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## **Shouldn't Their Stories Be Told In Their Voices: International Students' Experiences of Adjustment Following Arrival to the U.S.**

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Elizabeth Kelley Thompson entitled "Shouldn't Their Stories Be Told In Their Voices: International Students' Experiences of Adjustment Following Arrival to the U.S.," I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Educational Psychology and Research.

Barbara J. Thayer-Bacon, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Diana Moyer, Scott Ellison

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**Shouldn't Their Stories Be Told in Their Voices:  
International Students' Experiences of Adjustment  
Following Arrival to the U.S.**

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Science  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Elizabeth Kelley Thompson  
May 2013

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to the participants involved. Thank you all so much for sharing your thoughts, ideas, experiences, and perspectives with me. You gave me the opportunity to understand better the challenges, difficulties, and freedoms you encountered after coming to the U.S. You also provided in-depth details about your personal struggles and triumphs while acclimating to the American way of life. I couldn't have done this study without you nor would it have been as meaningful or beneficial for future international students. I value our friendships and hope to be part of your lives for many years to come. All the best to you in your future endeavors.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, Dr. and Mrs. William A. Thompson whose unconditional support and unwavering belief in me made this possible.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the experienced adjustment period for international students following their arrival to the U.S. and whether or not any expressed challenges could be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture. This study investigated the experiences of international students' adjustment strategies as told in their voices and perspectives. Included is an in-depth discussion focusing on strategies for overcoming challenges as well as a rich description of cultural intolerances that contribute to the stresses experienced by international students. A strategy of care and inclusion was employed making it possible for international students to tell their stories from their perspective.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND POSITIONALITY

Much research is available related to cross-cultural acclimation and management strategies for American students studying abroad (Byrnes, 2005; Crabtree, 2008; Friedman, n.d.; Gochenour, 1993; Lewin, 2009; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2002; Wilkinson, 2008). Conversely, while the field of research has expanded in recent years, international students coming to the U.S. that have experienced these same periods and processes of adjustment have largely been underrepresented or ignored in studies related to the challenges faced when acclimating or adjusting to a new culture.

A majority of literature that is available speaks to international students as being mere commodities, recruited for the sole purpose of economic benefit (Rhee and Sagaria, 2004, Lee & Rice, 2007). However, international students make many valuable contributions to our educational institutions (Andrade, 2006). There is little awareness or interest about the challenges these students face while adjusting to the U.S. both of which are imperative for developing suitable support strategies. Moreover, in many studies that have been conducted, strategies employed by U.S. institutions of higher learning to assist international students with processes of adjustment have often been developed and implemented from western, Eurocentric ways of thinking (Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002). Such studies

suggest that international students are solely responsible for overcoming difficulties and quickly acclimating to American culture. Accurate information based on the real lived experiences of international students as told from their perspective is necessary to produce services and programs that better serve international students in their transitional process. Shouldn't their stories be told in their voices?

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First and foremost my intent is to gain a better understanding of the experienced adjustment period for international students following their arrival to the U.S. as told from their perspective. Second, if participants express that challenges occurred during their adjustment period in the U.S., my intent is to determine if the challenges can be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture. For the purposes of this study, an international student is understood as being of non-American nationality that has relocated to America for the purpose of studying at an educational institution of higher learning.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the adjustment processes of international students, I plan to use a collective case study approach based on interpretive analysis. This method will allow me to interpret situations as perceived and expressed by the research participants in conjunction with my own experiences through interviews. Through interviews, "researchers use interviews

to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds” (Hatch, 2002, p. 91).

During interviews, I will ask questions related to the experiences and perceptions of international students as they progressed through the adjustment period following arrival to the U.S. The guiding questions of this study are: (1) what preconceived ideas and expectations did research participants hold prior to their arrival in the U.S.? (2) What are the most common challenges experienced by research participants as part of their adjustment periods? More specifically, (3) what academic, psychological, and social needs did research participants perceive as being the most significant in their experiences? (4) Can any expressed challenges be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture? (5) What are possible individual strategies for easing transition periods in cross-cultural settings? (6) What are possible institutional strategies for assisting international students with adjustment? Finally, (7) what suggestions or advice are offered by research participants to future international students preparing to come to the U.S. for the first time?

Because international student voices have largely been ignored, I employ a strategy of care (Thayer-Bacon, 2000) and inclusion (Greene, 1993) to tell their stories from their perspective. Because international students at U.S. institutions of higher learning have primarily been understood and assisted through systems based on western ways of thinking, I explain that ways of thinking are cultural in

nature and we as educators often fail to recognize the complexities that accompany their transitional processes. Because international students have often been exploited as capital, I discuss ways in which international students are beneficial to institutions of higher learning that have no financial implications.

It is intended that this thesis will appeal to members of the international student communities who may benefit from gaining insight into experiences of fellow international students and the strategies employed for easing transition. Additionally, staff and administrators in student services sectors, and faculty who teach, mentor, and potentially employ international students at U.S. institutions of higher learning may benefit by gaining awareness of successful strategies for assisting international students with their transitional process. It is my hope that this study will contribute to educational and administrative policies related to international students.

## **POSITIONALITY**

Serving as a facilitator of cross-cultural study for U.S. undergraduate students over the last eight years, I have had the wonderful opportunity to experience numerous cultures around the world (i.e. Jewish, various Caribbean, various European, Indian, Arab, etc.). As a result, there has been a gained appreciation for deep cultural perspectives that differ from my own. The familial structures of the Cherokee (one group of America's First Nation's people) are based on matriarchal order: in centuries past, the beloved woman decided when the tribe went to war; men, when marrying, would and still do leave their own clan

and join that of his wife (S. Ledford, tribal ambassador, personal communication, June 30, 2007). The notion of modesty for Egyptian women: this leads to the wearing of a hijab, full veil, and/or burka are clothing norms that preserve beauty and honor from unwanted or inappropriate gazes but underneath women dress in high-fashion heels, skintight jeans, and form fitting dresses (Egyptian tour guide, personal communication, December 29, 2008). As a blond-haired, blue-eyed American woman traveling throughout Egypt, I was instructed that for my own safety and sense of decency I should keep my hair covered and avoid looking directly into the eyes of men so as not to emit suggestive, sexual signals. I also experienced the celebration of religious traditions and festivals by Trinidadians: Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity are the three major religions on the isle of Trinidad. Christians and Muslims light diyas in recognition of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights celebrated in recognition of one's inner light which brings ultimate joy and peace. During the Christmas season, Hindu homes have prayer flags in the front yard right next to an inflatable Santa Claus. Various faiths are accepted and observers of each tradition live harmoniously side-by-side (S. Francis, Trinidadian national, personal communication, December 16, 2006).

Although the Cultural Studies program in which I am currently enrolled is not solely considered to be the study of culture, the overall application of cultural studies parallels my personal and professional choice to challenge others, particularly students in higher education, to become educated, active participants and thoughtful contributors in the global community. The primary reason I chose

the Cultural Studies program was to further my opportunities for influencing educational policies within the student services sectors, specifically righting injustices that may be cultural in nature (i.e. related to attributes such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). I take seriously the struggles and progresses thereafter that result from cultural and social bias.

The “roots [of cultural studies] can be traced to individuals...concerned with adult literacy, poverty, and social change through education” (Casella, 1999, p. 108). This focus on education as a means for social activism still applies for those of us in cultural studies today. I hold an optimistic view toward human nature and believe that education enables people to change the world. Not only have I advocated for social change through education, I have witnessed this change first-hand through the facilitation of thousands of students experiencing differing cultures while studying abroad. As the director of a nationally acclaimed cross-cultural study program, my experiences have been concerned with breaking down barriers, dispelling stereotypes, and facilitating the recognition of injustices not only on a local scale but globally as well. Ideally, every cross-cultural encounter will cause and effect personal reflection of cultural conditions that students encounter. This travel not only represents physical movement from place to place but also, “Thinking one’s way from one position to another” (Wallace, as cited in Casella, 1999, p. 19).

I believe that immersion into various cultural settings impacts students’ lives in such a way that challenges them to question their place, their position,

and their privilege in the world and what responsibility they have to that world. Such an immersion for an American student of privilege should lead to a recognition:

- that their first ethical responsibility is to understand there is a reciprocity of learning between themselves and those with whom they interact, work, or live while having the cross-cultural experience;
- that the ways in which they see, hear, speak, and interpret their everyday lived experiences may be resulting in racism, oppression, stereotyping, discrimination or other intolerances that are cultural in nature;
- that their reality should move beyond a perspective of might and privilege to one that employs a widened lens intent upon changing the status quo.

Handel Wright (Notes on Cultural Studies, n.d.) explained that recognizing your reality is partial – there are other ways of knowing, being, and thinking. It is necessary for students to be aware of the impossibility of objectivity while in cultural settings different from their own. Throughout these experiences students bring with them perspectives tied to their race, class, gender, and positions of privilege. However, “We always profit...from a confrontation with another....Consciousness itself is spurred by difference, in that we gain our first awareness of who we are when we learn that we exist independent of another or another’s ways” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p.34).

Such learning in context can promote appreciation for differing values and belief systems, advance language acquisition, mature intellectual and emotional abilities, and force in-depth reflexivity of cultural others that leads to the moving away from a “charity orientation toward more of a social justice orientation” (Crabtree, 2008, p. 1) based on action concerned with transforming social identities. The more exposed and personal these encounters are for my students, the less likely it will be for them to “other.” Maxine Greene (1993) speaks to this in “The Passions of Pluralism,” “The more continuous and authentic personal encounters can be, the less likely will it be for categorizing and distancing to take place. People are less likely to be treated instrumentally, to be made ‘other’ by those around” (p. 1).

Conversely, to some the studying of their culture could be considered intrusive as if we as Americans are automatically attaching a stigma of oppression – as if somehow members of a different culture are automatically lower in status. Going into a setting with good intentions, to change a way of life to mirror the American ideal, to introduce our God as a means of rescue, or to give gifts and money often harm rather than help those with whom we advantageously choose to save. I agree with Greene’s (1993) and Freire’s (1987) concept of being absolutized, when one is unaware or unconcerned with the diversity surrounding her/him, s/he will find it difficult to appreciate and understand new and different things. We as educators need to seek

opportunities for openness to diversity and for an intentional avoidance of 'fixities' to prevent further oppression and damage.

As an educator and facilitator of cross-cultural study, I have an ethical responsibility to teach students to be aware of their privilege and to be conscious of others' lives, not as being lesser but being different. Here different (rather than 'other') does not attach to its meaning deficient, inferior, abnormal, unacceptable, substandard or invalid. I am aware that studying abroad for a person coming from a position of privilege means something very different than for a person coming to the U.S. for education or employment opportunities. Peggy McIntosh (2003) elucidates the power of white privilege is "like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks" (p.1). A recent trip to Cairo, Egypt is a prime example of this nationality advantage. My position of privilege granted unwarranted ease and access. Upon arrival at the airport, I was ushered into the visa processing line without question or delay, had my luggage carried without request, was greeted with a meal from the local KFC, and assigned an armed "tourist" body guard.

The economic and political influence of the U.S. around the world automatically attaches to its citizens a position of power and privilege. Being middle class in the U.S. means wealth beyond imagination to 90% of the world's population. While abroad, I have been embarrassed at times at my inability to speak fluently the language of a host culture, however, the fact that I do speak

the world's dominant language (not in terms of number of speakers but rather that of colonization, oppression, marginalization, and power) gives me advantage. Further, I have often heard American music, have been able to watch American television shows and movies on the big screen, have had access to American news media, and have encountered speakers and symbols of the English language. For many coming to the U.S. for the first time, language barriers, racial stereotypes, feelings of transience and displacement, little to no representation of the home culture, and lack of access to resources means something very different.

Not only do I enjoy learning about ways of knowing and thinking that differ from my own, I have an interest in providing a forum through which students from different backgrounds can tell their stories, their lived experiences. Silencing any voice damages both the individual and the community as a whole. During the many times I have traveled and studied abroad, I have experienced (and witnessed my students experiencing) various difficulties adjusting to a new culture. In turn, I want to gain a better understanding of the processes of acclimation and adjustment through which international students progress following their arrival to the U.S.

