

**SURVIVING** and  
**THRIVING**  
in **ACADEMIA**

# ACADEMIC MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONAL ACADEMICS

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



EDITED BY

**JASVIR KAUR NACHATAR SINGH**

ACADEMIC MOBILITY AND  
INTERNATIONAL  
ACADEMICS

*Surviving and Thriving in Academia* provides short, accessible books for navigating the many challenges, responsibilities and opportunities of academic careers. The series is particularly dedicated to supporting the professional journeys of early and mid-career academics and doctoral students but will present books of use to scholars at all stages in their careers. Books within the series draw on real-life examples from international scholars, offering practical advice and a supportive and encouraging tone throughout.

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–Krishna Bista, Professor of Higher Education,  
Morgan State University, Maryland (USA)

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**JASVIR KAUR NACHATAR SINGH**

*La Trobe University, Australia*



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# CONTENTS

<i>About the Contributors</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
Introduction	1
<b>Section 1 Leadership</b>	
1. Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Navigating towards Leadership Positions as a Woman International Academic <i>Ashleigh-Jane Thompson</i>	17
2. Virtuous Like Water – International Academic in a Leadership Position <i>Yuhang Rong</i>	31
<b>Section 2 Experiences of Esteemed and Young Scholars</b>	
3. Life Lessons for Aspiring International Academics: What My Experience Suggests about How to Thrive <i>Vijay Kumar</i>	49
4. My Academic Path as an International Academic from MENA to Canada: Good, Better, Best. Never Let It Rest <i>Jinan Issa</i>	63

5. Being an International Academic in a Malaysian University: Challenges, Opportunities and Way Forward <i>Muhammad Muftahu</i>	81
6. Facets of Academic Life – Perspective of an International Visiting Scholar <i>Amrita Kaur</i>	97
7. An International Early-Career Academic Journey in Australia <i>Jasvir Kaur Nachatar Singh</i>	115
8. Moving in and Coming Home: Insights from Two Early Career Researchers in Japan <i>Shannon Mason and Yusuke Sakurai</i>	129
<b>Section 3 Personal and Family Experiences in Long- and Short-Term Mobilities</b>	
9. International Academic Experiences in Japan <i>Ariunaa Enkhtur and Sainbayar Gundsambuu</i>	149
10. Short-Term International Mobility among Academics <i>Jisun Jung</i>	165
11. International Academic Mobility: Categories of Difference and Narratives of Possibility <i>James Burford and Mary Eppolite</i>	181
<i>Index</i>	201

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MEd and PhD degrees in Education/TESOL with distinctions from Universiti Sains Malaysia and was awarded the University's Gold Medal for being the most outstanding candidate in education. She also received the university's fellowship scheme and was one of its brilliant student ambassadors. With over 18 years of experience in different countries of the MENA region, Malaysia and Canada, she came across different challenges and was fortunate to obtain exceptional opportunities. She started her career in 1998 as a translator and an interpreter in the Ministry of Industry and Minerals in Baghdad, Iraq. Later, she worked as an ESL instructor and a trainer in Azzawiya Oil Refining Company from 2005 to 2008 when she decided to pursue her postgraduate studies. She gained research skills and was indulged in research culture, which was evidenced in her quality publications in the second semester of her master's study. Her experience as a researcher was enhanced in her PhD journey when she received the exceptional opportunity to work on an international project in four countries: Malaysia, Australia, Hong Kong and South Korea. Later, her job as an Assistant Professor at the Omani University of Applied Sciences and Technology for over 5 years followed by receiving an offer from the APEX university USM to work in the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) was another unique experience. She immigrated to Canada and started another academic adventure to receive the OCELT recognition from TESL Ontario. She learnt tens of lessons gained from substantial experiences teaching international post-graduates and multicultural undergraduates.

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**Dr Shannon Mason** is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Nagasaki University, Japan. She completed her doctoral research at Griffith University in Australia, but relocated to Japan during the final two years of her candidature to take up an academic position. She has a broad research

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**Dr Muhammad Muftahu** is a Nigerian, who works as a Senior Lecturer, Deputy Director and Coordinator of the Global Higher Education Network (GHEN) at the National Higher Education Research Institute, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). He is also the Coordinator of the Professional Programme in Higher Education Leadership and Management, Co-Coordinator of Higher Education Access and Success research cluster, and Commission Member of the Academic Talent Management Project (ATM) 2020, Universiti Sains Malaysia. His research interest and expertise include Higher Education Sustainable Leadership and Management, Comparative and International Higher Education, Higher Education and Industry, Higher Education as Field of Study and Qualitative Methodology.

