DISSERTATION

"WE ARE AFRO-CARIBBEAN, NOT AFRICAN AMERICAN": CAREER READINESS AND POLICY AWARENESS IN EMPLOYMENT PREPARATION EXPERIENCES

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

"WE ARE AFRO-CARIBBEAN, NOT AFRICAN AMERICAN": CAREER READINESS AND POLICY AWARENESS IN EMPLOYMENT PREPARATION EXPERIENCES

This quantitative study examined the career readiness and work authorization policy awareness of Afro-Caribbean international students (ACIS) enrolled at four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States. The research investigated how institutional practices, academic class standing, employment experiences, and résumé support influenced students' understanding of the regulations governing Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). Data were collected from 106 ACIS students via a structured survey and analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, and chi-square tests.

The findings revealed no statistically significant difference in OPT and CPT knowledge between lower-classmen and upper-classmen, suggesting that academic progression alone does not ensure comprehension of the work authorization policy. Despite moderate engagement with résumé assistance via faculty, career services, workshops, AI tools, and templates, no specific support was significantly associated with an increase in in-field interview outcomes. Alarmingly, over half of the students reported participating in off-campus employment outside their academic field, violating F-1 visa conditions under federal regulations. These findings raise concerns regarding the accessibility and clarity of institutional guidance on career preparation and legal employment compliance. This research highlights the urgent need for targeted institutional support and policy-aligned advising for international students, particularly those navigating scholarship

agreements and transitioning into the U.S. workforce. The results offer important implications for career services, university administrators, and global sponsors supporting the ACIS population across higher education institutions.

Keywords: Afro-Caribbean international students, CPT, OPT, HBCUs, résumé support, immigration compliance, career readiness

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all Afro-Caribbean International Students in the United States, both those currently enrolled in higher education institutions and those who are formally enrolled. This research exists because of your experiences, and it will not go unnoticed. To the participants in this study who were brave enough to share your stories, I am eternally grateful, because this new knowledge would not be possible without you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The transition from higher education to the workforce presents unique challenges for international students studying in the United States. For Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS), these challenges are further shaped by their racial, cultural, and immigration status within predominantly Western institutional settings. Navigating work authorization policies, such as Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT), is a critical step for international students on F-1 visas, yet many struggle with limited access to accurate guidance and institutional support. While Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have long served underrepresented populations, little is known about how these institutions prepare ACIS for employment opportunities or support their understanding of complex work authorization policies. This study seeks to address gaps by examining the role of institutional region, resume assistance methods, class standing, and employment experiences in shaping the career readiness and CPT/OPT policy knowledge of ACIS attending HBCUs. This chapter introduces the research problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, and the theoretical foundation. It documents the research questions, methodology, and analysis, providing a foundation for understanding the importance of supporting Afro-Caribbean students' transition from campus to career within the HBCU context.

Research Problem

Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) represent a growing but under-researched population within U.S. higher education. Although these students share common immigration requirements with other international students, their experiences are further shaped by racial, cultural, and institutional factors, particularly when enrolled at Historically Black Colleges and

Universities (HBCUs). One of the most critical transitions these students face is preparing for legal employment in the United States, which requires navigating complex work authorization programs such as Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). Research has shown many international students struggle with understanding and accessing these programs due to inconsistent advising, limited institutional resources, and a lack of targeted career support (Forbes-Mewett, 2013; Rahming, 2019). However, few studies have explicitly focused on the ACIS population or explored how institutional characteristics, such as geographic region, access to resume assistance, and employment opportunities, impact their knowledge and readiness for this transition.

Despite the critical role of career services in facilitating employment pathways, many ACIS at HBCUs may not receive structured, consistent support to prepare resumes, apply for jobs, or understand how CPT and OPT regulations apply to their degree program. Furthermore, regional disparities in funding, institutional size, and employer access may result in unequal preparation for workforce entry across Southern and Midwestern HBCUs. Without a clear understanding of whether these institutional and experiential factors influence employment readiness and policy awareness, higher education leaders may be unable to implement effective, equity-minded strategies to support ACIS.

The lack of empirical data on ACIS's career preparation experiences and their knowledge of CPT and OPT policies, particularly within the context of HBCUs, represents a critical gap in the literature. This study addresses gaps by examining how academic classification, employment status, resume assistance, and institutional region relate to students' knowledge of work authorization policies and job-seeking outcomes. Focusing on this overlooked student population,

the study aims to provide actionable insights for improving institutional practices, enhancing student support services, and promoting equitable transitions from college to career for Afro-Caribbean International Students.

Purpose of the Study

This quantitative non-experimental study aimed to examine the employment preparation and work authorization policy knowledge of ACIS enrolled at HBCUs in the United States. This study investigated whether there was a significant difference in CPT test scores between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen ACIS. It also examined whether there was a substantial difference in the number of job interviews received based on the format of resume assistance, specifically comparing faculty-led versus career center-led workshops.

The study explored whether ACIS enrolled at HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 differed significantly in their CPT test scores. Lastly, it examined whether there was an association between institutional groups and access to resume assistance through workshops. By identifying key differences across academic classifications, institutional types, and career preparation formats, the study aimed to provide practical insights to inform institutional policies and improve employment readiness support for ACIS at HBCUs.

Research Questions

This study explores the institutional and experiential factors influencing the workforce transition of Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) in the United States. Specifically, it examines how academic classification, employment experience, résumé assistance formats, and institutional groupings affect students' knowledge of Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and

Optional Practical Training (OPT), as well as job-seeking outcomes such as the number of interviews received. The research aims to better understand the role of career services and institutional support structures in preparing ACIS to navigate visa regulations and successfully transition from college to career. By focusing on measurable variables tied to institutional practices, this study addresses gaps in the literature on ACIS. It offers practical insights to enhance advising models, résumé preparation, and policy literacy among this underrepresented international student population. The following primary research questions guide this study:

1. Is there a significant difference between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen on CPT test scores?

2. Is there a significant difference between faculty-led and career center-led resume workshops on the number of job interviews received?

3. Is there a significant difference between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 on CPT test scores?

4. Is there an association between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 students in receiving resume assistance through workshops?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing literature on international student success, particularly focusing on a marginalized and under-researched population: ACIS enrolled at HBCUs. The study addresses critical gaps in existing research by analyzing institutional and individual factors that influence CPT and OPT policy awareness and job-seeking outcomes. It offers practical implications for academic leaders, faculty, international student advisors, and career services professionals.

First, the study adds to the limited research focused explicitly on ACIS, representing a distinct subgroup within the broader international community. While international populations from Asia, Europe, and Latin America have received considerable scholarly attention, individuals from the Caribbean, particularly those with Black Caribbean backgrounds, have been largely overlooked in empirical studies. Their experiences are further shaped by racial identity, immigration status, and institutional context, making this study timely and necessary. By centering this group, the research offers more nuanced insights into how identity intersects with policy awareness and career readiness.

Second, the study provides valuable evidence regarding how institutional factors such as HBCU group, access to resume assistance, and employment experience influence understanding of CPT and OPT policies. These policies are not just technical or bureaucratic requirements but critical gatekeepers to professional development and long-term employability in the United States. Enhancing policy literacy among ACIS is a matter of compliance and equitable access to opportunity. This research helps institutions understand where knowledge gaps exist and how specific services might be improved or redesigned to serve international populations better.

Third, the study contributes to applied practice by offering actionable recommendations for career services professionals, faculty, and university administrators. For example, by evaluating different types of resume assistance, ranging from faculty-led support to AI-driven tools, the study identifies which formats are most accessed and which are associated with better job interview outcomes. These findings can guide institutions in reallocating resources toward high-impact practices and ensuring culturally responsive and inclusive support systems are in place for ACIS at HBCUs.

Fourth, the study highlights disparities in policy knowledge across institutional groups. Findings revealed ACIS enrolled in HBCU Group 2 demonstrated significantly higher understanding of CPT and OPT policies than those at HBCU Group 1. This points to the need for cross-institutional collaboration, benchmarking, and resource sharing to promote more equitable outcomes across HBCUs. It also raises important questions about differences in staffing, funding, training, or institutional priorities should be addressed through coordinated efforts.

Finally, this research establishes a data-informed foundation for future scholarship on the intersection of race, immigration policy, institutional type, and international success. It encourages further investigation into how ACIS navigates workforce transitions and calls on higher education institutions to adopt inclusive, culturally informed, and evidence-based practices. In doing so, the study contributes to a broader movement to support the holistic development of international populations and ensure no subgroup, particularly one as vital and vibrant as the Afro-Caribbean community, is left behind.

Researcher's Positionality

My journey into U.S. higher education began with an idea shaped by what I saw on TV. Growing up, my only images of American college life came from shows like *Saved by the Bell*, *Full House*, *Family Matters,* and the movie *Drumline*. Watching these sitcoms and films, I imagined college as a vibrant place full of friendships, fun, and opportunity the essence of the American Dream. Even though I traveled to the U.S. on many vacations, those short trips were not enough to satisfy my deep hunger to live this experience. I wanted to be like the students I saw on those shows, living the entire American college life, and I was determined to make it happen.

When I finally selected a college, I did not know what an HBCU was or the significance of attending one. I had no fundamental understanding of ethnic groups or cultural differences within the Black community, so arriving on campus was a shock. I was confused when I saw students who looked like me but spoke in different accents and languages, dressed in various clothing, and had other food preferences. It was the first time I realized how diverse the Black diaspora was, and it opened my eyes to the complexities of identity and culture.

Academically, I was just as unprepared. In my home country, I was unfamiliar with the concept of course credits or GPA requirements in the U.S. I thought if I maintained a 2.0 GPA, I would automatically progress to the next level, much like the school system I was used to. I did not understand different degrees existed beyond a bachelor's or associate's degree, and I was completely unaware of the various academic expectations in higher education. When I addressed my instructors as "Ms.," "Mrs.," or "Mr.," they would often correct me, telling me to refer to them as "Dr." I was perplexed, thinking, "We are not in a hospital, why are we calling them doctors?" It was not until I asked my advisor I learned about advanced degrees like the Ph.D., and I immediately set my sights on earning one. From that moment on, it became my goal to achieve the highest level of education possible.

Nevertheless, achieving these goals was not easy. Even though I had set my mind on academic success, I was still lost in many ways. I struggled to navigate a system I did not fully understand. Thankfully, I found mentors two Afro-Caribbean faculty, my international student officer, and my professor, who took me under their wing and showed me the ropes. They introduced me to graduate school opportunities, explained U.S. immigration policies, and helped

me secure scholarships. Their guidance made all the difference, but I could not help but notice many of my international friends were not as fortunate.

Some of my closest friends from The Bahamas, Haiti, British Virgin Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica, who attended the same HBCU as me, did not have the same mentorship and support I received. Many of them struggled to secure internships and, as a result, could not maintain their F1 visa status. Some entered premature marriages to stay in the U.S., while others were forced to return home to The Bahamas, where they struggled for years to find employment in their fields. It was devastating to watch their dreams unravel, knowing they had the same potential as I did. I could not shake the feeling something had to be done to prevent this from happening to future Afro-Caribbean international students.

As I moved forward with my career, I began to understand just how significant the gaps in support were for students like us. For instance, it was not until the week of my undergraduate graduation; I discovered my college had a career service center. While there, I heard nothing about resume workshops, job search resources, or interview preparation. As a result, I completed three years of unpaid internships, unaware that programs like Curricular Practical Training (CPT) would have allowed me to work legally and be paid. The lack of information and resources left me at a severe disadvantage compared to my domestic peers.

Even after graduation, the obstacles did not end. I applied for Optional Practical Training (OPT), a work permit allowing me to work in the U.S. for a year. The process dragged on for months, and my application was not approved until the 89th day of the 90-day waiting period. Those three months were incredibly stressful. I could not get a driver's license, transfer ownership of the car I had bought, or even access medical insurance, which was canceled the day I graduated.

I was stuck—unable to return home because it would have jeopardized my OPT application and unable to move forward because I lacked the essential tools I needed to live and work in the U.S. Those months were filled with anxiety, sleepless nights, and a deepening sense of isolation.

When my OPT was finally approved, I took the first job I could find, a low-paying position at a private Christian school. The job was toxic, and I endured mental and verbal abuse for a year, but I did not know my options. No one had told me how to apply for a state teaching license or transition into a public school system. I blindly sent resumes to various schools, hoping for a response, but nothing came. I learned how to navigate the job market properly when I reconnected with an Afro-Caribbean friend who had since become a permanent resident. This friend helped me apply for a teaching license, submit job applications through the correct channels, and prepare for job fairs. With their guidance, I was hired by three different school districts within minutes of interviewing, completely transforming my career trajectory in the U.S.

Since then, I have dedicated my career to helping other Afro-Caribbean international students avoid the same pitfalls. I have worked in K-12 education, teaching science at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and I have spent more than ten years as an international recruiter in higher education. Through my work, I have helped over 1,000 students from The Bahamas enroll in U.S. institutions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). I have secured over $25 million in scholarships for these students and taught them financial literacy for debt-free graduation.

Today, I serve as an advocate and educational consultant for Afro-Caribbean international students, working with scholarship organizations and ministries of education. I act as a recruiter liaison for Colorado State University in the Afro-Caribbean region, bridging the gap between

students and their opportunities. I am also a Ph.D. candidate pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Education & Human Resource Studies, specializing in Equity, Education, and Transformation. In addition, I have earned graduate certificates in High-Impact On-Demand Learning Solutions and Conflict Resolution to further my ability to serve these students.

I am deeply passionate about this work because I have lived through these students' challenges. I know firsthand how easy it is to get lost in the system without proper guidance, and I am committed to supporting others. I understand the biases I bring to this study because of my own experiences, but I am committed to minimizing them and approaching this research objectively. Every challenge has made me stronger and more determined to help Afro-Caribbean international students succeed. This research is personal for me; it is about ensuring these students have the tools, resources, and support they need to thrive in the U.S. educational system and beyond.

Definitions of Terms

Several key terms are defined in this section to ensure clarity and consistency throughout this study. These definitions are grounded in existing literature, U.S. immigration policy, and the context of higher education. Since this research focuses on Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) studying at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) under F1 visa regulations, it is essential to clearly explain terminology related to immigration status, employment authorization, institutional grouping, and career preparation services. The definitions reflect how each term is used within the scope of this study.

Afro-Caribbean Legal Permanent Resident: An individual born in an Afro-Caribbean country who has obtained U.S. legal permanent resident status commonly referred to as a "green card" through qualifying categories such as a U.S. citizen spouse, parent, sibling, employer sponsorship, self-petition (e.g., VAWA), or the Diversity Visa Lottery (USCIS, 2019).

Afro-Caribbean Naturalized U.S. Citizen: An individual born in an Afro-Caribbean country who has become a naturalized U.S. citizen. Citizenship may be obtained through processes involving a U.S. citizen spouse, parent, sibling, employment sponsorship, self-petition, or the Diversity Visa Lottery (USCIS, 2019).

Afro-Caribbean Nonimmigrant Resident: An individual born in an Afro-Caribbean country who resides temporarily in the U.S. without citizenship or permanent residency. These individuals hold nonimmigrant visas and may be authorized to work only under specific categories, such as H-1B (dual intent), F-1 (academic student), J-1 (exchange visitor), or M-1 (vocational student) status (USCIS, 2019).

Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS): Individuals of African descent who were born in or are citizens of Caribbean nations and are studying in the United States on F1 student visas. This study focuses explicitly on ACIS enrolled at HBCUs (Mwangi, 2014; Rahming, 2019).

AI-powered resume Tools: Technology platforms use artificial intelligence to analyze and improve resumes. These tools offer keyword optimization, industry alignment, and formatting guidance. Standard tools include VMock, Rezi, ResumeWorded, and ResumeNow (Liu & Ball, 2020).

Career Services: An institutional office or department supporting students' professional development, career exploration, and employment preparation. Services typically include resume assistance, job search resources, interview coaching, career fairs, and guidance on employment authorization for international students. In this study, career services refer specifically to support available to ACIS at HBCUs, including one-on-one advising, faculty-led coaching, AI-assisted resume tools, and workshops. The effectiveness of these services depends on their accessibility, cultural relevance, alignment with immigration regulations, and institutional investment in international student success (Gopal, 2016; Rahming, 2019; Singh & Doherty, 2021)

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): A temporary off-campus work authorization for F1 visa holders allows participation in paid or unpaid internships, cooperative education, or practicum experiences integral to the academic curriculum. The employment must be directly related to the student's major field of study (8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(i); USCIS, 2019).

Designated School Official (DSO): An official at a U.S. institution, which the Department of Homeland Security authorizes to advise F1 students, issue immigration documents, and update records in the SEVIS database. DSOs are legally responsible for ensuring student compliance with visa regulations (8 C.F.R. § 214.3(g)(1); Choudaha & Chang, 2012).

F1 Visa: A non-immigrant visa granted to international students pursuing full-time academic study at U.S. colleges or universities. This visa requires continuous enrollment, compliance with immigration policy, and restrictions on employment (USCIS, 2019).

GoinGlobal: An international career platform provides job search resources, employer directories, and visa information for international job seekers. It is particularly valuable for students seeking immigration-compliant employment opportunities (Liu & Ball, 2020; Zhou & Okahana, 2019).

HBCU Group 1: Institutions in this study located in South Carolina began recruiting ACIS more recently and are still building career development and immigration support infrastructure.

HBCU Group 2: The institutions in this study are in Ohio and Tennessee. They began recruiting ACIS earlier, have more established support services, and demonstrated higher student engagement with resume tools and CPT/OPT policy awareness.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): HBCUs were institutions of higher education established before 1964 with the principal mission of educating African American students. Today, HBCUs serve diverse populations, including international students such as ACIS (Williams, 2019).

In-field Employment: Employment directly related to a student's academic major, as defined by U.S. immigration regulations governing CPT and OPT. Working outside of the field while on work authorization violates F1 visa terms (8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii); Rahming, 2019).

Optional Practical Training (OPT): A work authorization program that allows F1 students to gain temporary employment directly related to their field of study. OPT can be pre-completion or post-completion and is generally limited to 12 months unless the student qualifies for a STEM extension (8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii); USCIS, 2019).

Out-of-field Employment: Employment not directly tied to a student's major or academic program. If accepted under CPT or OPT, this constitutes a violation of immigration regulations and can lead to termination of SEVIS status (8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C); Rahming, 2019).

Resume Assistance: Support services institutions help students prepare job-ready resumes. This includes workshops, one-on-one sessions, written feedback, and AI-powered platforms. Effectiveness depends on cultural relevance, policy alignment, and institutional resources (Gopal, 2016; Singh & Doherty, 2021).

SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System): A federal database tracks and monitors international students and their visa status. Institutions are required to report student employment, academic status, and other changes to SEVIS via their DSO (8 C.F.R. § 214.3(g)(3)(iii); USCIS, 2019).

STEM OPT Extension: A 24-month extension of post-completion OPT for F1 students who graduate with a degree in a DHS-approved STEM field and work for an E-Verified employer (8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C); USCIS, 2019).

Unauthorized Employment: Any employment undertaken by an F1 student without proper authorization or outside the scope of their CPT or OPT approval. This includes working off-campus in a role unrelated to their major or failing to report employment to a DSO. Unauthorized employment can result in visa revocation and loss of legal status (8 C.F.R. § 214.3(g)(1); Zhou & Okahana, 2019).

Work Permit Policy Knowledge (WPPK): The degree to which international students understand CPT and OPT regulations, including eligibility requirements, field-related job criteria, and consequences of noncompliance (Davis & Brown, 2022; Gairola & Pathak, 2021).

Chapter Summary

Chapter One introduced the study by outlining the background, research problem, and purpose focused on Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) enrolled at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States. The chapter contextualized the unique challenges faced by ACIS in navigating U.S. employment authorization policies, particularly Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT), while highlighting the limited scholarly attention given to this population within the HBCU landscape.

The research problem addressed the gap in literature regarding ACIS' preparedness for workforce transitions, especially concerning policy knowledge, access to resume assistance, employment experience, academic classification, and institutional context. This quantitative, non-experimental study aimed to examine whether these factors significantly influenced ACIS knowledge of CPT and OPT policies and their job-seeking outcomes. Four primary research questions guided the inquiry, emphasizing institutional group comparisons and support strategies such as faculty-led and career center-led resume workshops.

The study's significance was established through its contribution to international student success literature and its practical implications for improving institutional policy, advising practices, and culturally responsive career services at HBCUs. The chapter also presented the researcher's positionality, offering a reflective narrative on lived experiences that paralleled the

study's focus. This personal insight deepened the study's relevance and highlighted the urgency of equitable support systems for ACIS navigating the transition from college to career in the United States.

The chapter concluded with a comprehensive list of key definitions used throughout the study to clarify immigration status categories, institutional terms, and employment-related policies. These definitions ensured consistent terminology aligned with U.S. immigration regulations and higher education contexts. In Chapter Two, a thorough literature review will be presented. This includes examining international student experiences, the role of career services, CPT and OPT policy navigation, and the historical and cultural significance of HBCUs. The literature review will provide the scholarly foundation to situate this study within broader discussions of race, immigration, and equity in higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of the literature related to the career preparation and work authorization knowledge of Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) enrolled at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States. This chapter synthesizes research on the lived experiences of international students in U.S. higher education, with a particular emphasis on those of African descent from the Caribbean region. Although international students from Asia, Europe, and Latin America have been widely studied, ACIS remain an underrepresented and under-researched population, especially within the context of HBCUs.

This chapter begins by exploring literature on ACIS identity formation, racialized experiences, and academic persistence within the HBCU context. It then examines the role of institutional support, particularly career services, in guiding international students through the complex landscape of U.S. employment policies such as Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). Special attention is given to gaps in institutional knowledge, resume assistance strategies, and variations among HBCUs that may influence students' preparedness for workforce transitions.

This chapter builds the foundation for the present study by identifying what is currently known and what remains absent from the literature. It highlights the importance of examining how factors such as academic classification, employment experience, institutional group, and access to resume assistance relate to ACIS knowledge of CPT/OPT policies and job-seeking outcomes. The literature reviewed in this chapter supports the need for research that centers on the voices of ACIS

and investigates the institutional practices that shape their ability to navigate career pathways successfully in the United States. (***See Figure 1***)

Figure 1: *Flow Chart of the Literature*

Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) at HBCUs

Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) represent a growing but under-researched segment of the international student population in the United States. These students are typically F-1 visa holders born in Caribbean nations such as Jamaica, Haiti, The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, and others, and they do not hold U.S. citizenship or legal permanent residency (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; USCIS, 2019). Many ACIS are academically gifted, multilingual, and culturally grounded, often having attended rigorous British-modeled education systems in their

home countries (Matthews, 2017; Mwangi, 2014). Despite these strengths, their experiences in U.S. higher education, particularly at HBCUs, reveal complex challenges involving race, identity, and institutional support.

Identity formation and racial classification

Though HBCUs are historically known for their nurturing environments and their commitment to student success, many were founded with a specific mission to educate African Americans (Anderson, 1988; Gasman, 2010) As a result, ACIS are often misperceived as domestic Black students and consequently excluded from targeted international student support services (Deaux et al., 2007; Mwangi, 2014). This misrecognition creates tension in how they are racialized and classified, often leading to inadequate advising on immigration-related policies like Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). The intersection of their Black racial identity and foreign national status can render their unique needs invisible to both faculty and staff.

The literature highlights that ACIS students face identity conflicts when entering U.S. academic environments. Campbell (2017) reflects on the personal experience of identifying solely as Jamaican until encountering the U.S. racial classification system, which grouped him with African Americans. This abrupt redefinition led to confusion, resistance, and self-identity reevaluation. The assumption that all Black students in the U.S. share the same cultural background

creates barriers to authentic recognition and cultural affirmation for Afro-Caribbean populations (Talley-Matthews, 2022).

Gender and emotional well-being

Gender adds another layer of complexity to the experiences of ACIS. Matthews (2017) and Rahming (2019) note that Afro-Caribbean women often face compounded forms of marginalization. They are expected to conform to cultural norms unfamiliar to them in the U.S. while also navigating stereotypes tied to both their race and gender. These expectations may include assumptions of hyper-resilience, passivity, or academic overachievement, placing additional pressure on their mental and emotional well-being.