### **INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BEING UNDERREPRESENTED OR IGNORED IN RESEARCH**

Dillard (2000) and Stanfield (1995) explain that due to researcher positionality, people of color historically have been misrepresented and even exploited in research. Much of the available research related to cross-cultural

adjustment pertains primarily to American students studying abroad (Byrnes, 2005; Crabtree, 2008; Friedman, n.d.; Gochenour, 1993; Lewin, 2009; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2002; Wilkinson, 2008). Topics such as study abroad and national identity, impact of study abroad on academic and professional marketability, second language acquisition, and expanding attitudes toward other cultures are numerous. Interestingly, literature related to international students coming to the U.S. pertains primarily to their economic contribution, to the impact of nationality on learning styles, and to competitive strategies for keeping the U.S. as the top destination (Altbach, 2004; Charlesworth, 2008; Vickers & Bekhradnia, 2007). Could it be that race, culture and nationality are unimportant in the higher learning environment because the majority of students, faculty, administrators, and their family members are of the dominant social structure?

### **ASSISTANCE THROUGH WESTERN EYES**

If one's language is truly bound by cultural relevance, how can international students whose first language is not English tell their stories in English? While research shows that immersing oneself into a setting where a different language is spoken improves and accelerates the adjustment process (Birdsong, 1999; Krashen, 1982; Swain, 1993), this research is written in English and analyzed from a Euro-western lens. Can the analysis be accurate when applied to different cultures and languages? Thayer-Bacon (2000) refers to Maria Lugones, an Argentinean philosopher who reminds us that "she has to talk

in our language (English), and that White theories and language are inadequate in expressing” her real lived experiences (Lugones, as cited in Thayer-Bacon, p. 121). What about those whose voices don’t speak English considered?

The way we think is strictly tied to our culture. The roots of western thinking Thayer-Bacon (2000) says “separates mind from body and ideas from experience” (p. 35). There is a “superiority of reason (the mind) over tools associated with the body (feelings, intuition, and imagination)” (p. 35). This tendency discounts some key areas of cultural difference as they pertain to the ways in which knowledge and experience are constructed. Moreover, how we communicate differs. Cultural influences often determine the way in which we give and receive information (i.e. direct or indirect, procedural or personal, etc.) (Zieghan, 2001). Are these variances considered when developing strategies for assisting international students with adjustment?

One particularly relevant study conducted by Helen Fox (1994) found that the reason educators perceive international students as being incapable of analyzing and logically developing written arguments is due to differences in communication styles. She established that students’ writing styles are “inextricably bound by their cultures, ways of seeing the world, and identities” (Andrade, 2006). Euro-western ideas about academic performance are not universal. While this is just one example of differing cultures’ communication styles, we as educators need to gain a more in-depth understanding of the numerous ways international students express themselves.

Through this study I hope to gain insight into the experienced adjustment period for international students following their arrival to the U.S. as told from their perspective. If challenges are expressed, I seek to find out if the challenges can be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture. I also hope to determine more culturally relevant, suitable ways in which we as educators can assist international students.

In the following chapter I discuss the beneficial contributions of international students that go beyond simply assessing their value as solely economic. I also share results from studies that relate to academic, social, and cross-cultural adjustment processes of international students and that indicate various cultural intolerances toward international students by members of the host culture. Finally, I explain the way that we think is cultural in nature and must be taken into consideration when developing strategies for assisting international students. In chapter three, I provide a detailed explanation of the participant sample, case selection, and methodology used for this study. Because much related research excludes the voices and perspectives of international students, I share their lived experiences as told from their perspectives. The study concludes in chapter five with a summary of the research findings, recommendations for easing periods of adjustment at both the individual and institutional levels, and suggestions for future study.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Academic Need – Challenges or concerns as expressed by participants in this study that relate to academic skills such as listening ability, lecture and reading comprehension, note taking, vocabulary, grammar, and essay writing, academic rigor, different instructional methods, social dynamics with instructors, and interactions with classmates.

Adaptation – Cultural relativism tendency toward difference in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture. The worldview is expanded to include constructs from different worldviews. There is an ability to view the world through a different lens and change behavior to communicate more effectively in a different culture (Bennett & Hammer, 1998).

Alienation – A withdrawing or separation of a person, a cutting-off. The absence of or the failure to find adequate or convincing norms for social relationships and self-fulfillment (Williams, 1983).

Culture – A group of people who possess and share deep-rooted connections such as identity attributes, values, beliefs, languages, customs, and norms (Milner, 2007). Included here are specific constructs such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc. A living process that shapes the way we live, view ourselves, and make sense of the world around us (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 86).

Defense – Cultural relativism tendency toward difference in which one's own culture is experienced as the only good one. The world is organized into "us" and "them" where "we" are superior and "they" are inferior. Cultural difference is threatening (Bennett & Hammer, 1998).

Denial – Ethnocentric tendency in which one's own culture is experienced as the only real one. Differing cultures are avoided by maintaining psychological and/or physical isolation. There is a propensity to be disinterested in cultural difference (Bennett & Hammer, 1998).

Ethnicity - A cultural term for boundary formation between groups of people who share values, norms, symbols, and similar ways of organizing daily life. Term closely connected to the concept of race (Barker, 2004).

Ethnocentric – One's own culture is experienced as the only reality (Bennett & Hammer, 1998).

Ethnorelative – One's own culture is experienced in the context of different cultures (Bennett & Hammer, 1998).

Home – The cultural, social, and political boundaries that demarcate varying spaces of comfort, suffering, abuse, and security that define an individual's or group's location or positionality (Giroux, 1992, p.15).

International Student – A student of non-American nationality that has relocated to America for the purpose of studying at an educational institution of higher learning.

Marginalization – Relegation to an unimportant or powerless position in a community, culture, or group. Marginalized people are those who possess so little power they cannot escape the “underclass” and are typically capable individuals denied of any useful social and economic participation (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

Minimization – Ethnocentric tendency in which elements of one’s own cultural worldview are experienced as universal. Different cultures may be trivialized or romanticized (Bennett & Hammer, 1998).

Norm – A pattern or trait understood to be typical, appropriate, and acceptable in the behavior of a social or culture group (Ferraro & Andreatta, 2011).

Oppression –The exercising of authority or power over a subjugated “other” (Barker, 2004).

Positionality – Indicating that knowledge and voice are always present. The concept of positionality refers us to the who, where, when and why of speaking, judgment and comprehension (Barker, 2004).

Power – A force by which individuals or groups are able to achieve their aims or interests especially against the will of others. Power here is constraining (power over) or however, as Foucault stressed, power is also productive and enabling (power to) (Barker, 2004).

Privilege – An advantage, immunity, permission, right, or benefit prescribed to an individual, group, race, etc., that is ascribed to a status or rank and is exercised over others (McIntosh, 1988).

Psychological need –Challenges or concerns as expressed by the participants of this study that relate to mental and emotional states such as stress, depression, homesickness, irritability, isolation, etc.

Race – A category of people based on supposed biological characteristics, including skin pigmentation, eye shape and placement, nose size, etc. A 'racialized group' would be one identified and subordinated on the grounds of race as a discursive construct (Barker, 2004).

Social need – Challenges or concerns as expressed by the participants in this study that relate to social skills such as societal norms, social dynamics, and interactions with persons on campus and within the community.

Stereotype – A commonly held mental image based on behavior or appearance that reduces a person or people group to an oversimplified opinion, a prejudiced attitude, or an unfairly critical judgment. A form of representation that categorizes others through the operation of power (Barker, 2004).

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the experienced adjustment period for international students following their arrival to the U.S. as told from their perspective. If challenges are expressed, my intent is to determine if the challenges can be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture. In this chapter I outline for the reader (1) a history of international students in the U.S., (2) the tendency of American institutions of higher learning to view international students solely as commodities, (3) social and educational contributions of international students, (4) various adjustment experiences of international students following their arrival to the U.S., and (5) examples of cultural intolerance and positionality by members of the host culture toward international students. I close with a brief synopsis of ways in which cultures differ.

#### **HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S.**

The history of international students studying in the U.S. can be traced to admissions rosters of antebellum colleges in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries. In this study, an international student is understood as being of non-American nationality that has relocated to America for the purpose of studying at an institution of higher learning. Bevis and Lucas (2007) state that the progressive movement of the early twentieth century contributed to American

colleges and universities gaining in prestige. “The new social emphasis was on service, technology, and practical learning. As this perspective moved to the forefront of American awareness, it encouraged the development of a vast array of technical advances in business and industry” (Bevis and Lucas, 2007, p. 59). Even with the rise of educational status and technological advances, numerous obstacles remained that deterred international students from coming to study in the U.S.: the continuance of European university reputations for academic excellence, variations in curricula among nations, difficult social and cultural adjustments, language barriers, etc. Thus, enrollments remained modest. America’s tendency toward isolationism also continued to inhibit the interest of international students:

In one typical survey conducted in 1910, a large percentage of the schools queried expressed no more than mild interest in accepting students from abroad. For many educators, un-attuned as they were to the idea of global education exchange, encouraging the enrollment of foreign students was an unfamiliar, even uncomfortable prospect (Bevis & Lucas, 2007, p.60).

Despite these barriers, enrollments of international students did grow in the first half of the twentieth century rising from approximately 3500 in 1904 to nearly 30,000 by the year 1950 (Bevis & Lucas, 2007).

With WWII came a dominating involvement by the U.S. in global events (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Once peace was restored in 1945, Americans began to

value institutionalized peace keeping efforts “because much of the rebuilding and recovery of economic stability in Europe depended on aid from the United States” (Bevis & Lucas, 2007, p.103). Moreover, Americans began to recognize the importance of understanding cultural differences and becoming educated on global issues, both essential to defense efforts. It was during this time that the Institute of International Education (IIE), originally founded in 1919, became the premier U.S. institution for advancing international education efforts (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). The IIE had been established after WWI by Nobel Peace Prize winners Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, Elihu Root, former Secretary of State, and Stephen Duggan, Sr., Professor of Political Science at the College of the City of New York who understood that peace could not be achieved without greater cultural understanding and that international educational exchange was the forum through which this could occur (Institute of International Education, n.d.). One notable progression by mid-century was the development of government sponsored funding for international education (Bevis & Lucas, 2007).

In 1947, the IIE was approached by the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to oversee the newly established Fulbright Educational Exchange Program which sponsored international scholar exchanges (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). “By the end of the decade of the 1940s, the Institute of International Education had taken on the Fulbright Program’s exchange duties, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific

and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)” (Bevis and Lucas, 2007, p.111). UNESCO’s first Fellows (international professionals) came to U.S. for study in 1948 and by that time the enrollment of international students began to grow exponentially (Bevis & Lucas, 2007).

In 1952, 30,462 international college students from 126 countries were enrolled in some 1300 American colleges and universities (IIE, 1952). During academic years 1954 through 1999, the total number of international students registered in American colleges and universities increased from over 34,000 to 514,723, up a staggering 1400% (IIE, 2004). Over the next decade, international student enrollments continued to climb. By 2010, IIE statistics indicate a total of 723,277 international students were enrolled representing more than 4% of all college and university-level students. New international students enrolling for the first time at U.S. institutions in the fall of 2011 grew 6.5% over the previous year, from 214,490 to 228,467. The total number of registered international students that same academic year was 764,495 (IIE, 2012).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) international students come to the U.S. to study primarily due to the quality of education offered (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Institutions of higher learning in the U.S. are required to meet rigorous standards set forth by accrediting agencies in order to receive certification from The Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the USDOE (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Moreover, specific industries provide accreditation to university programs in order to ensure that

program graduates are educated consistently with national standards. These standards are highly recognized around the world (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). One participant in this study mentioned that the quality of education was the main reason he decided to come to the U.S. for his graduate degree:

The degree from the United State (sic) is better.... But for me, even if I get admission from [other countries], I think I wouldn't go there. Although admission from here is very complicated and it's very hard. You have to get the GRE. You have to get the TOEFL course..... But that's why I really want to get the admission from here, the United State (sic), the education here is better. The life here is better.

The diversity of institutions and degrees available, world-wide recognition of these degrees, and a wide range of available financial support also top the list of important factors attracting international students to the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

### **INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS COMMODITIES**

Although many efforts of international education in the twentieth century sought to improve cultural understanding, diplomacy, and international exchange (Bevis & Lucas, 2007), America's exploding economy resulted in a perspective that viewed international students as profitable resources (Lee & Rice, 2007; Levin, 2002; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004).

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), international students spend nearly \$23 billion annually on tuition, housing, and other necessary living expenses with 70% of principal funding sources coming from family and home country governments (DOC, as cited in Open Doors, 2012).

Higher education is among the United States' top service sector exports, as international students provide revenue to the U.S. economy and individual host states for living expenses, including room and board, books and supplies, transportation, health insurance, support for accompanying family members, and other miscellaneous items (Open Doors, 2012).