Muhammad has immensely contributed to the development of higher education as a discipline of study and practices through teaching, postgraduate supervision, research, and wide publication, which awarded him with several academic recognitions at home and abroad, including garnering international grants. Similarly, he is a member and a fellow of various higher education professional bodies and networks across the globe, such as the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE), United Kingdom, Nigeria Society for Higher Education Research and Development (NSHERD), Higher Education Research Association (HERA), Malaysian Society for Higher Education Policy and Research Development (PenDaPat), Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM), and the

Academy of Management Nigeria (AMN). Giving back to the community by promoting higher education research in Nigeria and national development, he founded the Nigerian Society for Higher Education Research and Development (NSHERD), – the first platform of its kind bringing various scholars of interest for researching higher education in Nigeria. Similarly, recognising his contribution earned him to be appointed as Chairman Visitation Panel, Kaduna State University (KASU) for the period of 2016–2020 which he completed with thoroughness and diligence.

**Yuhang Rong** serves as the Associate Vice President for Global Affairs and Associate Professor in Residence of Educational Leadership at the University of Connecticut (UConn). He represents UConn as its Senior Leader at the global research university consortium, Universitas 21. He oversees the State of Connecticut partnership with the German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. Concurrently, he is the Vice Chair of the Board of Directors at the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) in Washington, DC; and he is a member of the Advisory Board for the Queen Rania Teacher Academy in Jordan. Yuhang earned his BA in English from East China Normal University (华东师范大学), MA in Education Administration from West Virginia University, and PhD in Professional Higher Education Administration from the University of Connecticut.

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**Dr Jasvir Kaur Nachatar Singh** is an award-winning Senior Lecturer at the Department of Management, Sport and Tourism, La Trobe Business School, La Trobe University, Australia. In 2020, Dr Singh received an international teaching recognition from Advance HE, UK, as a Fellow (FHEA). In 2018, Dr Singh received two La Trobe University Teaching Awards and Best Presenter Award at the Global Higher Education Forum, Malaysia. Dr Singh's research expertise is in higher education discipline with a particular interest exploring international students' current issues such as their academic success, lived experiences, employability, career aspirations as well as learning experiences in a blended learning environment. In addition, Dr Singh also explores lived experiences of international academics and recent work is on international academics with leadership positions. Dr Singh has published several articles in high-impact journals and has presented at numerous national and international higher education conferences in Malaysia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Thailand, Hawaii, Japan and Australia. In 2020, Dr Singh was appointed as the Associate Editor for *Higher Education Research & Development* journal. In 2018, Dr Singh was appointed as a Research Fellow at the Malaysian National Higher Education Research Institute.

**Dr Ashleigh-Jane Thompson** is a Senior Lecturer and Program Director in the La Trobe Business School, where she is involved with the sport management programme. Throughout her academic career, she has developed and taught a variety of Undergraduate and Masters coursework subjects and has supervised several Masters and PhD students. She is an award-winning researcher whose primary research activities are in

the fields of sport communication, sport marketing, fan engagement and sport innovation. Her research has a theoretical and practical impact both nationally and internationally. She is an active researcher within La Trobe's Centre for Sport and Social Impact and collaborates with other researchers within Australia and internationally. Ashleigh-Jane is also currently the Vice-President of the Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand (SMAANZ). In addition to her scholarly pursuits, she maintains active connections with the sport industry by partnering with sport organisations for research projects, as well as working in media operations at national and international sporting events and serving as a Director on various sport organisation boards. She also regularly engages with the media as an outlet to translate her research and encourage public dialogue and debate.

# PREFACE

The COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing challenges continue to change academia as we know it. As time passes by, we have discovered that, in the end, what changes take place, when and why depend on the conscious decisions we make as staff members in each of our roles – from our particular vantage point in teaching and learning, research and service – and, most importantly, on our ability to distinguish what is urgent (survival) from our longer time horizons (growing and thriving, as we hope).

This new precarious environment has also brought to the fore academia's most troubling assumptions, some of which were already being defied by a growing consciousness about global and systemic inequalities, and a recognised need to re-orient our livelihoods as a consequence of environmental degradation and climate change. As much as we pride ourselves of being in 'the ivory tower' watching the world at distance and commenting/engaging with it as needed, we are inextricably embedded in that same world. We are affected by it, one way or the other, and our passivity legitimises what is noble and troubling about it. We are called, then, to participate in our own ways in the calls for action, conversations, decisions and new paths ahead that could result from positioning ourselves as agents of change.