The intersection of race, gender, and immigration status creates a unique set of emotional stressors, often leading to experiences of isolation, invisibility, and cultural misrecognition on campus. When institutions lack culturally sensitive counseling or mental health services attuned to these challenges, ACIS women may feel discouraged from seeking help or may receive support that does not fully address their needs. Despite these barriers, Afro-Caribbean women often demonstrate resilience by drawing on spiritual practices, familial encouragement, and peer networks. However, these internal resources do not replace the need for structural support within institutions (Rahming, 2019; Desmore et al., 2016).

Family expectations and career guidance

Family expectations also play a significant role in shaping ACIS's academic and professional decisions. Desmore et al. (2016) found that strong family and faith-based networks provide motivation and emotional resilience. Families often view U.S. higher education as a

critical pathway to upward mobility, and students may feel a heightened responsibility to succeed academically and professionally for themselves and their families and communities back home. These expectations can be a source of encouragement and pressure, particularly when students face barriers such as immigration limitations or lack of internship access.

Unfortunately, many institutions do not provide culturally tailored career guidance that considers these dual pressures (Gairola & Pathak, 2021; Matthews, 2017). Career advising often fails to address the intersection of immigration status, cultural values, and workforce preparation. As a result, ACIS may struggle to find support for navigating CPT timelines, building professional networks, or accessing resume workshops that speak to their unique circumstances (Gairola & Pathak, 2021; Matthews, 2017). This disconnect can cause internal conflict and missed opportunities, even among high-performing ACIS who are otherwise well-positioned to succeed.

Institutional Blind Spots and Support Gaps

Enrollment data indicates the total number of ACIS in U.S. higher education remains relatively small, about 11,200 as of the 2021–2022 academic year (USCIS, 2024), their presence at HBCUs is growing. Nevertheless, very few studies have disaggregated the experiences of ACIS from other Black or international students in institutional assessments, resulting in a continued lack of recognition and advocacy (Malcolm, 2014; Mwangi, 2016).

Despite these barriers, ACIS often demonstrate exceptional academic performance and professional drive (Matthews, 2017; Rahming, 2019). However, their trajectory can be hindered by institutional blind spots, such as limited awareness among staff about visa regulations, the absence of targeted workshops for CPT/OPT, and the tendency to group all Black students into a

monolithic category (Hoang, 2024; Farmer et al., 2015). These gaps seriously affect career readiness and legal compliance with federal immigration policy.

The literature calls for greater institutional awareness, training, and differentiated programming to meet the needs of ACIS at HBCUs. Without these reforms, many will continue to experience disconnection, underemployment, or even visa status loss due to a lack of timely and relevant support. Recognizing ACIS as a distinct and vibrant population within the HBCU context is a matter of inclusion, equity, and institutional responsibility.

Career Services in Higher Education

Career services have evolved significantly over the past several decades, shifting from basic job placement functions to more comprehensive models focused on career development, experiential learning, and skill-building (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). These offices now provide various services, including resume reviews, mock interviews, employer networking events, and internship placement support. For international students, however, traditional models may fall short if they do not include targeted resources that account for immigration-related constraints and cultural adjustment factors (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Gopal, 2016). For example, an ACIS student preparing for an internship may not be aware when engaging in paid work off-campus without CPT approval could result in SEVIS termination. Similarly, students accustomed to

collectivist values may struggle to navigate individualistic career advising approaches emphasizing self-promotion over communal achievement (Matthews, 2017).

Institutional Limitations and Gaps for International Students

At many colleges and universities, career services are not adequately structured to meet the unique needs of international students (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Gopal, 2016). Although these offices may offer generalized support, such as resume writing workshops or job fairs, they often lack staff trained in international employment processes, including authorization timelines and visa regulations. This leaves international students, including ACIS, vulnerable to policy violations due to miscommunication or limited access to accurate information, especially when navigating internships or post-graduation employment options (Gairola & Pathak, 2021).

In addition to legal concerns, international students frequently encounter advising models that overlook cultural and contextual challenges. These may include language barriers, unfamiliarity with U.S. hiring expectations, or the absence of social and professional networks (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Liu & Ball, 2020). Many advising approaches are built on assumptions of shared cultural understanding and legal flexibility, which can marginalize students from different national and racial backgrounds. Without personalized guidance of these layered realities, international students may miss key deadlines, misunderstand eligibility requirements, or fail to

connect with employers who are open to hiring individuals with temporary work authorization (Singh & Doherty, 2021).

Misclassification and Exclusion of ACIS

Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) face a dual-layer of marginalization. They are often misidentified as domestic Black students and thus excluded from international student programming (Mwangi, 2014; Rahming, 2019). This misclassification results in lost opportunities to learn about CPT and OPT policies and prevents timely access to critical immigration advising. Matthews (2017) notes that misunderstandings regarding these procedures can result in students unintentionally violating visa terms, leading to disqualification from future employment benefits. Hoang (2024) similarly identifies work authorization confusion as a significant source of anxiety and systemic inequity for international students navigating academic-to-career transitions.

Resource Gaps of Career Services at HBCUs

The challenges international students face are often intensified at HBCUs, where Career Services may already operate with limited staff and budgets. While these institutions are known for fostering inclusive learning environments, many lack robust infrastructure to support international students (Farmer et al., 2015). Inadequate funding and a shortage of trained personnel limit the ability of HBCUs to provide immigration-related career guidance. As Mwangi (2014) points out, many international students at HBCUs experience inconsistent advising and minimal institutional outreach due to staff unfamiliarity with visa policies. As a result, ACIS often relies on informal networks or self-navigation, which increases the likelihood of missteps and missed opportunities. Even when staff are willing to support them, a lack of immigration expertise can

lead to either outdated or incomplete advice, further widening the gap in access to career readiness resources.

Promising Practices and Equity-Based Innovations

Some institutions have taken steps to implement equity-focused practices. AI-powered resume review platforms, such as VMock and ResumeWorded, faculty-led workshops, and peer mentoring programs have shown promise in improving access to job preparation tools (Gairola & Pathak, 2021; Singh & Doherty, 2021). However, these innovations are not universally adopted, and many students remain unaware of their existence or how to access them. This is particularly true for international students, who often receive less marketing and communication regarding career services than their domestic peers (Liu & Ball, 2020).

Call for Culturally Responsive Career Services

The literature calls for a shift toward culturally and legally responsive advising that addresses ACIS's complex and intersectional realities. Career services must do more than offer generalized job readiness programming; they must consider how race, nationality, visa status, and cultural upbringing influence a student's ability to navigate employment systems in the United States (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Gopal, 2016). For ACIS, culturally responsive services involve clear explanations of CPT and OPT timelines, inclusive outreach strategies, and advisors who are trained to understand both immigration regulations and the lived experiences of Afro-Caribbean students (Matthews, 2017; Rahming, 2019).

Gairola and Pathak (2021) argue that international students face persistent barriers in accessing high-impact employment resources without this dual approach merging legal accuracy

with cultural sensitivity. These barriers include misinterpretation of CPT eligibility requirements, lack of clarity about job restrictions under F-1 status, and fear of violating visa terms. This is particularly relevant at HBCUs, where ACIS are frequently excluded from international student programming due to racial misclassification or institutional assumptions about their citizenship status (Hoang, 2024; Mwangi, 2014).

Career centers must intentionally build partnerships with DSOs, host targeted workshops, and develop advising tools that reflect the unique challenges ACIS faces. These efforts reduce visa-related risks and promote a stronger sense of belonging and confidence during job preparation (Gairola & Pathak, 2021; Liu & Ball, 2020). They provide a pathway for ACIS to benefit from their academic training fully and to engage in internships, cooperative education, and post-graduation employment without the fear of misunderstanding regulations or being overlooked in support systems (Gairola & Pathak, 2021; Matthews, 2017).

Culturally responsive career services are essential for promoting equity in workforce transitions. They create conditions where international students can access the same career-enhancing opportunities as their domestic peers, even while navigating additional immigration barriers (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Singh & Doherty, 2021). Without these reforms, institutions risk perpetuating the very inequities they claim to challenge. Despite growing calls for more inclusive career services, there remains a lack of research that examines how culturally responsive advising is implemented at HBCUs, particularly in relation to CPT and OPT guidance for ACIS. This gap

emphasizes the need for studies investigating institutional practices, student experiences, and disparities across HBCUs.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a form of temporary off-campus work authorization available to F-1 visa holders who wish to engage in employment directly related to their major field of study. Under U.S. federal regulation, CPT must be "an integral part of an established curriculum" and must either be required for the degree or earn academic credit (8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(i)). CPT is typically used for internships, practicum experiences, cooperative education, or fieldwork connected to academic objectives. Prior authorization is required through a Designated School Official (DSO) and the SEVIS database. Students who begin employment before authorization risk termination of their F-1 status and ineligibility for future work benefits (USCIS, 2019).

Eligibility and Institutional Process

A student must have completed at least one full academic year at an SEVP-certified institution to be eligible for CPT (USCIS, 2019). The proposed employment must align with the academic program and be part of a formal institutional arrangement, such as a course or structured program that provides academic credit for the experience (Gopal, 2016; USCIS, 2019). Once an academic department approves, the DSO is responsible for reviewing documentation, ensuring compliance with immigration rules, and entering the CPT authorization in SEVIS (USCIS, 2019). Despite these federal guidelines, many institutions interpret and implement CPT differently,

resulting in inconsistencies in access, awareness, and advising quality (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Gairola & Pathak, 2021).

Systemic Advising Gaps

One of the most common barriers to CPT participation is the lack of clear, consistent, and legally accurate advising. Research shows that institutional advising varies widely in quality and content, leaving many students without the necessary information to make timely decisions about CPT (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Some universities offer structured CPT workshops and detailed advising checklists, while others rely on outdated materials or provide minimal guidance (Farmer et al., 2015). These inconsistencies are especially pronounced at under-resourced institutions where DSOs may be overextended or undertrained in employment authorization processes (Matthews, 2017). As a result, students often misunderstand basic CPT requirements, such as the need for pre-authorization, course linkage, and full-time vs. part-time eligibility rules (Gairola & Pathak, 2021).

ACIS-Specific Challenges in Navigating CPT

Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) face additional institutional barriers when navigating CPT due to intersecting race, nationality, and misclassification challenges. Because ACIS are often perceived as domestic Black students, they are frequently excluded from international student communications and programming (Rahming, 2019; Mwangi, 2014). This invisibility means they may not receive critical emails about CPT procedures, upcoming workshops, or timelines. Matthews (2017) explains that many ACIS only discover the

complexities of work authorization after missed deadlines or missteps, further contributing to anxiety, confusion, and missed career opportunities.

Additionally, institutional procedures such as mandatory CPT courses or proof of academic alignment may not be clearly explained to international students. Gopal (2016) notes that students are often expected to self-navigate these institutional structures despite having limited prior exposure to U.S. employment systems or immigration policy. This expectation can be especially burdensome for ACIS given the additional cultural and social barriers they face at HBCUs where immigration advising may not be well-integrated into academic or career services (Hoang, 2024 & Matthews, 2017).

Equitable Advising

Scholars emphasize the need for advising models beyond generic academic or immigration support and instead reflect the lived realities of international students navigating multiple systems of exclusion. Gopal (2016) argues that advising for F-1 students must be proactive and policy-literate rather than reactive or reliant on student self-advocacy. Gairola and Pathak (2021) similarly call for career services and DSOs to develop structurally informed practices that account for both immigration regulation and cultural background. While terms like "equitable advising" are not always used explicitly, the underlying argument across the literature is clear: institutions must ensure international students, including ACIS, receive advising that accounts for visa constraints, racial misclassification, and uneven access to CPT-related resources.

Matthews (2017) and Rahming (2019) both highlight how ACIS experience invisibility in support services due to assumptions based on race and nationality, which leads to exclusion from vital communications and programming. In this context, equitable advising does not simply mean

fairness; it means building systems that identify students correctly, communicate proactively, and offer legally accurate and culturally aware guidance in advance of CPT deadlines or employment decisions.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a form of temporary employment authorization available to F-1 visa holders. It allows students to gain practical experience in their field of study during or after program completion. According to U.S. federal regulation, OPT provides up to 12 months of authorized work, with an additional 24-month STEM extension available for students who graduate from eligible science, technology, engineering, or mathematics programs (8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)). Students must apply for OPT through United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and authorization is contingent on receiving a recommendation from their institution's Designated School Official (DSO). The application must be submitted within a narrow window, typically between 90 days before and 60 days after a program's end date. Once approved, students receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) that permits legal work in a role directly related to their major (USCIS, 2019).

Eligibility and Institutional Barriers

Although OPT is widely regarded as a critical bridge between academic training and professional practice, obtaining it remains complex and unevenly supported across institutions. Eligibility requires students to apply within a federally regulated time window and receive both a DSO recommendation and USCIS approval, yet many institutions fail to communicate these steps (USCIS, 2019). Choudaha and Chang (2012) highlight significant inconsistencies in how

institutions implement OPT advising, noting that some schools provide robust programming while others rely on generic handouts or outdated online resources.

Gopal (2016) emphasizes that international students often bear the burden of navigating this high-stakes process independently, particularly in environments where staff are not well-trained in immigration policy. Singh and Doherty (2021) further argue that procedural ambiguity around OPT is compounded when career services and international offices fail to collaborate. This disjointed approach confuses eligibility rules, timelines, job relevance requirements, and EAD processing expectations. When institutions assume students already understand these elements or delay outreach until the final academic term, students are at risk of missing deadlines or making procedural errors (Matthews, 2017).

These advising failures can have serious consequences. Students may be unable to secure work authorization in time, leading to lost job opportunities or the expiration of their F-1 status. For many, this also forecloses future options, such as the H-1B visa or long-term U.S. employment pathways. The literature indicates a clear need for consistent, well-resourced OPT guidance that centers on proactive support and legal compliance (Gairola & Pathak, 2021; Hoang, 2024).

ACIS -Specific Barriers in OPT Navigation

Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) encounter distinct barriers in navigating OPT due to the intersection of race, nationality, and institutional misclassification. Multiple studies confirm that ACIS are often mistaken for domestic Black students, which results in exclusion from international student communications and programming (Mwangi, 2014; Rahming, 2019). Students not flagged in campus databases as F-1 visa holders may never receive OPT application timelines, email reminders, or invitations to relevant advising sessions. This misclassification is

especially harmful during the final academic semester, when critical steps related to OPT must be completed on a strict deadline.

Matthews (2017) documents how Afro-Caribbean women often feel unseen within academic systems, reporting a lack of engagement from advisors and offices responsible for supporting their legal and career transitions. This invisibility can delay access to crucial information about OPT procedures, further complicating an already stressful process. Although literature on ACIS and OPT is limited, related research illustrates that international students who lack targeted advising or culturally relevant outreach often miss the application window entirely or submit incomplete documents (Hoang, 2024).

These challenges are intensified for ACIS, which may not be familiar with the structure of U.S. immigration systems, especially if institutional offices assume they already know the process. Additionally, cultural expectations from family members and scholarship sponsors often create added pressure to secure employment quickly after graduation. When ACIS are left to navigate OPT without proactive institutional support, they experience heightened vulnerability during a critical phase of their transition to the workforce. While more direct research on ACIS and OPT outcomes is needed, existing scholarship clearly shows that racial and national misclassification leads to material disadvantages in access to work authorization guidance (Matthews, 2017; Mwangi, 2014; Rahming, 2019).

Consequences for Career Transition

The consequences of inadequate OPT advising are far-reaching for international students. When students are not guided through the application process in a timely and accurate manner, they risk missing critical deadlines, submitting incomplete applications, or misunderstanding

employment restrictions, all of which can lead to legal status violations or disqualification from employment opportunities (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Gopal, 2016). Delays in Employment Authorization Document (EAD) approvals may result in the loss of job offers, inability to begin work on time, or even forced departure from the United States despite academic success and strong employer interest (Singh & Doherty, 2021).

These administrative failures are especially harmful post-graduation, when many international students rely on OPT as a steppingstone toward long-term employment, economic stability, or future visa sponsorship. Gairola and Pathak (2021) argue that institutional advising models must be policy-informed and student-centered to ensure students are not inadvertently excluded from employment pipelines due to gaps in communication or support. When advising services are fragmented or inaccessible, international students face career disruption, immigration uncertainty, and heightened emotional stress factors that severely compromise their ability to transition from higher education to the workforce.

Toward Equitable and Coordinated OPT Advising

The literature calls for institutions to implement coordinated, inclusive, and policy-informed OPT advising systems that serve the full diversity of international student populations (Gopal, 2016; Gairola & Pathak, 2021). This includes staff training on immigration policy, cross-department collaboration between DSOs and career services, and targeted outreach to underrepresented international student groups, such as ACIS (Singh & Doherty, 2021). While federal OPT policy is externally controlled, institutions ensure students are informed, supported, and equipped to navigate the process successfully (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Matthews, 2017). Equitable advising in this context means identifying students who may be misclassified, adjusting

outreach practices to reflect cultural and national identity differences, and removing procedural ambiguity from the OPT process (Gopal, 2016 & Matthews, 2017). Without these structural changes, OPT will continue to function as a selective benefit primarily to those already possessing institutional capital, rather than a universally accessible transition tool for all international graduates (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Hoang, 2024).

Work Permit Policy Knowledge (WPPK) and Career Readiness

Work Permit Policy Knowledge (WPPK) refers to an international student's understanding of federal regulations governing employment under F-1 visa status, including eligibility criteria, timelines, reporting responsibilities, and restrictions tied to Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). For Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS), WPPK is critical to maintaining legal status, gaining professional experience, and successfully transitioning from higher education to the workforce (USCIS, 2019; Gopal, 2016).

Widespread Misunderstanding of CPT/OPT Regulations

Several studies have documented that international students frequently experience confusion regarding CPT and OPT requirements, including uncertainty about when authorization is needed, how to apply, and what restrictions apply (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Gopal, 2016; Singh & Doherty, 2021). Many students are unclear whether authorization is needed before beginning an internship, how to distinguish part-time from full-time CPT, and when to apply for OPT (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Gairola & Pathak, 2021). Singh and Doherty (2021) found that even students attending large research universities with international offices reported difficulties understanding work authorization timelines and employment limits. When missteps occur, such as

unauthorized employment or late OPT applications, students risk visa termination, job loss, or ineligibility for future benefits like H-1B sponsorship (Hoang, 2024; Matthews, 2017).

WPPK as a Component of Career Readiness

Career readiness for international students must extend beyond résumé writing and interview preparation to include comprehensive knowledge of work authorization policies. Gopal (2016) and Singh and Doherty (2021) argue that career advising models are incomplete without explicit instruction on immigration-related employment procedures. For ACIS, culturally responsive and legally accurate advising is essential to ensure they are prepared to meet employer expectations while remaining in compliance with visa restrictions. Institutions that embed WPPK into their career services through integrated workshops, faculty partnerships, and individualized advising are better positioned to support student transitions into the workforce (Gairola & Pathak, 2021; Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Without this foundation, ACIS may find themselves academically prepared but legally and procedurally unready for employment, undermining the purpose of their U.S. education.

Institutional Gaps in Outreach and Timing

For ACIS, institutional advising failures often occur in content, timing, and delivery. While prior literature has documented the exclusion of Afro-Caribbean or international students from immigration-related advising (Matthews, 2017; Rahming, 2019), less attention has been paid to how this exclusion impacts measurable knowledge of CPT/OPT policies or career-related outcomes. Matthews (2017) found that many ACIS first heard about OPT requirements late in their academic journey often after critical deadlines had passed. Instead of receiving structured, semester-by-semester advising on CPT and OPT options, students were left to rely on informal

peer networks or general online resources. Gopal (2016) argues that work authorization knowledge remains fragmented and inaccessible without intentional, staged outreach aligned with students' academic progress.

This study responds to that gap by examining how institutional factors such as resume assistance format, academic classification, and DSO support are associated with ACIS students' CPT/OPT knowledge and job-seeking experiences. For ACIS navigating dual pressures of legal compliance and post-graduation planning, delayed or informal advising can severely limit their ability to participate in internships, build experience, or secure job offers. Moving beyond anecdotal evidence and qualitative accounts, this study offers empirical insight into how structural advising differences influence the workforce transition process for this under-researched population.

Delivery of WPPK Through Institutional Advising

Career readiness for international students involves not only résumé preparation and job search strategies but also a functional understanding of U.S. work authorization systems. However, few studies explicitly examine the role of Work Permit Policy Knowledge (WPPK) as an integral component of career development for F-1 visa holders. Gopal (2016) argues that immigration literacy should be essential for international student success. Nevertheless, many advising frameworks treat work authorization as a separate or optional issue rather than a core career competency. As a result, international students may be academically qualified but procedurally unprepared to participate in legal employment opportunities.

While some researchers have explored general advising challenges for international students (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Singh & Doherty, 2021), there is limited scholarship that

disaggregates how WPPK affects different subgroups within this population, particularly students of Afro-Caribbean descent. Matthews (2017) and Rahming (2019) highlight the unique barriers faced by ACIS due to misclassification and insufficient institutional outreach, but the connection between these barriers and their preparedness to meet CPT/OPT requirements remains underexplored in the literature.

Additionally, few empirical studies evaluate how WPPK is taught or delivered through institutional support systems. The literature broadly emphasizes the importance of cultural inclusion and advising quality but does not address how specific advising formats, such as faculty-led versus career center-led workshops, affect a student's knowledge of work authorization processes. This gap is significant because timely and accurate policy knowledge directly influences students' ability to engage in internships, meet employer expectations, and pursue long-term career goals. More research is needed to determine how institutions embed WPPK into their career readiness models into their career readiness models and whether delivery methods influence outcomes for international students, particularly those underrepresented in advising literature, such as ACIS.

HBCU Institutional Group Comparisons

While Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) share a collective mission to serve Black students, institutional differences in geographic location, funding levels, student populations, and support structures can create varying experiences for Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) (Gasman, 2010). This study categorizes participating institutions into three groups: HBCU Group 1, HBCU Group 2, and a third category labeled “Other HBCUs.” Group 1 includes institutions from South Carolina. Group 2 includes institutions from Ohio and

Tennessee. Other HBCUs include institutions from Florida, Maryland, and additional locations that are not part of the primary comparative analysis. While these institutions are not examined in direct comparison with Groups 1 and 2, they provide broader contextual insight into the institutional diversity present among HBCUs.

There is limited scholarly research comparing HBCUs by region or state regarding international student advising, CPT/OPT awareness, or access to career readiness programming. While Mwangi (2014) and Mwangi and English (2017) have explored the international student experience within HBCU contexts, particularly for African and Caribbean students, the literature does not disaggregate outcomes based on institutional location or categorize HBCUs by levels of international student support. As a result, there is a lack of clarity around how differences in resource allocation, staffing, or advising models may affect the capacity of institutions to prepare ACIS for U.S. workforce transitions.

Although no formal studies have confirmed differences in international student support across HBCUs, informal evidence from institutional websites, program descriptions, and practitioner observations suggests that some HBCUs may have more robust infrastructures. These may include dedicated Designated School Officials (DSOs), coordinated CPT/OPT workshops, and tailored résumé-building support. In contrast, other institutions may operate with fewer resources or rely on generalized advising that does not fully address the legal and professional needs of F-1 visa holders. These institutional differences can influence when and how ACIS access

career readiness resources, learn about work authorization policies, and prepare for job-seeking after graduation.

By organizing institutions into distinct groups, this study addresses that gap and explores whether institutional groupings are associated with differences in CPT/OPT knowledge or job-seeking outcomes for ACIS. Comparing Group 1 and Group 2 HBCUs offers a framework for understanding how context may influence student access to immigration-related support. Including "Other HBCUs" for contextual reference acknowledges broader institutional diversity, even if these schools are not part of the core comparative analysis. This grouping structure allows the study to investigate institutional influences on ACIS career readiness more clearly and systematically than previous literature has attempted.