Similar to the DOC and Institute of International Education (IIE), western perspectives of international students as being commodities are common in literature (Burgess, 1997; Kenyon & Koshy, 2003; Vickers & Bekhradnia, 2007; Quazi, 1999). Desruisseaux (1996) speaks to the economic impact of international students being “responsible for 100,000 jobs in the U.S.” (as cited in Rhee & Sagaria, 2004, p. 84). Numerous instances of international students being viewed as capital are quoted in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

International student tuition is an important source of revenue and, in fact, allows institutions to hire more instructors and provide more facilities, which in-state students might not have had otherwise.

This is why so many institutions actively recruit international students. (Quazi, 1999, as cited in Rhee & Sagaria, 2004, p.84).

Most of us know very well and even admit to each other privately that the reason we import so many foreign graduate students is that they are a source of unquestioning, hard-working, intelligent, cheap labor who require little or no advising and who help us further our own careers. (Burgess, 1997, as cited in Rhee & Sagaria, 2004, p.86)

There are also many studies dedicated to finding strategies for institutions of higher learning to recruit international students because of their associated monetary value (Breneman, 2002; Levin, 2005; Zeiss, 2004; Zilwa, 2005). According to their respective websites, American Education Partners, International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF), and the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC) are among many recruitment agencies working to “organize deficiencies in the marketplace” (AIRC, Our Vision, n.d.) and “guarantee exposure to key decision makers in international education markets” (ICEF, Our Solutions, n.d.)

Enrollments of international students are constructed as a statistic of competition against other countries, “as if this ... were an indicator of each nation’s global market share” to be “controlled and secured” (Rhee & Sagaria, 2004, p. 84). Such language is a continuance of the colonial Euro-western “imperialism’s securing distant markets (lands), and the portrayal of colonized

subjects as capital” (Said, 1993, as cited in Rhee & Sagaria, 2004, p. 85). Some studies even argue contention among American taxpayers who oppose the spending of revenues on international students, “many of whom may return home with knowledge that will allow their countries to better compete” with the U.S. (Wilson, as cited in Rhee & Sagaria, 2004, p. 85).

Perceiving international students as commodities, sources of capital, and colonized market shares fails to acknowledge their contributions to international education, research, and progress in the U.S. Sadly, this view may lead to an inordinate amount of focus being placed on the recruitment period and very little concern or consideration being given to international students following their arrival.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

While the impact international students have on the U.S. economy can arguably be a beneficial contribution, there is little said about the educational, cultural, religious, and/or environmental benefits they provide. Peter McLaren articulately addresses reasons for the notable omission of international student contributions in research:

Many western countries deny the influences of their ethnic minority inhabitants, while appropriating and naturalizing their contributions and making them their own. At the same time that the contributions of minority groups are absorbed by the dominant culture, the dominant culture presents itself as a distinctly white social order

into which minority groups are invited to adjust themselves through an assimilation into whiteness. Yet the price of admission into such a society is not only morally repugnant but historically inaccurate, since whites have set themselves up as arbiters of a culture already transformed by the contributions of its oppressed groups. Such contributions are either ignored or assumed to have emerged from the dominant culture (McLaren, as cited in Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. x).

Influences and contributions of international students at the higher education level may include (1) diverse perspectives and voices in the classroom, (2) expanded research approaches, (3) enhancement of departmental and institutional academic reputations, (4) establishment of global educational connections, (5) increased levels of academic performance, and (6) exposure to difference, especially in more homogenous settings (Andrade, 2006). If we value our educational practices in the U.S. and regard them as internationally relevant in terms of quality and universality, then we must also value the contributions of our international students.

Moreover, some International students might remain in the U.S. after completing their studies to become educators themselves granting significant insight into other ways of knowing and being. Mathews (2008) reported that more than half of international students in the U.S. receiving doctoral degrees choose to stay permanently. Those that choose to stay might also fill vital

positions for which they are well experienced and skilled (i.e. technology, environmental conservation, etc.). For example, “Australia is currently benefiting from the skills of foreign students, who have opted to stay in the country and work in the fields of information and communications technology and engineering” (Colebatch, as cited in Andrade, 2006, p. 133).

With regard to foreign policy, international students who study in the U.S. may eventually “take leadership positions [elsewhere] which ultimately may benefit relations between countries” (Lee & Rice, 2007). International students may also add to our awareness of and respect for cultures that differ from our own and then they may return home with awareness of and respect for the U.S.

### **EXPERIENCED ADJUSTMENT PROCESS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FOLLOWING ARRIVAL TO THE U.S.**

Through my own lived experiences I am aware of both positives and negatives that occur when one encounters a new culture for the first time. Thus, I suppose international students might also face considerable challenges while attempting to successfully manage environments completely foreign to their way of life. Zhou, Frey, and Bang (2011) report both transitional concerns (i.e. food, organization of daily life, language barriers, customs and laws, scales and measurements) as well as psychological concerns (i.e. stress, depression, homesickness, irritability) play a role in the international student’s adaptation to the host culture. Not only are these stressors present, but participants in that same study expressed academic concerns (i.e. adjustments to academic rigor, different instructional methods) as well as social concerns (i.e. relational

dynamics with instructors, interactions with colleagues) (Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011).

Andrade (2006) as well as Yeh and Inose (2003) indicate that language difficulties present the most significant academic and social inhibitors to adjustment by international students. Various studies identify English-related skills, such as listening ability, lecture and reading comprehension, note taking, verbal communication, vocabulary, grammar, and essay writing as being problematic academically for international students with limited English proficiency (Andrade, 2006; Lee, 1997; Lewthwaite, 1996; Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000). Studies have also suggested that international students with limited English speaking skills lack confidence when expressing themselves verbally (Andrade, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1996; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000; Tompson & Tompson, 1996) and fear making mistakes which results in less class participation (Jacob & Greggo, 2001).

Zhou, Frey, & Bang (2011) reported that academic adjustment of international students is significantly impacted by interactions with members of the host culture (i.e. faculty, staff, colleagues, etc.) who represented “social support for international students in their transitional time” (p. 82). Their study found that faculty support is key to bridging academic and social adjustment especially where cultural differences exist in terms of lecture methods and communication styles (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Li, 2007; McClure, 2007).

Robertson, Line, Jones, and Thomas (2000) reported that their survey of faculty and staff found they are usually not empathetic when it comes to academic challenges faced by international students. Responses often included criticisms of international students for “not taking responsibility for academic advancement and having little appreciation of critical thinking” (as cited in Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 387). Furthermore, there was little concern for academic challenges that result from homesickness and/or feelings of alienation which is one indication that members of the host culture may not consider cultural differences in their assessment of academic engagement and that they may “wrongly mistake” silence of international students in the classroom as indifference or incompetence (Lee & Rice, 2007).

In addition to academic adjustment, studies show that social adjustment of international students is also significantly impacted by interactions with members of the host culture (Ying & Liese, 1994; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). International students that experienced fewer quality interactions with American peers tended to have slower, more difficult adjustment periods (Li, 2007; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Klineberg and Hull (1979) found that the more in-depth interaction with members of the host culture, the more positive the adjustment process for international students. Though interaction may be discouraged by host nationals, international students still prefer relationships with American peers because this leads to a more rich and quick transition (Hayes & Lin, 1994).

In terms of social adjustment, Spencer-Rodgers (2001) found that communication barriers may present challenges for international students. In her study based in stereotypic beliefs of international students by American host nationals Spencer-Rodgers (2001) found that the most “derogatory descriptors” were related to the “lack of ability [by international students] to communicate effectively in English” (p. 652). Comments from American host nationals included statements such as “international students can’t speak,” “can’t communicate,” and “shouldn’t be [teaching assistants]” (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001, p. 652). American host nationals viewed international students with limited English language proficiency levels as being odd, socially awkward, or even unlikable rather than persons simply trying to deal with enormous social challenges (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001).

The shock of entering an entirely new culture and adjustment to the unfamiliar environment is also a common stressor for international students (Pederson, 1994). In these cases, certainty is no longer available: “Familiar cues have been removed or given a new meaning resulting in responses ranging from a vague discomfort to profound disorientation” (Pederson, 1994). Oberg (1960) outlined six factors of culture shock that negatively affect adjustment periods within unfamiliar cultures:

- 1) tension resulting from the effort of psychological adaptation;
- 2) a sense of deprivation referring to the removal of former friends, status, role, and/or possessions;

- 3) rejection by or of the new culture;
- 4) confusion in role expectations, feelings, and self-identity;
- 5) unexpected anxiety, disgust, or indignation regarding cultural differences; and
- 6) feelings of helplessness as a result of not coping well in the new environment (as cited in Pederson, 1994, p. 2).

Not all features of culture shock affect all international students (Church, 1982) but these factors are common to the adjustment processes of any person entering a distinctively different culture.

### **CULTURAL INTOLERANCE AND POSITIONALITY OF MEMBERS OF THE HOST CULTURE**

Despite the heterogeneous nature of the international student population in the U.S., research shows a pervasive commonality of cultural intolerances toward international students such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, etc. (Pederson, 1991; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Spradley & Phillips, 1972; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). Psychologist Otto Klineberg (1968), whose research helped win the landmark supreme court school desegregation case of *Brown –vs.- the Board of Education*, wrote “The existence of prejudice and discrimination in many areas and among many people, and its unhappy consequences for interpersonal relations,... represent a serious issue for student exchanges. Discrimination is a reality which many students must face” (p. 442).

Lee and Rice (2007) outline many barriers for entry to the U.S. that international students must overcome before their studies even begin such as

immigration restrictions, lengthy interviews, applications, fees, and in-depth interactions with English-speaking agents at numerous government agencies. Such agencies may include the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of State (DOS), U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS), Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The enormities of pre-arrival tasks are “burdensome enough to discourage [international] students from applying to U.S. institutions” (Altbach, 2004).

Cultural intolerances exist post-arrival as well. Zhou, Frey, and Bang (2011) reported that their international student participants sensed prejudice and discrimination and were keenly aware of being perceived as outsiders. Kher, Juneau, & Molsted (2003) showed that admission, registration, housing, and dining services on their home campus did not do well at assisting international students despite their greater transitional needs. Lloyd (2003) also found that confusing registration processes, incompatible housing accommodations, and a lack of support services are among the challenges international students face.

Through my professional experience, I am aware of an institution that places incoming international students in the least desirable residential housing available. When an inquiry was made as to the reason for this practice, the response given was “International students have a lower standard of living than our American students and most will think their dorm rooms are a step up. Besides, the parents of our American students would complain if we placed their

children in these residences” (anonymous, personal communication, 2011).

Could this be considered institutional racism or cultural discrimination?

Are foods and comfort items available to help ease the adjustment processes for international students? Can language of instruction and assessment be made available that is representative of international students? Are resources available that make it possible for practicing all faith traditions? With regards to faculty, administrators, and American student peers, do international students encounter negative stereotypes or misinformed portrayals of their cultures? Is employment available that contributes to the learning experience or enhances future opportunities? Is there an ease of accessibility for employment?

Through federal law, international students are permitted to work in the U.S. but only after certain restrictions have been met. According to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) (2011), international students must always first have explicit authorization from USCIS before beginning employment. They are eligible to work on-campus for a maximum of only 20 hours per week unless on an official school break. International students are also permitted to work off campus if the work (1) is directly related to the major field of study, (2) provides income for cases of severe economic hardship, or (3) is with an organization listed in the International Organization Immunities Act (USCIS, Students and Employment, 2011). Pre-approval documents and fees must be submitted to CIE initially and then to USCIS for approval at least 90 days

in advance of anticipated employment (USCIS, Students and Employment, 2011). Lee and Rice (2007) reported that additional restrictions may apply at the institutional level. Because the rationale for restrictions is not clearly communicated, the international student participants in their study “interpreted such restrictions as blatant discrimination” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 401).

Although the international student population in the U.S. is heterogeneous in nature, Spencer-Rodgers (2001) found that “a number of specific characteristics are thought to be commonly ascribed to international students as a whole” (p. 640). These stereotypes range from the positive: talented, driven, progressive, and fearless to the negative: deficient, handicapped, and socially inhibited (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001, p. 640). As explained in chapter one, stereotypes are commonly held mental images based on behavior or appearance that reduces a person or people group to an oversimplified opinion, a prejudiced attitude, or an unfairly critical judgment.