I reflect on these overall trends as I read this book and consider the individual experiences that lie at the heart of the editor and authors' work. I am an international academic myself – someone born in another country, who grew up and was educated in another socio-cultural milieu, who navigated unfamiliar and uncertain pathways to study and work overseas, and who serendipitously arrived at the same maze of corridors of La Trobe's beautiful Bundoora Campus in Melbourne. There, I met Dr Jasvir Singh, my colleague and the editor of this volume, alongside other colleagues who had also 'come from away' and hailed from a wide range of backgrounds. Despite the wide diversity of life and professional experiences we embodied and carried, we all acknowledge many things in common with one another as 'international academics'.

Here we are, living and working in a system conditioned, pushed or pulled by 'a variety of structural factors', which means constantly living on the edge in practice – first as students, then as academics; constantly assessing our strengths and limitations, yearning for a sense of stability. Hoping for (and living) career dreams in our respective disciplines and programmes, whilst putting between brackets (and addressing) all sorts of financial and logistical problems and major pending questions – including whether we belong, or not, whether we speak the language, or not, whether we 'mask' successfully in a cultural environment different than ours, or not, whether we are able to survive (or let alone thrive), or not. And so forth. Day by day, often for years, encouraged to think about ourselves as being privy to the wealth of opportunities of global academia, a world where any of those troubling dilemmas often go unrecognised – and hence unaddressed – by institutions and the academic community in a broader sense.

Yet, at the same time that those problems are real and require attention, it behoves us to consider, highlight and celebrate the courage and effort of many international colleagues who – despite being caught in a maze of uncertainty and precarity – are also able to make the most of the opportunities at hand. Thus, the task of evaluation, recognition and critical analysis of the international academic should not only limit itself to denouncing problems but also to recognising accomplishments – as Jasvir Singh correctly points out in the introduction to this volume. That is, approaching the experiences of international academics with nuance and empathy, open to listening without reservations, connecting with what identifies all of us in this ever-changing environment. There is much to learn from the daily experiences of international academics who, like all of us, carry on their lives in an increasingly competitive and precarious academic environment. This was already the case before the pandemic, and it is even more the case nowadays.

As international academics face new barriers and difficulties in this new era – including even more uncertain job prospects, logistic difficulties, forced distancing from colleagues abroad and, more importantly, loved ones, among other challenges – it will be more important than ever to recognise their difficulties, but also their roles and unique contributions to the academic world and our respective institutions. This book is a major step in this direction. It is a must-read book for current and/or future international academics – whether thinking of short- or long-term mobility in academia. My most sincere congratulations to the editor and contributors around the world to this volume. This is one of the strengths of the book, as it draws on varied experiences and voices of international academics, globally. I look forward to the many stimulating conversations it will elicit and,

hopefully, the decisions and policies that it will help inspire in the future.

**Raúl Sánchez Urribarrí** is a Senior Lecturer in Crime, Justice and Legal Studies at the Department of Social Inquiry, La Trobe University. He has served as Coordinator of Short-Term International Mobility at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of South Carolina, an LLM from Cambridge University and a Law Degree from Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (Venezuela). His research focuses on democracy and the rule of law, and it has been published in a variety of outlets, including *The Journal of Politics, Law & Social Inquiry*, the *Annual Review of Law and Social Sciences* and *International Political Science Review*. He is a Non-Resident Research Fellow at Tulane University's Center for Inter-American Policy and Research, and a Co-Editor at *Thesis Eleven journal*. Currently, he serves as Chair of the Section on Venezuelan Studies (SVS) of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA).

# INTRODUCTION

## BEHIND THE SCENES...

This book was initiated during one of the lockdowns in Melbourne in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I emailed Dr Marian Mahat (the series editor of the *Surviving and Thriving in Academia* book series) after reading her edited book titled ‘Achieving Academic Promotion’ to just let her know that her chapter on promotion has helped me to gain confidence to apply for promotion as an international early career researcher. We then had an informal conversation over Zoom, where I was tossing an idea to her on writing on international academic experiences. She then said ‘Why don’t you take the lead?’. I still remember the conversation till today as I was caught by surprise – me as a junior researcher and that too an international academic who is trying to thrive in uncharted territory? I remember saying ‘Me? You sure? I have not done this before’. Marian encouraged me and shared her wisdom with me on the process. I am forever grateful to her for this opportunity as I obtained knowledge on how the process works – to be an editor of a book (previously I was a chapter contributor only), fortunate to know other

international scholars from around the world and rekindled with my colleagues, friends and acquaintances to invite them to contribute to this book.

Actually, it was my dream to write on how international academics turn their issues into opportunities and adopt practical strategies that lead to successes within the Academy. Now that my dream is fulfilled, I do hope that this book will provide hope, inspiration and guidance to other aspiring international academics out there.