Gaps in the Literature

Although the literature offers valuable insights into international student advising, work authorization policies, and career development, several critical gaps remain particularly as they relate to Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Lack of Empirical Research on ACIS

While qualitative research by Desmore et al. (2016), Matthews (2017), and Rahming (2019) has explored aspects of ACIS identity development, institutional belonging, and gendered experiences in higher education, few studies have collected quantitative data related to their understanding of Curricular Practical Training (CPT), Optional Practical Training (OPT), or associated job-seeking outcomes. These prior works have helped illuminate the lived experiences of ACIS, particularly

around issues of invisibility, misclassification, and emotional resilience. However, the absence of empirical data on how institutional factors influence their knowledge of work authorization policy represents a significant gap in the literature. Most existing studies group ACIS within the broader category of international students or among domestic Black students, obscuring the specific challenges they face during their transition into the U.S. workforce.

Lack of Institutional Comparisons Among HBCUs

Second, the literature lacks comparative studies examining how different HBCUs support international students through employment authorization advising and career readiness initiatives. While HBCUs are often praised for their commitment to student success and inclusive environments (Gasman, 2010), they vary significantly in structure, staffing, resources, and support services. There appears to be limited research comparing institutions based on characteristics like résumé assistance formats, advising structures, or career services integration to examine potential differences in CPT/OPT knowledge or employment outcomes among international students. This gap limits understanding of how institutional context may contribute to disparities in access to information and support for Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS), particularly regarding work authorization policies and post-graduation employment transitions.

Lack of Disaggregated Outcome Data

Fourth, few studies disaggregate international student outcomes by region of origin, racial identity, or visa classification. Much of the existing literature treats international students as a monolithic group, making it difficult to understand subgroups such as ACIS's specific experiences and needs. This lack of differentiation can obscure important institutional patterns and support gaps, particularly for students who may simultaneously navigate the complexities of being Black,

international, and non-citizen. For ACIS, these intersecting identities may shape how they are perceived, advised, or included in institutional programming. Yet, limited empirical research explores how these factors influence work authorization knowledge or career readiness. As a result, many institutions may rely on one-size-fits-all approaches to advising and career support, which do not account for the unique challenges ACIS face during their academic and post-graduation transitions (Gopal, 2016; Matthews, 2017; Mwangi, 2014).

Overreliance on Qualitative or Anecdotal Data

Finally, while qualitative studies have been essential in identifying key barriers facing international students, there is a growing need for quantitative research to test and expand these findings (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Gopal, 2016). Much of the current literature is based on interviews, case studies, or practitioner reports, which provide important insights but lack generalizability. There is limited statistical evidence exploring the relationships between institutional support factors such as résumé assistance type or academic classification and CPT/OPT knowledge or job-seeking outcomes. This study addresses that gap by applying a quantitative approach to examine how institutional structures influence career preparation and work authorization policy awareness among ACIS enrolled at HBCUs.

Chapter Two Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive review of the literature related to the academic and career experiences of Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The chapter began by exploring the identity development, cultural misrecognition, and institutional exclusion frequently experienced by ACIS, especially within advising systems that often fail to distinguish them from domestic Black students. While these

students often exhibit academic resilience and strong family support systems, they continue to face invisibility within career services and limited access to international student-specific resources.

The review examined the role of career services in higher education, identifying a widespread lack of tailored support for international students, particularly in employment preparation, résumé development, and work authorization guidance. Literature on Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) revealed systemic advising inconsistencies, legal confusion, and procedural gaps that often leave international students, including ACIS, unprepared to meet employer expectations or navigate the U.S. job market.

The chapter introduced Work Permit Policy Knowledge (WPPK) as an essential yet underexamined component of international student career readiness. Although federal CPT and OPT guidelines are clearly defined, the literature suggests that students rarely receive consistent or proactive education about these policies. For ACIS, misclassification and lack of outreach further exacerbate the challenges of securing legal and career-aligned employment experiences during and after their degree programs.

Next, the chapter discussed HBCU Institutional Group Comparisons, noting that while HBCUs share a historical mission of educational access, they differ substantially in infrastructure, advising practices, and capacity to support international students. Though informal evidence suggests some institutions may offer more robust support structures, the literature does not currently compare HBCUs based on institutional characteristics to evaluate how these differences may influence CPT/OPT knowledge or job-seeking outcomes.

Finally, the chapter outlined several key gaps in the literature, including the lack of empirical studies focused on ACIS, limited research comparing institutional support structures across HBCUs, and a general absence of disaggregated outcome data for international student subgroups. Most existing research relies heavily on qualitative methods, with few studies examining how specific advising factors, résumé assistance, or academic classification relates to work authorization knowledge or career preparation outcomes.

This study addresses these gaps through a quantitative analysis of ACIS enrolled at HBCUs, examining how institutional structures, support mechanisms, and classification variables impact knowledge of CPT/OPT policies and job-seeking outcomes. The next chapter details the methodological framework for the study, including research design, participant sampling, instrumentation, and procedures used to analyze the data.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This chapter presents the methodology used to investigate how institutional factors influence knowledge of work authorization policy and career preparation outcomes among Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) enrolled at four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States. The study employs a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design to explore relationships between academic classification, employment experience, résumé assistance formats, and students' knowledge of Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). This chapter outlines the research design, research questions, population and sampling strategy, instrumentation, variable scoring, data collection procedures, and ethical considerations that guided the study.

Restatement of the Research Problem

Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) represent a growing but under-researched population within U.S. higher education. Although these students share common immigration requirements with other international students, their experiences are further shaped by racial, cultural, and institutional factors, particularly when enrolled at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). One of the most critical transitions these students face is preparing for legal employment in the United States, which requires navigating complex work authorization programs such as Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). Research has shown many international students struggle with understanding and accessing these programs due to inconsistent advising, limited institutional resources, and a lack of targeted career support (Forbes-Mewett, 2013; Rahming, 2019). However, few studies have explicitly focused on the ACIS population or explored how institutional characteristics, such as geographic region, access to resume assistance, and employment opportunities, impact their knowledge and readiness for this transition.

Despite the critical role of career services in facilitating employment pathways, many ACIS at HBCUs may not receive structured, consistent support to prepare resumes, apply for jobs, or understand how CPT and OPT regulations apply to their degree program. Furthermore, regional disparities in funding, institutional size, and employer access may result in unequal preparation for workforce entry across HBCU Groups 1 and 2. Without a clear understanding of whether these institutional and experiential factors influence employment readiness and policy awareness, higher education leaders may be unable to implement effective, equity-minded strategies to support ACIS.

The lack of empirical data on ACIS's career preparation experiences and their knowledge of CPT and OPT policies, particularly within the context of HBCUs, represents a critical gap in the literature. This study addresses gaps by examining how academic classification, employment status, resume assistance, and institutional region relate to students' knowledge of work authorization policies and job-seeking outcomes. Focusing on this overlooked student population, the study aims to provide actionable insights for improving institutional practices, enhancing student support services, and promoting equitable transitions from college to career for ACIS.

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design to explore how institutional factors influence work authorization knowledge and career preparation outcomes among ACIS enrolled at four HBCUs in the United States. Using numerical data, a quantitative approach was appropriate for examining relationships and group differences, allowing the researcher to measure trends and identify statistically significant patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Muijs, 2010).

A non-experimental design was selected because the study did not involve manipulating variables or implementing interventions. Instead, it focused on analyzing existing conditions as they naturally occurred among participants (Ary et al., 2019). This design was ideal for investigating associations between academic classification, employment type, résumé assistance formats, and students' knowledge of Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT).

The study employed a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time to capture participants' current perceptions and experiences. According to Creswell and Creswell

(2018), cross-sectional surveys are commonly used to explore attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within a population at one moment, especially when time and resources do not allow for longitudinal analysis.

Using a structured survey instrument allowed for efficient data collection from a sample of 106 participants. This format supported inferential statistics, including independent t-tests and chi-square analyses, to examine group differences (e.g., underclassmen vs. upperclassmen, or HBCU Group 1 vs. Group 2) and relationships between institutional supports and employment preparation outcomes. This methodology provided both breadth and depth in assessing how institutional structures shape ACIS students' CPT/OPT knowledge and workforce readiness.

Restatement of Research Questions

This study explores the institutional and experiential factors influencing the workforce transition ACIS in the United States. Specifically, it examines how academic classification, employment experience, résumé assistance formats, and institutional groupings affect students' knowledge of Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) and job-seeking outcomes such as the number of interviews received. The research aims to understand better the role of career services and institutional support structures in preparing ACIS to navigate visa regulations and successfully transition from college to career. By focusing on measurable variables tied to institutional practices, this study addresses gaps in the literature on ACIS. It offers practical insights to enhance advising models, résumé preparation, and policy literacy among this underrepresented international student population. The following primary research questions guide this study:

1. Is there a significant difference between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen on CPT test scores?

2. Is there a significant difference between faculty-led and career center-led resume workshops on the number of job interviews received?

3. Is there a significant difference between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 on CPT test scores?

4. Is there an association between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 students in receiving resume assistance through workshops?

Research Questions and Analysis

This section outlines the primary research questions, sub-questions, and the statistical tests used for analysis. Independent t-tests were applied to difference-based questions, as recommended by Morgan et al. (2020), while Chi-square tests were used for association-based questions, as recommended by Morgan et al. (2020) and McHuge (2013).

Each set of research questions is organized thematically to reflect the structure of the study.

Class Standing on OPT & CPT Scores and Employment Status

To explore the relationship between academic classification and work authorization knowledge, an independent t-test was used, as recommended by Morgan et al. (2020), to determine if significant differences exist in CPT and OPT scores across different student classifications. (***See Figure 4***)

Figure 4*: Research Questions and Statistical Analysis Chart*

Primary Question 1: Academic Classification & Employment Experience

RQ #	Description	Statistical Test	Survey Questions

RQ1	Is there a difference between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen on CPT test scores?	Independent t-test	Q3, Q25-29
RQ2	Is there a difference between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen on OPT test scores?	Independent t-test	Q3, Q30-34
RQ3	Is there a difference between students currently working on/off campus in-field on CPT/OPT scores?	Independent t-test	Q21-22, Q25-34
RQ4	Is there a difference between students currently working on/off campus out-of-field on CPT/OPT scores?	Independent t-test	Q21-22, Q25-34
RQ5	Is there a difference between students previously worked on/off campus in-field on CPT/OPT scores?	Independent t-test	Q23-24, Q25-34
RQ6	Is there a difference between students previously worked on/off campus out-of-field on CPT/OPT scores?	Independent t-test	Q23-24, Q25-34
RQ7	Is there a difference between students working off-campus in/out of field on CPT/OPT scores?	Independent t-test	Q21-22, Q25-34

Primary Question 2: Résumé Assistance

RQ #	Description	Statistical Test	Survey Questions
RQ8	Is there a difference between faculty-led and career center-led resume workshops on number of interviews?	Independent t-test	Q13-16, Q9-10
RQ9	Is there a difference between faculty-led and career center-led one-on-one resume assistance?	Independent t-test	Q13-16, Q9-10
RQ10	Is there a difference between faculty-led and career center-led AI-assisted resume assistance?	Independent t-test	Q13-16, Q9-10
RQ11	Is there a difference between faculty-led and career center-led traditional resume assistance?	Independent t-test	Q13-16, Q9-10

Primary Question 3: Institutional Region – CPT/OPT Knowledge

RQ #	Description	Statistical Test	Survey Questions
RQ12	Is there a difference between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 on CPT test scores?	Independent t-test	Q2, Q25-29
RQ13	Is there a difference between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 on OPT test scores?	Independent t-test	Q2, Q30-34

Primary Question 3 Continued: Institutional Region – Résumé Assistance

RQ #	Description	Statistical Test	Survey Questions
RQ14	Is there an association between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 students in receiving resume workshop assistance?	Chi-Square	Q2, Q14
RQ15	Is there an association between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 students in receiving one-on-one resume assistance?	Chi-Square	Q2, Q13
RQ16	Is there an association between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 students in receiving AI-assisted resume assistance?	Chi-Square	Q2, Q15
RQ17	Is there an association between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 students in receiving traditional resume feedback?	Chi-Square	Q2, Q16

Primary Question

1. Is there a difference between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen on CPT test scores?
    - Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)

Sub-Questions

2. Is there a difference between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen on OPT test scores?
    - Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)

3. Is there a difference between those who are currently working on or off campus in their field on OPT and CPT test scores?
    - Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)
4. Is there a difference between those who are currently working on or off campus outside of their field on OPT and CPT test scores?
    - Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)
5. Is there a difference between those who previously worked on or off campus in their field on OPT and CPT test scores?
    - Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)
6. Is there a difference between those who previously worked on or off campus outside of their field on OPT and CPT test scores?
    - Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)
7. Is there a difference between those working off-campus in and outside of their field on OPT and CPT test scores?
    - Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)

Faculty vs. Career Center Resume Assistance

This section examines the effectiveness of faculty-led versus career-centered resume assistance on job search outcomes. As recommended by Morgan et al. (2020), an independent t-test was used to determine if significant differences exist between the two groups.

Primary Question

8. Is there a difference between faculty-led and career center-led resume workshops on the number of job interviews received?
    - Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)

Sub-Questions

9. Is there a difference between faculty-led and career center-led one-on-one resume assistance on the number of job interviews received?
    - Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)
10. Is there a difference between faculty-led and career center-led AI-assisted resume assistance on the number of job interviews received?

- Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)

11. Is there a difference between faculty-led and career center-led traditional resume assistance on the number of job interviews received?

- Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)

Institutional Differences on CPT and OPT Scores

This section explores differences in CPT and OPT scores between HBCU Groups 1 and 2. An independent t-test was used to determine if significant differences exist between these institutions, as recommended by Morgan et al. (2020).

Primary Question

12. Is there a difference between HBCU Groups 1 and 2 on CPT test scores?

- Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)

Sub-Question

13. Is there a difference between HBCU Groups 1 and 2 on OPT test scores?

- Statistical Test: Independent t-test (Morgan et al., 2020)

Resume Assistance Differences Between HBCU Groups 1 and 2

To analyze the association between the institutions (HBCU Groups 1 and 2) and the type of resume assistance received, a Chi-square test was used as recommended by Morgan et al. (2020) and McHuge (2013).

Primary Question

14. Is there an association between HBCU Groups 1 and 2 students in receiving resume assistance through workshops?

- Statistical Test: Chi-Square (Morgan et al., 2020; McHuge, 2013)

Sub-Questions

15. Is there an association between HBCU Groups 1 and 2 students in receiving one-on-one resume assistance?

- Statistical Test: Chi-Square (Morgan et al., 2020; McHuge, 2013)

16. Is there an association between HBCU Groups 1 and 2 students in receiving AI-assisted resume assistance?

- Statistical Test: Chi-Square (Morgan et al., 2020; McHuge, 2013)

17. Is there an association between HBCU Groups 1 and 2 students in receiving traditional (written feedback) resume assistance?

- Statistical Test: Chi-Square (Morgan et al., 2020; McHuge, 2013)

This section provides a structured approach to the research questions and statistical analyses used in the study. Independent t-tests were selected for difference-based questions, as recommended by Morgan et al. (2020), while Chi-square tests were used for association-based questions, as recommended by McHuge (2013) and Morgan et al. (2020).

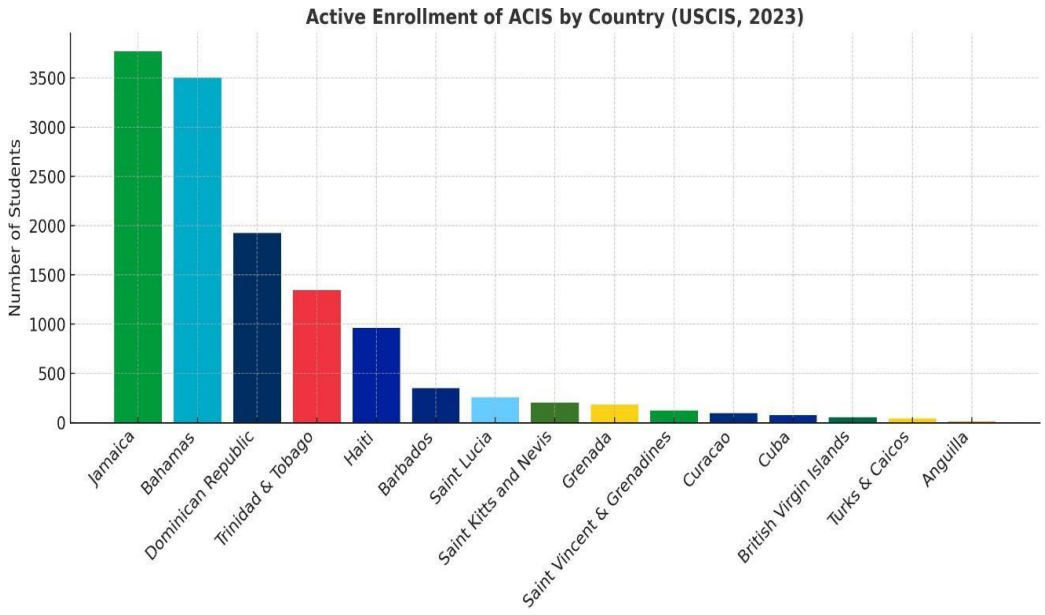
Population and Sample

The population for this study consists of ACIS who are currently or recently enrolled at HBCUs in the United States under F-1 student visa status. According to the SEVIS Mapping Tool (2023), the Afro-Caribbean region includes 15 countries: Anguilla, The Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Cuba, Curaçao, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Although students from these nations represent only 4.86 percent of the total international student population in the U.S., they constitute a vital and often underexamined segment within American higher education. USCIS (2019) estimates that approximately one million international students are enrolled annually, yet limited attention has been given to the experiences of Black international students from the Caribbean.

As of February 2023, the SEVIS Mapping Tool reported active enrollment among ACIS from countries such as Jamaica (3,769), The Bahamas (3,504), the Dominican Republic (1,921), Trinidad and Tobago (1,344), and Haiti (962). USCIS (2023) also reported that 5,870 ACIS were enrolled in STEM undergraduate programs and 3,845 in graduate STEM programs. Many of these students attend HBCUs, particularly those in the southeastern United States regions that

historically attracted Afro-Caribbean migration due to their geographic proximity and labor shortages in the 1940s (Thompson, 2012). (***See Figure 2***)

Figure 2: ***Active Enrollment of ACIS by Country (USCIS, 2023)***



This study includes a purposive sample of 106 ACIS currently or previously enrolled at four HBCUs. A purposive sampling strategy was selected to ensure that participants met the specific inclusion criteria: (a) self-identification as Afro-Caribbean, (b) current or prior enrollment at an HBCU, and (c) active or previous F-1 student visa status. This approach was appropriate given the population's relatively small and geographically dispersed nature. It allowed the researcher to focus on a student subgroup often marginalized in research and policy discussions (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

The researcher recruited participants through professional networks, institutional partnerships, and access to scholarship rosters developed through her ongoing role as an international recruiter. Of the 158 initial responses received, data cleaning procedures were applied

to remove incomplete surveys and ineligible participants. The final dataset included 106 valid responses suitable for statistical analysis.

The four participating HBCUs were organized into three analytic categories to facilitate institutional-level comparisons: HBCU Group 1, HBCU Group 2, and Other HBCUs. Group 1 consisted of institutions located in South Carolina. Group 2 included institutions in both Ohio and Tennessee. Due to a lower number of ACIS respondents from the Tennessee-based institution, it was combined with the Ohio-based institution to create a more balanced and analytically meaningful group. Combining institutions with similar missions or institutional types is a commonly accepted practice in education research to enhance comparative validity and strengthen the power of statistical analysis (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019).

- **HBCU Group 1**: Institutions located in South Carolina
- **HBCU Group 2**: Institutions located in Ohio and Tennessee
- **Other HBCUs**: Institutions located in Florida, Maryland, or regions not included in the primary comparison groups

Although this chapter outlines the institutional grouping strategy, Chapter Four presents detailed demographic distributions and group-based comparisons. These groupings provide a

framework for understanding how institutional context may influence ACIS students' awareness of work authorization policies and their overall career preparation experiences.

Sampling Technique Used and Justification

This study employed a purposive sampling technique, which involves intentionally selecting participants who meet predefined criteria relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). This approach was appropriate due to the specificity of the population being studied, ACIS enrolled at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to target individuals with shared characteristics such as Caribbean nationality, F-1 visa status, and current or prior enrollment at an HBCU (Patton, 2015).

Given ACIS's limited and dispersed nature in higher education, random sampling was not feasible. Instead, purposive sampling enabled the researcher to access this underrepresented population using established networks and direct outreach. Palinkas et al. (2015) highlight that purposive sampling is particularly effective when the research seeks in-depth understanding from a specific group rather than generalizing to the broader population. This method allowed the study to prioritize insight and relevance over broad generalizability, consistent with the goals of institutional policy and support system analysis.

Sample

The final sample for this study included 106 Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) enrolled at four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). A total of 158 survey responses were initially collected after data cleaning, which included removing incomplete surveys

and respondents who did not meet the eligibility criteria; 106 valid responses were retained for analysis. Eligible participants self-identified as Afro-Caribbean, held or currently held F-1 visa status, and were enrolled at one of the participating HBCUs. This sample was identified using purposive sampling, which was appropriate given the study's focus on a specific and relatively underrepresented subgroup within the broader international student population (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Recruitment was conducted through the researcher's established professional networks, which include international admissions partnerships, scholarship programs, and institutional contacts. The researcher leveraged a WhatsApp group chat specifically used to communicate with ACIS and reached out to students who had previously received academic advising or scholarship support. Using a targeted sampling strategy, this study ensured representation of ACIS from multiple Caribbean nations across different academic levels and institutional contexts. This sampling approach allowed the study to capture meaningful experiences related to work authorization policy knowledge, résumé assistance, and job-seeking outcomes.

Instrument

This section provides an overview of the survey instrument developed by the researcher specifically to assess the career preparation experiences and work authorization policy knowledge of ACIS enrolled at HBCUs. The instrument consisted of two key components: a demographic questionnaire and a Work Authorization Knowledge Check. These tools were designed to gather

essential background information and evaluate students' familiarity with CPT and OPT, two federal employment pathways crucial to international student career transitions.

The demographic portion of the survey ensured accurate identification of eligible participants and captured contextual data, including academic classification, country of origin, visa status, and institutional affiliation. The Work Authorization Knowledge Check assessed how well ACIS understood CPT and OPT eligibility, reporting requirements, application processes, and timelines. These questions were constructed using federal guidelines from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS, 2023), SEVIS training materials, and institutional CPT/OPT advising resources.

By creating this custom instrument, the researcher sought to address gaps in existing tools that do not reflect the unique intersection of race, immigration status, and institutional context experienced by ACIS. The demographic and knowledge components results are used to identify disparities in policy awareness and areas in which institutions may need to strengthen support systems. A complete version of the instrument is provided (**see Appendix 3**)

Process of Creating the Instrument

Several steps were undertaken to develop the survey and knowledge check instrument used in this study:

- **Utilization of I-20 Information:** The survey was developed using content commonly found on page three of the I-20 form, the nonimmigrant document issued to all international students. These items were designed to reflect student experiences related to visa status, employment eligibility, and institutional procedures.

- **Reference to USCIS Guidelines:** Questions were created aligned with current information published on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website. This ensured that the items related to Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) reflected up-to-date federal regulations and procedural requirements.

- **Consideration of Cultural and Language Factors:** The researcher identified potential cultural and language barriers that could impact participant understanding during development. Items were reviewed to ensure clarity and accessibility across diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds common among ACIS.

- **Iterative Revision Process:** The instrument underwent several rounds of revision based on expert feedback and pilot testing. Questions were first reviewed and refined in Microsoft Word, with adjustments made for clarity, accuracy, and relevance. Once finalized, the instrument was transferred to the Qualtrics platform for online administration.

Demographic Student Section

The demographic section of the survey was designed to collect essential background information to confirm participant eligibility and contextualize ACIS's experiences. These items were used to ensure that respondents met the inclusion criteria for the study and to support the disaggregation of responses by academic classification, visa status, and national origin. The information gathered contributes to a richer understanding of ACIS profiles and provides a

foundation for analyzing differences across institutional and personal variables. A brief description of the key demographic components is provided below:

- **Screening Procedures:** At the beginning of the survey, participants were required to verify their eligibility for the study. They were asked to select their international student status from the following options: "Actively Enrolled," "Optional Practical Training (OPT) Approved," or "OPT Pending." Only participants who confirmed current or prior enrollment under F-1 visa status were permitted to continue. Additionally, participants were asked to identify their country of birth and citizenship from a list of 15 designated Afro-Caribbean nations. These two questions served as critical screening tools. Any respondent who did not meet both criteria, including F-1 visa status and citizenship from an Afro-Caribbean country, was excluded from the final dataset during the data cleaning process. This ensured the sample reflected the intended study population.