When negative attributes are prescribed to international students, they may perceive American host nationals may be perceived as “lacking any desire to understand another culture” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 399) and therefore feel they are being rejected based on cultural identity. Rhee and Sagaria (2004) speak to this diminished identity that occurs when American host nationals have difficulty pronouncing the names of international students and, as a result, expect the name to be changed:

When Mr. Patel's Korean postdoctoral student, Young Jin Kim, arrived at Penn State last academic year, Mr. Patel asked him to choose an American name. Now everybody calls Young Jin "Jim." Mr. Patel explains that people in the lab had had difficulty pronouncing the name of a previous Korean student (p. 87).

Studies by Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell and Utsey (2005), Bonazzo and Wong (2007), and Hayes and Lin (1994) showed that international students who perceived and/or experienced cultural intolerances had severe stress adjusting psychologically and culturally. Moreover, research shows that discrimination is a "significant predictor" of international students' academic adjustment (Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008, as cited in Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011, p. 84). "Learning can be negatively affected when international students perceive their environment as unwelcoming" (Lee & Rice, 2007). I think cultural intolerances like those mentioned above situate international students (1) as being homogenous with no distinct lived experiences or cultural perspective, (2) as 'others' inferior to the American host national, and (3) as outsiders with diminished individual identities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research reviewed in this chapter provides a sketch of the history of international students in the U.S., the contributions international students make to institutions of higher learning, the experienced adjustment processes of international students including academic, social, and cultural challenges, and

the tendencies of cultural intolerance that are commonly enacted toward international students. Although these studies were conducted for various reasons, each can be said to help raise the awareness about the experiences and perceptions of international students following their arrival to the U.S.

The research identified in this chapter reveals that challenges do occur consistently across cultures, nationalities, languages, and levels of international know-how. Underlying these challenges international students face are the level of English language proficiency, the lack of social and cultural knowledge by both the international students as well as by host nationals, the common view that international students are beneficial only for their economic contributions, and cultural intolerances such as stereotyping, discrimination, exclusion, and rejection based on cultural identity. In the following chapter, I move on to describe the methodology used for this study including the process and design of my research, the participant demographics, the site location, and the methods used for data collection and analysis.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to gain a more in-depth understanding of the processes of acclimation and adjustment through which international students progress following their arrival to the United States. As a result of this research, it is my hope that future international students might better prepare for adjustment and acclimation to American culture by gaining insight into the strategies employed by fellow international students. It is also my hope the educators can develop more culturally relevant and applicable strategies for assisting international students with their adjustment processes. In this chapter I explain in detail the research process and design, sample selection and participants demographics, the case description, the methods employed for data collection and analysis, and the limitations of this study.

#### **PROCESS AND DESIGN**

A collective case study approach was used for this research project. The qualitative method provided me with the opportunity to gain insight into the lived experiences of international students (real people) in the context of being enrolled at an institution of higher learning (real setting). I wanted to understand the world and it's happenings from the perspective of my participants. Spradley's (1979) depiction summarizes the caring position qualitative researchers take with regards to their participants:

By word and by action, in subtle ways and in direct statements, [researchers] say, "I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you would explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (p. 34).

To gain a better understanding of the issue, a collective case study approach was employed and multiple types of data were collected including interview transcripts, observation field notes, and document analyses. Creswell (2002) defines case study as being "a problem to be studied, which can reveal an in-depth understanding of a case or bounded system which involves understanding of an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals." The selected sample (or unit of analysis) was bounded to the specific population group of international students. It was the investigation of the bounded system in this research project that lends itself to the case study approach. A detailed explanation of participant sample and case selection can be found below in sections "Participant Demographics" and "Case Description."

The primary strategy employed for data collection was in-depth formal interviews. Interviews were conducted one-on-one, at a public location on campus considered neutral to both the participants and me. All interviews were conducted at pre-determined times. Each lasted between 55-65 minutes and

was electronically recorded. A semi-structured, open-ended interview process with guiding questions was used. Interviewing with open-ended questions helped me follow the participants' lead so they could respond and discuss as they wanted. This also led to opportunities for probing further and gaining a deeper understanding of how international students made sense of and dealt with their transition period in the U.S. The research questions that guided this qualitative study were:

- 1) What preconceived ideas and expectations did research participants hold prior to their arrival in the U.S.?
- 2) What are the most common challenges experienced by research participants as part of their adjustment periods?
- 3) What academic, psychological, and social needs did research participants perceive as being the most significant in their experiences?
- 4) Can any expressed challenges be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture?
- 5) What are possible individual strategies for easing transition periods in cross-cultural settings?
- 6) What are possible institutional strategies for assisting international students with adjustment?

- 7) What suggestions or advice are offered by research participants to future international students preparing to come to the U.S. for the first time?

The full interview guide may be found in Appendix I.

Prior to the beginning of each interview I explained the intended process to the participant. A specific length of time was not set but each participant was told that s/he could speak as long or as brief as s/he preferred. I communicated the purpose of the study as outlined in the project objectives statement found in my Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects required by the University:

*The purpose of this research project is to determine the processes of adjustment through which international students progress following their arrival to the United States. While the field of research has expanded in recent years, international students have largely been underrepresented in studies related to cross-cultural acclimation and adjustment. Reports indicate transitional difficulties (i.e. food, organization of daily life, language barriers), academic concerns (i.e. adjustments to academic rigor, different instructional methods), social challenges (i.e. relational dynamics with instructors, interactions with colleagues) as well as psychological concerns (i.e. stress, depression, homesickness) play a role in adaptation to the host culture. How then might we better prepare future international students for adjustment to the U.S.?*

I also reviewed with participants the informed consent form including potential risks and benefits, matters of confidentiality, my contact information, and that participation was voluntary and asked if anything needed to be clarified. The full informed consent form may be found in Appendix II. Participants were encouraged to keep the interview confidential and received a detailed explanation about my strategies for protecting their confidentiality:

- All related materials including the informed consent form will be kept for the required period of three years in the principal researcher's faculty advisor's (Dr. Thayer-Bacon) office in a locked filing cabinet.
- Data will be available as a secondary source for future researchers only after this study is concluded.
- No reference will be made either orally or in written form that could link the participant to this research.
- The predetermined pseudonym assigned would be used in all reporting and data analysis.

Once participants understood the purpose, process, and matters of confidentiality as indicated by an affirmative response, the interview commenced.

Field notes were kept in a notebook as the interviews were conducted to record body language, intonation of responses, recognized cultural idiosyncrasies, etc. One example of this was the insistence of a male participant to purchase a drink for me in the nearby Starbucks after my offer to do the same for him. He mentioned that in his country it is unacceptable for married males to receive/accept gifts from females who are not related. Within one week following the interviews, field notes were recorded in detail and transcripts were typed verbatim by me. Once all transcripts were coded, three major categories were identified which I used to organize my findings. These coding categories included participants' thoughts and perceptions of adjustment, participants'

strategies for easing transition periods of adjustment, and participants' recommendations.

The case study approach yielded data based on the participants' experiences and perspectives as they recounted progressing through the various stages of acclimation and adjustment to the American culture. At times, the interviews would veer off topic from the intended research questions but I found all of the information offered by my participants relevant and interesting. For example, one interviewee from Nigeria spoke about reactions she encountered from fellow Nigerian students after deciding to wear her hair natural rather than wearing a "conforming weave". Another from Saudi Arabia discussed in detail his perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how he refused to contribute money to Hamas due to their "terroristic tendencies."

I found the interview process to be enjoyable and a rapport was established between the interviewees and me. Participants were asked about their reasons for coming to the U.S. to study, their experiences during the adjustment period following arrival to the U.S., and advice they might offer future international students coming to the U.S. for the first time. I learned about the various pre-disposed inclinations the participants held about the U.S. prior to their arrival, the negatives and positives of the transition process, and what they thought would be important to share with future international students.

## **PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS**

Demographic data collected from the participants has been explained below based on five categories: gender, age, academic level/classification, country of origin, and length of time in the U.S. Six international students participated in this study. Three participants were male and three were female. All were degree-seeking students, three being at the graduate level and three at the undergraduate level. All indicated their primary reason for coming to the U.S. had been for educational purposes. The participants in this study hailed from various geographical regions: Asia (2), Africa (1), the Middle East (1), the Caribbean (1), and Europe (1). Six countries were represented in this study: South Korea, Taiwan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Haiti, and Germany. The length of time participants had been in the U.S. ranged from only fourteen months to six years. Three participants indicated their length of time in the U.S. as being under two years while three indicated they had been in the U.S. three and a half years or longer.

There is much research available which indicates variations in acclimation and adjustment periods of international students based on demographic data (i.e. age, country of origin, cultural relevancy, and language proficiency) (Andrade, 2006; Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Zhou, Frey & Bang, 2001). No evident correlation emerged between the participants' academic level or classification, their age, and the length of time they had resided in the U.S. While demographic

factors were analyzed and may have influenced actual outcomes of adjustment experienced by participants, these factors were not the focus of this study. This data was included to clarify the cross-representations of participants' ages, purposes of study, countries of origin, and amounts of time each had lived in the U.S. in order to avoid assumptions regarding the sample.

### **CASE DESCRIPTION**

For the purposes of this study, participants were considered international by F-1 or J-1 visa status, classified by the U.S. Department of State as being temporary U.S. resident for the purpose of study or training. I selected six participants who were colleagues of mine from classes taken prior to the study and/or from the same academic department.

The method of convenience sampling selection was based on proximity to me as the researcher. As discussed within the limitations section of this chapter, the particular sample in this study does not allow for nor is it presumed to be a complete representation of the international student population. Further, I wanted to ensure that my sample size would not be so small that it would be difficult to achieve saturation and that it would not be so large that it would be difficult to examine in-depth the data produced. Creswell (2002) and Kuzel (1992) suggest that 6–8 sampling units will suffice when experiences are similar in nature. Morse (1994) recommends that at least six participants should be included in qualitative studies where the goal is to gain an in-depth understanding into the true meaning of a participant's experience.

Additionally, one research university in the southeast region of the U.S. was selected for my study. This University was chosen because of features common to many U.S. graduate and undergraduate, degree-granting institutions of higher learning that have moderate levels of internationalization. Internationalization efforts include but are not limited to:

- Hiring, promotion, and tenure granting tracks for international faculty or those with international experience;
- Administration structure includes resources, activities, and programs dedicated to study abroad, international student recruitment, international scholarly research, and international awareness;
- Foreign language proficiency requirement;
- International partnerships across disciplines;
- Support services for international students (i.e. orientation, ESL program).

This institution is part of the public university system in its respective state. There are approximately 30,000 enrolled students and 1,500 full-time faculty members with almost 1,200 students classified as being international the majority of whom are international. Over 120 countries are represented in the international student population, with the largest constituencies hailing from China, India, South Korea, Canada, and the UK. Numerous cultural student organizations are available.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Due to the heterogeneous nature of the international student population in the U.S., replications of the study conducted with a larger sample may help to better establish the results. The sample represented here is constrained by time and familiarity to the researcher and is reflective of only a small percentage of international students enrolled at the institution in consideration. The institution represented was chosen because of features common to many U.S. institutions of higher learning, however outcomes may vary elsewhere. Additionally, geographic location, marital status, financial means, distance from home, previous experience in the U.S. and other attributable factors are likely to affect adjustment processes of international students but are not assessed in this study.

It can also be assumed that differing interpretations and translations may impact results. Perceptions may vary depending on cultural relevance and language of use and thus potential misperceptions across languages of both the researcher and the participants may occur. Additionally, proficiency level of the English language fluctuated among participants and may have limited the generalizability of findings. Further, the participants in this study are seeking degrees in humanistic oriented programs. It can be assumed that this particular sample of international students was more aware of cultural intolerances such as stereotypes and prejudices as well as tendencies of cultural relativism because of their studies in education, languages, etc.

Although outlined for the reader, my personal subjectivity and positionality are evident in the terminology, the study structure, the data analysis, and the interpretations influence outcomes of the study. I understand that my positionality affects my approach to this study. However, taking care to avoid biased assumptions and to use a strategy of inclusion will hopefully contribute to successful strategies for easing transition periods for our international students.

In this chapter I provided the collective case study methodology used in this study and the outline of the data collection process and design including interview questions, participant demographics, and case selection. In the following chapter I discuss at length the findings of the data collected from participants and the resulting analysis.

