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b) Research in Brief – includes manuscripts that focus a specific topic or question using new data or conceptual framework that does not require a full-length manuscript; up to two figures/tables, and maximum 5-8 references (1,500-2,000 words).

c) Study Abroad/Reflection- includes descriptions and perceptions from students and scholars concerning another culture, language, people and society from an insider or outsider perspective (between 1,000 to 2,500 words).

d) Book Review - includes reviews and critiques of the written work of scholars from a number of disciplines related to international students (between 750 to 1,200 words).

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For more information:
Krishna Bista, Editor-in-Chief/Founder
Journal of International Students
Walker 2-31 School of Education
University of Louisiana at Monroe
http://jistudents.org/

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The Factors That Influence Dietary Habits Among International Students in the United States

Amir A. Alakaam, MS
Diana C. Castellanos, PhD
Jessica Bodzio, MS
Lee Harrison, PhD
Marywood University (USA)

Abstract

This study examines the dietary intake changes and factors related to dietary acculturation in international students attending an urban university in the United States. The researchers administered seven focus groups of college-age international students (n = 32) between June and August 2012. The participants were enrolled in Northeastern and Midwestern U.S. universities. A qualitative research inquiry was used for data collection, presentation, and analysis. An interview guide was developed to explore the dietary habits of international students. The results show the participants face many dietary challenges as a result of adapting to American culture. The major dietary-related influences include: the food environment, campus environment, religion, and individual preferences. Additionally, the consequences of dietary changes were associated with undesirable health outcomes including weight gain, increased blood glucose levels, increased cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and mental problems.

Keywords: Dietary habits, dietary acculturation, international students, traditional food, Western food.

Over the past years, the number of students enrolled in universities outside their country of citizenship has risen significantly (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2013). In 2011, there were over 4.3 million international students studying worldwide (OECD, 2013). International students attending universities in the United States accounted for the highest percentage (17%) of international students all over the world (OESD, 2013). The United States is likely to remain one of the most attractive countries and the top host nation in an increasingly competitive market for international students in the foreseeable future (OECD, 2013); therefore, it is important to improve the student experience in the United States (OECD, 2013; Verbik & Lasanowski – Hobsons, 2007). The purpose of this study is to explore dietary
intake changes and factors related to dietary acculturation in the U.S. college-age international student population.

**Literature Review**

As international students assimilate to customs and culture of the host country, they also change their dietary practices (Edwards, Hartwell, & Brown, 2010). Adaption to the host culture is associated with poor diet quality (Brittin & Obeidat, 2011), primary effects on food choice, eating habits, and physical health (Papadaki, Hondros, Scott, & Kapsokefalou, 2007; Winham, 2009). Past studies have indicated that changes in individuals’ eating habits after they move to the United States can result in undesirable health outcome such as excessive weight gain and development of chronic diseases (Satia-Abouta, Patterson, Neuhouser, & Elder, 2002; Winham, 2009).

Traditional food is a food with particular characteristic in term of the use of raw ingredients which differentiate it from other processed and convenience food (Trichopoulou, Soukara, & Vasilopoulou, 2007). Outside of the United States, traditional foods such as bulgur salad in the traditional Mediterranean diet are typically high in fiber, low in saturated and trans-fat, high in carbohydrates, and frequently have a variety of fresh vegetables and fruits (Ayala, Baquero, & Klinger, 2008; Chatterjee, 2005; Renzaho & Burns, 2006; Trichopoulou, Soukara, & Vasilopoulou, 2007). However, diets in the United States are high in calories from sweeteners and saturated fat, high in salt, and low in carbohydrates and fiber such as fast food (Drewnowski & Popkin, 1997; Patil, Handley, & Nahayo, 2009; Winham, 2009). Acculturation is also positively related to length of residence in the United States and with consumption of American food products such as pizza, hotdogs, and American coffee (Brittin & Obeidat, 2011).