### SETTING THE SCENE...

This book means a lot to me as an international academic myself, born and educated (up to undergraduate level) in Malaysia, I was intrigued to explore experiences of other international academics through a storytelling approach, with a practical lens. I completed my postgraduate degrees in Australia as an international student, and upon my PhD graduation I was employed on contract as an international academic in an Associate Lecturer position at my current institution.

Based on my experience, I noticed that international academics do not share with other colleagues (domestic or other international academics) about a number of things: (1) challenges they face or (2) opportunities they receive or even (3) strategies that they have adopted in their teaching and research endeavours as well as (4) celebrating their success or learning from their failures in the host higher learning institutions.

Hence, I wanted this book to offer an enhanced understanding of international academics' experiences, offering practical strategies and personal experiences, and using the BOSS (barriers, opportunities, strategies, successes) framework. I did not want to focus just on international academics' barriers and issues but most importantly I also wanted to highlight how

they overturn their issues into opportunities and adopted successful strategies to gain varied success in the Academy. This framework is further explored in subsequent sections. I personally want to learn the trick and trades adopted by international academics globally, through a practical lens. This book is not based on theoretical or empirical research instead it is a sharing of the colourful journeys of international academics around the world through practical reflections. The chapters offer practical, hands-on individual stories of international academics that focus on the intersectionality of their experiences.

#### WHO ARE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMICS?

In the pursuit of internationalisation, progressively more higher education institutions are competing with one another to attract international academic staff members for a variety of reasons. Higher education institutions are keen to attract and host international academics, in order to propel their institutions in ranking systems, important for attracting international students and funding, as well as to fill gaps in staffing due to insufficient organic growth of research and teaching staff members (Burford, Koompraphant, & Jirathanapiwat, 2018; Gao & Liu, 2020; Larbi & Ashraf, 2020). Herschberg, Benschop, and van den Brink (2018) further argue that as a result of recruiting international academics, it ‘will enhance quality related to research, education and service, which in turn, will lead to an enhanced international reputation’ (p. 812) for the host institution. In addition, according to Kim, Wolf-Wendel, and Twombly (2011) international academics also ‘bring with them a diversity of

perspectives and worldviews that potentially enrich the university in the global context' (p. 722).

There are varied definitions of international academics. Scholars such as [Kim et al. \(2011\)](#) argue that prior research studies have skewedly defined international academics principally on their citizenship and birthplace excluding their immigration status, thus under-reporting the number of international academics. Therefore, [Kim et al. \(2011\)](#) define international academics as those who are foreign-born and gained undergraduate degrees in their home country as they 'may have very different cultural, social, and educational experiences that affect their academic life' (p. 723) while being employed in the host country higher learning institutions. [Walker \(2015\)](#) has another perspective of who international academics are. [Walker \(2015\)](#) argued that international academics are individuals who are born overseas, 'educated and enculturated in one system of education and currently teaching and researching in another' ([Walker, 2015](#), p. 61). This definition is multidimensional as [Walker \(2015\)](#) does not specify if international academics gained their education either in their home or host or even third country.

For the purpose of this book, 'international academic' is defined as a foreign-born national employed at a host higher learning institution as a short-term or long-term teaching and/or research staff member. Short-term mobility can be referred as visiting lecturer or researcher at the host higher learning institution for a short period of time (i.e. less than a year). For long-term mobility, an international academic is employed on teaching and research positions or research or teaching only positions for an extended period of time. In this instance, an international academic can also be a permanent residence or citizen of the host country.

## CURRENT SCENE ON INTERNATIONAL ACADEMICS

As already noted, international academics bring ‘a rich source of cultural, pedagogic and academic experience’ (Minocha, Shiel, & Hristov, 2019, p. 943) to the host higher learning institutions due to their international backgrounds and vast experiences. The current literature on international academics demonstrates a number of unique strengths they offer to their host institutions. International academics leverage their international pedagogic practices, which can offer innovative solutions, such as introducing ‘problem-based teaching and project-based learning, using rich media in the classroom and embedding international case studies’ (Minocha et al., 2019, p. 952). In addition, international academics are often actively involved in the curriculum content development in their host institutions (Minocha et al., 2019). International academics have also contributed in the research space. For instance, international academics in Jepsen et al.’s (2014) study reported that they have established key international research collaborations and publications as well as being part of valuable research networks by working in an international setting. With achievements in teaching and research space, host higher education institutions have also benefitted from the cultural diversity of international academic staff members in enhancing quality of learning and research in universities (Green & Myatt, 2011).