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the adjustment and acclimation processes of international students following their arrival to the U.S., including preconceived ideas and expectations about what participants would encounter upon arrival and any individual challenges, whether academically, psychologically, or socially. If research participants expressed challenges, I sought to determine if the challenges could be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host community. I also hoped to get a closer look at the strategies employed for adjustment as well as suggestions for how future international students could better prepare for such an adjustment period as told from the research participants' perspectives.

This chapter includes results of the data collected from study participants based on analysis as related to the study's guiding questions: (1) What preconceived ideas and expectations did research participants hold prior to their arrival in the U.S.? (2) What are the most common challenges experienced by research participants as part of their adjustment periods? More specifically, (3) what academic, psychological, and social needs did research participants perceive as being the most significant in their experiences? (4) Can any expressed challenges be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture? (5) What are possible individual

strategies for easing transition periods? (6) What are possible institutional strategies for assisting international students with adjustment? Finally, (7) what suggestions or advice are offered by research participants to future international students preparing to come to the U.S. for the first time?

For the purposes of this study, three major coding categories were used as part of the data analysis: participants' thoughts and perceptions of adjustment, participants' strategies for easing transition periods of adjustment, and participants' recommendations.

### **PARTICIPANTS' THOUGHTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF ADJUSTMENT**

The coding category based on participants' thoughts and perceptions of the adjustment period relates to the guiding questions: (1) what preconceived ideas and expectations did research participants hold prior to their arrival in the U.S.? (2) What are the most common challenges experienced by research participants as part of their adjustment periods? More specifically, (3) what academic, psychological, and social needs did research participants perceive as being the most significant in their experiences? (4) Can any expressed challenges be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture? Within this coding category, data analysis revealed four major themes: preconceived perceptions and stereotypes of Americans, perceptions of academic adjustment, perceptions of social adjustment, and perceptions of cultural intolerance. It should be noted that within the perceptions

of social adjustment theme, a subtheme emerged related to the perception of freedom.

### **THEME 1: PRECONCEIVED PERCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES OF AMERICANS.**

This theme was the most prevalent and participants offered much related discussion. Although responses varied in terms of willingness by participants to disclose, analysis revealed that a majority of preconceived notions and expectations were consistent among participants. Prior to arrival in the U.S. there was an optimistic expectation about what would be experienced. The idea of America was held in high regard although perceptions of Americans themselves were not so positive. Influences on these predetermined notions included (1) media (all participants had some degree of access to American television shows, movies, and music in their home countries), (2) familial perspectives, (3) interactions with people in the home country that had traveled to the U.S., and (4) encounters with Americans traveling in the home country.

Although recognized by participants as being attached stigmas or stereotypes, the images of Americans as expressed by participants tended to be collective no matter from which country they hailed. While the majority of preconceived ideas about Americans have negative connotations, some are positive. Additionally, the participants in this study had an overwhelmingly positive perspective of the U.S. as a whole.

Stigmas and stereotypes of Americans as discussed by participants include the following, listed in hierarchical order according to number of times mentioned:

- Rude (5)
- Spoiled, have everything wanted and/or needed (4)
- Have plenty (i.e. resources, material goods, money) (4)
- Lazy, do not have to work hard to attain goals (4)
- Undisciplined (i.e. poor study habits, obese) (4)
- English speakers do not accept speakers of other languages (3)
- Liberal socially (i.e. promiscuous, vulgar, immodest) (3)
- Wealthy, make plenty of money (3)
- Friendly, outgoing, talkative (3)
- Individualistic (i.e. selfish, unconcerned with others, conscious of “my” time, space, things) (3)
- Wasteful (i.e. no recycling, throw away food, clothes, electronics) (3)
- Should be imitated (2)
- Superior (2)
- Vengeful (1)
- Powerful (i.e. economically, politically) (1)
- Ignorant (1)

One respondent summed up her perceptions of Americans:

We [Koreans] view the American people as very liberal, very, very liberal. Sex is like everywhere. You hear vulgar language in nearly every setting, in all situations. You hear it a lot in movies and on the T.V. And a lot of the stereotypes are like lazy, obese, very spoiled, they don't care about the community they only care about themselves, very individualistic. This is the view that my mom holds. I remember growing up learning that Americans are wealthy. That they get what they want but they don't study hard but they can get away with that because they have plenty of stuff.

This particular respondent openly discussed with me those preconceived notions that she perceived as being confirmed once she began residing in the U.S.:

Americans are very conscious about this is mine, this is my space, this is my stuff, my right. You guys hold that so dear. You're very individualistic. And with the whole like obese part I was okay (pause)... I was very shocked to see some of the people. Like I am talking very big. I had never seen anybody that size. I guess that is one of the stereotypes that was confirmed. Also, people here are wasteful. Like eating at restaurants or in the cafeteria I will see people taking a bite of a hamburger and then just leaving the rest and throwing it away and I'm thinking seriously, you understand you've just taken one bite and you are now going to throw it away. Like why did you get it in the first place? It's very wasteful. It's

almost like you have a lot so you are used to wasting a lot and it's not a big deal because you still have a lot. So that was a few of the negative stereotypes about Americans that did come true or was confirmed.

With regard to ideas about the American way of life, all participants expressed it as being ideal:

- Perfect, organized systems (i.e. legal system, good roads, electricity and running water) (4)
- Beauty of environment (4)
- Lives are uncomplicated, easy (3)

The respondent from Nigeria spoke to this ideal: "The fact that you as Americans have stable electricity and running water two-four-seven. Good roads. Everything just seemed perfect before I came here." The respondents from both Taiwan and Saudi Arabia mentioned the beauty of the environment and gave specific references to the "mountains," the "coast," the "waterfall in Yosemite" National Park, Cinderella's "castle in Disney World", and the "Grand Canyon."

## **THEME 2: PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT.**

Each participant in this study expressed that the primary reason they had chosen to come to the U.S. to study was because of the perceived quality of education offered. One participant when asked why she decided to study abroad in the U.S. had this to say:

The higher education is way better than most of what we have in Nigeria. And I wanted to be able to use my degree anywhere in the world. And to just be around different cultures and see life from a different perspective from what I have been used to all my life.

In addition to the perceived quality of education available in the U.S., participants mentioned their choices to study in the U.S. also pertained to opportunities (1) to experience and learn about a different culture, (2) to learn English or learn to speak English better, and (3) to gain an understanding about what American life is all about.

All participants expressed some level of difficulty adjusting to the U.S. higher education system. Those with little English speaking ability (perceived or actual) said this was without a doubt the most challenging “barrier” to overcome academically and that they had experienced “a longer period of adjustment” in this area than they had psychologically or socially. The participant from Haiti whose native language is French elaborated, “I have to interpret books, tests, and assignments word for word, sentence for sentence, so it’s very difficult.” Lectures and other in-class instructional methods proved difficult for note taking due to the time needed for interpreting, translating, and writing unfamiliar words and phrases. In cases such as these, words are often written or typed as they sound and then left for translation later. This presents challenges for participants whose languages do not have exact translations or representations of specific English words which can make true comprehension impossible. Thus, for these

participants the academic adjustment is a much slower, more challenging process.

While English-speaking abilities factored into the academic adjustment period for some participants, those able to speak English fluently or with some degree of English language proficiency mentioned additional academic difficulties. The need to think reflectively and offer personal positions, the grading system, instructional methods and teaching styles, the number of exams, and class structure, etc., were mentioned by participants.

When asked about the most academically challenging aspect of adjustment, one participant whose native language is not English but who does have the proficiency level to converse felt the most challenging academic difference was the common requirement to think for himself versus memorizing material:

The studying, the education here is totally different from my country. You depend a lot on yourself. You have to go and read and do the homeworks [sic] and do the study and do the research... I spent hours and hours on books and doing the research and writing papers. I would stay up late hours in the night reading and writing. We don't write a lot in my country. Yeah. It's basically normal writing things.... You fill in the blanks and multiple choice and probably if you write it would be like four or five, six sentences.... But here you have to do a lot of writing and that is

very daunting for me. There we memorize a lot of things. Even at the graduate [level], it is 100% memorizing.

When probed about the reflective and critical thinking requirements in his home country, he offered:

You don't have to go and reflect about anything. I remember one of our professors he was teaching us method of teaching English and he was using this book about the grammar translation method and the silent way and ... then he asked us to write a reflection. Like 99% of the students they summarized things... They didn't give their opinion because they don't know what to say.

When asked about the most academically challenging aspect of adjustment to the U.S., another participant whose native language is English offered:

Well, for me it was the grading system. Like in Nigeria, 80 upwards an A [sic]. Here I have to work 10 points harder to make an A. I mean it's harder to get an A in Nigeria but if you get an 80 it's an A. If you get a 70, it's a B but here a 70 is a C. So when I got here, my freshman year, I got a 75 on my English test and I was sad because I found out it was a C. I thought it was a B so I thought I did do good.

Regardless of the country of origin or the English language ability each participant in this study experienced some degree of difficulty adjusting academically. Aside from language barriers, some challenges expressed were (1) adjusting to workload requirements associated with independent thinking and reflexivity, (2) the inconsistency of grading systems/scales between the home country and the U.S., (3) instructional methods that incorporated collaborative learning strategies and involvement of the student in presentations and public speaking, (4) the frequency of exams, and (5) classroom structure such as roundtable discussions. With the exception of language “barriers,” all participants conveyed an easing of these challenges within the first term or semester, after approximately three to six months.

### **THEME 3: PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT.**

While several negative stereotypes of Americans were expressed and even “confirmed” according to participants, I found it interesting that each one preferred to interact and socialize with Americans rather than fellow international students despite any challenges they encountered. Reasons given for this preference included to become fully immersed in the “superior” culture, to better adapt to the way of life, to have freedom from judgment from fellow international students, and to avoid their own culture’s stereotypes. One respondent offered:

I prefer to mingle with American friends, not just with my own kind of people. When I first came, that’s one of the reasons I didn’t stay around Nigerians. Because I wanted to immerse myself into the

culture. So, I might have just like two or three Nigerian people but all my other friends are American. And Nigerians make fun of me saying, "She only likes white people. She doesn't like us anymore." And I say, "Look I can't come all the way from Nigeria and be with you guys all the time. I'm never going to adapt so I have to be with other people so I can adapt."

When asked about the most socially challenging aspect of adjustment to the U.S., three participants mentioned an intentional "move away" or avoidance of people from their home country. While participants began their adjustment process with an unfavorable disposition toward Americans, this was perceived as being the easiest way to meet their social desire to fit in, to not be perceived as a "foreigner," and to avoid being judged or stereotyped themselves. My participant from South Korea discussed this in detail:

I prefer to spend a lot more time with Americans. I think it's because I was told that Asians are so exclusive, they stay within their own clique, and they have their own things they do and they never include outsiders. So on purpose I removed myself from the Korean community because I didn't want to be considered one of those girls that only wants to be with Koreans and cares nothing about everyone else. In American culture, like, well, I didn't want to do anything that seemed different. I didn't want to violate cultural norms so I just tried to go along and fit in and be American.

I found it interesting that participants sensed their own marginalization and possible discrimination by members of the host culture as well as by members from their own culture whether the international student body in whole or those of the same nationality.

Another theme that emerged as related to perceived challenges of social adjustment was the navigation of different communication styles. Respondents often referred to the indirect manner in which things are communicated in America. One specifically mentioned the way Americans “beat around the bush”:

Americans don't say things in a direct manner and I had to learn not to do that. You are very sensitive to the feelings of others. But I am used to people in my home country telling me “Oh, you look fat” or “Oh, you look ugly or “You're not good at playing basketball.” Just telling me the way it is. Here you cannot do that. You have to say things nicely without lying and I just don't know how to do that.

Another spoke of the way Americans say things just for the sake of saying them:

Socially, communicating here was hard to adjust to. I thought that when Americans said something, they meant it. I learned that they say things just for the sake of saying them. They will say, “Hey I will call you tonight” or “We should watch a movie this weekend.” I take things as the way they are said to me. So I didn't make plans for the weekend because I thought we were going to watch a

movie. It's hard to know what's real and what's not real, what's just being polite and what's genuine.

With regards to social adjustment, my analysis found that each of the study's participants experienced challenges. Among those expressed were (1) perceiving disparity between American culture and that of one's own culture, (2) understanding social standards (i.e. tipping, ways of greeting such as hugging), (3) overcoming attached stereotypes, (4) navigating various styles of communicating (i.e. formal and informal, sarcasm, direct and indirect), and (5) learning social relationship norms. As with perceived academic challenges, all participants conveyed an eventual easing but the adjustment period lasted longer, for approximately one to two years. The findings also suggest that the more in-depth interaction international students had with Americans, the quicker their adjustment. All respondents indicated personal relationships with Americans but the number and degree of closeness varied.

