-related work, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Comments mostly pertained to the uncertainty resulting from the spread of the virus, and different stakeholders' actions simultaneously circulating together as a result. Staff mentioned that they were "just trying to survive", "were in crisis mode", or were "just doing the best they could, given the circumstances". Geoffrey, mentioned the following during one particular interview exchange:

> Geoffrey: I think when you're talking to those people who support you and their anxieties are high, it makes your anxieties be high. I think that's a little bit difficult to work around as well and how can you ease those anxieties for students when you can't really see them in-person or feel that normalcy.
>
> Thomas: And you have that anxiety yourself.
>
> Geoffrey: Yep, exactly, yep.

Elsewhere, in SEUU leadership's communication to the community, they spoke of having to contemplate painful and difficult decisions to best address COVID-related challenges. While much of the language that alluded to staff emotions appeared to evoke sentiments of exhaustion, exasperation, or urgency, some of it expressed something more positive. That is, several artifacts like the "Get Connected" Handbook, emails to new international students, and one participant all expressed enthusiasm and excitement. One staff member shared how she feels "giddy" and gets excited when an international student arrives, likening it to a "holiday kind of thing." Though, this staff member does not know if others have had such experiences when it comes to their work supporting

international students, or if they all "get it." In this comment, it appears she associates the emotion of excitement with exerting more work effort, saying "I mean, I think they like the work. I think they do the bare minimum of it."

To this end, ANT and "After-ANT" approaches tend to avoid engaging with emotion and affect. Indeed, researcher Nigel Thrift (2000) argued that ANT tended to "neglect specifically human capacities of expression, powers of invention...which cannot be simply gainsaid, in favour of a kind of flattened cohabitation of all things" (p. 2014-15). However, more recent literature is exploring affect and emotion's contributions to assembling or disrupting networks (Müller & Schurr, 2016; Sage, Vitry, & Dainty, 2020). Such research should be extended into Education to better understand how staff feelings can impact the work that they enact, particularly during times of stress or challenge, such as during COVID-19 or even when understaffed.

7.5.2 *Exploring Different Orientation Event Programming Formats*

A second area for further research centers on the model around which international students may be oriented. In this study, new undergraduate and graduate international students are oriented as one group, and isolated from their domestic peers. Domestic undergraduate students attend their own orientation. And all graduate students have a separate required orientation, including international graduate students. There is even an orientation for graduate teaching assistants, as well as individual academic department or program orientations. Such a decentralized model for orientation reflects a specific configuration of actor-networks, each consisting of a distinct arrangement of human actors, materials, and work practices that are performed, as well as yielding a specific "effect" in the orientation programming and outcomes that result. What if the

model were different? What if there were separate new international student orientations, one for undergraduates and one for graduates? What if international students were more incorporated into the primary, domestic undergraduate student orientation? How differently might the orientation-network(s) look, and what can we glean from it for opening up the possibilities to reimagine staff work practices? Conducting this kind of study using a different type of case could yield additional insights into how institutions and their staff can prepare for disruptive times and continue to serve their students through support programming.

7.5.3 *What About International Students?*

This study focuses on international student support services, and the new international student orientation as one representation. While the scope of this work specifically explored spatiality as it contributed to staff work practices to enact such programming, it is important to acknowledge a key actor within the orientation-network: international students. Including their voice in future research can enable researchers to help us understand their contributions to the ways in which staff members act to enact the orientation. In disruptive times like COVID-19, there may potentially be more interaction with students throughout the orientation-creation process, thereby possibly leading to insights that help to open up ways of working to support students that could have been veiled or taken for granted during less disruptive periods.

7.6 Concluding Reflections

This dissertation is the "effect" of an emergent performance of a series of messy actor-networks that became entangled with one another in particular ways over time and

space. It is the nexus of several intersecting trajectories, of "stories-so-far" (Massey, 2005). As staff improvised and adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, so did I. I shifted my entire frame of reference for viewing and understanding concepts like space, power, objects, agency, and even time, viewing them in one way for the first 34 years of my life. In less than two years, I tried to embrace space's "relational turn," understanding these concepts as ongoing performances of a network of different actors (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Latour, 2005; McGregor, 2004a, 2004d; Scoles, 2017). It felt difficult to maintain this new perspective when the old one felt so comfortable and natural.