Knowledge of food choices and preferences as well as the factors that influence eating habits of international students from various ethnic groups is necessary in order to provide effective nutrition education and care to an increasingly diverse population (Brittin & Obeidat, 2011; Verbik & Lasanowski – Hobsons, 2007). However, little is known about college-age international students’ food experience and dietary habits after arrival in the United States. To gain understanding of dietary behaviors among international students, the following question was investigated: What factors influence dietary acculturation among a group of college-age international students in the United States.

**Research Method**

In this study, the grounded theory was used for data collection, analysis, and presentation. The grounded theory of qualitative research was utilized to explore dietary acculturation in the target population. Grounded theory research is a qualitative tradition built on compared concepts (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and is viewed as a relatively easy approach to qualitative research (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), that enables theories to emerge from the data collected (Urquhart, 2001). Grounded theory allows processes to emerge and discover the relevance of the data; the theory obtains an abstract analytical outline of phenomena that related to a specific situation (Creswell, 1998). This method follows a systematic yet flexible process to collect, code, and make connections among the finding; and develop theories that emerge from the data (Hage, 1972).
Researchers and Trustworthiness

In the qualitative study, the researchers consider as an instrument for data collection and analyses (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). In the current study, the researchers have a different background. The first author is an international master students, had participated in previous research related to international student dietary habits and nutrition policy. The second and third authors are faculty members in the Nutrition departments in Marywood University in Pennsylvania and registered dietitians (RD). The fourth author is a full professor, a chairperson of Nutrition and Dietetics Department in Marywood University and an RD. The authors had several years’ experiences in the qualitative and quantitative research related to dietary acculturation, dietary habits of immigrants, and food researches. The researchers make effort to prevent the personal connections to international students affects the study process and the data analyses. The researchers endeavored to make the data more rigorous and far from biases by using multiple researchers in the coding process and data analyses.

To ensure trustworthiness a team was recruited to provide feedback on the article’s manuscript and to involve the authors in questioning data collection and analyses. This team included two faculty members in the nutrition department and three doctoral students from two different U.S. Universities who study dietary acculturation, nutrition policy, and food system. Feedback from other researchers and student informants was used to support data finding and analyses, and to confirm content validity. The data assumptions about international students’ dietary habits were honestly reported and discussed among authors to ensure data quality and trustworthiness, as these method used to inform dependability, conformability, and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Procedure

The Institutional Review Board approved this study under Marywood University Institutional Review Board. The primary researcher conducted seven focus group interviews using an interview guide. There were four to six participants in each focus group. The interviews were held in a location referred by the participants as public and easily accessible, the location identified after the researcher asked all the participants where they would like to meet. During the focus groups, each participant first read and signed an informed consent form before participating. The primary researcher administered the interview guide (described below) to each focus group and utilized a note taker. Probes were used to further explore or clarify statements made by the participants. Each focus group was audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the trained research assistant within 48 hours after the interview was completed. The focus group recruitment and process continued until data saturation was reached.

Focus group interview guide

The principal investigator (PI) developed a focus group interview guide. The questions in the guide were based on literature review and used concepts from previous studies (Brittin & Obeidat, 2011; Edwards, Hartwell, & Brown, 2011; Jabber, Brown, Hammad, Zhu, & Herman, 2003; Pan, Dixon, Himburg, & Huffman, 1999; Yeh et al., 2008). The guide generated discussion around the
following constructs: (a) previous dietary habits prior to coming to the United States, (b) current dietary habits and food choice changes, (c) the influence of different factors on these changes, and (d) the overall health effects after living in United States. Appendix 1 provides list of the questions in the guide. The guide was reviewed by three registered dietitians. Furthermore, it was pretested with three international students (one undergraduate student and two graduate students) representing the target population for clarity and understanding, and to confirm content validity. Changes were made based on the review and pretest.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home country</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in United States</td>
<td>6 months - 2 years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 - 4 years</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence in the United States</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sikhism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confucius</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participants**

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. This type of sampling is useful and cost efficient when further participants of a specific topic are needed and a limited number are available (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). The primary researcher contacted acquaintances that were college students at five different U.S. urban universities; three in the Northeastern and two in the Midwestern United States. The acquaintances provided fellow international students with the necessary information regarding the study. If the international student expressed interest in participating, then he or she contacted the primary researcher in order to acquire additional information. The inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: aged 18-40 years, fluent in the English language, had been in the United States between six months to four years, and
enrolled in a U.S. university. All participants were international students. This included holders of U.S. student visas (F-1 Visa, J-1 Visa, and M-1Visa), as well as individuals who were born in the United States but left before the age of two and only returned upon entrance into a university.