***SUBTHEME: THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM.***

Each participant in this study referred to some concept of freedom they perceived or experienced following arrival to the U.S. The majority of the related responses spoke of freedom in terms of choice. Participants found that once in America they had the opportunity to choose what activities they would participate in from day to day, to choose what course of study they would pursue, to choose which friends they would invest in or spend time with. When one participant was asked to further explain the concept of freedom of choice, she spoke in terms of

the resources that are readily available, “America is a large country and has numerous resources that make accessibility possible. Travel is easy with the availability of public transportation. I have the freedom to go here or go there because it’s available.”

Another participant spoke of freedom in terms of convenience:

Everything is convenient. Grocery stores are huge and carry so many things. They are close by and set up to make things easy, and quick. Even drive throughs are convenient. And you can even have your choice of foods, drinks because they offer so many choices. Banking is convenient. You can do everything over the internet. And the internet is easy, and free a lot.

One participant spoke of freedom in terms of opportunity to experience the American way of life. She mentioned the need to caution others not to “lose their mind” in the sense of this newfound social freedom. Yet another spoke about freedom in terms of being away from the “very conservative” culture in his home country. “Women they don’t mix with men and that makes it kind of stressful if you all live together.” While in America, “you want to have a free life, to go wherever you want to go.” At home, he dealt with people watching, “what did you do, what did you wear, where did you come from, where did you go.” He mentioned that being so far away he felt freedom to live his life without so much scrutiny.

#### **THEME 4: PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURAL INTOLERANCE.**

For international students, being repositioned from the dominant culture in their home country to that of a minority in the U.S. can be difficult. The findings in this study suggest that various challenges of adjustment could be attributed to cultural intolerance. Such challenges were perceived as occurring in a spectrum of contexts including peer interactions, dealings with institutional faculty and staff, in the classroom, and within the community. While my study does not prove that each perception reported can be attributed to cultural intolerance, there are clear indications that international students perceived it to be so and therefore this information is pertinent to my study.

To get a better understanding of what perceptions of cultural intolerance might mean for participants, I posed the question, “What comes to mind when you hear the phrase cultural intolerance.” I wanted to ensure this construct carried similar significance and that meanings were common across participants. Responses included a variety of terms and concepts such as “rudeness,” “bias,” “ignorance,” “impatience,” “avoidance,” “damage,” “close minded,” “stereotyping,” and “exclusion.” Stereotypes, rudeness and antagonism directed at international students with accents or inabilities to speak English fluently, and negative representations of home cultures in American media were all examples given of cultural intolerance.

With regard to stereotypes of home countries and cultures, the participant from Nigeria spoke at length about how Americans responded when they first met her:

When I talk they ask where is the accent from. They say you don't talk like a normal black person. I get labeled as African American, not just African so that is hard. I feel like I am just a stranger in the middle of all different cultures. They say you have really nice teeth, are they real? At first I used to get mad when people asked me very ignorant questions. Then I began to see this as a way for me to educate them. Some people ask is it true that you are poor. No. If it wasn't for the people in government we would have a very rich country. We have all this oil, the education is good. That we live in huts. I'm like ...my house is bigger than your house. And I never have to open the gate for myself. Another is that we don't have schools. I make sure to tell them that Nigerian students in the U.S. are among the smartest. It is a very big deal to us. Every kid that makes it to the college level has worked very hard for it. You don't have food to eat. Even the typical poor person in Nigeria eats better than they do here in the U.S. because even they have a farm to get their own food. Mostly questions about poverty, education, housing. If we wear clothes. If we have elephants for pets.

Another spoke about her experiences with stereotypes:

I have had people make comments to me that could be considered racist because they are just very insensitive. Very ignorant. I'm not sure if they were trying to be funny but it wasn't. Like, is it true that you eat dogs. And I'm like first of all that itself is very biased that you can eat chicken and cows and that's okay because they are not pets but I cannot eat dogs because they are American pets. Or even like alluding to well known Asian people. Like are you friends with Jacki Chan because you're Asian in general. Or even with like the language, oh, so you speak Chinese. I am not from China, I'm Korean. It's almost like the whole continent of Asia is from China. I am smart, I am good at math, I do play an instrument so yeah I do fit into some of the stereotypes but mostly people are just looking for ways to classify me as inferior.

With regard to language intolerance, one participant whose language of use is Mandarin Chinese spoke of difficulties that resulted from his inability to speak fluently:

You can feel that some people, they really don't like, they really don't want to talk to you. I have to say it's really hard to be my friend since I don't talk much. My answers are only like one word, two words. So if I cannot come up with more questions and speak in sentences, there will be a silent period. Because sometime people get tired of repeat over and over again (sic). I feel like I talk

like a dumb person. So I ask them to say again. And they can get mad or angry over this.

This participant's experience with cultural intolerance repositioned him beyond his physical appearance as a white, Asian male that is common in the U.S. to that of a non-native English speaker.

Due to negative portrayals of the home culture in American media, one disclosed perception of cultural intolerance came from the respondent from Saudi Arabia. He admitted a "fear inside" about being in the U.S. especially after the events of September 11. He mentioned that prior to these events his country did not have any issue with the U.S. But afterwards, he had a fear that "someone might want revenge" because of his nationality which was often portrayed negatively, as terroristic. Before coming to the U.S., he mentioned, "I was really thinking of moving to another country." His ending remark was a resounding "I am not a terrorist." Most of his interactions on campus however, had been okay. "Nobody looks at you. Nobody does anything to you. Everybody is in his own way."

Another form of cultural intolerance expressed by participants pertained to their status as immigrants and the confrontations they encountered when entering the U.S. Responses related to the red tape associated with "the process of visa" and the amount of time they had to explain to customs agents their purpose for coming to the U.S. "When I get my scholarship and came here ... I spent a lot of time actually at the airport for checking, probably for like 6 or 7

hours there.” Participants get embarrassed by the negative connotations associated with being classified as immigrants, foreigners, “not American,” as well as being lumped all together. Perceptions of fear, inferiority, and exclusion stem from being constantly reminded that “I am different,” “I don’t belong here,” and “I am not American.”

Participants also mentioned perceptions of rudeness and unwillingness to help by members of the host culture. In cases such as these, participant perceptions may have been related to insecurities about fitting in, being inferior, or lack of language ability. However, most responses pertained to specific incidences where there was an overt intolerance. Participants mentioned lack of empathy from both faculty and students regarding the amount of time and energy that had been spent on studies. Faculty were believed to be insensitive to issues of cultural relevance (i.e. women speaking publicly in the presence of men). Participants hesitant to speak openly in class due to their lack of English language abilities were deemed by faculty as “indifferent” or “uncooperative.” Incidences of language bias (making fun of accents, refusing to speak slowly, etc.) and “invisibility” were seen as cultural intolerances. International students perceived this lack of willingness to gain understanding of their native culture as “rejection” and “isolation” based on cultural identity. The participants’ words point to perceived intolerances that are cultural in nature.

## **PARTICIPANTS' STRATEGIES FOR EASING TRANSITION PERIODS OF ADJUSTMENT**

The coding category based on participants' strategies for easing transition periods of adjustment relates to the guiding questions: (1) what are possible individual strategies for easing transition periods? (2) What are possible institutional strategies for assisting international students with adjustment? Within this coding category, data analysis revealed three major themes: social strategies, language strategies, and anticipated yet unconfirmed themes.

### **THEME 1: SOCIAL STRATEGIES.**

Participants' responses were similar with regard to social strategies that had helped them adjust to life in the U.S. Each of the six participants employed as an adjustment strategy involvement in extra-curricular social activities either on campus or within their local communities. Such involvements included volunteering with the international student center to host culturally related events, pledging a sorority, attending church services with American friends, joining a music ensemble, and playing intramural sports. While most responses included an acknowledgement that social activities could hinder studies, participants perceived this strategy to be a means for fitting in and "quickly adjusting." Participants believed "structured" social activities "performed in moderation" would speed up both processes.

One respondent spoke of extracurricular activities as a means for learning about the American culture:

I got involved. I joined a club that required me to interact with American students or people. I know it's easier and a lot more comfortable to just stay at home or to be with people that speak your language and that share your culture, but I feel like in order to adjust you really do need to learn the cultural things from natives, from native speakers, natives of the country.... If you never expose yourself or put yourself out there... you can only learn so much just by observing. You need to learn from the people themselves.

On-campus employment was an additional strategy respondents perceived as easing social transition. Jobs related to fields of study (i.e. institutional technology help desk attendant for the Computer Information Systems major, French lab tutor for the French Education major) and/or areas of interest (i.e. teaching assistant for first-year international students' orientation course) seemed to be a natural way to bridge the academic and social adjustment. According to the participants of this study, through employment, "international students can become familiar with professional standards," and "learn about social norms in the workplace." One participant explained that "due to visa restrictions," international students are not permitted to obtain employment off-campus except in cases of "emergent circumstances" as defined by the Department of Homeland Security. "My employment in this country is up to Homeland Security. Am I a threat?" The issue of employment can be

problematic to international students for numerous reasons and has been discussed in more detail within the literature review section of this thesis.

When asked about involvements in extra-curricular activities on campus or within the community, all respondents indicated some degree of participation which helped ease adjustment to the U.S., speed acclimation, make personal connections, learn more about the host culture, and contribute to the overall learning process.

## **THEME 2: LANGUAGE STRATEGIES.**

Due to the importance of American English language skills, most participants said they employed an adjustment strategy of spending significant time prior to and following arrival working to improve their English speaking abilities. My findings lined up with several other studies that identified language ability as a significant influence on international students' adjustment (Andrade, 2006; Xu, 1991; Yeh & Inose, 2003). One participant who has English language proficiency but expressed difficulties with communicating effectively mentioned as a strategy, "I met a friend on the tennis court and ... sometimes I just need to listen to someone talk, like sentences and phrases. So I do appreciate his effort helping with that."

Strategies common to pre-arrival included (1) listening to radio stations that play songs in English, (2) watching television shows and movies that have English speaking characters, (3) seeking out conversations with English speakers in the home country, (4) watching and listening to YouTube videos that

instruct on proper pronunciations and vocabulary, and (5) completing web-based English language lessons.

Similar strategies were employed post-arrival. Participants expressed that opportunities for listening to the English language were “easier to access” than in the home country. Interaction with native English speakers, although difficult and “intimidating,” was perceived as resulting in improvement of language speaking abilities at a much faster pace. This was the most common strategy employed for easing the transition period for international students who were non-native English speakers.

One participant whose first language is Mandarin Chinese spoke of his strategies for navigating difficulties that resulted from his inability to speak English fluently:

I try to come up with more questions for friends to hear them speak in sentences. If I cannot come up with questions, there will be a silent period. It takes a while for me to get used to the accent. The sentence pattern they use, the words they choose, it takes a while for me to get used to it. So I ask nicely for them to slow down. I listen to everything and ask questions.

Essentially, he stressed the strategy of “pushing through” the silent period, asserting that “If we cannot overcome the silent period there will be no more conversation.”

### **THEME 3: ANTICIPATED BUT UNCONFIRMED THEMES.**

Participants agreed that familial support was a strategy that helped them adjust to life in the U.S. None had immediate family in the U.S. and none had familial ties located close enough to visit during breaks or holidays for support or to “offer a taste of home away from home.” Based on previous research and travel experiences with students, I expected participants in this study to indicate a heavy reliance on familial support when adjusting to the U.S. However, all perceived the lack of family in close proximity forced them to interact more with Americans that in turn resulted in a quicker acclimation. When participants were asked about family residing in the U.S., responses included very little discussion. Those that had extended family in the U.S. indicated very little desire or time availability for visiting. Although families’ involvement was highly valued when it came to decisions about studying in the U.S., where to study, what field, and future plans, little evidence emerged as to the way their support was relied upon during the adjustment period.

Additionally, although all participants conveyed an awareness of various institutional resources available to them, only two indicated use of services. Both were non-native English speakers and thus had visited the English tutoring center to get assistance. I found it interesting that most participants in this study mentioned various institutional resources as part of their recommendations for future international students even though they themselves had not relied on these resources. While the institutional efforts were thought of positively and

appreciated by participants, they saw little representation of themselves culturally and linguistically and therefore dismissed institutional efforts as being unable to “meet specific needs” or “understand personal difficulties of transition.”