What is more, I frequently improvised while preparing for and implementing this study. I originally planned to conduct it almost entirely in-person on the Main Campus. However, due to the coronavirus arriving to my city and triggering stringent responses from diverse officials, I improvised and switched to virtual format. Herein, my challenge was that as I was shifting and improvising, so too were SEUU staff who contributed to the new international student orientation. Ever present through this shift was a lingering unpredictability and uncertainty in what might happen next.

However, as I began to notice this uncertainty and its impacts on staff work practices and the orientation, I realized that despite my challenges and frustrations, I was living in the orientation-network and observing its unfolding. Not what I expected, once I mentally made this shift in perspective, I felt more confident in tracing the constellation of actors and their social interactions with one another to produce the orientation. As I think back on this work and the analyses developed from it, I'm reminded of ANT scholars Fenwick and Edwards (2010), who said that they "unpick what appears to be

stable; highlight ambivalences; and locate weak connections where intervention can transfigure, dissolve or initiate networks of activity and imagination" (p. 174).

I believe Fenwick and Edward's words encapsulate the spirit of this study. I sought to understand how staff worked to produce a new international student orientation event during a global pandemic, and how spatiality contributed to that work. However, in doing so I made mistakenly thought that I would be interacting with a nice, neat, and stable orientation actor-network. Then COVID-19 and the global health pandemic appeared to disrupt everything. Though, through its disruptions COVID-19 dissolved my preconceptions and initiated a new imagining of *orienting*, and of the ways in which staff work practices contribute to it. My hope is that the insights taken from this study encourage the opening up of the international student services blackbox, as well as the blackboxes of other practices within higher education organizations, and inspire opportunities for intervention, transformation, and imagination of new possibilities. When we understand who and what are involved in enacting different things within an institution, like initiatives, policies, programs, or events, and their connections or lack thereof to one another, we can begin to (re)consider the possibilities before us. Such an endeavor enables us to grow and develop new opportunities for supporting our students, not just during pandemics, but at any time and in any space.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. APPROVED STUDY PARTICIPATION EMAIL INVITATION

Greetings,

My name is Thomas Teague and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Kentucky (UK) in Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation. As part of my program, I am interested in exploring how University of Louisville staff members plan, construct, and implement a revised new international student orientation program during the COVID-19 pandemic. As someone who interacts in some capacity with international students, your experience with this student group can help me to better understand how the orientation event for this population is organized, what staff members are involved, and how staff facilitates this event within the context of a global health pandemic. My goal is that the results of this research will help universities to consider how they may best serve these students, through events like orientation, as they endeavor to enroll and retain more international students to their campuses.

Therefore, I invite you to participate in this research study. By volunteering, you would be contacted to participate in two interviews over a period of 4-5 months about your experience related to this year's new international student orientation program, approximately from August to November of 2020. Each interview would last approximately one to 1.5 hours and would be held in a format of your choice (e.g. via Microsoft Teams or telephone).

Additionally, you may be asked to take and share photos of physical spaces on campus where new international students may interact for portions of the orientation programming, only if you are permitted to be in these spaces at this time, per university and departmental policies. Examples may include buildings, rooms within the buildings, furniture layouts, signage, etc. If asked, please try to take photos of these physical spaces without student or staff presence, to maximize individual privacy. Your participation is voluntary. As a token of my appreciation, I will provide you with a $20 gift card of your choice from either Starbucks Coffee, Quills Coffee, or Amazon, delivered electronically to your university email address.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me via email at thomas.teague@uky.edu. I will then send you a follow-up email to schedule the first interview within the next two weeks, as well as provide you with an informed consent form to review. At the beginning of our interview, we can discuss the form as well as any questions you may have. Thank you in advance for your consideration of participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Thomas Teague
Ph.D. Student in Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation
University of Kentucky College of Education

APPENDIX 2. PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview #1 Protocol: Background & Relational Map

1. Tell me a bit about yourself, including what you studied in college and previous roles you've had prior to this one.

2. Describe to me your current position as _____ and in what setting you currently work (home office, at school, etc.).

3. What does the new international orientation event program look like for the 2020-2021 academic year?

    a. How is it organized?

    b. What are the goals of the orientation as you understand them?

    c. What does student success look like in this orientation?

    d. What do you do in your position that relates specifically to the orientation *(i.e. What work have you done to contribute to the orientation this year?)*

Introduce relational map exercise asking participant to map out in a diagram each person, object, space, and technology they use to successfully accomplish their everyday job.