- **Academic Classification Level:** Participants indicated their current academic classification level, such as "Freshman," "Sophomore," "Junior," "Senior," or "Graduate." This item allowed the researcher to analyze differences in CPT and OPT knowledge and job-seeking outcomes by level of academic progress.

- **Duration of International Student Status:** Participants specified how long they had been international students in the United States, with options ranging from "1–2 years" to "More than 5 years." This question assessed participants' exposure to the U.S. higher education system and potential familiarity with federal work policies.

- **Institution Attended:** Participants selected their current or most recent institution from a provided list, with an option for "Not Available" if their institution was not listed. This allowed

the researcher to assign each participant to a pre-established institutional group (HBCU Group 1, Group 2, or Other) for comparative analysis.

- **Country of Birth and Citizenship:** Participants identified both their country of birth and country of citizenship from a predefined list of 15 Afro-Caribbean countries. This question was critical to defining the sample population and ensuring inclusion criteria were met based on national origin rather than regional residence alone. This distinction was crucial considering regional citizenship laws. For example, under the Bahamas Nationality Act (1973) and the Constitution of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, a child born in The Bahamas to non-Bahamian parents does not automatically receive Bahamian citizenship. If a student were born in The Bahamas but holds Chinese citizenship due to parental lineage, that individual would not be counted in the U.S. SEVIS or USCIS datasets as part of the ACIS population, despite residing in the region. As such, only students who are citizens of the 15 listed Afro-Caribbean nations and confirmed F-1 visa holders were included in this study's final sample.

Survey Item Descriptions

The survey instrument included several key questions to capture variables relevant to participants' academic status, professional experiences, and knowledge of U.S. work authorization policies. These items were developed to align directly with the study's research questions and to support the classification and comparison of participants based on factors such as time spent in the U.S., visa status, and field of study. Below is a description of the primary item categories included in the survey:

- **Years Spent as an International Student in the U.S.:** Participants were asked to indicate how long they had been studying in the United States under international student status.

This question was essential for assessing participants' familiarity with the U.S. educational system, their exposure to immigration policies, and the extent to which they may have integrated into the domestic job market.

- **Educational Institution:** Participants were asked to select the U.S. institution they attended. This item was used to classify respondents by HBCU group (Group 1, Group 2, or Other) and allowed the researcher to explore how institutional context may influence access to international student support services, including CPT/OPT advising and career services.

- **Level of Study:** To understand participants' academic progress, the survey asked whether they were currently freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, or graduate students. This classification allowed for comparing knowledge levels and job preparation activities across different academic stages.

- **Field of Study:** Participants were asked to identify their central study area. This information assessed whether students in STEM-related fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) differed in their access to or understanding of employment pathways such as CPT and OPT compared to non-STEM fields.

- **Current Visa Status:** The survey included an item requiring participants to identify their current visa status. This was a critical variable in the study, as it directly affects eligibility for CPT and OPT and influences the type of institutional support students may receive during their job search process.

- **Work Experience in the U.S.:** Participants were asked to report any prior work experiences in the United States, including internships, part-time jobs, and full-time

employment authorized through CPT or OPT. These responses helped contextualize students' professional development and preparedness for entering the U.S. workforce.

- **Work Authorization Knowledge:** The final section of the instrument assessed participants' understanding of work authorization programs available to F-1 international students, specifically CPT and OPT. This knowledge is particularly critical for ACIS, as visa regulations directly impact their ability to pursue internships, secure job offers, and transition into long-term employment opportunities in the U.S. The survey items in this section aimed to determine whether students possessed the legal and procedural awareness required to participate in these programs while maintaining compliance with federal immigration policy.

Employment Information of Students' Experience

The employment-related section of the survey was designed to gather insights into students' job search experiences, access to institutional resources, and professional development during their academic programs. The questions assess the number of job interviews received in the U.S., both within and outside the students' field of study, and the extent to which students accessed support services to navigate the job search process. Participants were asked to reflect on their engagement with career services, including résumé assistance, interview preparation, and search engine tools specifically designed for international students. These tools included platforms like GoinGlobal and Visa Jobs, which career services centers frequently promote to help F-1 students identify visa-

sponsoring employers. Questions also explored whether students were made aware of these platforms and how often they used them in their job search.

To contextualize their employment history, students were asked about both current and previous on-campus or off-campus work experiences, focusing on whether the work was aligned with their field of study. These questions provided insight into students' practical exposure and readiness to apply academic knowledge in real-world professional environments.

Additionally, participants were asked whether they received international student-specific job search guidance through their institution's career services. This allowed the study to evaluate whether support was tailored to students navigating work authorization processes such as CPT and OPT. By capturing institutional outreach and student utilization of resources, the data offers valuable insight into how well ACIS is supported in transitioning from college to career.

Work Authorization Knowledge Check

The work authorization knowledge check is a tool for assessing Afro-Caribbean International Students' (ACIS) understanding of work authorization programs, specifically Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). This assessment consists of 10 multiple-choice questions to measure students' knowledge of essential aspects such as eligibility criteria, requirements, regulations, and procedures related to these programs. The knowledge check aims to determine whether students' preparation in this area is adequate and how it relates to their ability to pursue work opportunities in the U.S. These questions were developed using U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) guidelines. They were intended to assess students' factual knowledge of eligibility requirements, application processes, reporting

obligations, and regulatory limits associated with CPT and OPT participation. To interpret student knowledge levels, scores were categorized into three distinct tiers for each section:

- **Highly Knowledgeable (4–5 points):**

  Indicates a strong understanding of CPT or OPT policy, including procedural

requirements and eligibility timelines. Students in this range are likely well-prepared to engage in authorized employment opportunities.

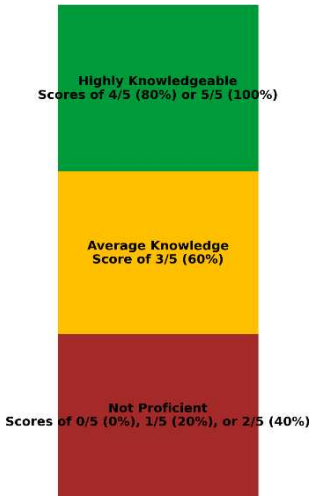
- **Average Knowledge (2–3 points):**

  Reflects a moderate understanding of work authorization processes, but with notable gaps that may impact timely or compliant participation.

- **Not Proficient (0–1 point):**

  Suggests limited or inaccurate knowledge of CPT or OPT procedures, which may place students at risk of non-compliance or missed employment opportunities.

Figure 3: ***CPT and OPT knowledge score levels used to assess proficiency.***



CPT and OPT Score Utility

The CPT score assessed whether students understood their eligibility to engage in internships or employment opportunities directly related to their academic programs during their

study. This knowledge is critical for ensuring students obtain relevant practical training while maintaining compliance with federal regulations.

The OPT score helped determine students' awareness of post-graduation employment options within their field, particularly those offered by employers that sponsor international students. This understanding is closely tied to institutional job search resources, such as international student job boards and résumé support provided through career services. Additionally, the OPT score indicated whether students were aware of legal pathways to transition into the U.S. workforce while maintaining lawful F-1 visa status.

By applying this scoring framework, the researcher could evaluate whether participants classified as highly knowledgeable or average knowledge were more prepared for job interviews and had greater access to employment opportunities compared to those classified as not proficient. This differentiation helped identify key policy literacy and institutional support gaps, offering insight into how preparedness may influence post-graduation outcomes.

The study used these knowledge levels as outcome variables to assess relationships between students' understanding of work authorization policies and institutional support structures, including résumé assistance, classification level, and HBCU institutional group.

Understanding of Optional Practical Training (OPT): Participants were asked detailed questions about their awareness and knowledge of OPT, a work authorization option for F-1 international students. OPT allows students to gain practical experience in their field of study for up to 12 months (or 36 months for STEM graduates). The survey assessed:

OPT Knowledge Assessment Areas

- **Basic Awareness:** Participants were asked whether they had heard of OPT and understood its purpose and benefits. For example: “Are you familiar with OPT and its application process?” This item assessed whether students knew about the opportunity to work after graduation through OPT.

- **Types of OPT:** The survey included items that assessed participants’ understanding of the difference between pre-completion OPT (authorized work during enrollment) and post-completion OPT (authorized work following program completion). Questions such as, “Do you understand the distinctions between pre-completion and post-completion OPT, and when to apply for each?” helped evaluate students' preparedness for employment during different phases of their academic journey.

- **Application Process:** Students were asked about their knowledge of the OPT application timeline, required documentation, and submission deadlines. These questions were designed to determine whether participants were informed about the procedural and time-sensitive nature of the application process. For instance: “Are you aware of when and how to apply for OPT, and the processing times involved?”

- **OPT Limitations:** This section assessed students’ understanding of specific conditions and restrictions tied to OPT participation. One key concept was the 90-day unemployment rule, which limits how long a student may remain unemployed while on OPT. An example item included: “Do you know the limitations on unemployment during the OPT period?”

CPT Knowledge Assessment Areas

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) Awareness: **CPT** allows international students to engage in work experiences directly related to their major while in school. The survey included questions aimed at understanding whether participants were knowledgeable about this work option and its unique requirements:

- **Introduction to CPT:** The survey assessed whether participants had received information about CPT through academic advisors or other institutional channels. For example: "Has your academic advisor informed you about CPT as an option for gaining work experience?" This item gauged the extent to which institutions guided CPT eligibility and participation.

- **Part-time vs. Full-time CPT:** Participants were asked about their understanding of the distinction between part-time and full-time CPT and the implications of prolonged full-time use. One question, for instance, asked: "Are you aware that using full-time CPT for more than 12 months disqualifies you from OPT eligibility?" This item helped assess students' awareness of how early work experiences could impact future employment opportunities.

- **CPT Application Process:** Participants were also asked about their knowledge of the CPT application process, including academic authorization, institutional requirements, and compliance with visa regulations. A representative item included: "Do you understand the steps involved in applying for CPT and the requirements for maintaining your F-1 status while on CPT?" These responses helped evaluate whether students could navigate CPT participation during their academic programs.

General U.S. Work Authorization Knowledge: Beyond OPT and CPT, the survey explored the participants' broader understanding of employment regulations under the F-1 visa. These included:

Additional Work Authorization Knowledge Areas

- **Employment Restrictions:** Participants were asked whether they understood the employment limitations imposed by F-1 visa regulations. These items focused on whether students knew that employment is generally restricted to on-campus positions and that off-campus work requires prior authorization. A representative item included: “Do you know the types of employment allowed under your F-1 status?” This question helped assess foundational knowledge related to legal work participation.
- **Role of Designated School Officials (DSOs):** The survey included items measuring students’ understanding of DSOs' responsibilities in facilitating work authorization. For example, “Do you know the role of your school’s DSO in helping you with OPT and CPT applications?” These items evaluated students’ awareness of institutional resources and ability to access appropriate support throughout the work authorization process.

The Work Authorization Knowledge section was vital to understanding how well-prepared ACIS students were to take advantage of work opportunities available under U.S. immigration law. By focusing on both OPT and CPT, the survey provided insights into whether participants comprehensively understood these options, their limitations, and the steps required to secure work authorization.

Career Services and Job Search Engines

This survey section assessed whether career services and job search resources are tailored to meet ACIS needs. The goal is to evaluate whether ACIS students are aware of and have access to institutional job search tools and support and how well these services address international students' unique challenges, such as work authorization processes and visa limitations.

Institutional Role in Career Services

Institutions play a critical role in providing career services to international students' needs. This includes hosting job fairs and offering career counseling designed to help international students navigate the complexities of the U.S. job market. Institutions are responsible for ensuring that job fairs include employers familiar with visa sponsorship processes, such as OPT and CPT, and willing to hire international students. Additionally, career services should offer guidance on resume assistance, interview preparation, and the legal requirements surrounding work authorization for international students.

The survey assesses whether ACIS students feel providing resume assistance, work authorization awareness, and locating employers who hire international students are relevant to their needs and whether they have been adequately supported in finding employers who understand the complexities of hiring students with F-1 visas. This focus on institutional support aligns with the study’s goal of exploring how well schools meet the career development needs of their international student population.

Work Authorization Knowledge and Career Development

Understanding work authorization is a crucial component of career development for ACIS students. Visa limitations directly affect their ability to secure internships, job offers, and long-term employment in the U.S. Programs like OPT and CPT allow students to gain professional experience within their field, but only if they understand how and when to apply. ACIS students may face difficulties securing internships or jobs essential for their career trajectory without a solid understanding of these work authorization options. As a result, institutions must provide clear and

accessible guidance on these programs to ensure that students can fully take advantage of these opportunities.

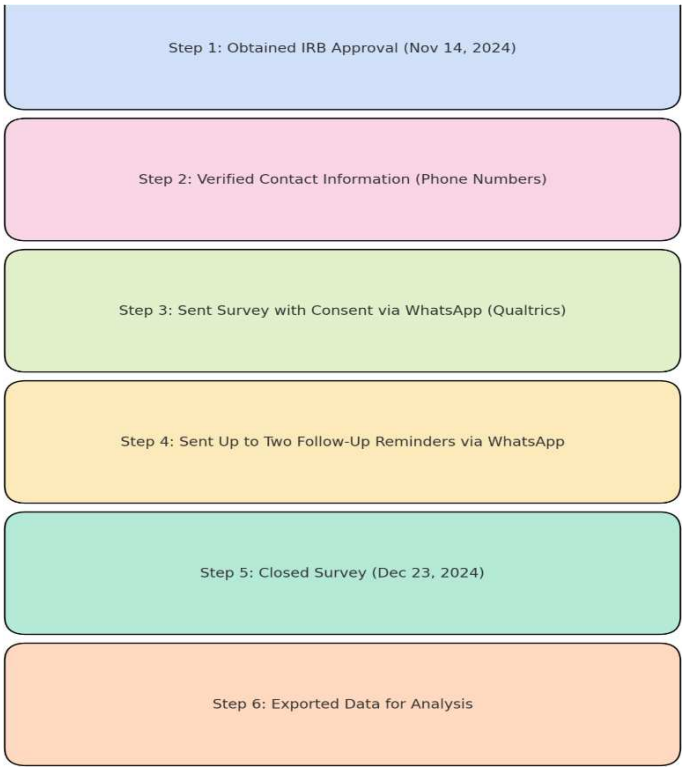
Questions of Career Services

To gain a deeper understanding of ACIS experiences with institutional career services, the survey included an open-ended item designed to capture personal reflections and challenges. This item focused on students' difficulties accessing or utilizing career services, particularly in résumé assistance, job search support, and navigating work authorization processes such as OPT and CPT. This item's purpose was to explore how effectively career services address the unique needs of ACIS. By incorporating a qualitative element, the study allowed participants to describe their experiences in greater depth, offering insights that may not emerge through closed-ended or multiple-choice questions. These responses helped identify institutional gaps, unmet needs, and opportunities for improving support systems that guide ACIS in transitioning from college to career.

Data Collection Process

This study followed a structured and ethical data collection process to recruit and survey ACIS enrolled at HBCUs. The data collection period ran from November 15 to December 23, 2024, following formal approval from Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB Approval #6312) on November 14, 2024. (***See Figure 5***)

Figure 5: ***Step-by-step process used to recruit and survey ACIS participants.***



Step 1: IRB Approval: The researcher obtained IRB approval before distributing the survey. No data collection occurred before this approval, ensuring full compliance with federal and institutional guidelines for human subjects' research.

Step 2: Participant Recruitment and Contact Verification- Since 2019, the researcher has been an international recruiter who maintains direct and indirect contact with ACIS students through college outreach, scholarship contracts, and advising roles. The researcher accessed an updated list of student phone numbers and verified the accuracy of the contact information before survey distribution.

Step 3: Sampling and Distribution Strategy- Participants were selected using a purposive **sampling method** to ensure eligibility and relevance to the study. The researcher categorized participants as either:

- **Directly recruited**, having received visa guidance, scholarship support, or college admission assistance, or
- **Indirectly recruited**, benefiting from scholarship contracts facilitated by the researcher or partner organizations.

All eligible participants received a personalized survey invitation via WhatsApp. The invitation included the IRB-approved informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, participation rights, confidentiality protocols, and researcher contact information.

Step 4: Survey Administration- The survey was administered through Qualtrics, a secure, web-based survey platform. Only participants who consented were granted access to the survey. The survey link was sent individually to ensure direct engagement, and the format was mobile-accessible to maximize ease of participation.

Step 5: Follow-Up Communication To improve response rates, the researcher sent up to two follow-up reminders via WhatsApp to non-respondents. These messages reiterated the study's importance and provided the survey link again. Communication was respectful and spaced at least one week apart.

Step 6: Data Closure- The survey was closed on December 23, 2024, after sufficient responses had been gathered to meet the study's statistical needs. All data collected during this period was automatically stored within Qualtrics and later exported for cleaning and analysis.

This structured, multi-step approach ensured ethical compliance, accurate participant selection, and high-quality data collection from a targeted sample of ACIS students at HBCUs.

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis procedures for this study followed a systematic, step-by-step process using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. This section outlines the steps used to clean, organize, and analyze the data to address the study's research questions related to ACIS enrollment at HBCUs. The data analysis process is below. (***See Figure 6***)

Figure 6*: Sequential steps for coding, cleaning, and statistical testing in SPSS.*

Step 1: Data Cleaning and Screening- Upon closing the Qualtrics survey, the dataset was exported into SPSS. The following steps were taken to ensure the data was suitable for analysis: removed incomplete responses and entries that failed to meet eligibility criteria (non-F1 visa holders or non-ACIS participants); verified that responses to demographic and survey questions were within acceptable ranges; coded missing values and standardized categorical variables.

Step 2: Variable Coding and Grouping- Key variables were coded and grouped for consistency and comparability: Academic Classification was grouped into lowerclassmen (freshmen and sophomores) and upperclassmen (juniors and seniors). Employment Status was categorized by type (in-field or out-of-field) and timing (current or previous). Provider grouped Résumé Assistance: faculty-led or career center-led (including workshops, one-on-one, AI-assisted, and written feedback). Institutional Region was relabeled into HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2, based on enrollment balance and geographic distribution. CPT and OPT Knowledge Scores were calculated based on 5-item quizzes for each category, with scores ranging from 0 to 5.

Step 3: Descriptive Statistics- Descriptive statistics were generated to summarize participant demographics and key variables. Frequencies and percentages were used for categorical variables, while means and standard deviations were reported for continuous variables such as CPT and OPT scores.

Step 4: Inferential Statistical Tests- To address the study's primary and sub-research questions, inferential statistical tests were conducted as follows: Independent t-tests were used to examine differences in CPT and OPT knowledge scores and résumé support outcomes across academic classification, employment status, résumé assistance type, and institutional grouping. Chi-square tests examined associations between institutional groupings and access to résumé assistance types. All statistical tests were two-tailed with a significance level set at $p < .05$, as recommended by McHugh (2013) and Morgan et al. (2020). Assumptions for each test were reviewed and reported, including normality, homogeneity of variance, and expected cell count thresholds.

Step 5: Interpretation of Findings—The findings were interpreted for each research question. Where statistically significant differences or associations were identified, these were noted in Chapter 4 with supporting tables and figures. Practical significance and implications for institutional practice were addressed in Chapter 5.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in full compliance with ethical guidelines for human subjects' research and adhered to the standards set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Colorado State University. The study was approved on November 14, 2024 (IRB Protocol #6312). All procedures were designed to ensure participants' rights, safety, and confidentiality were protected throughout the research process.

Informed Consent

Before participation, all individuals were provided with a detailed consent form embedded at the beginning of the Qualtrics survey. This form clearly explained the purpose of the study, the

voluntary nature of participation, the estimated time required to complete the survey, and the types of questions that would be asked. Participants were informed that they could skip any questions or exit the survey at any time without penalty. Only those who selected "I consent to participate" could complete the survey.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants were not asked to provide names, student ID numbers, or any identifying institutional information. All responses remained anonymous and were coded numerically in the SPSS dataset. Contact information was used solely to distribute the survey link via WhatsApp and was not stored alongside participant responses. The anonymity of participants was prioritized to avoid any potential identification by institutions or sponsors.

Data Storage and Protection

The collected data were stored securely within the password-protected Qualtrics platform and later exported to a password-protected external hard drive accessible only by the researcher. No raw data were shared with third parties or institutional stakeholders. Data will be retained for three years, after which all digital files will be permanently deleted.

Minimization of Risk

The study posed minimal risk to participants. The primary risk involved potential discomfort responding to questions about job search challenges, immigration knowledge, or institutional support. To mitigate this risk, participants were reminded that they could skip any question or withdraw without consequences. No compensation was provided for participation.

Researcher Role and Bias

The researcher disclosed their role as an international recruiter and acknowledged that some participants may have had prior contact with the researcher through scholarship advising or institutional outreach. Survey responses were collected anonymously to reduce bias, and no identifiers were linked to response data. The researcher did not influence participant responses and had no authority over their academic or immigration status. These procedures ensured that the study upheld the ethical standards of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice as outlined in the Belmont Report and federal regulations governing human subject research.

This chapter detailed the research design, methodology, and analytical procedures used to investigate the career readiness and work authorization knowledge of ACIS enrolled at HBCUs. The chapter began by restating the problem and outlining the study's purpose, followed by presenting the primary and sub-research questions, which guided the methodological choices. A quantitative, non-experimental design was employed, utilizing a survey instrument that included demographic items, resume and employment history questions, and a 10-item knowledge check assessing CPT and OPT policy understanding. The population consisted of ACIS currently or formerly enrolled at select HBCUs across the southern and midwestern United States, grouped into HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 for analysis. Following IRB approval, a purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit 106 valid participants through direct WhatsApp outreach.

Instrumentation and scoring procedures were explained, including how CPT and OPT knowledge scores were categorized as "highly knowledgeable," "average knowledge," or "not proficient." Data were collected through Qualtrics, and analysis was conducted using SPSS. Descriptive statistics provided demographic profiles and response summaries, while inferential

statistics, primarily independent t-tests and chi-square tests, addressed the study's research questions. Flowcharts and tables were included to illustrate the data collection and analysis processes. Ethical procedures were also discussed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the secure storage of participant data. The next chapter presents the analysis's results, including descriptive findings, test statistics, and interpretations related to the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the study's quantitative findings, focusing on the employment preparation and transition experiences of ACIS in the United States. The chapter begins with an overview of the participants' demographic characteristics, providing context for their employment status, job search experiences, and sources of resume feedback. These descriptive statistics establish a foundation for addressing the study's research questions.

Following the demographic overview, the research questions are restated to clarify the study's focus. The results section is structured by each research question, integrating descriptive statistics to summarize key data points and inferential analyses, including independent t-tests, to examine group differences. Where applicable, effect sizes and post hoc analyses are included to further interpret statistical significance. Tables and figures support the findings to enhance clarity

and facilitate interpretation. The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings. This approach ensures a logical and comprehensive presentation of the study's quantitative analysis.

Describing the Data

This section provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the ACIS participants, highlighting variables central to understanding their academic and employment contexts. A total of 106 ACIS participated in this study. The sample included 66 female participants (62.3%) and 40 male participants (37.7%). In terms of immigration status, 91 students (86%) were actively enrolled on F-1 student visas, 9 (8%) had received Optional Practical Training (OPT) approval, and 6 (6%) were awaiting OPT approval. Academic classification was distributed across all four undergraduate levels, with 21 freshmen (20%), 19 sophomores (18%), 25 juniors (24%), and 41 seniors (39%). Most students had maintained their F-1 visa status for 3–5 years (42%), followed by 1–2 years (30%), less than 1 year (17%), and more than 5 years (10%).