## **PARTICIPANTS’ RECOMMENDATIONS**

The coding category based on participants’ recommendations relates to the guiding question: What suggestions or advice are offered by research participants to future international students preparing to come to the U.S. for the first time? Within this coding category, data analysis revealed four major themes: common directives and assertions, dispel preconceived notions, disconnect from home temporarily, and institutional tools and resources.

### **THEME 1: COMMON DIRECTIVES AND ASSERTIONS.**

When participants were asked what advice they would offer to future international students coming to the U.S. for the first time, all offered invaluable information. For anyone that has traveled extensively or found themselves acclimating to a different culture, these suggestions might seem to be natural responses. However, Bang and Edwards (2010) assert that the more cultural competence an international student has prior to his/her arrival in the U.S., the better he/she can adapt to cultural, social, and academic challenges. One respondent wanted to ease any anticipated tension or anxiety by explaining “The difficulty they may face at the beginning will last for a certain period of time. Then life will be easier if they finish the first semester. It takes time.”

Common directives and assertions were made regarding the actual adjustment experience. Do not be afraid to ask a lot of questions. Find people who will be honest with you and answer questions you have about the culture. Don't let the whole ethnocentrism that your culture is the best interfere. Don't believe everything you have heard about America because it is better to experience it yourself. Don't stay in your own circles. Break out of your comfort zone. Don't expect things to be done the way that you are used to them being done. Find someone here to help you settle down to help guide you.

All participants expressed that getting out and experiencing the culture was key to having a successful adjustment process. One in particular thought getting out and interacting is the best way to make it through the adjustment period:

Go in with the attitude of openness and be okay with questioning everything. Because it's almost like if you don't ask why things are, you're just going to think, "Oh, well that's rude, or that's disrespectful. That doesn't fit what I'm used to." Ask. Always ask questions from people that are willing to help you. You need to be able to feel comfortable interacting with the people that live here. If you just hide and stay in your own little room...Just go out. Go out and see and hear and do, even if it seems scary.

**THEME 2: DISPEL PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS.**

Another theme that surfaced related to dismissing ideas about the people and the lifestyle in the U.S. These ideas are typically “over generalized” and based on media portrayals or conversations with people that have not really “experienced the U.S. for themselves.” One respondent wanted to ensure future international students did not come to the U.S. with the same preconceived notions she had:

Life here is not easy. You pretty much have to work very hard. You have to work hard for everything. Nothing is going to be handed to you. Just because on the outside Americans seem to have it so easy, once you're here you'll know that its' not that way. You have to pick stuff up (snapping fingers), and pay attention to your surroundings. I've seen some people come and their ego gets in the way and they get so closed minded, they don't want to break the shell and be open and to learn more.

Another participant mirrored those sentiments stating:

Maybe you have a perception about any cultural things, it might be wrong. But you know what? You have to go and mix with other people. Probably you will go and criticize or start to compare things and say no, that's bad and this happened. Or even thinking about

staying here, you might not like it so it takes time actually to adopt yourself to the culture.

### **THEME 3: DISCONNECT FROM HOME...TEMPORARILY.**

With regards to relying on support from home, each of the participants thought it necessary for future international students to disconnect from the home culture for a short time in the beginning of their transition process:

Distance yourself from e-mailing or calling home every day or watching or listening to your own country's music or shows. Spend that time talking with someone from America, especially if you share the language. Or even take that time to study and do research about the American culture. Try to stay as far from your own culture and what is normal for a bit so you can learn quickly the new culture.

Other similar responses related to not relying on parents so much following arrival, not expecting friends or family "back home" to understand what "feelings and problems" are being experienced, and not "wasting time" speaking to people in the home country because "it will only delay learning new things in the U.S." One respondent who came to study in the U.S. from Nigeria at the age of 17 had a lot of concern about leaving her family and being so far away. However, she mentioned, "You have to pick stuff up (snapping fingers), and pay

attention to your surroundings” in order to truly “leave home” and adapt to the “new life.”

#### **THEME 4: STAY OPEN TO NEW PEOPLE, NEW IDEAS, NEW THINGS**

Being open-minded was a common theme that emerged when participants were asked what advice they felt was the most important to convey to future international students. “Be open-minded in a way so you’ll be able to understand how these people appreciate their lifestyle.” One participant discussed being open to “copying” the actions of American peers to be able to handle situations in ways that are expected in the U.S. Rather than handling formal things in the way one might be used to at home, there should be a willingness to learn the proper way of doing things here in the U.S.:

Just watch ...and copy their actions and even sometimes like make a mental note of oh this person did this when this situation occurred or said this on this occasion. Because you have like the formal things. Like how do they interact with professors? What kind of e-mails did they send the professors if they are sick? Things like that you might be used to not even informing the professor that you won't be attending class. In the states you do write e-mails notifying professors of something like that beforehand. You tell them you won't be in class and you tell them why and there is a certain way of doing things. And if you never seek out help from

Americans you won't necessarily learn the proper way of doing business or interacting and adjusting.

Another discussed the practicality of being open to spending time with American host nationals to help learn cultural norms:

If you never expose yourself or put yourself out there to help them to teach, you can only learn so much just by observing. You need to learn from the people. They will tell you things that you didn't know. If you never go out to eat with them how will you know, oh this is how you order. Drinks come first and then you order your food and then you get the desert and then you get your check and then you leave. Oh, and you are supposed to tip also. How would you know if you never do things with American people?

One respondent mentioned relaxing and being open to learning that “people don't do things like you do them or they don't talk the way that you do.” She went on to say:

If you keep thinking that then you will get really frustrated and you can't understand stuff that people are trying to say or do. That's the biggest thing. I feel like if you're open minded you'll be able to survive anywhere because you're willing to learn more and make changes and get better and make new friends. But some people their ego gets in the way and they get so closed minded, they don't

want to break the shell and be open and to learn more. That has helped me adjust here.

While the experiences of participants in this study varied throughout the period of adjustment, all had preconceived notions about what they would experience following arrival to the U.S., all indicated challenges with academic and social adjustment which eased after approximately one semester (or six months), and all perceived some form of cultural intolerance such as rudeness, bias, exclusion, discrimination, and stereotyping.

Participants employed various social and language strategies for navigating the adjustment period. However, there was agreement that involvement in extracurricular activities such as joining sports teams or musical ensembles, attending church functions, and working on campus was a significant factor in aiding their adjustment. Involvements helped participants develop more in-depth relationships with host nationals, accelerate language learning, and gain insight into both formal and everyday cultural norms.

Participants felt similarly about the advice and suggestions they should offer to future international students coming to the U.S. for the first time. Being open to new things, getting out of the comfort zone, asking lots of questions, and dispelling ideas and anticipations about what should or should not be normal and proper were among the most common. In this study, each of the participants thought that their words and perceptions were key to helping others through the transitional experience. They wanted to ensure the findings and

recommendations were told from their perspective. As a result, I was careful to include within this chapter as many direct quotes as possible that pertained to emerged themes. In the following chapter I will provide a summary of this study's findings that reflects the voices and perspectives of my participants and the resulting implications.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Using a qualitative research method, this case study explored the experienced adjustment period for international students following their arrival to the U.S. as told from their perspective. This study investigated the academic, social, psychological and cultural challenges international students deal with and whether challenges could be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture. This chapter includes conclusions about the research findings, suggestions for improving the adjustment period for future international students, and recommendations for future research all of which are based on the guiding questions of this case study:

- 1) What preconceived ideas and expectations did research participants hold prior to their arrival in the U.S.?
- 2) What are the most common challenges experienced by research participants as part of their adjustment periods?
- 3) More specifically, what academic, psychological, and social needs did research participants perceive as being the most significant in their experiences?
- 4) Can any expressed challenges be attributed to some type of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture?

- 5) What are possible individual strategies for easing transition periods in cross-cultural settings?
- 6) What are possible institutional strategies for assisting international students with adjustment?
- 7) What suggestions or advice are offered by research participants to future international students preparing to come to the U.S. for the first time?

This qualitative case study provided noteworthy insights into the thoughts and perceptions of international students as told from their perspective. These are summarized below:

- International students hold preconceived ideas prior to their arrival in the U.S. Such thoughts include optimistic expectations about what will be experienced, both negative and positive stereotypic beliefs about Americans, and a view of the American way of life as being ideal. Although participants in this study recognized their overgeneralizations of the U.S., the citizens, and the lifestyle, the ideas were consistent no matter which country, culture, gender, or language was represented.
- The most common challenges experienced by international students during the adjustment period relate to academic and social situations. Additionally, English language proficiency level has significant effects on both the academic and social adjustment. Academically speaking, thinking reflectively and interjecting personal positions as well as

adjusting to different instructional methods and lecture styles are among the most challenging. With regard to social adjustment, international students prefer to interact with host nationals despite possible language barriers or discouragement from American peers in order to fit in, be perceived as an insider, and avoid being stereotyped themselves. Communication styles such as indirectness and perceived disingenuousness by host nationals are noticeably challenging. Very little difficulty relates to psychological or cultural adjustment as these are understood as being temporary and common for any transition period, not just those cultural in nature.

- Expressed academic and social challenges of international students can at times be attributed to both overt and covert incidences of cultural intolerance or positionality by members of the host culture. International students describe these intolerances as rudeness, bias, ignorance, impatience, avoidance, damage, close-mindedness, stereotyping, and exclusion. Such cultural intolerances occur in all contexts – with American peers, with institutional faculty and staff, and within the community. Examples of challenges that are cultural in nature include being negatively stereotyped and having stereotypes reinforced in American media, being excluded from conversations both in the classroom and in social settings, confrontations with immigration and customs agents, insensitivity and lack of empathy by faculty

regarding the time and effort spent on studies, among others. Whether or not cultural intolerance is intended by host nationals, international students perceive it to be so. Such intolerances hinder international students from becoming “insiders” and make host nationals seem unwelcoming and hostile.

- Individual approaches employed for easing transition periods in cross-cultural settings include both social and language strategies. Extracurricular involvements on campus are the most commonly employed social tactic for easing adjustment as these activities expose international students to American English, cultural norms, and everyday experiences of host nationals that help advance adjustment. Examples of extracurricular activities include volunteering with student-led organizations, involvement with the Greek community, attending church functions, joining music ensembles, gaining employment, and playing intramural sports. Language strategies are similar pre and post- arrival and include listening to songs in English, watching TV and movies with English speaking characters, seeking out conversations with English speaking host nationals, watching and listening to English videos on YouTube, and completing web-based English language lessons.
- Little discussion is offered as related to possible institutional strategies for assisting international students with adjustment. I suppose this lack

of openness is due to the idea that international students perceive offering suggestions to reputable and established institutions of higher learning as being arrogant, overconfident and possibly even presumptuous. Moreover, international students who do not speak English fluently may be too self-conscious to utilize institutional support efforts and therefore are unable to give a personal perspective or related suggestion. This presupposition is supported by my own experience of being aware not to attach judgments based on my own cultural lens. It also ties to literature that suggests cultural inhibitions would not allow for such an evaluation especially with regards to culturally based perceptions of relationships with perceived authority figures (Aubrey, 1991; Jones, 1999). One notable insistence, however, is that international student voices and real-lived experiences should be represented more prevalently.

- International students offer numerous suggestions and tips of advice to future international students preparing to come to the U.S. for the first time. Common directives include: be open-minded, ask lots of questions, break out of your comfort zone, and don't expect things to be done the way that you are used to them being done. Strategies include: (1) conducting research on the American culture prior to arrival (including American English studies), (2) dispelling any preconceived

notions, and then following arrival (3) staying open to experience new ideas and new people and (4) disconnecting from home temporarily.

Based on these findings, several recommendations for improving the adjustment period for international students at both the individual and institutional level were generated.

### **INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

First, when educators and institutions form strategies geared toward easing challenges for international students during the adjustment period in the U.S., they should include voices and experiences of international students which are typically underrepresented or viewed solely as markers of economic contributors. Surveys could be conducted after the first term to gauge international student interest and participation levels in campus activities, institutional programs and support systems, and the classroom. Each could be good indicators of comfort levels of international students, the sufficiency of support strategies already in place, and the degree to which international student needs are being met. Additionally, cultural programs and student organizations should be led by international students and/or alumni as much as possible. Also, related materials and literature should primarily consist of international student voices and real-lived experiences rather than the perspectives of American host nationals. International students are willing to contribute and participate if given the opportunity.