4. Take out a piece of paper and pen or pencil. In the middle of your paper, put your name and a circle around it. Then, think about all the work you do in a day that relates to the international new student orientation. With that idea in mind, draw a diagram around your name of ALL the people, objects, things, spaces, software, and hardware that you use to do that work.

5. Now, place a mark in beside the parts of your diagram that are different from last year with regard to the work you do that contributes to the orientation *(it could be a circle of something that has changed, a "+" of something added, an "x" of something removed, etc.).*

6. Is there anything else you'd like to add that has not already been discussed?

Interview #2 Protocol: Photograph Exercise

Ask participants to bring 3 photos of things they think either helps them get their work done or inhibits how they get their work done. Interviewer also brings a few so they can discuss (choosing photos that may represent key actors, obligatory passage points, fluid technologies, etc.) Looking at each photo in turn, ask:

1. How does working with the objects in the photos help or hinder the work that you do to contribute to the new international student orientation.

After this exercise, ask:

2. In what ways has the COVID-19 health pandemic impacted:

    a. How the orientation has been planned, constructed, and implemented?

    b. The online and physical spaces in which the orientation has been planned, constructed, and implemented?

    c. The orientation's goals as you understand them?

    d. How you define student success as related to new international students?

    e. What attributes of the orientation contribute to international students being successful?

3. If you could change anything about how the orientation has been planned, constructed, or implemented, what would it be?

    a. What evidence or examples lead you to suggest these changes?

4. Is there anything else you'd like to add that has not already been discussed?

APPENDIX 3. FIELD NOTE REPORT TEMPLATE

Date:

Location/Space *(Where: online, in-person, etc.)*:

Phase in Orientation Programming (Phase I or II):

Observations

1. Main Event/Activity:
2. Goal of Event/Activity *(What's it aiming to achieve?)*:
3. People and Objects Present & Humans Relations Involved:
4. Other Interactions or Activities *(pre-, during- or post- event/activity):*
5. Emotions Present *(if applicable):*
6. Breakdowns, Improvisations, or Innovations:
7. What I learned about staff serving students in the observation:

Academic Notes

- Analysis Ideas:
- Theoretical Links:
- To Think About Further/To Do List:

Personal Notes

- What Surprised Me:
- Mistakes I made:
- Reflections:

APPENDIX 4. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

IRB Approval
7/30/2020
IRB # 60382
NMED

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

KEY INFORMATION FOR EXPLORING SPATIALITY: HOW UNIVERSITY STAFF PRODUCE A REVISED, NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ORIENTATION AMID GLOBAL PANDEMIC STUDY

I am asking you to choose whether or not to volunteer for a research study about ways in which University of Louisville (UofL) staff members serve international students through orientation programming within the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic. This page is to give you key information to help you decide whether to participate. I have included detailed information after this page. Ask me questions. If you have questions later, my contact information is below.

WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

By doing this study, I hope to learn about how (UofL) staff members plan, construct, and implement a revised new international student orientation program during the COVID-19 global pandemic. As someone who interacts in some capacity with international students, your experience can help me to better understand how the orientation event for this population is organized, what staff members are involved, and how staff facilitates this event within the context of a global health pandemic. My goal is that the results of this research will help universities consider how they may best serve these students, through events like orientation, as they endeavor to recruit more international students.

In volunteering for this study, you will participate in two virtual interviews over 4-5 months. Each will take approximately one to 1.5 hours via Microsoft Teams or telephone. During the interviews, I will ask you about topics like: your current position and responsibilities, the revised new student orientation, who and what you work with to contribute to that orientation, spaces and settings within which you work, how the orientation differs now compared to last year, how certain items with which you work inhibit or help you work, and your thoughts on how COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted the ways in which you work to contribute to the revised orientation program.

I will record our interviews for data analysis purposes, and they will be professionally transcribed by rev.com. The recordings will be destroyed upon authenticating the interview transcriptions. I will provide you a copy the transcriptions to check for accuracy or make any edits of portions you wish to not be used in the study.

Additionally, you may be asked to take and share photos of physical campus spaces related to portions of the orientation programming, only if you are permitted to be in them at this time, per university/departmental policies. Examples may include buildings and rooms within them, signage, etc. If asked, please try to take photos of these spaces without student or staff presence, to maximize individual privacy."