Despite international academics’ increasing presence and benefits they bring to host institutions, scholarly attention to international academics has been limited towards understanding international academics’ personal and professional challenges, and it is usually reported as a one-dimensional or uniform experience (Sehoole, Adeyemo, Phatlane, & Ojo, 2019). Personal challenges include lack of communication with other colleagues due to language

obstacles (Jiang et al., 2010; Wilkins & Neri, 2019), financial hardship due to relocation costs (Collins, 2008), adjustments to host-country ways of living and culture (Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010; Wilkins & Neri, 2019), as well as issues with work permits (Wilkins & Neri, 2019).

Profound professional challenges include a lack of English proficiency for teaching students (Luxon & Peelo, 2009), differing approaches to teaching practices at their host institutions (Burford et al., 2018; Larbi & Ashraf, 2020; Singh & Chowdhury, 2021), different supervision practices (Jiang et al., 2010) and inadequate understanding of students' expectations and learning behaviours (Singh & Chowdhury, 2021).

Despite these challenges, international academics thrive in the Academy as they are highly educated and experienced individuals who have extraordinary competences, skills and abilities in academia but 'how' they have celebrated their success, overcome their personal and professional challenges as well as seized opportunities in different contexts is yet to be shared through their reflective experiences.

#### FUTURE SCENE USING BOSS FRAMEWORK...

Although empirical-based studies have provided valuable insights into the personal and professional challenges faced by international academics, they often neglect the ways in which international academics have adopted strategies and created opportunities in being competent teachers and researchers as well as benefitting other colleagues and students at their host university. Therefore, the BOSS framework is adopted in this book to explore the differing lenses and perspectives of international academics as early career researchers, leaders,

mentors, LGBTIQ community advocates, family caregivers and short-term international academics. Their lived experiences are able to guide other international academics who are in similar situations or aspire to be an international academic in the future.

Key insights offered by the international academics in this book using the BOSS framework are as follows:

Ashleigh-Jane Thompson from New Zealand, currently a senior lecturer in one of the universities in Melbourne, Australia, wrote Chapter 1 highlighting her formal and informal leadership experiences as an early career international academic. How she obtained leadership positions in Australia as a woman in a male-dominated field is fascinating. You have to read the chapter to find out more!

Chapter 2 is written by Rui Hang, an Associate Vice President for Global Affairs at an American university. Through a philosophical lens, he explains how he transitioned from a 'plain' academic staff member from China to holding several senior leadership positions in the United States. You have to read his chapter on how he 'climbed' the leadership position and the professional and personal challenges that came with it.

A fascinating Chapter 3 by Vijay Kumar, from Malaysia and now attached to University of Otago, New Zealand (one of the most beautiful campuses in the world – I have been there myself – fantastic view) as an Associate Professor. He presents his insights on how he transitioned from being an academic in a Malaysian university to New Zealand. Vast difference, according to him. So, if you want to know more on his challenges, strategies he adopted and success stories, please do read his chapter.

Jinan Issa wrote her confronting experiences as an international scholar and a researcher in some of the MENA countries, Malaysia and Canada (Global North and South

institutions) for over 14 years in Chapter 4. She has vast scholarly experience moving from country-to-country over 14 years. I would encourage you to read her chapter to gain more insight on how to be a mobile academic and highlights her recent move to Canada.

Chapter 5 offers a unique perspective from Muhammad Muftahu. Muhammad is from Nigeria and currently attached to a research institute in a Malaysian university. He mainly captures his experience as an international researcher by relating a few personal and professional issues that he encountered and proposes practical suggestions to overcome these challenges. If you are thinking of moving countries on an international researcher basis, I would read this chapter. Even for those seeking teaching and research positions, his experiences can be useful to advance your research career.

A profound international academic from India wrote about her international experiences working in Thailand, Malaysia and now currently based in China in Chapter 6. Amrita Kaur provides meaningful strategies on overcoming challenges as an international academic. If you want to know more about her academic opportunities as well as successes internationally, please do read her chapter.

It is tough to be an international academic more so an early career academic. So, in Chapter 7, Jasvir Kaur Nachatar Singh, from Malaysia, provides raw accounts on challenges she faced, how she created her own opportunities, adopted success strategies and how success came her way in Australia. Do not skip this chapter as you might find it useful to navigate your career path in academia using Jasvir's self-created opportunities.

Chapter 8 is written by Shannon Mason and Yusuke Sakurai from Japan. Shannon is from Australia and Yasuke is from Japan. An interesting account on how Shannon as an Australian navigates her career path in Japan and how