Regarding nationality, most participants were born and held citizenship from The Bahamas. Specifically, 100 participants (94%) were born in The Bahamas, while 96 (91%) held Bahamian citizenship. Participants also represented Jamaica (7 citizens, 6 births) and Haiti (3 citizens, no births). This distinction acknowledges students where nationality and country of birth do not align due to variations in citizenship laws. Institutional affiliations were grouped into three categories. Group 1 included HBCUs in South Carolina (n = 39; 37%), Group 2 included HBCUs in Ohio and

Tennessee (n = 43; 41%), and the third group (n = 24; 23%) included students from HBCUs located in Florida, Maryland, and how many states with low representation.

These demographic characteristics offer insights into the diverse backgrounds of ACIS participants and establish the context for interpreting their employment experiences and career preparation.

Table 1 *Demographic Descriptive Statistics of ACIS (N =106)*

Demographics	n	%
Gender		
Female	66	62
Male	40	38
F1-Status		
F1-Actively Enrolled	91	86
F1- OPT Approved	9	8
F1-OPT Pending	6	6
Classification		
Freshman/Year 1 (1-29 credits)	21	20
Sophomore/Year 2 (30-59 credits)	19	18
Junior/Year 3 (60-89 credits)	25	24
Senior/Year 4 (90+ credits)	41	39
Length of Time in F1 Status		
Less than 1 year	18	17
1-2 years	32	30
3-5 years	45	42
More than 5 years	11	10
Country of Birth		
Bahamas	100	94
Haiti	0	0
Jamaica	6	6
Country of Citizenship		
Bahamas	96	91
Haiti	4	3
Jamaica	7	6
Institutions		
HBCU Group 1 (SC)	39	37
HBCU Group 2 (OH C TN)	43	41
Other HBCUs (Maryland & Florida)	24	23

Note: Country of citizenship has an extra number for Jamaica because the participant has dual citizenship. However, it is not known which citizenship was used to enter on F1 status.

Employment Status

Employment experiences were examined across four categories: current on-campus and off-campus employment, and whether the position was related or unrelated to the student's field of study. As shown in Table 2, 40 participants (38%) reported working on-campus in positions related to their academic discipline. In comparison, 35 participants (33%) indicated on-campus employment in roles unrelated to their field of study. Fifty participants (47%) reported current off-campus employment aligned with their academic program, and 30 (28%) reported off-campus employment outside their field of study.

Previous employment experiences had followed a comparable distribution. Thirty-eight participants (36%) indicated they had previously worked on-campus in positions aligned with their major, while 33 participants (31%) reported prior on-campus employment in unrelated roles. Forty-eight participants (45%) indicated they had previously worked off-campus in their field, and 32 (30%) reported prior off-campus employment unrelated to their academic program.

These findings suggest a substantial portion of ACIS engaged in work experiences both on- and off-campus, with a moderate level of alignment to their field of study. Notably, the data reflect nearly one-third of the participants worked outside of their academic focus, which may indicate limited access to major-related employment opportunities. The prevalence of current and prior off-campus employment in-field highlights a proactive effort among ACIS to secure career-relevant experiences despite potential institutional or visa-related challenges.

Table 2 *Employment Status of ACIS Descriptive Statistic*

Employment	n	%
Current Work		
On Campus (In Field)	40	38
On Campus (Out of Field)	35	33

Off Campus (In Field)	50	47
Off Campus (Out of Field)	30	28
Previous Work		
On Campus (In Field)	38	36
On Campus (Out of Field)	33	31
Off Campus (In Field)	48	45
Off Campus (Out of Field)	32	30

Work for Pay and Volunteer Experience

In addition to formal employment, the study examined participants' engagement in paid and volunteer experiences within their field of study. In Table 3, the data provide insights into the extent to which ACIS pursue professional development opportunities do not have full tenure. Fifty-nine participants (56%) reported working in paid positions within their academic field, where 47 participants (44%) indicated they had not obtained paid employment relevant to their major. For volunteer experiences, 34 participants (32%) stated they had engaged in unpaid work in their field of study. In contrast, a majority, 72 participants (68%), reported they had not participated in any volunteer opportunities aligned with their academic program.

These findings suggest slightly more than half of the participants did obtain paid employment in their field, where unpaid volunteer engagement was considerably lower. The limited prevalence of volunteer work may reflect competing academic and financial priorities, as visa regulations, restricted work hours, and limited access to structured internship opportunities constrain many international students. Further, the relatively high proportion of students without field-related experience, whether paid or volunteer, underlines the need for institutions to provide targeted programming for career exposure and bridging experiential learning gaps.

Table 3 *Work for Pay and No Pay ACIS*

Employment Income	n	%
Work for Pay		
Received Payment	70	66

Worked without Pay		
Volunteer	36	34

Résumé Feedback by Support Source and Academic Classification

This section provides a detailed analysis of the résumé assistance received by Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS), disaggregated by both academic classification (lowerclassmen and upperclassmen) and the source of support (career services and faculty). Résumé support was assessed across five categories for each source: one-on-one assistance, use of AI tools, workshop participation, résumé template tools, and written feedback. The results are presented in Table 4.

Career Services Support

Among lowerclassmen (n = 43), 18 participants (42%) received one-on-one résumé assistance from career services, 15 (35%) used institution-provided AI résumé tools, and 19 (44%) attended résumé workshops. A total of 18 (42%) received written résumé feedback through career services channels. In comparison, upperclassmen (n = 64) reported higher engagement across all résumé support formats. Thirty-two participants (50%) received one-on-one résumé assistance from career services, 38 (59%) utilized AI résumé tools, and 32 (50%) attended résumé workshops. And, 36 (56%) received written résumé feedback from career services.

These findings indicate upperclassmen were more likely to engage with various résumé services offered by career centers. The increased usage may reflect greater awareness of these services and a more immediate relevance of job preparation for students nearing graduation.

Resume templates were the most frequently used resource overall, with 57% of participants relying on these tools to format and structure their resumes. One-on-one support from career services was similarly highly used, with 52% of students receiving personalized assistance. Workshops conducted by career centers were another widely accessed resource 50% of participants. Faculty support played a significant role in resume preparation. Nearly half (47%) of participants sought one-on-one guidance from faculty members, and 40% attended faculty-led workshops. Additionally, 44% of students used faculty-provided resume templates, and 36% received instructor-written feedback.

The integration of technology in the resume development process was notable. AI-powered resume tools were used by 47% of participants in the context of career services and 38% through faculty recommendations or platforms. This suggests ACIS students adopt automated tools to refine and tailor their resumes to specific job descriptions. A total of n = 23 students (22%) reported no resume assistance from faculty or career services, highlighting a lack of in personalized support for nearly one-quarter of the ACIS participants. These findings demonstrate ACIS benefit highlights what they use from a multifaceted approach to resume preparation, combining institutional resources, faculty mentorship, and technological tools.

Faculty Support

Faculty résumé support was also frequently reported, particularly among upperclassmen. Among lowerclassmen, 20 participants (47%) received one-on-one résumé assistance from faculty, 11 (26%) used faculty-recommended AI tools, and 14 (33%) received written feedback. Among upperclassmen, 37 participants (58%) received one-on-one résumé assistance from faculty, 25 (39%) reported using AI résumé tools introduced by faculty, and 35 (55%) received

written résumé feedback from instructors or mentors. Faculty support appeared to play a role in résumé development, with nearly half of all lowerclassmen and over half of upperclassmen benefiting from direct guidance. This suggests faculty members may act as primary résumé mentors without centralized or robust career center programming tailored for international students.

Notably, 22 lowerclassmen (51%) and 18 upperclassmen (28%) reported receiving no résumé feedback from either career services or faculty. This indicates although résumé support is more widely accessed by upperclassmen, a portion of lowerclassmen (90%) remain without structured résumé guidance.

Summary of Patterns

Overall, the data demonstrates a in résumé assistance from career services and faculty as students' progress academically. However, the high rate of résumé neglect among lowerclassmen highlights a need for importance of introducing earlier résumé intervention programs, particularly those accessible to international students navigating visa-related employment limitations.

Table 4 *Resume Feedback Descriptive Statistics for Career Services n =106*

Feedback Source	n	%
Career Service		
One on One	55	52
AI Tools	50	47
Workshops	53	50

Resume Tools (Templates)	60	57
Feedback (written)	45	42
Faculty		
One on One	50	47
AI Tools	40	38
Workshops	42	40
Resume Tools (Templates)	47	44
Feedback (written)	38	36
No feedback from faculty or career services	23	22
Feedback Source *by Academic Classification*	n=106	%
Career Services - One-on-One		
Lowerclassmen Yes	18	42
Lowerclassmen No	25	24
Upperclassmen Yes	32	50
Upperclassmen No	32	50
Career Services - AI Tools		
Lowerclassmen Yes	15	35
Lowerclassmen No	26	61
No Response	2	5
Upperclassmen Yes	25	40
Upperclassmen No	37	58
No Response	2	3
Career Services - Workshops		
Lowerclassmen Yes	19	44
Lowerclassmen No	24	56
Upperclassmen Yes	32	50
Upperclassmen No	32	50
Career Services - Feedback (Written)		
Lowerclassmen Yes	18	42
Lowerclassmen No	25	59
No Response		
Upperclassmen Yes	36	57
Upperclassmen No	28	44
No Response		
Faculty - One on One		
Lowerclassmen Yes	20	47
Lowerclassmen No	23	54
Upperclassmen Yes	37	58
Upperclassmen No	27	43
Faculty - AI Tools		
Lowerclassmen Yes	11	26
Lowerclassmen No	32	74
Upperclassmen Yes	25	39
Upperclassmen No	39	61
Faculty - Workshops		
Lowerclassmen Yes	17	40

Lowerclassmen No	26	60
Upperclassmen Yes	26	42
Upperclassmen No	36	59
No Response	2	1.9
Faculty - Feedback (Written)		
Lowerclassmen Yes	14	33
Lowerclassmen No	29	68
Upperclassmen Yes	35	55
Upperclassmen No	29	45

Note: Resume feedback from both Faculty and Career Service. By academic classification, Lowerclassmen n = 43, Upperclassmen n = 63 and Total n = 106

Job Search Resources

Table 5 presents the job search platforms most used by ACIS, highlighting gaps in awareness, while students were presented with 15 job search engines. Four were selected by the student sample, indicating limited awareness, availability, and use of job search tools intended to support international employment transitions. Handshake was the most used platform, reported by n = 45 students (42%), followed by InternationalStudent.com with n = 40, and "other" platforms (Indeed, LinkedIn, or university-specific job boards) reported by n = 25 (24%). Notably, only n = 1 student (0.9%) reported using GoinGlobal, a platform designed to support international students with visa-compliant job searches.

Despite these resources being available, significant awareness gaps persisted. For instance, n = 61 students (58%) did not report using Handshake, n = 62 (62%) were unaware of InternationalStudent.com, and n = 105 (99%) were unaware of GoinGlobal. None of the 106 participants (100%) selected any of the other remaining 11 job search engines provided in the survey, and n = 61 students (58%) reported not being aware of any job search engines.

These findings suggest while students are engaging with broadly accessible and internationally oriented job search platforms, there may be a lack of awareness or institutional promotion of more targeted tools like GoinGlobal. The limited use of such specialized platforms could reflect gaps in career services outreach, training, or student familiarity with available resources designed to support international employment transitions.

Table 5 *International Student Job Search Resources ACIS Descriptive Statistic*

Resource	n	%
Job Search Engine	Aware	Unaware
Handshake	45	42
Unaware of Handshake	61	58
InternationalStudent.com	40	38
Other (Unknown)	25	24
Did Not Report Other	81	76
GoinGlobal	01	0.9
Unaware of GoinGlobal	105	99
Unaware of Eleven Search Engines	106	100
Unaware of any Job Search Engine	61	58

Note: 15 job search engines listed in the survey questionnaire.

Number Job Interviews Descriptive Statistics

Table 6 presents a summary of job interviews reported by Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS), disaggregated by interview type (in-field or out-of-field) and academic classification (lowerclassmen and upperclassmen). Of the total sample (N = 106), 60 participants (56.6%) reported having received at least one job interview in their field of study, while 46 participants (43.4%) reported interviews for positions outside of their field.

In-Field Job Interviews by Classification

Among lowerclassmen (n = 43), 33 participants (76.7%) indicated receiving job interviews related to their field. Four participants (9.3%) reported one interview, two (4.7%) reported two

interviews, and three (7.0%) reported three interviews. One participant (2.3%) reported receiving six interviews. Among upperclassmen (n = 64), 22 participants (34.4%) reported in-field interviews. Twelve participants (18.8%) received one interview, 10 (15.6%) received two, and two (3.1%) received three interviews. Seven (10.9%) reported four interviews, while three (4.7%) reported five and six interviews. Two participants (3.1%) received seven interviews, and one each received eight or ten interviews.

Out-of-Field Job Interviews by Classification

For lowerclassmen, 27 participants (62.8%) reported receiving no interviews outside their field of study. Seven (16.3%) received one interview, six (14.0%) received two, and one participant each (2.3%) received three, four, or five interviews. No participants reported six or more out-of-field interviews. Among upperclassmen, 30 participants (46.9%) reported no out-of-field interviews. Ten participants (15.6%) received one or two interviews, while three (4.7%) received three. Three additional participants (4.7%) received four interviews. One participant (1.6%) reported five interviews, and two participants (3.1%) received six or seven interviews. Three participants (4.7%) received eight interviews.

These data indicate upperclassmen were more likely than lowerclassmen to receive job interviews within and outside their field of study.

Table 6 *Number of Job Interviews Descriptive Statistic*

Interview Type	n	%
In-field	60	56
Out of Field	46	44
By Classification and Field Alignment	n	%
Interviews In Field Lowerclassmen		
Zero	33	77
One	4	9
Two	2	5
Three	3	7
Four	0	0

Five	0	0
Six	1	2
Seven	0	0
Upperclassmen		
Zero	22	35
One	12	19
Two	10	16
Three	2	3
Four	7	11
Five	3	5
Six	3	5
Seven	2	3
Eight	0	0
Nine	10	3
Ten		
No. of Interviews Out of Field		
Lowerclassmen		
Zero	27	63
One	7	16
Two	6	15
Three	1	2
Four	1	2
Five	1	2
Upperclassmen		
Zero	30	47
One	10	16
Two	10	16
Three	3	5
four	3	5
Five	1	2
Six	2	3
Seven	2	3
Eight	3	4

The descriptive statistics provide a comprehensive overview of the participants' demographic profiles, employment histories, resume feedback sources, and job search strategies. This contextual foundation is understanding the broader landscape of career preparation and transition experiences among Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS). With this background established, the next section of the chapter shifts to inferential analyses, examining

the research questions to explore significant relationships between key variables and identify the factors most influence to ACIS students' employment outcomes and workforce integration.

CPT and OPT Differences Based on Class Standing and Employment Status

Understanding how academic progression and employment status influence knowledge of CPT and OPT policies is essential to evaluating ACIS's career readiness. As students' progress through their educational programs, they may gain greater access to institutional resources, such as internships, faculty advising, and career services, which can contribute to a deeper understanding of CPT and OPT regulations. Similarly, engagement in practical work experiences, whether on or off campus, may reinforce familiarity with employment policies tied to F1 visa compliance.

To explore whether students' academic classification and employment status impact their CPT and OPT knowledge, a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted. These tests compared the mean CPT and OPT scores across different student groups, including lowerclassmen and upperclassmen students with or without work experience. The results provide insights into the relationship between academic development, employment exposure, and regulatory knowledge critical for transitioning from college to the workforce.

Research Question - CPT and Classification

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference in CPT test scores between lowerclassmen (freshmen and sophomores) and upperclassmen (juniors and seniors). The test compared the mean CPT scores of the two groups to assess whether class standing influences students' understanding of CPT policies. The research question was:

RQ1: *Is there a significant difference between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen on CPT test scores?*

As shown in Table 7, the mean CPT score for lowerclassmen was 2.44 (SD = 1.90), while upperclassmen scored slightly higher, with a mean of 3.00 (SD = 1.90). This difference was not statistically significant, $t(86) = -1.260$, $p = .540$, with a 95% confidence interval from -1.43 to .321.

These results suggest class standing does not have a significant effect on CPT knowledge among the participants. Despite expectations upperclassmen might demonstrate greater knowledge of CPT due to increased exposure to academic and career resources, the data indicate relatively similar levels of understanding across both academic groups.

Table 7

Class Independent Samples t-test

	Lowerclassman			Upperclassman					
Variable	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
CPT Total Score	27	2.44	1.93	61	3.00	1.90	-.1.43, .321	-1.260	86

Research Question 2-Resume Workshop Type & Interviews

Students' understanding of Optional Practical Training (OPT) policies may develop as they progress through their academic careers. Upperclassmen, in particular, may demonstrate greater familiarity with OPT due to increased exposure to institutional resources, interactions with faculty advisors, and conversations with peers who have navigated the application process. This research question explores whether academic standing significantly influences students' knowledge of OPT policies. An independent-samples t-test compared OPT test scores for lowerclassmen (freshmen and sophomores) and upperclassmen (juniors and seniors).

RQ2: *Is there a significant difference between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen on OPT test scores?*

As in Table 8, the t-test results did not reach statistical significance at the .05 alpha level, $t(86) = -1.835$, $p = .459$. The mean OPT score for lowerclassmen was 2.07 (SD = 1.66), while upperclassmen scored slightly higher with a mean of 2.85 (SD = 1.90). Although upperclassmen demonstrated a higher mean score of OPT knowledge, the observed difference was not statistically significant. These findings suggest academic standing may influence familiarity with OPT policies, but further research with a larger and more diverse sample is needed to confirm a meaningful relationship.

Table 8

Class Independent Samples t-test

		Lowerclassman			Upperclassman					
Variable		n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
OPT Score	Total	27	2.07	1.66	61	2.85	1.90	-1.62, .065	-1.835	86

Research Question 3- CPT Scores by Institution Group

Building on examining academic standing and its relationship to CPT and OPT knowledge, it is essential to explore whether employment status impacts students' understanding of these policies, specifically the location and relevance of work. Practical work experience, whether on or off campus, may provide exposure to immigration regulations in real-world settings, potentially enhancing their familiarity with CPT and OPT.

To investigate this relationship, independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare CPT and OPT test scores between students working on campus and those working off campus in their field. This analysis aimed to determine whether the physical location of employment influences of students' policy knowledge.

RQ3: *Is there a significant difference between those who are currently working on or off campus in their field on OPT and CPT test scores?*

As shown in Table 9, no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups. For CPT scores, $t(86) = 0.093$, $p = .804$ and for OPT scores, $t(86) = -0.220$, $p = .751$. Students working on campus in their field had a mean CPT score of 2.76 (SD = 1.93) and a mean OPT score of 2.71 (SD = 1.98). Those working off campus in their field had comparable scores, with a CPT mean of 2.84 (SD = 1.92) and an OPT mean of 2.59 (SD = 1.85).

These findings suggest the location of employment, on-campus or off-campus, does not significantly relate to students' understanding of CPT and OPT policies, even when the work is aligned with their academic discipline. This may indicate other factors, such as direct training or institutional guidance, play a more influential role in shaping regulatory knowledge.

Table 9

Currently Working on Campus in the Field Independent Samples T-test

	Yes			No					
Scores	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
CPT	14	2.76	1.93	74	2.84	1.92	-1.063, 1.167	.093	86
OPT	14	2.71	1.98	74	2.59	1.85	-1.203, 0.964	-.220	86

Research Question 4-Workshop Access by Institution

Expanding on the previous analyses of class standing and work experience in the field, it is also essential to examine whether employment outside one's academic discipline influences students' knowledge of CPT and OPT policies. While any form of practical work experience may expose students to aspects of immigration regulations, positions unrelated to their field of study may provide fewer opportunities to engage meaningfully with CPT and OPT processes.

To assess whether work location and a lack of field alignment affect students' policy knowledge, independent-samples t-tests were conducted. This analysis compares CPT and OPT test scores between students currently working on campus in fields outside their studies and those working off campus in fields outside their studies.

RQ4: *Is there a significant difference between those who are currently working on or off campus outside of their field on OPT and CPT test scores?*

As shown in Table 10, no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups. For CPT scores, $t(86) = -0.169$, $p = .474$; for OPT scores, $t(86) = -1.799$, $p = .448$. Students working on campus outside their field had a mean CPT score of 2.92 (SD = 1.78) and an OPT score of 3.50 (SD = 2.02). In contrast, students working off campus outside their field had a CPT mean of 2.82 (SD = 1.94) and an OPT mean of 2.47 (SD = 1.80).

These findings suggest working outside of one's field, regardless of location, does not significantly impact knowledge of CPT or OPT regulations. The results indicate the relevance of the work to academic training may play a lesser role in developing policy knowledge than previously assumed.

Table 10

Currently Working on Campus outside of the Field Independent Samples t-test

	Yes			No				
Scores	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
CPT	12	2.92	1.78	76	2.82	1.94	-1.289, 1.087	-0.169	86
OPT		3.50	2.02		2.47	1.80	-2.160, .1075	-1.799	86

Research Question 5- OPT Knowledge by Class Standing

In addition to current employment, prior work experience may shape students' understanding of CPT and OPT policies. Particularly for Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS), earlier exposure to field-related employment, whether on or off campus, could influence their familiarity with visa-related regulations and enhance their preparedness for workforce transitions. This research question examines whether the location of previous employment in the student's field (on-campus or. off-campus) is associated with differences in CPT and OPT knowledge.

RQ5: *Is there a significant difference between those who previously worked on or off campus in their field on OPT and CPT test scores?*

As shown in Table 11, independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences in either CPT or OPT scores based on previous work location. For CPT, $t(86) = 0.576$, $p = .184$; for OPT, $t(86) = 0.119$, $p = .334$. Students who previously worked on campus in their field had a mean CPT score of 2.62 (SD = 1.69) and a mean OPT score of 2.57 (SD = 1.75), while those who previously worked off campus in their field had a CPT mean of 2.90 (SD = 1.99) and an OPT mean of 2.63 (SD = 1.91).

These results suggest the location of prior work experience within the student's field of study does not influence knowledge of CPT or OPT policies. The findings reinforce previous analyses indicating other factors, as direct training or institutional guidance, may play a more critical role in shaping students' understanding of visa-related employment regulations.

Table 11

Previously Working on Campus in the Field Independent Samples T-test

	Yes			No					
Scores	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
CPT	21	2.62	1.69	67	2.90	1.99	-.678, 1.231	.576	86
OPT	21	2.57	1.75	67	2.63	1.91	-.874, .985	.119	86

Research Question 6- Employment Status & CPT Knowledge

Building on the analysis of prior work experience within the field, this research question examines whether past employment outside of one's academic discipline, either on-campus or off-campus, affects students' understanding of CPT and OPT policies. Students who work in positions unrelated to their field may have limited exposure to visa-specific guidelines or less incentive to engage with relevant regulations. To assess these potential differences, independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare CPT and OPT test scores among students who had previously worked on campus outside their field and those who had worked off campus outside their field.

RQ6: *Is there a significant difference between those who previously worked on or off campus outside of their field on OPT and CPT test scores?*

As shown in Table 12, the t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences in CPT and OPT scores based on the location of prior work outside of students' academic disciplines. For

CPT scores, $t(86) = -1.112$, $p = .680$; for OPT scores, $t(86) = -0.525$, $p = .826$. Students who had previously worked on campus outside their field had a mean CPT score of 3.67 (SD = 2.16) and a mean OPT score of 3.00 (SD = 2.19), compared to those who had worked off campus outside their field, who had a CPT mean of 2.77 (SD = 1.89) and an OPT mean of 2.59 (SD = 1.85).

These results suggest past employment outside one's field of study, regardless of whether it occurred on or off campus, does not influence students' understanding of CPT or OPT policies. This finding further supports the pattern observed in earlier research questions, reinforcing the conclusion work relevance, rather than location or experience alone, may be a more relevant factor in policy knowledge acquisition.

Table 12 *Previously on Campus Outside of the Field Independent Samples T-test*

	Yes			No					
Scores	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
CPT	6	3.67	2.16	82	2.77	1.89	-2.505, 0.708	-1.112	86
OPT	6	3.00	2.19	82	2.59	1.85	-1.984, 1.155	-0.525	86

Research Question 7- Employment Status & OPT Knowledge

This research question explores whether the relevance of off-campus employment, specifically, whether the job is aligned with the student's academic field, affects knowledge of CPT and OPT policies. While off-campus work offers exposure to U.S. workplace environments, only positions related to a student's field of study are typically compliant with F1 visa guidelines. This analysis seeks to determine whether the alignment of off-campus work in a student's academic program influences their understanding of these critical visa-related policies.