As a token of my appreciation, I will provide you with a $20 gift card to one of the following businesses of your choice: Starbucks Coffee, Quills Coffee, or Amazon. The duration of this study will be during Fall 2020, approximately from August through November 2020.

WHAT ARE KEY REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?

Although you may not get personal benefit from taking part in this research, your responses may contribute to greater academic understanding about the ways in which U.S. colleges and universities support international students. You have a choice about whether or not to complete each interview and you are free to skip any questions or discontinue at any time. For a complete description of benefits and/or rewards, refer to the Detailed Consent.

WHAT ARE KEY REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE NOT TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?

There are no known serious risks to participating in this study. Some questions may make you feel uncomfortable and you may choose not to answer them.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

The person in charge of this study is Thomas Teague of the University of Kentucky, Department of Educational Policy and Evaluation Studies. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you wish to withdraw from it, my contact information is: thomas.teague@uky.edu or 828-308-4727. Additionally, you may contact my faculty advisors, Dr. Beth Goldstein, beth.goldstein@uky.edu, and Dr. Jane Jensen, jjensen@uky.edu.

If you have any questions, suggestions or concerns about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact staff in the University of Kentucky (UK) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Monday-Friday at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428..

DETAILED CONSENT:

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU WOULD NOT QUALIFY FOR THIS STUDY?

- Being under the age of 18
- Not interacting with international students in any way as a part of your role or job
- Not being a staff member at the University of Louisville (staff members include professional staff, full time and/or part time)

WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND WHAT IS THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF TIME INVOLVED?

The research procedures will be conducted in a format of your choice (e.g. via Microsoft Teams or via telephone). You will need to participate in two interviews during the study. Each interview is completely voluntary and will last about one – 1.5 hours. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately two-three hours during Fall 2020, between approximately August and November of 2020.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

Within two weeks of responding to the recruitment email, you will be contacted with a request to set up your first interview, via your University of Louisville email address in conjunction with your professional role that is publicly available. You will be asked to schedule your interview within two weeks of sending your email response to participate.

At the time of your first interview, in a format of your choosing (e.g. via Microsoft Teams or telephone), we will review and sign the consent form. I will then ask you a few questions related your background and how you came to serve international students, your understanding of the format of the new international student orientation for this year, and your role in relation to the orientation. I will also ask you to participate in a mapping exercise to understand who and what you work with to contribute to the orientation programing.

At a later time, I will contact you via email to set up your second interview in a format of your choosing (e.g. via Microsoft Teams or telephone). During this interview, I will ask you to participate in an exercise where you share 3-4 photos that you brought with you of objects you work with and how they help or hinder the work that you do to contribute to the orientation. I will have a few photos for you to discuss with me as well. Then, we will discuss ways in which the COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted the orientation and international student success, as well changes you might wish to implement in relation to the orientation. During this time together, we may discuss any of your feedback in more detail, such as if there is something that I do not understand and about which I require clarification.

Both interviews will take place during the fall of 2020. With your consent, I will record each interview so that I may use it for data analysis. Upon transcribing and analyzing your interviews, I will destroy the original recordings and provide you a copy of their transcriptions so that you may check them for accuracy or edit portions you wish to not be used in the study.

WHAT ARE WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no risks to staff members other than those that they would experience in everyday life.

Although I have tried to minimize this, some questions may make you feel upset or uncomfortable in some unanticipated way. However, you may choose not to answer them.

In addition to risks described in this consent, you may experience a previously unknown risk or side effect.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

I do not know if you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced feelings of relief when expressing themselves and their experiences freely. Information learned may help contribute to greater understanding about how U.S. colleges and universities support international students in times of change like during a global pandemic.

DETAILED CONSENT:

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU WOULD NOT QUALIFY FOR THIS STUDY?

- Being under the age of 18
- Not interacting with international students in any way as a part of your role or job
- Not being a staff member at the University of Louisville (staff members include professional staff, full time and/or part time)

WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND WHAT IS THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF TIME INVOLVED?

The research procedures will be conducted in a format of your choice (e.g. via Microsoft Teams or via telephone). You will need to participate in two interviews during the study. Each interview is completely voluntary and will last about one – 1.5 hours. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately two-three hours during Fall 2020, between approximately August and November of 2020.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

Within two weeks of responding to the recruitment email, you will be contacted with a request to set up your first interview, via your University of Louisville email address in conjunction with your professional role that is publicly available. You will be asked to schedule your interview within two weeks of sending your email response to participate.