Second, orientation and introductory methods could be reframed to incorporate language and culturally relevant strategies tailored to specific cultural needs. For example, orientation manuals written in English could also include primary instructions and key points in the first languages of international students. A related webpage could be developed to poll incoming students about culturally relevant needs and to provide contact information as well as instruction for getting needs met. Housing accommodations for international students whose cultures forbid gender mixing should not be co-ed. International students who are unable to drive could be housed near educational facilities, houses of worship, food services, etc. according to individual priorities. International foods could be included on the menus of institutional dining services to help ease the adjustment period.

Third, pre-arrival information provided to international students could include information geared toward raising awareness of American culture and strategies for cross-cultural adjustment. International students themselves could also research ways in which to become more aware of American culture so as to avoid potential tensions resulting from culture shock. Good resources as told from the American perspective include

- CultureGrams™ – online datasheet that provides United States cultural information in twenty-five relevant categories including languages, religions, customs, gestures, lifestyles, etc.

- *Culture Shock: International Students in the United States* – DVD available at amazon.com gives insight into the cross-cultural adjustment process and the experience of being a foreigner in the United States.
- “American Culture and American Diversity” from *The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook* – provides insight into the core values and beliefs that permeate American culture. May be accessed at <http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/publications/culture/pdf/workbook.pdf>.

Fourth, in addition to pre-arrival applications and information, international students could be given pre-arrival preparation materials that incorporate the findings of this and other studies as they relate to awareness of cultural intolerances in the U.S. Several notable studies as referenced in chapter 2, the literature review section of this study, include:

- Hayes and Lin (1994), “Coming to America: Developing Social Support Systems for International Students;”
- Lee and Rice (2007), “Welcome to America: International Student Perceptions of Discrimination;”
- Pederson (1991), “Counseling International Students;” and
- Spencer-Rodgers (2001) “Consensual and Individual Stereotypic Beliefs about International Students among American Host Nationals.”

Explicit instructions should be given to international students through advising or counseling services that explain how to recognize American tactics of

discrimination, exclusion, racism, and stereotyping as well as how to report such incidences should they occur. Educators should also become more aware of these incidences and be intentional about creating safe learning environments that foster respect and acceptance of all.

Fifth, institutions could host specialized orientation sessions geared toward preparing international students for anticipated academic adjustments in the U.S. as found in this and other notable studies (Andrade, 2006; Jacob and Greggo, 2001; Yeh and Inose, 2003; Zhou, Frey, and Bang, 2011). Topics may include various instructional methods employed in American institutions, social dynamics of the American classroom, grading system, comprehensive reading requirements, independent thinking and reflection, culturally relevant expectations for in-class participation and collaborative learning, etc. Specialized tutoring services conducted in the language of instruction as well as the international students' first language could also prove beneficial.

Sixth, international students should find ways to join in and become involved. As a means of accelerating the adjustment process, a conscious effort should be made to engage in activities at the institution or within the community. Find a friend, a host family member, a roommate, or an employee who is already participating in activities that may be of interest and ask her/him to make connections or help with involvement. Some suggestions for doing so include: volunteering for an institutional program by offering a necessary skill, tutoring other international students in the area of study, tutoring American host nationals

studying the international students' first language, attending worship services and events, joining musical ensembles that sing or play instruments, rushing a fraternity or sorority, and playing intramural sports.

Seventh, educators should follow a curriculum of care and inclusion that is culturally relevant and intentional about promoting awareness of cultural characteristics. This representative thinking as Thayer-Bacon explains "cannot function in isolation. It involves the willingness to reason from others' points of view and the sensitivity to hear their voices" (2000, p.104). Incorporating case study interviews intent on introducing students to the various perspectives and experiences represented in the classroom could be one strategy. Multiple rounds of interviewing may be necessary, beginning with more surface level, visible elements of culture and then progressing on to the more in-depth, concealed components. Examples of questions include:

- 1) What languages are spoken?
- 2) What are some important festivals and celebrations?
- 3) What foods are the most common?
- 4) Are sports played? What types? By whom?
- 5) Are their traditional styles of dress/clothing?
- 6) What are the familial relationships? Who has authority in the family?
- 7) What is seen or thought of as beautiful?
- 8) What are the roles in relation to age (i.e. are elderly revered, at what age does one come of age, what does adulthood mean)?

9) What are the roles in relation to gender (i.e. is the first-born daughter or son given special privileges or authority)?

10) Is there a tendency toward cooperation or individuality?

Asking students to share reflections about their own backgrounds as well as those of whom they interviewed would provide opportunities for gaining awareness of the similarities and difference as well bringing numerous voices into the classroom.

### **BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY**

Besides the aforementioned recommendations, members of the international student body aware of the results of this study may benefit from gaining insight into experiences of fellow international students and their strategies for easing adjustment. Those working in student services sectors as well as faculty who teach, mentor, and potentially employ international students may also benefit by learning of successful strategies for assisting international students with their academic and social adjustment processes.

Another benefit of this study is the contribution made to research literature related to cross-cultural adjustment that includes new findings of academic and social challenges experienced by international students coming to the U.S. for the first time. Moreover, this study investigates the experiences of international students' adjustment strategies as told in their voices and perspectives, all of which have largely been ignored in related research. Aside from this study, very little literature is available that incorporates culturally relevant approaches to

adjustment strategies. Common challenges such as language barriers and relationships with peers are often discussed in studies about international student transitions, but this study focuses on strategies for overcoming challenges as told from the perspective of those actually encountering the challenges. Finally, this study provides a rich description of cultural intolerances which can and do contribute to stresses and challenges experienced by international students.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY**

One suggestion for future research is to further explore the themes identified in this study and how they relate to the age, class, and gender of the participants. It would be interesting to learn if any instances of stereotyping or other cultural intolerances occurred that are related to these demographics specifically or if they primarily related to physical and/or cultural attributes (language, accent, color of skin, etc.). For example, do women face discrimination more often than men? Do students with varying degrees of socioeconomic status perceive the same level of cultural intolerances by host nationals? Is a student from one socioeconomic status more aware of stereotyping, discrimination, or other possible intolerances or is s/he less aware? If so, what strategies then can be implemented to address and rectify disparities?

Replications of this study could be conducted with a larger sample of voices and perspectives of international students in order to provide a cross-representation of more countries, more cultures, and more languages. Moreover, a larger sample with regards to institutional cases could provide more

in-depth analysis of adjustment strategies employed by international students and institutions alike which could result in generalizability and more established results.

Another recommendation for future research could be to compare perceptions of faculty-student relationships and culturally relevant ideas about those in authority. If these ideas vary across cultures, it may be that levels of influence by faculty vary as well. Aside from the educational implications (i.e. in-class participation, responses in one-on-one meetings with the academic advisor, degree of engagement, etc.) these perceptions may or may not influence international students' recognition of and reporting discriminatory acts, crimes, racist remarks, stereotyping, etc. to persons in authority at institutions of higher learning.

Document analyses of orientation and informational materials provided to incoming international students could be conducted. Incorporating international student experiences and suggestions for success into these documents could give insight into better strategies for future students navigating the transition period. Tailoring documents and assistance strategies to individual culturally based needs (i.e. including both native language and English in the documents, providing contact information for faculty or staff who speak the same language or hail from the same country) would most certainly be beneficial.

Further research could also be conducted on the perceptions of American faculty, administrators, and students toward international students, if they differ

among various nationalities, and what the implications of varying perspectives might be. Continual assessment of faculty and administration involved with international students could provide more in-depth insights into challenges encountered and strategies employed.

Retention rates of international students could be explored across U.S. institutions of higher learning and, if there is a disparity, further research could be conducted into reasons for this disparity. This could provide insights into successful strategies for assisting international students with their transition period.

If we are serious about international education, if we value our educational practices in the U.S. and regard them as internationally relevant in terms of quality and universality, if we are concerned with the satisfaction of the learning experience, then we must also value the voices, perspectives, and contributions of our international students. With further study, U.S. institutions of higher learning can gain a more in-depth understanding of international student academic, social, cultural, and psychological needs.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

For the purposes of this interview please answer the following:

Your gender:

Your age:

Academic level classification:

Major/Degree Program:

Country of Origin:

How long have you been in the U.S.?

Why did you decide to study abroad in the U.S.?

Did you come solely for educational purposes?

What are your future plans?

Do you have family residing in the US? Location?

What is the general perception of the U. S. in your home country? What did you think about the U.S. prior to your arrival? Were those perceptions correct? Where did you get these ideas?

How long of an adjustment period did you experience following your arrival?

What has been the most difficult portion of your adjustment to the US? What is/was your biggest frustration?

What has been the most favorable portion of your adjustment to the US? What do you enjoy the most about being in the US?

What has been the most academically challenging portion of your experience in the U.S.?

Did /do you have a supportive network stateside that has helped you adjust? What advice did they offer to you?

Do you prefer to stay within your community of fellow international students or do you spend time interacting with American peers? Explain.

Have you been or are you currently involved in extra-curricular activities on campus or within the community, (i.e. Greek, outreach, sports or intramurals, musical ensembles, employment)?

What advice would you offer to future international students coming to the U.S. for the first time?

Is there any information you wish you would have known prior to coming to the US?

Is there anything else you would like to contribute or share for the purposes of this study?

## APPENDIX II

### INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT Shouldn't Their Stories Be Told in Their Voices?

#### INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research project designed to discover the processes through which international students acclimate and adjust to American culture. This research study is part of the course requirements and thesis project being completed for the master of science degree in Cultural Studies in Educational Foundations in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at the University of Tennessee.

#### INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

You must be an international university student (at least 18 years of age) at either the undergraduate and graduate level. You must be classified as an international student by F-1 or J-1 visa status, that of a temporary US resident for the purpose of study or training.

You will participate in a 60-90 minute interview related to your decision to study abroad, your transition period following arrival to the US, your cross-cultural experience, and suggestions or advice you might offer to American students preparing to study in or experience a new culture for the first time. If you are willing to participate in an interview, please indicate this by signature at the end of this form. Your interview will be conducted by the researcher in public locations neutral to both the participant and researcher. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

#### RISKS

Potential risks may include matters of confidentiality, embarrassment, and participant anxiety. As a safeguard, your responses will be catalogued under pseudonyms. Care will be taken not to record your name or any identifiable information on the audio recordings. Transcripts will be identified only by the predetermined pseudonym.

The researcher asks that you agree not to reveal to others outside of the study the contents of questions or comments made during individual interviews. No reference will be made either orally or in written form that could link you to this research. All related materials including this informed consent form will be kept for the required period of three years in the principal researcher's faculty advisor's (Dr. Thayer-Bacon) office in a locked filing cabinet.

Regarding the potential for embarrassment, the principal investigator will ensure that you are put at ease and made aware of the precautions being taken. Also, should issues requiring attention surface, you will be directed to contact directly the free counseling available through the UT Student Counseling Center located at 1800 Volunteer Boulevard, 865.974.2196.

#### BENEFITS

The primary benefits of this study will be expanding awareness and reflection of your cross-cultural immersion and adjustment period. You may find it beneficial to know you will contribute to advising students preparing to experience a new culture for the first time. You may find it beneficial to know you will contribute to the primary investigator's understanding of the life experiences of international students transitioning to American culture. In addition, you may find

it beneficial that some information obtained by you may contribute to related literature and research findings in the field.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please initial to indicate you have read page 1.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Researchers will keep all information you provide in the study confidential. All related materials including the informed consent form will be kept for the required period of three years in the principal researcher's faculty advisor's (Dr. Thayer-Bacon) office in a locked filing cabinet. Data will be available as a secondary source for future researchers only after this study is concluded. No reference will be made either orally or in written form that could link you to this research. The predetermined pseudonym assigned to you will be used in all reporting and data analysis.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Ms. Elizabeth K. Thompson at ethomp16@utk.edu and 4xx.xxx.xxxx. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

### **PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

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### **CONSENT**

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

Elizabeth Kelley Thompson was born in Evansville, IN, USA, on April 2, 1968. She attended Lee University in Cleveland, TN and graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in 2004. She served as the Director of Global Perspectives, a nationally acclaimed study abroad and international education program at Lee University in Cleveland, TN for eight years. She was also actively involved with international student orientation and employment at Lee University. She has extensive experience developing academically inclined study abroad programs and stateside cross-cultural immersions. Ms. Thompson has led 350+ undergraduate and graduate students into such learning contexts. She has participated in and presented at national and international conferences related to international education including Salzburg Global Seminar and NAFSA Association of International Educators. Elizabeth has received her master's in Cultural Studies in Educational Foundations in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, in 2013.