RQ7: *Is there a significant difference between those working off-campus in and outside of their field on OPT and CPT test scores?*

As in Table 13, independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences in CPT and OPT scores between students working off-campus in their field and those working off-campus outside their field. For CPT scores, $t(86) = 0.576$, $p = .184$; for OPT scores, $t(86) = 0.119$, $p = .334$. Students working in their field off campus had a mean CPT score of 2.62 (SD = 1.69) and an OPT score of 2.57 (SD = 1.75), while those working outside their field had CPT and OPT means of 2.90 (SD = 1.99) and 2.63 (SD = 1.91), respectively.

These findings suggest off-campus employment, regardless of whether aligned with the student's field of study, does not significantly impact knowledge of CPT and OPT policies. This further supports the conclusion drawn in previous analyses employment relevance alone may not be a related to policy comprehension.

Table 13 *Working Off Campus Independent Samples T-test*

	Yes			No					
Variable	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
CPT Total Score	21	2.62	1.69	67	2.90	1.99	-.678, 1.231	.576	86
OPT Total Score	21	2.57	1.75	67	2.63	1.91	-.874, .0985	.119	86

Resume Assistance and Job Interviews

Securing employment after graduation is a central goal for many international students, particularly those navigating the complexities of the U.S. job market on an F1 visa. As such, resume preparation plays an important role in enhancing students' career readiness. Institutions

often support this process through a variety of resume assistance strategies, including faculty-led initiatives and career center-led programs. These resources may take the form of workshops, one-on-one coaching, AI-assisted resume reviews, and written feedback from faculty or career professionals.

Understanding whether different types of resume assistance influence students' success in securing job interviews is essential for assessing institutional support services. By identifying which formats are most effective, universities may can tailor their career programming to better meet the unique needs of Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS). To evaluate the relationship between resume assistance methods and job search outcomes, a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted. These analyses assessed whether the type and source of resume support impacted the number of job interviews students received.

Research Question 8- In-Field Campus Jobs & CPT

Resume workshops are a widely used form of career preparation designed to strengthen students' job application materials and improve their competitiveness in the job market. This research question examines whether the types of workshops, faculty-led or career center-led, had a measurable impact on students' securing job interviews. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the number of job interviews received by students who participated in each workshop type.

RQ8: *Is there a significant difference between faculty-led and career center-led resume workshops on the number of job interviews received?*

As shown in Table 14, the results of the independent samples t-test indicated no statistically significant difference in the number of job interviews received based on the type of resume workshop attended, $t(104) = -0.509$, $p = .732$. Students who participated in faculty-led workshops reported an average of 1.68 job interviews (SD = 2.09), while those who attended career center-led workshops reported a lower average of 1.45 interviews (SD = 2.43).

To assess the practical significance of this difference, Cohen's *d* was calculated, yielding a small effect size ($d = 0.10$). This suggests the format of the resume workshop had a minimal impact on students' ability to secure job interviews. These findings indicate both faculty-led and career center-led workshops provide comparable support in preparing students for the job search process. Institutions may consider offering both formats to increase accessibility and accommodate student preferences without concern for differential outcomes.

Table 14 *Independent Samples t-Test for Job Interviews by Resume Workshop Type*

	Yes			No					
Variable	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
Job Interviews	44	1.68	2.09	62	1.45	2.43	-1.127, .666	-.509	104

Research Question 9- Out-of-Field Campus Jobs & CPT

One-on-one resume assistance offers students personalized feedback and tailored support, which may enhance their job search outcomes. This research question examines whether the source of one-on-one assistance, faculty-led versus career center-led, significantly impacts the number of job interviews students receive. Independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare outcomes between the two groups.

RQ9: *Is there a significant difference between faculty-led and career center-led one-on-one resume assistance on the number of job interviews received?*

In Table 15, the results of the independent samples t-test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(104) = -0.370$, $p = .653$. Students who received faculty-led one-on-one resume assistance had a mean of 1.63 job interviews (SD = 2.12), compared to a mean of 1.46 interviews (SD = 2.48) among those who received assistance from career center staff.

These findings suggest both faculty-led and career center-led individual feedback approaches provide similar levels of support in helping students secure job interviews. Institutions may benefit from offering options to meet students' needs without concern for outcome disparities based on the source of the support.

Table 15 *Independent Samples t-Test for Job Interviews by One-on-One Resume Assistance Source*

	Yes			No					
Variable	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
Job Interviews	56	1.63	2.12	50	1.46	2.48	-1.050, .720	-.370	104

Research Question 10- Previous In-Field Campus Jobs & OPT

As artificial intelligence (AI) plays a growing role in career development services, evaluating its effectiveness in resume preparation is increasingly relevant. This research question examines whether AI-assisted resume feedback, provided either by faculty or through career center services, affects students' job search outcomes, specifically the number of job interviews received.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to assess whether the source of AI support makes a significant difference.

RQ10: *Is there a significant difference between faculty-led and career center-led AI-assisted resume assistance on the number of job interviews received?*

As shown in Table 16, the results indicated no statistically significant difference in the number of job interviews received based on the source of AI-assisted resume support, $t(104) = -0.385$, $p = .775$. Students who used faculty-led AI resume tools had a mean of 1.67 interviews (SD = 2.51), while those who used career center-led AI tools had a mean of 1.49 interviews (SD = 2.18).

These findings suggest AI-assisted resume feedback, regardless of whether it is provided through faculty or career services, yields comparable outcomes. Institutions may consider continuing to integrate AI tools across departments without concern for differential effectiveness based on who administers the technology.

Table 16 *Independent Samples t-Test for Job Interviews by Source of AI-Assisted Resume Support*

	Yes			No					
Variable	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
Job Interviews	36	1.67	2.51	70	1.49	2.18	-1.114, .752	-.385	104

Research Question 11- Previous Out-of-Field Campus Jobs & OPT

Traditional resume assistance, as written feedback, structured editing, and line-by-line review, remains a staple in career development services. This research question evaluated whether the source of traditional resume support (faculty-led or career center-led) influences students' job

interview outcomes. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the number of job interviews received between the two groups.

RQ11: *Is there a significant difference between faculty-led and career center-led traditional resume assistance in the number of job interviews received?*

As in Table 17, the results indicated no statistically significant difference between students who received faculty-led traditional resume support and those who received assistance from career centers, $t(104) = -1.299$, $p = .366$. Students who received traditional resume support from faculty reported an average of 1.86 job interviews (SD = 2.26), compared to 1.28 interviews (SD = 2.23) for students supported by career center staff.

These findings suggest traditional resume assistance methods, regardless of provider, offer comparable benefits in helping students secure job interviews. Institutions may, therefore, continue offering traditional feedback across departments, as faculty and career centers appear equally effective in supporting student success in the job search process.

Table 17 *Independent Samples t-Test for Job Interviews by Source of Traditional Resume Assistance*

	Yes			No					
Variable	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
Job Interviews	49	1.86	2.26	57	1.28	2.23	-1.456, .303	-1.299	104

Higher education institutions across different geographic locations may offer varying levels of career support, immigration guidance, and experiential learning opportunities for international students. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 may present distinct institutional environments influencing students' understanding of CPT and OPT policies. To assess whether grouped institutional differences

existed in students' knowledge of these employment authorization policies, independent sample t-tests compared the CPT and OPT scores of students attending HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2.

Research Question 12- Off-Campus Jobs & CPT Knowledge

Institutional location may impact students' access to career services and understanding of employment authorization policies. This research question examines whether students attending HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 differ significantly in their knowledge of CPT regulations. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare CPT test scores between the two groups.

RQ12: *Is there a significant difference between HBCU Group 1 versus HBCU Group 2 on CPT test scores?*

As in Table 18, students attending HBCU Group 2 demonstrated significantly higher CPT knowledge scores (M = 2.19, SD = 0.85) than those at HBCU Group 1 (M = 1.46, SD = 0.71), $t(50) = -3.374$, $p < .01$. The 95% confidence interval for in means was from -1.166 to -0.296, indicating a meaningful difference in performance. To assess the magnitude of this difference, Cohen's *d* was calculated, yielding a value of 0.95, indicating a much larger-than-typical effect size. This suggests that institutions 1 group substantially influence students' knowledge of CPT policies.

Table 18 *Independent Samples t-Test for CPT Scores by HBCU Group 1 & 2*

	GBCU Group 1			HBCU Group 2					
Variable	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
Institutions	26	1.46	.706	26	2.19	.849	-1.166, -.296	-3.374	50

Research Question 13- Resume Workshops & Interviews

Similar to CPT knowledge, differences in OPT test scores across HBCUs may reflect variations in institutional support and workforce preparation strategies. This research question investigates whether students at HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 differ significantly in their understanding of OPT policies.

RQ13: *Is there a significant difference between HBCU Group 1 versus HBCU Group 2 on OPT test scores?*

As shown in Table 19, results of the independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(50) = -2.075$, $p < .05$. Students from HBCU Group 2 scored higher on the OPT assessment (M = 2.27, SD = 0.78) than those from HBCU Group 1 (M = 1.77, SD = 0.95). The 95% confidence interval was from -0.984 to -0.016. Cohen's *d* was calculated at 0.56, representing a moderate or medium effect size. This indicates institutional grouping plays a meaningful role in students' understanding of OPT regulations, though to a lesser extent than observed in CPT knowledge.

Table 19 *Independent Samples t-Test for OPT Scores by HBCU Group 1 & 2*

	HBCU Group 1			HBCU Group 2					
Variable	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	95% CI	t	df
Institutions	26	1.77	.951	26	2.27	.778	-.984, -.016	-2.075	50

The availability and use of career services may vary between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2, potentially influencing students' access to resume support. Some institutions may prioritize workshops, while others emphasize one-on-one coaching or technology-enhanced options, such as AI-powered resume tools. Understanding whether institutional differences exist in how students engage with resume assistance can help universities tailor their career services to better meet student needs. To explore these differences, a series of chi-square tests was conducted to examine associations between institutions and students' use of various resume assistance formats.

***Research Question 14*- One-on-One Resume Help & Interviews**

Institutions may differ in their emphasis on resume workshops based on institution's resources, staffing, and programming priorities. This research question examines whether students at HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 differ in their use of workshop-based resume assistance.

RQ14: *Is there an association between HCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 students in receiving resume assistance through workshops?*

As shown in Table 20, a chi-square test revealed no statistically significant association between HBCU and grouped students in workshop-based resume assistance, $\chi^2(1) = 0.200$, $p = .654$. These results suggest that students across both engage with workshops at similar rates.

Table 20 *Chi-Square Test: Workshop-Based Resume Assistance by HBCU*

HBCU	Used Workshop Assistance	Did Not Use	Total
Group 1	38	42	80
Group 2	54	52	106

Research Question 15- One-on-One Resume Help by Institution

One-on-one resume coaching is another key component of career support services. This research question explored whether institutional differences exist in students' utilization of personalized resume guidance.

RQ15: *Is there an association between HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 students in receiving one-on-one resume assistance?*

In Table 21, the chi-square test indicated no statistically significant association between institutions and one-on-one resume assistance, $\chi^2(1) = 0.038$, $p = .846$. Students at HBCU Group 1 and HBCU Group 2 reported similar levels of engagement with individual coaching services.

Table 21 *Chi-Square Test: One-on-One Resume Assistance by HBCUs*

HBCU	Used 1-on-1 Assistance	Did Not Use	Total
Group 1	40	40	80
Group 2	53	53	106

Research Question 16- AI Resume Tools by Institution

AI-assisted resume tools are increasingly used in career services to provide automated feedback and enhance resume quality. This research question evaluates whether students from different institutions engage differently with AI-powered resume assistance.

RQ16: *Is there an association between HBCU Group 1 versus HBCU Group 2 students receiving AI-assisted resume assistance?*

As shown in Table 22, the chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between HBCUs and the use of AI-assisted resume tools, $\chi^2(1, N = 186) = 4.27$, $p = .039$. Students attending HBCU Group 2 were likelier to utilize AI-powered resume support than their Group 1 counterparts. Although statistically significant, the effect size was small, as indicated by the Phi coefficient ($\varphi = .04$). These findings suggest institutional variation in adopting or promoting technology-driven career services. However, the practical impact may be limited.

Table 22 *Chi-Square Test: AI-Assisted Resume Assistance by HBCU Groups 1 and 2*

HBCU	Used AI Resume Assistance	Did Not Use	Total
Group 1	36	44	80
Group 2	52	54	106

Research Question 17- Traditional Resume Feedback by Institution

Traditional resume feedback, including written comments and structured editing, remains a standard support method. This research question explores whether students from HBCU Group 1 versus HBCU Group 2 differ in using traditional resume review services.

RQ17: *Is there an association between HBCU Group 1 versus HBCU Group 2 students in receiving traditional (written feedback) resume assistance?*

As shown in Table 23, a chi-square test revealed no statistically significant association between HBCU and receipt of traditional written resume feedback, $\chi^2(1) = 1.982$, $p = .159$. These

results indicate that students across institutions accessed traditional resume assistance at comparable rates.

Table 23 *Chi-Square Test: Traditional Resume Feedback by HBCU Group 1 versus Group 2*

HBCU	Used Traditional Feedback	Did Not Use	Total
Group 1	42	38	80
Group 2	50	56	106

Chapter Four presented the results of this quantitative study, which examined the employment preparation and transition experiences of Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) attending elective Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States. The chapter began with a comprehensive overview of the 106 participants' demographic characteristics, including gender, country of birth, and citizenship, F1 visa status, academic classification, and institutional affiliation. Most participants identified as Bahamian (91%), with Jamaican (6%) and Haitian (3%) also represented. Nearly half of the participants were seniors, and over 70% had been in the U.S. for at least 1–5 years.

Descriptive statistics showed that most ACIS participants were employed both on- and off-campus, with roughly equal distribution between jobs aligned and misaligned with their field of study. However, 56% had received at least one job interview within their field, while 43% received

interviews outside their field. Resume assistance was accessed through both career services and faculty, with higher engagement levels among upperclassmen. Although resume workshops, one-on-one support, and AI tools were used, 22% of students reported receiving no resume feedback from either source, indicating gaps in early institutional support.

The majority of students were unaware of specialized job search tools like GoinGlobal, with only 1% of participants using the platform. Common platforms included Handshake and InternationalStudent.com, but even these had awareness gaps of over 50%. These findings suggest use of availability-targeted job search engines intended to assist international students.

Using independent t-tests and chi-square tests addressed 17 research questions. No statistically significant differences were found in CPT and OPT knowledge based on academic classification or employment status, whether current or previous, or based on whether employment was on- or off-campus or aligned with the students' academic program. Similarly, no significant associations were found between resume assistance type (faculty-led on. career center-led) and the number of job interviews received.

However, significant differences emerged based on institutional grouping. Students attending institutions classified as HBCU Group 2 demonstrated significantly higher knowledge of CPT and OPT regulations than students from HBCU Group 1, with moderate to large effect sizes. Additionally, students at HBCU Group 2 were significantly more likely to use AI-powered resume tools. These findings may highlight institutional disparities in policy awareness and access to technologically enhanced support tools.

Overall, the findings suggest academic standing, employment history, and resume assistance methods alone do not predict increased knowledge of CPT/OPT policies or improved job search outcomes. Instead, institutions emerged as a stronger determinant of policy knowledge, indicating structural and environmental differences between HBCUs may influence student preparedness. These insights set the stage for Chapter Five, which interprets the findings in the context of the literature and discusses implications for institutional policy, student advising, and future research aimed at improving the career readiness of ACIS students.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings from the study, "We Are Afro-Caribbean, Not African American: Career Readiness and Policy Awareness in Employment Preparation Experiences. The study examined how institutional factors, class standing, employment experiences, and resume assistance methods influence (ACIS) knowledge of Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) policies, as well as students' job search outcomes. Chapter Five interprets and synthesizes these findings in the context of the literature reviewed. It outlines the practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Interpretation of Key Findings

The study's findings provide insight into how career readiness and immigration policy knowledge are shaped for Afro Caribbean International Students (ACIS) at selected Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Seventeen research questions were addressed through inferential statistical analyses, primarily independent samples t-tests and chi-square tests.

Class Standing and Work Permit Policy Knowledge

The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between lowerclassmen and upperclassmen ACIS in OPT and CPT work permit policy knowledge (WPPK). The mean CPT score for lowerclassmen was n= 2.28 (SD = 1.30) compared to n= 2.27 (SD = 1.27) for upperclassmen. Similarly, the mean OPT score was 2.71 (SD = 1.33) for lowerclassmen and 2.72 (SD = 1.29) for upperclassmen. These scores suggest that academic class standing did not significantly impact students' knowledge of work authorization processes. These findings

challenge assumptions from the researcher's experience as a former undergraduate international student and long-time recruiter. It was often observed students requested OPT guidance only during their final academic year and rarely engaged with relevant workshops or advising sessions until the final semester. Within the ACIS community, CPT was seldom mentioned as a viable option for a pre-graduation work permit, and discussions about in-field job requirements were often absent. These patterns shaped the expectation that upperclassmen would possess higher OPT and CPT WPPK than lowerclassmen.

Instead, the uniformity in WPPK across class standings points to systemic concerns in how information about work permits is introduced, reinforced, and applied. This finding is consistent with the observations of Gairola and Pathak (2021) and Mwangi (2014), who emphasized international students of color often receive minimal structured support and limited access to culturally specific advising. Orientation programming, while essential for visa maintenance topics as full-time enrollment or avoiding criminal infractions, rarely extends into detailed application of work authorization policies (McCorkle & Monreal, 2021; NAFSA, 2022). This often results in students developing an awareness of OPT and CPT without fully understanding how to apply the policies correctly.

While USCIS federally regulates the policies, students are responsible for initiating applications, following timelines, and ensuring legal compliance. DSOs play a supporting role in advising and documentation, but students must demonstrate understanding, make timely decisions, and apply the policies in real-world job searches. Without targeted institutional reinforcement,

students may remain passive, aware but unprepared to act, especially when policy navigation intersects with immigration risk.

This limited application was evident in the employment practices reported by participants. Of 106 students, 30 (28%) were currently employed off campus in a field outside their academic field, while 32 (30%) had previously worked off campus in a field other than their academic one. Notably, most of these students were not the same individuals, meaning 54 students (51%) were engaged in off-campus, out-of-field employment during or prior to the study. Of those 54 students, 51 were sophomores, juniors, or seniors, making this especially concerning given their proximity to graduation and entry into their careers.

Engaging in off-campus employment outside of a student's field, with an approved OPT or CPT, violates immigration regulations. Under 8 CFR § 214.2(f)(10)(ii), OPT must be "directly related to the student's major area of study." If a student is granted an OPT work permit, accepting a position unrelated to their program of study violates the terms of that authorization. Further, students who begin working without reporting employment details to their Designated School Official (DSO), as required under 8 CFR § 214.3(g)(3)(iii), are in violation of their F-1 visa conditions. Non-compliance may result in automatic termination of the SEVIS record, loss of visa status, and being barred from re-entering the United States.

In some cases, a student be deemed "out of field" if employed by an organization that is not E-Verified, particularly for STEM OPT extension eligibility, per 8 CFR § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)(3). However, in this study, many students knowingly reported working off campus outside their academic field before graduation, putting them at even greater risk. Because they had not yet earned their degrees, unauthorized employment could result in termination of visa status, loss of scholarships, denial of re-entry, and institutional dismissal, each of which jeopardize

their education and their immigration standing and future opportunities in the United States (Rahming, 2019; USCIS, 2019).

For example, a student majoring in biology who accepts a position as a high school biology teacher may assume the job is related to their field. However, unless their degree is in Biology Education, the job is considered outside their field under federal policy. Misinterpretations like this illustrate how unclear messages around "in-field" definitions lead to inadvertent violations. This highlights the importance of institutions providing field-specific advising and clearly explaining how degree titles and job descriptions should align.

By contrast, on-campus employment is permitted regardless of field alignment. According to 8 CFR § 214.2(f)(9)(i), F-1 students may work on campus up to 20 hours per week during the academic term without restrictions regarding a job's relevance to their major. Such jobs are legal and beneficial. For instance, a nursing major working at a campus library may enhance transferable skills such as communication, organization, and teamwork. These are valuable in healthcare settings, as Rachmawati (2024) emphasized. However, this work experience is generally not counted toward career-specific practical training and is often excluded from students' résumés when applying for OPT, internships, or post-graduation employment.

This observation aligns with the work of Rahming (2019), who found international students often lacked documented in-field experience when applying for jobs. Employers cited insufficient discipline-specific work history as a primary reason for not being qualified. Similar concerns were raised by Davis and Brown (2022) and Zhou and Okahana (2019), each reported many

international students graduated with strong academic performance lacking evidence of practical experience aligned with their program of study.

Considering the original intent of the F-1 visa. Students are admitted to the United States with the expectation they will receive both theoretical instruction and practical training in their field, as stated in their visa application and institutional Form I-20. When institutions do not provide pathways or clear information about how to gain in-field experience through CPT, OPT, or internships, students are unable to meet the terms of their educational commitment, which carries academic, professional, and immigration-related consequences.

In summary, the data show OPT and CPT WPPK remain consistently limited across academic class levels. Class standing alone does not appear to predict whether students will correctly apply CPT or OPT policies. Instead, the findings reveal a more profound need for targeted support, policy transparency, and ongoing engagement from institutions to help ACIS understand the law and successfully navigate the path to compliant, career-building employment.

Resume Assistance and Job Search Outcomes

According to the data, 55 of 106 ACIS surveyed (51%) received one-on-one resume assistance from career services, while 50 (47%) received support from faculty. The researcher relied on faculty in the School of Education during their undergraduate academic journey. That department was widely known by Broward and Dade Counties, Florida, for facilitating employment and supporting students with internships, which may have inadvertently limited the researcher's awareness of or access to broader institutional career services. After transitioning into recruitment and realizing how many students struggled to secure employment, the researcher encouraged students to engage with career services but did not promote faculty involvement. As a

result, both outcomes in this study were unexpected. The researcher assumed the use of both faculty and career services for resume support would be less.

The researcher expected significant outcomes in one-on-one resume assistance from Career Services Gopal (2016), Liu and Ball (2020), and Singh and Doherty (2021) documented how resume coaching and access to job-specific guidance enhanced employment outcomes of international students. However, no statistically significant difference in the number of job interviews received was found among ACIS who received résumé support, whether the assistance came from faculty, career services, AI tools, workshops, or written feedback. Rahming (2019), in a qualitative study, found that Afro-Caribbean students, regardless of immigration status, ranging from U.S. citizens to F-1 international students, often struggled to secure employment after the interview due to discrimination, lack of job experience, employers' lack of awareness of immigration policies, and minimal institutional support.

Although this study did not examine whether discrimination, lack of job experience, limited employer awareness of immigration policies, or institutional support directly affected interview outcomes, students still secured interviews despite these known disadvantages identified by Rahming (2019). For example, 60 of 106 ACIS participants (57%) reported receiving at least one in-field job interview. The researcher reflected on prior employment experiences in Florida (2010–2016), where an ongoing teacher shortages in STEM-related fields often resulted in job offers based solely on degree attainment, regardless of résumé formatting or prior work history.

This context and assumptions that culturally formatted résumés would hinder employment outcomes initially shaped the researcher’s expectations. However, the present study focused exclusively on résumé assistance through U.S.-based formats at participating institutions. It did

not ask or explore the impact of factors such as employer bias, student work history, or institutional preparedness. The researcher acknowledges that systemic disadvantages persist for international students (Gairola & Pathak, 2021) and marginalized populations within historically African American educational spaces continue to face intersecting barriers to employment (Brown & Johnson, 2018). Further, HBCUs have historically operated with fewer resources and less funding for student support services than predominantly white institutions (Williams, 2019), which may influence the availability and effectiveness of their career services. While 55 students (52%) received one-on-one assistance from career services, 50 (47%) received it from faculty.