At the time of your first interview, in a format of your choosing (e.g. via Microsoft Teams or telephone), we will review and sign the consent form. I will then ask you a few questions related your background and how you came to serve international students, your understanding of the format of the new international student orientation for this year, and your role in relation to the orientation. I will also ask you to participate in a mapping exercise to understand who and what you work with to contribute to the orientation programing.

At a later time, I will contact you via email to set up your second interview in a format of your choosing (e.g. via Microsoft Teams or telephone). During this interview, I will ask you to participate in an exercise where you share 3-4 photos that you brought with you of objects you work with and how they help or hinder the work that you do to contribute to the orientation. I will have a few photos for you to discuss with me as well. Then, we will discuss ways in which the COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted the orientation and international student success, as well changes you might wish to implement in relation to the orientation. During this time together, we may discuss any of your feedback in more detail, such as if there is something that I do not understand and about which I require clarification.

Both interviews will take place during the fall of 2020. With your consent, I will record each interview so that I may use it for data analysis. Upon transcribing and analyzing your interviews, I will destroy the original recordings and provide you a copy of their transcriptions so that you may check them for accuracy or edit portions you wish to not be used in the study.

WHAT ARE WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no risks to staff members other than those that they would experience in everyday life.

Although I have tried to minimize this, some questions may make you feel upset or uncomfortable in some unanticipated way. However, you may choose not to answer them.

In addition to risks described in this consent, you may experience a previously unknown risk or side effect.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

I do not know if you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced feelings of relief when expressing themselves and their experiences freely. Information learned may help contribute to greater understanding about how U.S. colleges and universities support international students in times of change like during a global pandemic.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?
If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?
There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?
When I write about or share the results from the study, I will write about the combined information. I will keep your name and other identifying information private.

I will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not the researcher (i.e. Thomas Teague) from knowing that you gave me information, or what that information is. To protect the confidentiality of data, I plan to:

- Assign a pseudonym to you so that your personal identity is not included in the study's results.
- Keep all recorded material notes related to our interview in a secure location. If in my home, in a locked desk drawer. If in my office, a locked cabinet.
- Keep all computer files or audio files from recorded interviews either on an encrypted and password protected jump drive or via a password protected computer in a locked office.
- Collapse data, as needed and appropriate, so that your personal identity may not be identified in the results.
- For interviews that will occur via Microsoft Teams: Please be aware, while I make every effort to safeguard your data once received from the online company, as with anything involving the Internet, I can never guarantee the confidentiality of the data while still on the company's servers, or while enroute to either them or us.

You should know that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to share your information with authorities if you report information about a child being abused, if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else, or if you share about a sexual assault related to an international student.

Additionally, officials from the University of Kentucky may see or copy information that identifies you for the purpose of ensuring the study was done correctly.

CAN YOU CHOOSE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY EARLY?
You can choose to leave the study at any time. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study, nor will your employment or student standing be adversely impacted.

If you choose to leave the study early, data collected until that point will remain in the study database and may not be removed.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
As a token of my appreciation, you will receive a $20 gift card to your choice of Starbucks Coffee, Quills Coffee, or Amazon. Your gift card will be distributed to you via your publicly available university email address.

WILL WE CONTACT YOU WITH INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN FUTURE STUDIES?

No

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?
I am being guided in this research by my advisor and dissertation committee chair, Dr. Beth Goldstein, in the Education Policy and Evaluation department in the UK College of Education. Additional guidance will be provided by my other committee members, including Drs. Jane Jensen and Jungmin Lee of the UK Education Policy and Evaluation department and Dr. Susan Roberts of the UK Department of Geography.

The information that you are providing will no longer belong to you. The research may lead to new educational knowledge. This knowledge could have some financial value. There are no plans to provide financial payment to you or your

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VITA

Thomas W. Teague, Jr.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

2009 **M.S. in College Student Personnel**
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN
- *Problems-Lieu-Of-Thesis Paper:* Factors that motivate African-American undergraduate students at four-year public institutions to study abroad

2007 **B.A. in French Language and Literature with a Teaching Option**
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC
- *Summa Cum Laude, Valedictorian*

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2019-Present **Career Coach**
Ulmer Career Center, College of Business, University of Louisville

2014-2019 **Academic Advisor**
Gatton College of Business & Economics, University of Kentucky