Additionally, 51 students (48%) received no one-on-one support from career services, and 56 (53%) received none from faculty. This supports findings that international students may underutilize institutional resources due to fear, cultural misunderstandings, or lack of tailored services (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Despite moderate engagement with templates (57%), workshops (50%), and AI tools (47%), no resume assistance method was higher interview rates. AI users averaged 1.67 interviews, while non-users averaged 1.49. This was not reassuring, given that the literature suggests applicant tracking systems (ATS) heavily screen resumes for keywords (Nguyen, 2021). It is unclear what AI tools students used or if those tools helped students align their resumes with their field or position annoucements and employers. For instance, did a public health major include terms like "community-based research" or "data analysis" in their resume?

Based on the researcher’s visits to high schools and conversations with ACIS across several Caribbean nations from 2015 to 2024, it was observed that limited internet access often restricted online learning resources. Students become accustomed to teacher-modeled instruction and structured templates. This aligns with their preferences for resume templates and in-person

workshops. However, despite using these tools, 60 students (57%) secured in-field interviews, while 46 students (43%) were interviewed for out-of-field roles. Rahming (2019) emphasized the risks of resume development disconnected from immigration responsibilities or intended career paths. To counter these dangers, Rahming advocated for institutions to provide culturally responsive career advising and immigration-informed résumé preparation explicitly aligned with students' visa requirements and long-term goals. Similarly, Gopal (2016) and Gairola and Pathak (2021) emphasized the need for tailored advising models to help international students navigate the technical requirements of work authorization and the strategic positioning needed to succeed in a U.S. job market. Without this integrated support, students may craft résumés meeting generic academic standards but not reflect specific competencies and legal alignment necessary for professional success.

This 43% out-of-field interview rate raises concerns. While applying for unrelated jobs is not a policy violation, accepting them under CPT or OPT would be. According to USCIS (8 CFR § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)), employment must directly relate to a student's major. Institutions are required under 8 CFR § 214.3(g)(1) to monitor, report, and ensure compliance through SEVIS. These findings spark new questions: Did students knowingly apply for jobs outside their field? How many accepted those positions? How many declined? Did employers understand whether the students' majors aligned with job descriptions? These unanswered questions suggest institutional guidance may not be communicating immigration-related job restrictions to ACIS.

Despite these risks, the researcher was encouraged to see 60 students (57%) received in-field interviews. While each ACIS student has a different background, socio-economic status, and funding source, the U.S. immigration policies that govern them are the same. This raises an

important follow-up question: Why did some students comply while others did not? Even if students are aware of the rules, do they truly understand the consequences of violating them? especially in the context of résumé targeting and job type alignment? Acknowledging the inherent ambiguity in how students interpret in-field versus out-of-field roles is important. In some cases, employers may post multiple positions under one listing or conduct interviews across departments. As a result, what a student perceives as an in-field opportunity might shift into an unrelated job. Without access to the job descriptions or interview records, this distinction somewhat relies on students' perception and self-reporting, which may vary in accuracy and interpretation.

Additionally, a notable difference emerged in using AI resume tools between the two institutional groups. Students attending HBCU Group 2 reported significantly more engagement with AI-assisted resources compared to those at HBCU Group 1, highlighting variations in how technology-based career support is available and used across campuses. The researcher initially believed Group 2 students would report higher AI usage based on firsthand awareness of recruitment timelines. The researcher wrote three of the four scholarship contracts that established recruitment efforts for ACIS at these institutions and was privy to the historical context of recruitment within this community.

Group 2 institutions began recruiting ACIS approximately 8 years earlier than Group 1 institutions. This earlier engagement likely contributed to the development and integration of more effective AI-driven career support tools and job preparation programs. While it was expected that institutions in areas like South Carolina would lead in AI use due to growing access to technology, this assumption was not supported. According to Zhou and Okahana (2019), institutions with longer histories of serving international populations often have more mature infrastructures.

Last, although job search engines were accessed by many, students continued to apply for employment outside their majors. This reflects a broader disconnect between the use of job platforms and the ability to secure interviews that align with immigration-compliant employment. The issue here is not solely resume building but rather the gap between students' awareness of job search tools and how to apply them to find positions that meet in-field criteria under immigration law. Students may believe all experiences are valuable without realizing the legal implications. The majority of students reported using mainstream job search engines, with 44 students (42%) using Handshake and 40 students (38%) using InternationalStudent.com. In contrast, only one student (1%) used GoinGlobal, a platform specifically created for international job seekers with visa sponsorship filters, global job boards, and employer insights. GoinGlobal has been available since 2001 and is widely subscribed to by U.S. institutions with active international student populations. However, its use and effectiveness depends heavily on whether institutions purchase institutional access and actively promote it. The low usage rate among ACIS in this study may reflect a lack of institutional subscription, student awareness, or advisor promotion. If career centers or DSOs do not emphasize its value or integrate it into career advising sessions, students may rely more on broadly available tools like Handshake, which are not specifically tailored to international employment navigation.

Overall, this means 62 students did not use Handshake, 66 students did not use InternationalStudent.com. and, 105 students (99%) did not use GoinGlobal. The survey included 12 job search engines, yet on average, students were familiar with 4 or fewer. Twenty-one students (20%) indicated they were unfamiliar with any job search tools. The researcher was surprised to learn how many ACIS students were aware of Handshake, a U.S.-based job search platform widely promoted and available across college campuses. However, the researcher was not surprised by

the low awareness of GoinGlobal, having only discovered the platform in 2023, four years after completing studies at an HBCU.

The impact of using job search engines is significant. Platforms like GoinGlobal are specifically designed to connect international students with employers who sponsor work visas and are familiar with immigration regulations. Without awareness or access to these tools, ACIS students may rely on platforms that do not filter by work authorization status, thereby increasing their risks of applying for positions not compliant with OPT or CPT. Liu and Ball (2020) noted international students often remain unaware of platforms tailored to their specific needs, which reduces their chances of finding field-related employment and increases their vulnerability to policy violations. While Handshake is widely used, students may not be aware of how to filter listings by academic field or authorization type, which limits its effectiveness for international job seekers.

In summary, although ACIS students engaged with resume resources, these supports did not provide insight into an increase in-field job interview outcomes received by participants. This highlights the need to integrate immigration policy, resume development, and job search support. Institutions must ensure students use career tools and understand how to comply with relevant policies, articulate their qualifications, and align their job search with their academic field some students may prioritize graduate education as their next step rather than immediate employment.

OPT and CPT Policy Knowledge Across HBCU Groups

When examining differences in policy knowledge across institutional groups, CPT scores revealed a disparity. Students attending HBCU Group 2 institutions demonstrated higher

knowledge of CPT policies (M = 2.19, SD = 0.85) compared to students at HBCU Group 1 institutions (M = 1.46, SD = 0.71). This difference was statistically significant ($t(50) = -3.374$, $p < .01$), practically significant, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.95$).

The researcher was surprised by this difference, particularly considering the federally mandated role of the Designated School Official (DSO). DSOs are responsible for both advising international students on maintaining lawful status and reporting compliance to the Department of Homeland Security through SEVIS, as outlined in 8 CFR § 214.3(g)(1). Based on this responsibility, one might expect a more consistent delivery of CPT policy information across institutions. However, the researcher's experience as a recruiter provided insights into how this assumption may not hold. In some cases, DSOs may be newly assigned and primarily focused on administrative tasks, as issuing I-20s, without delivering comprehensive education about work authorization policies or information on employers who accept these work authorizations.

Although the researcher had prior awareness of frequent DSO turnover at HBCU Group 1 institutions, the focus of this study was on students' self-reported knowledge. The survey did not ask questions such as how often students met with their DSO, how many informational sessions were offered on CPT and OPT, or whether students were expected to stay updated on policy changes throughout their academic program. The absence of this contextual data limits interpretation and points to areas for future investigation. Prior studies (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Zhou & Okahana, 2019) have documented how inconsistent advising structures and late-stage information delivery disadvantages international students.

While the CPT knowledge gap was large, the difference in OPT scores was more moderate. Students at HBCU Group 2 (n = 26) institutions had a mean OPT score of 2.27 (SD = 0.78)

compared to 1.77 (SD = 0.95) at HBCU Group 1(n = 26), with a medium effect size (Cohen's d = 0.56). This may relate to the timing of OPT-related support, which often occurs in the students' final semester of study, resulting in a more uniform delivery across institutions. Yet, the effectiveness of this latest dissemination is debatable. Students' OPT decisions often require months of preparation and limited or late exposure to information may prevent them from fully understanding their legal rights and responsibilities.

Zhou and Okahana (2019) argued that international student support systems vary widely across institutions, and Rahming (2019) emphasized how Afro-Caribbean students are often overlooked in these efforts. This study's findings align with those concerns. At institutions where students had higher knowledge, many still engaged in questionable employment practices. This suggests, while access to information matters, students benefit most from timely, repeated, and contextualized guidance that links CPT and OPT policies to their employment decisions.

The most notable findings were the differences in CPT and OPT knowledge scores across HBCU groups. Students attending HBCU Group 2 (n = 26) had significantly higher policy knowledge scores than those attending HBCU Group 1 (n = 26). This aligns with research suggesting that institutional culture, funding, and administrative capacity can influence student access to immigration-related guidance and support (Martinez et al., 2020). These findings highlight differences in the integration of career preparation and immigration policy education in student services across various institutional contexts. Group 2 institutions may offer more established support systems and have a more extended history of serving ACIS students, while Group 1 institutions may be developing these frameworks. However, regardless of access, legal

and educational consequences arise when students are under-informed. Institutions must consider both the dissemination of policy and how students internalize and apply knowledge.

Resume Assistance Across HBCU Groups

When comparing resume support services between HBCU Group 1 and Group 2, similarities and differences emerged. Resume templates were the most frequently used tool, with 60 students (57%) reporting use, followed closely by workshops used by 53 students (50%). However, one statistically significant difference between the two groups was found in the use of AI-assisted resume tools. Specifically, more students at HBCU Group 2 were to used AI resume tools compared to students at HBCU Group 1, as indicated by the chi-square test, $\chi^2(1) = 4.268$, $p = .039$. This suggests there is a difference in how students across these institutions engage with emerging technologies for career preparation.

The researcher initially assumed AI usage would be low across both groups with its relatively new introduction in higher education. However, the findings challenged this assumption. The greater usage among HBCU Group 2 students may reflect several institutional differences. For instance, Group 2 institutions may have introduced AI-based resume support tools earlier due to a longer-standing presence of ACIS students. This more extended engagement prompted institutions to evolve their career services and adopt newer technologies to better meet the needs of international students.

To transition from expectations to implications, this raises important questions about institutional preparedness and how resume assistance strategies are developed over time. HBCU Group 2 may have more stable, better-resourced career services departments to train staff in AI

tools or embed these services into required programming. By contrast, Group 1 institutions may be building their systems or beginning to introduce these tools to students. While this interpretation provides a working premises theory based on observed student behavior and existing research, further investigation is needed to confirm its generalizability. The survey did not explore faculty training, departmental investments, or frequency of tool use among students, leaving questions about why these differences emerged.

Although AI usage varied, resume workshops and one-on-one resume coaching did not reveal any usage differences between groups. For one-on-one coaching, 93 students engaged with the service, 40 at HBCU Group 1 and 53 at HBCU Group 2, resulting in unequal portions. Workshop attendance was also No balanced: 38 for Group 1 and 54 for Group 2. This may indicate the availability of traditional services across HBCUs and/or reflect student preferences for more interactive or guided assistance. It may reflect students' preferences for face-to-face guidance over technology-mediated tools, which could stem from classroom norms in their home countries where teacher-centered instruction, limited internet access, and structured in-person learning are more common than independent digital learning or use of AI tools for academic or career preparation (Desmore et al., 2016; Matthews, 2017).

However, it remains unclear how impactful these sessions were workshop attendance and one-on-one coaching were not balanced. The survey did not ask about the content of the sessions, whether job-specific feedback, mock interviews, or follow-up support. Singh and Doherty (2021) and Gopal (2016) emphasized that resume development without guidance on job searching and interview preparation offers limited value, particularly for international students who need to tailor their applications to field-specific and immigration compliance requirements.

While AI-assisted resume tools offer speed and automation, they can overlook essential elements of visa compliance. For instance, an AI-generated resume for a nursing student might emphasize soft skills or general experience and overlook required licensure or clinical training. This misalignment could lead students to unknowingly apply for positions that violate immigration policy. According to USCIS (8 CFR § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)), employment under CPT or OPT must be directly related to a student's major. Institutions are required under 8 CFR § 214.3(g)(1) to verify this alignment and report it in SEVIS. Despite this, students may interpret all job experience as valuable. The researcher recalls feeling anxiety when revealing immigration status during job applications, a concern echoed by others in Rahming's (2019) study. An assumption that AI tools would naturally improve student employment outcomes was not supported here; AI use did not significantly improve higher interview numbers, stating this as a cause, and it is not echoing findings by Liu and Ball (2020) that resume support alone did not overcome broader employment challenges.

These outcomes point to a broader issue: Knowing if students used resume tools is not the same as knowing how well they understood or applied them. Without insights into how students were trained to use or if they practiced resume assistance resources, it becomes challenging to assess quality or consistency of the support they received. While the data confirms engagement with tools like workshops, templates, and AI programs, it does not reveal whether students learned how to tailor their resumes effectively, align them with employer expectations, or comply with visa-related employment guidelines. This raises important questions about the depth of students' learning and whether the assistance provided translated into the practice of meaningful career preparation. Accessibility to infrastructure may explain the differences. HBCU Group 2 institutions may have more dependable campus internet or broader tech investment. At the same

time, Group 1 students could rely more on in-person resources due to weaker bandwidth or fewer digital options. While many ACIS students came from Caribbean schools with shared formatting norms for resumes, this study did not explore whether their practices shifted after exposure to faculty or career services at U.S. institutions. Without this data, it is difficult to accurately assess the true impact of resume support.

Finally, although AI resume tools were more common at Group 2 institutions, students across both groups experienced similarly high percentages of out-of-field job interviews, assuming an unfounded 46 (43%) across the entire sample. This reveals a deeper issue: resume assistance alone does not guarantee visa-compliant employment readiness. For example, a biology major interviewing for a customer service role may feel the position offers useful experience, but under CPT or OPT, such employment is likely non-compliant. Resume strategies of job security must reflect a clear understanding of immigration policy. Rahming (2019) and Zhou and Okahana (2019) argued that institutions must do more to support vulnerable student populations, as ACIS, by connecting résumé-building efforts to legal employment eligibility and long-term career planning.

These findings underscore the need for institutions to move beyond general resume support and toward intentional, policy-informed career services explicitly tailored to the needs of international students. Traditional or one-size-fits-all models are sufficient. Instead, as supported by Choudaha and Chang (2012), services should be customized to meet the unique needs of ACIS students. Considering their academic majors and immigration requirements, job search platform usage, and the specific challenges they face in navigating the U.S. employment landscape.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study reveal several important implications for higher education practitioners, policymakers, and institutional leaders seeking to support Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). First, the lack of statistically significant differences in CPT and OPT knowledge based on academic classification or employment experience suggests advancing through academic programs or participating in work opportunities is insufficient to ensure students' understanding of complex immigration policies. Therefore, institutions must implement structured, proactive education on CPT and OPT regulations. This training should begin early in students' academic career and be reinforced through timely workshops, advising sessions, and mandatory orientation modules tailored to international students.

Second, given the finding that different forms of resume assistance (e.g., faculty-led, career center-led, AI-assisted, or traditional written feedback) did not relate to the number of job interviews received, institutions should reassess the content and delivery of career services for international students. Rather than relying on one-size-fits-all approaches, career centers should assess whether their resources are culturally relevant, accessible, and compliant with the requirements for F1 visas. Training faculty and career staff to understand the nuances of work authorization can help ensure that guidance provided to students is accurate and supportive of their immigration responsibilities.

Third, the regional disparities in CPT and OPT knowledge, where students at HBCU Group 2 completed significantly better than their Southern peers, may highlight systemic inequities stemming from differences in institutional funding, staffing, or policy emphasis. To address these

gaps, state and federal higher education agencies, as well as national HBCU advocacy organizations, should promote cross-institutional collaboration, sharing best practices, and equitable distribution of resources for international student support. HBCU Group 2 higher engagement with AI-powered resume tools, for example, may serve as a model for innovation and technology adoption.

Finally, university policies should embed international student support within broader institutional diversity and inclusion strategies. ACIS students navigate the dual complexities of being international and part of the African diaspora, which can make their transition into the workforce especially challenging. Institutions that provide holistic, culturally sensitive, and immigration-informed support systems are better positioned to ensure equitable career outcomes for these students. This study's findings urge HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions to invest in career readiness programs that reflect the lived realities and legal barriers faced by international students, ultimately fostering their long-term success and contributions to the global workforce.

Limitations

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. It used self-reported survey data to examine Afro-Caribbean International Students' (ACIS) knowledge of CPT and

OPT policies, employment experiences, and engagement with resume assistance at four HBCUs. While the findings offer valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. **Survey Scope and Missing Contextual Variables**

While the survey captured what resources students used and assessed their policy knowledge; it did not explore how or when students accessed these resources. For example, it did not inquire about how students were introduced to AI-powered resume tools (e.g., VMock, ResumeWorded, Rezi, Resumenow), whether these tools were recommended by faculty or career services, or how frequently students use them. Additionally, the survey did not ask how often ACIS students sought resume assistance throughout their enrollment, whether they returned for follow-up guidance after job interviews, or whether faculty or career services aligned their feedback with field-specific or immigration-related job requirements. Without this information, it is difficult to determine if services were used effectively or extent to which students engaged them. These gaps limit the interpretation of how resume assistance and career support contributed to employment outcomes. Future studies would benefit from capturing these dimensions to assess the quality and influence of institutional resources.

2. **Interrupted Enrollment and Incomplete Experience Reporting**

The survey did not ask whether students had withdrawn from their institution at any point prior to completing the survey. For example, some ACIS students may have taken leave due to financial hardship, illness, or family emergencies and later returned in the semester the survey was conducted. In these cases, students may have reported experiences based on pre-existing conditions that no longer accurately reflect the current institutional environment. This inconsistency in engagement could affect their access to services, knowledge of updated

immigration policies, or participation in resume or interview preparation. Gaps in enrollment could significantly impact international students' ability to comply with visa regulations and access continuous career support, making this a meaningful variable not captured.

3. **Exclusion of Institutional and DSO-Specific Data**

Although the study identified significant differences in policy knowledge between HBCU Group 1 and Group 2, the survey did not capture institutional-level data such as DSO tenure, frequency of meetings with international students, or whether CPT/OPT workshops were held regularly. This is a significant limitation, particularly given the researcher's prior perceptions of staff turnover and uneven support across campuses. Without this data, it is difficult to determine whether institutional consistency or gaps in advising influenced student knowledge or behaviors.

4. **Cross-sectional Design Limits Causality**

The research design captures a snapshot in time but did not measure changes in students' knowledge or employment outcomes throughout their academic careers. For example, it is unknown whether students who received resume assistance early had different trajectories than those who received it later. Similarly, it is unclear whether knowledge of CPT/OPT changed over time. A longitudinal design would better assess growth, regression, or long-term impact of support interventions.

5. **Self-Reported Data May Introduce Bias**

As with many survey-based studies, the results rely on participants' honesty and memory. Students may have misreported their employment experiences, misunderstood

what "in-field" meant, or understated their use of resume services due to social desirability. This limitation is especially relevant given the legal implications of non-compliant work, which may have caused some participants to underreport policy violations.

6. **Limited Generalizability**

The sample was drawn exclusively from four HBCUs with ACIS student populations. While this focus strengthens the internal assured a ACIS sample of the findings, it limits generalizability to ACIS at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Additionally, ACIS students represent a specific subgroup within international education; their cultural, racial, and immigration experiences are not necessarily reflective of other international student populations.

7. **Instrument Development and Validation**

The survey instrument was newly created and not previously validated. While the items were informed by USCIS policies and reviewed by experts, additional psychometric testing is needed to establish reliability, construct validity, and measurement consistency across contexts.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides a foundation for understanding the employment preparation and policy awareness of Afro-Caribbean International Students (ACIS) at selected Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), but several opportunities for future research are evident.

1. **Conduct Longitudinal and Comparative Research Across Institutions**

Studies should track ACIS CPT/OPT knowledge and employment behaviors over time, ideally from matriculation through employment post-graduation. A longitudinal approach can reveal how career services and institutional interventions impact long-term outcomes. Additionally, comparing experiences across institutional types as HBCUs, PWIs, HSIs, and community colleges, may help identify how institutional structure and mission influence student support and compliance with work authorization policies.

2. **Investigating the Role of DSOs and Enrollment Disruption in Career Preparation**

Research should explore how the consistency, training, and frequency of communication among Designated School Officials (DSOs) impact international students' preparedness and legal compliance. In addition, future studies should examine the impact of students at academic disruption as leaves of absence or gaps in enrollment on students' awareness of policy updates and continued access to advising resources.

3. Standardized Tools for Assessing Policy Knowledge and Readiness

There is a need to develop and validate standardized instruments that accurately measure CPT and OPT policy understanding. A reliable, psychometrically sound survey tool would

improve research quality, help institutions benchmark students' readiness and compliance across different populations and campuses, and the rigor of their support services.

4 Explore Post-Graduation Outcomes and the Influence of Identity

Research should investigate whether out-of-field employment during CPT/OPT affects students' job opportunities after graduation, domestically in their home country or abroad. Additionally, exploring the intersection of race, cultural identity, immigration status, and institutional context, particularly for ACIS students at HBCUs, may help institutions design more culturally responsive and equitable support systems.

Together, these recommendations provide a dual pathway for improving academic scholarship and practical institutional strategies to better serve the nuanced needs of Afro-Caribbean international students navigating U.S. higher education and employment systems.

Summary

This study contributes to the limited body of research focused on Afro-Caribbean international students and their career preparation experiences at HBCUs. While ACIS students engaged with a variety of career support services, neither class standing nor employment status significantly influenced their understanding of immigration policies. The institutional group, however, emerged as a significant factor in policy awareness. These findings underscore the need for intentional, equity-driven career services that are culturally responsive and informed by policy so, institutions can more effectively prepare ACIS students for successful workforce transitions in the United States.

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APPENDIX A:

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: "WE ARE AFRO CARIBBEAN, NOT AFRICAN AMERICANS" Career Services and Employment Experiences of Afro-Caribbean International Students in U.S. Higher Education Institutions
Principal Investigator: James Folkestad
Co-Investigator: Aleandra Pinder
Sponsor: Not applicable
Protocol: Kuali ID 6312

Purpose, Procedure, and Duration:
We are researchers from Colorado State University's School of Education inviting you to participate in a survey. We want to learn more about the career services provided to Afro-Caribbean international students in U.S. higher education institutions, including how well these services prepare students for employment and help them understand U.S. work authorization regulations (e.g., OPT and CPT).

If you agree to participate in our study, you will be asked to complete a survey. The survey will take about 20-30 minutes to complete. We expect around 640 Afro-Caribbean international students to respond.

Eligibility:
To participate in this study, you must meet the following requirements:

- Be currently enrolled as an international student on F1 academic student status.
- Be a citizen of an Afro-Caribbean country.
- Be classified as a sophomore, junior, or senior.

Risks:
Some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable, but you can skip any question you do not want to answer. You can also stop the survey at any time.

We will make every effort to safeguard your data, but we cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the Internet.

Benefits:
While you may not benefit personally from being in this study, your responses will help us understand how to improve career services and support for Afro-Caribbean international students.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Alternative:
We know of no alternatives to participating in this study.

Privacy:
Your responses to this survey are anonymous, meaning we will not collect any personal identifiers such as names or email addresses. Your responses may be used in future research or shared with other researchers.

Complaints:
If you have questions about the study, please contact Aleandra Pinder at Aleandra.pinder@colostate.edu.
If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer, contact the CSU IRB at CSU_IRB@colostate.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. While you are not required to participate, we hope you will. To ensure your responses are included, please complete the survey by November 30th, 2024.

Please select an option below to indicate you have read this information and consent to participate in the study:

- I agree to participate in this study.
- I do not wish to participate.

APPENDIX B:

INTRODUCTION STATEMENT TO STUDENT

Hi, I'm Aleandra Pinder, a Ph.D. candidate at Colorado State University. I would love for you to voluntarily take part in a quick survey that'll help improve support for Afro-Caribbean international students like us in U.S. colleges. Participation is not required, but your responses would be invaluable, and it only takes about 20-30 minutes to complete thank you for considering it!

APPENDIX C:

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Afro-Caribbean International Student,

We are conducting a survey to gather insights on the career services provided to international students at higher education institutions in the United States, specifically those from Afro-Caribbean countries. Your participation in this survey is crucial in helping us understand your experiences and needs related to career development resources and support.

The primary objectives of this survey are to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of career services offered by higher education institutions to Afro-Caribbean international students.
- Assess the accessibility and relevance of career advising, resume assistance, and job search opportunities provided by career services centers.
- Determine the level of knowledge and understanding of U.S. employment work authorization regulations among Afro-Caribbean international students.
- Identify any barriers or challenges faced by Afro-Caribbean international students in accessing and utilizing career services.

To participate in this study, you must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be currently enrolled as an international student on F1 academic student status.
- Have citizens from an Afro-Caribbean country.

Your participation is voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential. By completing this survey, you will contribute valuable insights to inform efforts to enhance career services and support for Afro-Caribbean international students across higher education institutions in the United States.

As part of the survey, you will be asked to:

- Complete a knowledge check on U.S. employment work authorization regulations.
- Provide feedback on your experiences accessing job search opportunities through career services centers.

Dear students, we have created the Optimal Practical Training and Curricular Practical Training knowledge check to help you better understand practical training opportunities and their impact on your employment prospects. We aim to assess your understanding of OPT and CPT regulations and how they affect your ability to secure employment. Please remember that this quiz is for informational purposes only and will not affect your grades or volunteer hours. We kindly ask for

your honest responses; any dishonesty will invalidate your participation. This is an excellent opportunity to expand your knowledge of practical training and its importance in your career pursuits. We appreciate your time and input in advancing our understanding of the needs and experiences of Afro-Caribbean international students as they navigate the U.S. job market. Thank you for your participation in this critical study.

Sincerely,

Aleandra Pinder
Ph. D. Candidate
Colorado State University

APPENDIX D:

ACIS SURVEY

Demographic Screening Questions

1. **Select International Student Status:**
   a) F1-Actively Enrolled
   b) F1- Optimal Practical Training Approved
   c) F1- Optimal Practical Training Pending

2. **Select your classification level if currently enrolled:**
   a) Freshmen/ year 1 (1-29 credits)
   b) Sophomore/ year 2 (30-59 credits)
   c) Junior/ year 3/ (60 -89 credits)
   d) Senior/ year 4 (90+ credits)

3. **How long have you been an international student in the country? (Do not count K-12 experience)**

a) 1-2 years
b) 3-5 years
c) More than 5 years
d) Less than 1 year

4. **Select the Afro-Caribbean country you were born in:**
   a) Antigua and Barbuda
   b) Bahamas
   c) Barbados
   d) Belize
   e) Cuba
   f) Curacao
   g) Dominica
   h) Dominican Republic
   i) Grenada
   j) Guyana
   k) Haiti
   l) Jamaica
   m) Saint Kitts and Nevis
   n) Saint Lucia
   o) Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
   p) Suriname

q) Trinidad and Tobago

5. **Select the Afro-Caribbean Country of Citizenship that is listed on your I-20 non-immigration document:**
   a) Antigua and Barbuda
   b) Bahamas
   c) Barbados
   d) Belize
   e) Cuba
   f) Curacao
   g) Dominica
   h) Dominican Republic
   i) Grenada
   j) Guyana
   k) Haiti
   l) Jamaica
   m) Saint Kitts and Nevis
   n) Saint Lucia
   o) Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
   p) Suriname
   q) Trinidad and Tobago

Employment Section

6. **Select your Gender**
   a) Male
   b) Female

7. **How many U.S. jobs have you interviewed for? (not related to your field)**

a) 0
b) 1
c) 2
d) 3
e) 4
f) 5
g) 6
h) 7
i) 8
j) 9
k) 10

8. **How many U.S. jobs have you interviewed for related to your program of study?**

a. 0

b. 1
c. 2
d. 3
e. 4
f. 5
g. 6
h. 7
i. 8
j. 9
k. 10

9. Do you have an updated resume?

a) Yes
b) No

10. Did you receive feedback on your resume from the Career Service Center?

a) Yes
b) No

11. Did the Career Service Center provide you with international student job search resources? Click all online service offers that apply:

a) Visajobs
b) H1B.io
c) GoinGlobal
d) United OPT
e) OPT Nation
f) InternationalStudent.com
g) Handshake
h) CareerShift
i) Dice
j) Other
k) I was not aware of job search sites.

12. Do you currently work on campus in your field?

a) Yes
b) No

13. Do you currently work off-campus in your field?

a) Yes
b) No

14. Did you previously work on campus in your field?

c) Yes
d) No

15. Did you previously work off-campus in your field?

c) Yes

d) No

CPT & OPT Work Permit Knowledge Check for International Students

Instructions: Welcome to the OPT and CPT knowledge check! This is NOT an exam, and it consists of 10 multiple-choice questions designed to evaluate your understanding of Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT) concepts. To ensure accurate assessment results, please follow the following instructions: Select the answer choice that you believe is most accurate and appropriate based on your understanding of OPT and CPT concepts.

16. International students must have completed at least one year of full-time study to be eligible for CPT (Curricular Practical Training). Which of the following accurately represents this requirement?

A) Students are eligible for CPT immediately upon enrollment.

B) CPT is only available to students with part-time study experience.

C) International students are eligible for CPT after completing one academic year of full-time study.

D) CPT eligibility is not related to academic study.

17. International students must obtain work authorization before participating in CPT (Curricular Practical Training). What is the necessary step for international students before engaging in CPT?

A) Seek approval from a faculty advisor

B) Obtain approval from the Department of Immigration

C) Secure approval from the employer only

D) Obtain approval from their Designated School Official (DSO)

18. What potential risk do international students face if they engage 40 hours per week of CPT (Curricular Practical Training)?

A) No impact on post-graduation work hours

B) Automatic extension of OPT (Optional Practical Training) work hours

C) Risk of having their OPT work hours reduced post-graduation

D) Guaranteed increase in OPT work hours post-graduation

19. What is the fee requirement for international students when applying for CPT (Curricular Practical Training)?

A) No fee is required for the CPT application

B) A $200 fee is required for the CPT application

C) A $350 fee is required for the CPT application

D) Fee amount varies depending on the university

20. What does CPT (Curricular Practical Training) allow international students to do while maintaining their F-1 student status?

A) Engage in off-campus employment unrelated to their field of study

B) Work on-campus part-time without restrictions

C) Participate in off-campus employment related to their field of study

D) Take a break from studies without losing their student status

OPT

21. What is the recommended action for STEM OPT participants regarding the Training Plan Form I-983?

A) Submit the form directly to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

B) Share the form with their employer only

C) Provide the form to their Designated School Official (DSO) outlining their training objectives and learning goals

D) Keep the form for personal records without submitting it to anyone

22. What is the consequence for international students who do not apply for an OPT or another academic program within the 60-day grace period after their studies?

A) They are automatically enrolled in an OPT program.

B) They are granted an extension of their student visa.

C) They must return to their home country.

D) They can continue to stay in the country without any changes.

23. When are international students eligible to work on PRE-OPT?

A) Anytime during their academic program

B) Only during the final semester of their academic program

C) With a minimum of 1 year left in the academic program

D) After completing their academic program

24. When can international students apply for OPT (Optional Practical Training) before graduating from their academic program?

A) At least 30 days before graduating

B) At least 60 days before graduating

C) At least 90 days before graduating

D) After graduating

25. What distinguishes STEM OPT employment from regular OPT?

A) No requirement for employment to be related to the student's program of study

B) A requirement for employment to be indirectly related to the student's program of study

C) A requirement for employment to be directly related to the student's program of study

D) Students on STEM OPT will be eligible for a two-year extension, and regular OPT students are not eligible for an extension.

26. "What challenges have you faced when using your school's career services? Think about how these services helped you with resume assistance, finding jobs, interviewing understanding work authorization (OPT and CPT).etc

27. How do you think these services could be improved to better support your career?

APPENDIX E:

ACIS SURVEY CHART CODE

CODE 9 is for all incomplete submissions

Survey Item	**Option**	**Code**	
F1 Student Status	F1-Actively Enrolled	1	
	F1-OPT Approved	2	

	F1-OPT Pending	3	
Institution Location	Columbia, South Carolina	1	
	Denmark, South Carolina	2	
	Nashville, Tennessee	3	
	Wilberforce, Ohio	4	
	Other	5	
Institutions By Regions			
	Southern Institutions (South Carolina)	1	
	Midwestern Institutions (Ohio & Tennessee)	2	
Classification Level	Freshman/Year 1 (1-29 credits)	1	
	Sophomore/Year 2 (30-59 credits)	2	
	Junior/Year 3 (60-89 credits)	3	
	Senior/Year 4 (90+ credits)	4	
Length of Time as an International Student	Less than 1 year	1	
	1-2 years	2	
	3-5 years	3	
	More than 5 years	4	
Country of Birth	Bahamas	1	
	Haiti	2	
	Jamaica	3	
	Other	4	
Country of Citizenship	Bahamas	1	
	Haiti	2	
	Jamaica	3	
	Other	4	
Gender	Male	1	
	Female	2	

Number of U.S. Job Interviews (Unrelated)	0	0	
	1	1	
	2	2	
	3	3	
	4	4	
	5	5	
	6	6	
	7	7	
	8	8	
Number of U.S. Job Interviews (Related)	0	0	
	1	1	
	2	2	
	3	3	
	4	4	
	5	5	
	6	6	
	7	7	
	8	8	
Types of Resume Assistance (Career Services)	One-on-one review (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Workshop (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Resume software/tool (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Feedback from staff (Yes/No)	1/0	
Types of Resume Assistance (Faculty)	One-on-one review (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Workshop (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Resume software/tool (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Feedback from staff (Yes/No)	1/0	
Frequency of Resume Assistance	0 times	0	
	1 time	1	

	2-3 times	2	
	4-5 times	3	
	6 or more times	4	
Mode of Resume Assistance	Virtual (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Face-to-face (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Feedback from Career Service Center (Yes/No)	1/0	
Job Search Resources (Career Services)	GoinGlobal	1	
	Handshake	2	
	InternationalStudent.com	3	
	Other	4	
Work for Pay (Current and Previous)	On-campus in field (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Off-campus in field (Yes/No)	1/0	
Volunteer Work (Current and Previous)	On-campus in field (Yes/No)	1/0	
	Off-campus in field (Yes/No)	1/0	
Final CPT and OPT Knowledge Level Codes			**Score Range**
Knowledge Level	Highly Knowledgeable	1	4/5-5/5 80%-100%
	Averagely Knowledgeable	2	3/5 -60%
	Not Proficient	3	0/5-2/5, 0%-40%
	Did not Take CPT and OPT	9	

APPENDIX F: 'Quantitative Data Responses'.

Introduction:

The qualitative component of this study was designed to gain deeper insight into Afro-Caribbean international students' experiences with institutional career services and the employment authorization process in the United States, specifically regarding CPT (Curricular Practical Training) and OPT (Optional Practical Training). Two open-ended survey questions, Questions 35 and 36, were included to capture student perspectives on their challenges and suggestions for improving institutional support. A total of 34 students responded to Question 35, and 35 students responded to Question 36.

Justification for Removal

However, the quality and depth of these responses varied significantly. Many students provided only one-sentence replies, fragments, or non-substantive responses using letters or symbols (e.g., "n," "n m," or "I don't know"). These submissions lacked the depth necessary for rigorous qualitative coding and interpretation. As a result, the researcher determined that the data were insufficient to serve as a formal basis for a qualitative analysis within the body of the dissertation.

Future Study

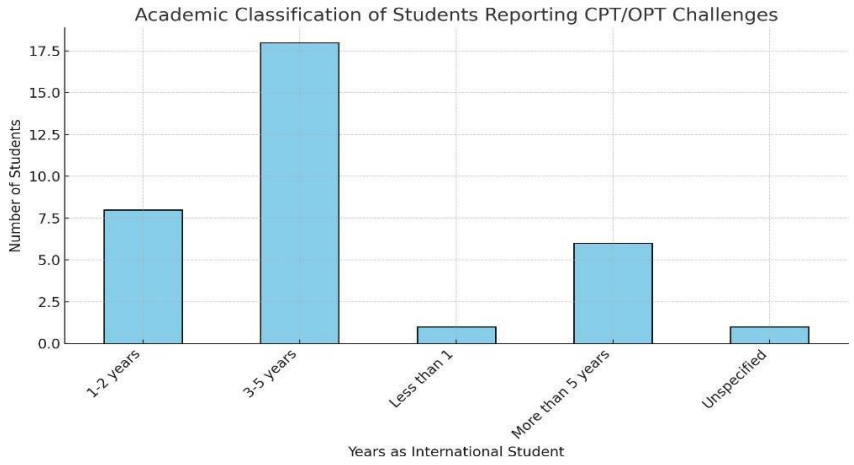
Given these limitations, the researcher has decided to conduct a follow-up qualitative study in the future, using structured interviews with a subsample from this same population. This next phase

will involve open-ended interview questions designed to guide participants through a more reflective and complete discussion of their experiences. The interview-based study will aim to obtain richer, more detailed data that fully captures Afro-Caribbean international students' lived experiences and institutional interactions as they navigate career preparation and employment authorization in the U.S.

In the meantime, the complete and coherent open-ended survey responses are summarized in this appendix as supplemental insight. While limited in scope, they offer early thematic signals reinforcing the need for a more in-depth qualitative investigation.

Descriptive Statistics of Qualitative Responses from Participants

A total of 34 Afro-Caribbean international students provided complete and meaningful responses to the open-ended qualitative questions regarding their experiences with CPT (Curricular Practical Training), OPT (Optional Practical Training), and institutional career services. These students answered questions 35 or 36 using complete sentences suitable for thematic analysis. Based on their self-reported academic classifications, 52.9% (n = 18) had been in the United States for 3 to 5 years, suggesting they were likely juniors, seniors, or recent graduates. Another 23.5% (n = 8) reported being in the U.S. for 1 to 2 years**,** likely as underclassmen.
Additionally, 17.6% (n = 6) had been in the country for more than 5 years, representing students with prolonged exposure to the U.S. education system, such as graduate students or super seniors. One student (2.9%) had been in the U.S. for less than one year, while another (2.9%) submitted an unusable or unspecified classification response. The average number of students per classification group was 6.8, with a median of 6, and the largest group represented those with 3–5 years of experience. The standard deviation was approximately 6.98, reflecting some variability in classification distribution. These findings suggest that students with more experience in the U.S. higher education system were likelier to report challenges navigating CPT/OPT and career support services. However, concerns also emerged from those earlier in their academic journeys.



35. “What challenges have you faced when using your institution’s career services or understanding the employment process (CPT/OPT)?”

Out of the 34 Afro-Caribbean international students who provided complete and meaningful responses to Question 35, 33 students (97.1%) expressed challenges related to clarity, access, institutional support, or employment restrictions surrounding CPT/OPT and career services. Only 1 student (2.9%) reported no challenges. These responses were categorized into four major negative themes and one positive theme, each supported by direct student quotes and interpretive commentary.

Thematic Summary of Question 35 Responses

Theme	Number of Students Reporting
Limited access to international-friendly jobs	At least 6 students
Inadequate CPT/OPT guidance	At least 7 students
Decline in support after freshman year	At least 4 students
Resume and job search resources lacking	At least 6 students
No challenges reported	1 student

Thematic Analysis of Question 35

Question 35: *“What challenges have you faced when using your institution’s career services or understanding the employment process (CPT/OPT)?”*

A total of 34 Afro-Caribbean international students provided substantive responses to this open-ended question. Of those, 33 students (97.1%) expressed challenges related to clarity, access, institutional support, or employment restrictions surrounding CPT/OPT and career services. Only 1 student (2.9%) reported no challenges. The analysis below presents key themes that emerged, supported by direct student quotations and interpretive commentary.

Theme 1: Limited Job Opportunities for International Students

Many students highlighted that career services promoted employment or internship opportunities that were inaccessible to international students due to citizenship restrictions or a lack of sponsorship.

One student stated,
“Finding job/internship opportunities for non-U.S. citizens is very difficult.”
(Senior, 3–5 years)

Another remarked,
“Employers and programs do not accept international students as they do not provide

sponsorship."
(Senior, 3–5 years)

A third explained,
"When presenting jobs or internships, the career services tells us international students to apply… however, they always say you MUST be a U.S. citizen to apply."
(Senior, 3–5 years)

Interpretation: These responses reflect a structural gap between what is promoted by career centers and what is available to international students. Students experience discouragement and exclusion when job opportunities lack clear visa sponsorship pathways yet are still advertised as accessible.

Theme 2: Inadequate Guidance and Clarity on CPT/OPT

Several students expressed confusion about the CPT/OPT process, reporting that information was often delayed, incomplete, or overly general.

One student commented,
"I didn't understand enough about OPT and CPT so I was kind of last minute with my decision."
(Senior, 3–5 years)

Another student noted,
"I do not think that the services adequately informed me of the nuances of CPT and OPT programs."
(Junior, 1–2 years)

A third respondent added,
"Not gaining the knowledge I need and the information I need as it regards international students and the steps we need to take."
(More than 5 years)

Interpretation: These reflections reveal that a lack of timely, step-by-step advising leads students to make critical CPT/OPT decisions too late. The data suggest a need for institutions to create structured, proactive programming that informs international students of their employment eligibility and legal requirements well before they approach graduation.

Theme 3: Lack of Sustained Institutional Support

Some students described a decline in support after their initial year or reported that services were largely absent throughout their college experience.

One student wrote,
"We had a center that assisted during freshman year; however, there's no help now."
(More than 5 years)

Another reflected,
“There was never any assistance or outlet on campus that informed of these findings.”
(More than 5 years)

Interpretation: These statements indicate that while some institutional services may be introduced early, they are not maintained across a student’s academic lifecycle. Students who enter U.S. higher education through transfer pathways or who stay beyond four years may not receive the consistent support they need.

Theme 4: Insufficient Resources and Practical Career Help

Students also pointed to limited resume-building assistance, lack of interview preparation, and minimal access to relevant job postings.

A student stated,
“No help with jobs for international students.”
(Senior, 3–5 years)

Another said,
“Need more help with resumes in junior year.”
(Senior, 3–5 years)

One student emphasized,
“Lack of resources, lack of support. Not many opportunities.”
(More than 5 years)

Interpretation: These findings suggest that career services may not be equipped to provide practical tools tailored to international students. This includes writing culturally responsive resumes, preparing for interviews that account for work authorization questions, and identifying employers with experience hiring F-1 visa holders.

Positive Theme: No Challenges Encountered

Only one student described a positive experience with career services or the CPT/OPT process.

The student stated,
“I have no problems.”
(Junior, 1–2 years)

Interpretation: This response may reflect a smooth institutional experience or a lack of interaction with the career services office. While encouraging, it is a significant outlier compared to the overwhelming number of critical responses.

Thematic Analysis of Question 36

Question 36: *"How do you think these services could be improved to help international students better prepare for CPT or OPT?"*

A total of **35 Afro-Caribbean international students** provided complete responses to this question. Their suggestions highlighted structural, programmatic, and communication-based improvements needed in career services. The responses are organized by theme, each supported by student quotations and interpretive analysis.

Thematic Summary of Question 36 Responses

Theme	Number of Students Reporting
Need for clarity and simplification of CPT/OPT	At least 7 students
Increase engagement and personal support	At least 6 students
Expand employer networks and advocacy	At least 5 students
Promote services more effectively	At least 4 students
Develop alumni or mentorship programs	At least 2 students
Hire knowledgeable and proactive staff	At least 2 students

Theme 1: Need for Clarity and Simplification of CPT/OPT Processes

Reported by at least 7 students

Students suggested that career services provide clearer explanations and simplified timelines for CPT and OPT to reduce confusion.

"I feel like they could make these processes (OPT/CPT) more streamlined and clearer to understand."
(Junior, 1–2 years)

"Better assist with processes and helping build resume."
(Senior, 3–5 years)

"Holding classes so international students can get a better understanding."
(Senior, 3–5 years)

Interpretation:
Students are asking for structured educational interventions—such as CPT/OPT seminars, printed timelines, or interactive workshops—that demystify eligibility requirements, deadlines, and application steps.

Theme 2: Increase Engagement and Personal Support for International Students

Reported by at least 6 students

Some students recommended that institutions take a more proactive and relational approach to international student services.

"I think that these services could engage more with students to help them understand the work authorization system and find jobs available to international students." (Junior, 1–2 years)

"Bring staff with personal experience of being an international student." (Senior, 3–5 years)

"They can be improved by the officials taking action and the concerns of the students more seriously."
(Junior, 1–2 years)

Interpretation:
The data suggest that international students value culturally competent staff, one-on-one advising, and proactive outreach tailored to their unique needs, rather than generic or transactional services.

Theme 3: Expand Employer Networks and Advocacy

Reported by at least 5 students

Students emphasized the importance of access to employers who are open to hiring non-citizens and are familiar with work authorization.

"Broaden the scope of business corporations to include applications of international students as well as U.S. citizens."
(Senior, 3–5 years)

"They can find more companies that would accept international students."
(Senior, 3–5 years)

"Help STEM students find jobs upon graduation."
(More than 5 years)

Interpretation:
These responses highlight institutional responsibility not only in advising but in employer advocacy. Students expect career services to establish partnerships with companies that welcome F-1 and STEM OPT applicants.

Theme 4: Promote Services More Effectively and Increase Visibility

Reported by at least 4 students

Several students noted that available services were not well promoted and recommended targeted outreach.

"The marketing can definitely be better. This is something we should all know about. Have pop ups, be at Caribbean student events. Pass out flyers and pamphlets." (Senior, 3–5 years)

"They can be improved simply by being promoted better. Students should know that this is an available tool."
(More than 5 years)

Interpretation:
This feedback suggests that students may be unaware of resources simply due to poor communication strategies. More visible, culturally embedded promotion could improve student engagement.

Theme 5: Develop Alumni or Mentorship Programs

Reported by at least 2 students

A few students suggested mentorship or alumni engagement to guide current international students.

"I think that they can have a mentorship program where current students can learn from the past alumni that studied in their field."
(More than 5 years)

Interpretation:
This recommendation supports the use of peer knowledge-sharing and professional networking to help students better understand the real-world application of CPT/OPT processes.

Theme 6: Hire Knowledgeable, Connected Career Advisors

Reported by at least 2 students

"Hire someone who is very knowledgeable and well connected in this field." (Senior, 3–5 years)

"Actually do their jobs."
(Senior, 3–5 years)

Interpretation:
These comments imply that some students felt the staff lacked sufficient expertise or initiative in guiding international students through employment preparation.

Summary and Connection to Dissertation Results

The themes from the qualitative responses strongly align with and contextualize the quantitative results presented earlier in this dissertation. For Question 35, most students 33 out of 34) reported

challenges, underscoring the gaps in clarity, institutional responsiveness, and access to employment pathways for international students. These findings help explain why knowledge levels of CPT and OPT may vary by classification, as those with more extended time in the U.S. likely encountered the shortcomings of these systems over time. Students expressed concerns about inadequate resume support, lack of employer partnerships, and confusion around CPT/OPT policies, especially among juniors, seniors, and those enrolled for over three years.

Question 36 responses provided further insight into how students believe these challenges can be addressed. Students consistently recommended transparent institutional communication, proactive advising, culturally responsive staff, and targeted programming tailored to international students. These suggestions echo the study's argument that career services must move beyond generalist approaches to actively support international student transitions. The qualitative findings offer a student-centered lens through which to interpret the patterns observed in the quantitative data.

Conclusion

The qualitative responses provide powerful testimony to the lived realities of Afro-Caribbean international students within U.S. higher education. They reveal both the barriers these students face and the institutional opportunities for improvement. Through their voices, students advocated for greater clarity, stronger advocacy, and more inclusive support structures as they navigated complex employment authorization systems. These perspectives validate the quantitative trends and serve as a call to action for institutions seeking to improve the career readiness and long-term success of their international student populations.