2013-2018 **Instructor of UK 101: Academic Orientation**
Undergraduate Education, University of Kentucky

2011-2014 **Education Abroad Advisor**
Education Abroad Office, UK International Center, University of Kentucky

2009-2011 **Study Abroad Advisor**
Study Abroad Programs Office, Texas A&M University

Summer 2008 **Graduate Intern**
International Centre, University of Worcester, England

2008 **Graduate Intern**
Programs Abroad Office, University of Tennessee- Knoxville

PUBLICATIONS

Marijanovic, N., Lee, J., **Teague, T.,** & Means, S. (2021). Advising Experiences of First Year International Doctoral Students. *Journal of International Students, 11*(2).

Teague. T. (2014). While Abroad. In D. Wick (Ed.), *NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisers and Administrators (pp.75-89). Washington, D.C.: NAFSA: Association of International Educators.*

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Teague, T. & Hall, S. (2019). *Collaborating for Change: Building Partnerships for International Student Success*. NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, National Conference, Louisville, KY.

Teague, T. & Marijanovic, N. (2019). *Understanding International Graduate Students' Career Needs.* NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, Region III Conference, Charleston, WV.

Marijanovic, N. & **Teague, T.** (2019). *Integrating Career Development into the Academic Experience for Graduate Students.* NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, Region III Conference, Charleston, WV.

Eglinski, S. **& Teague, T.** (2017). *Connecting study abroad & academic advising.* AACRAO: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, MN.

Kim, J., **Teague, T.**, & White, C. (2016). *Integrate, automate, empower: Streamlining processes for study abroad transfer credit.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Region VI Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

Teague, T., & Eglinski, S. (2015). *Who signs this?: Partnering with academic units in EA advising.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Region VI Conference, Cincinnati, OH.

Diehl, K., Reister, J., **Teague, T.,** Lilja, P., & Whitson, J. (2015). *Finding balance: Managing the demands of work, life and family.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Region VI Conference, Cincinnati, OH.

Teague, T., Pike, L., & Samek, D. (2014). *It's time for a facelift: Using technology to rejuvenate orientation programming.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Region VI Conference, Lexington, KY.

Robinson, J., **Teague, T.**, & Walker, J. (2014). *Supporting students' emotional well-being while studying abroad.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Annual National Conference, San Diego, CA.

Teague, T., & Slaymaker, K. (2014). *When non-US students study abroad: building collaborations between study abroad staff, ISSS staff and faculty.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Annual National Conference, San Diego, CA.

Teague, T., & Hale, K. (2013). *Re-entry as ongoing orientation.* KCEA: Kentucky Council on Education Abroad, Spring Meeting, Berea, KY.

Togunde, D., Snell, E., & **Teague, T.** (2013). *It's bringing the study abroad students full circle.* The Forum on Education Abroad, Annual National Conference, Chicago, IL.

McCallon, M., Pizzo, D.,**Teague, T.,** & Kurtzman, R. (2012). *Making study abroad a success for students with disabilities.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Region VI Conference, Columbus, OH.

Brown, L., **Teague, T.,** & Bollinger, A. (2012). *Let's talk about sex: How to discuss an uncomfortable topic in your pre-departure orientations.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Region VI Conference, Columbus, OH.

Teague, T. (2012). *ISP 599: A new approach to providing ongoing orientation at a large public institution.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Annual National Conference, Houston, TX.

Teague, T., & Scott, I. (2010). *Navigating the bayou: Examining the millennial employee's transition from school into the workplace.* NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Region III Conference, Houston, TX.

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

Fall 2020	University of Louisville Cardinal Spirit Staff Award for helping to make the college a great place to work by exuding positivity, elevating others, caring deeply, getting work done.
2014	Presentation selected at NAFSA Region VI Conference in Lexington, KY as a Regional Highlight Presentation: *It's time for a facelift: Using technology to rejuvenate orientation programming.*
2013	Presentation selected at NAFSA Region V & VI Bi-Regional conference in Indianapolis, IN to be presented at NAFSA Annual National Conference in San Diego, CA as Regional Highlight: *When non-US students study abroad: building collaborations between study abroad staff, ISSS staff and faculty.*
2010	Certificate of Achievement for Production and Presentation of a Poster at NAFSA Annual National Conference in Houston, TX: *ISP 599: A new approach to providing ongoing orientation at a large public institution.*