There were seven focus groups with a total of 32 male and female international students, of the 32 students, 20 were male and 12 were female. Age ranges for the participants from 19 to 38 years. Participants represented five U.S. urban universities; three were located in the Northeast and two in the Midwest. Table 1 provides characteristics information of the participants.

Analysis

The analysis started after the first interview. Three trained coders in qualitative inquiry analyzed the data to check for consistency, two were nutrition graduate students and one was nutrition faculty in Marywood University. The grounded theory of qualitative research was used for data collection, analysis, and presentation (Urquhart, 2001). Grounded theory research is a qualitative tradition built on compared concepts (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and is viewed as a relatively easy approach to qualitative research (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), that enables theories to emerge from the data collected.

The researchers followed this systematic method to collect and code the data; and to develop theories from the data collected during the interviews (Hage, 1972). The researcher analyzed the data collected from participants by using constant comparison method as one of component included in grounded theory to search for recurring themes in the transcripts (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). During data collection and analysis the researcher grouped and conceptually labeled the similar data during a process called open coding, which is the first stage to analyze the data in the qualitative research (Urquhart, 2001). The open coding yielded several ideas which became the key findings of the data analysis (Strauss, 1987; Urquhart, 2001). Then, the researcher categorized, linked, and organized concepts by relationship in a process called axial coding. Conditions and dimensions were developed, and finally through an interpretive process called selective coding, the study’s themes emerged (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1967; Strauss, 1987). In this stage, the resulting strategies were fully shaped out and the core category became saturated (Urquhart, 2001). The researchers used the participants own language to identify the categories and to emerge the themes and to represent the results.

Results

Analysis of data extracted four major themes associated with dietary acculturation among international students in the United States: (1) eating patterns, (2) influences on dietary habits changes after migration, (3) resistance to changes in dietary patterns, and (d) the consequences of these changes.

Themes

Eating Patterns. According to this study, eating patterns were defined as the decisions that an individual makes when choosing which foods to eat. These patterns were divided into two subcategories: (a) eating patterns in the home country and (b) eating patterns in the United
States. Table 2 provides the study findings about participants’ dietary habits in the home countries versus the United States.

Table 2
Dietary Habits in the Home Countries vs. Dietary Habits in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dietary habits</th>
<th>Home countries</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eating patterns</td>
<td>Mainly traditional food</td>
<td>Mainly American food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simple and basic</td>
<td>Convenience food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commensal eating</td>
<td>Eating alone most of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
<td>Home cooked meal</td>
<td>Simple preparation food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific meal time</td>
<td>Unstructured meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eating meals with three courses</td>
<td>Consuming more meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small food portion size</td>
<td>Large food portion sizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consuming breakfast daily</td>
<td>Skipping breakfast / light breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No late night meal available</td>
<td>Late night meal available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More varied</td>
<td>Less varied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less meat</td>
<td>More fast food and meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fresh fruits and vegetables</td>
<td>Less fresh fruits and vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited snacking and desserts</td>
<td>Consuming snacking and desserts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drinking traditional tea</td>
<td>Drinking coffee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Eating patterns in the home country. The main foods that the participants consumed in the home country were traditional foods, which were defined as the foods that the participant normally ate and were culturally familiar. These foods were fresh prepared, simple, and basic, such as meat, eggs, fish, beans, vegetables, fruit, seeds, and milk. (Drewnowski & Popkin, 1997; Winham, 2009).

Participants consumed a variety of traditional foods such as: eggs, bread, rice, meat, fruits, and vegetables. The participants indicated that the foods consumed in the home countries were fresh with limited frozen and processed products. Furthermore, participants mentioned that there were not any food labels in the home countries. They tended to associate food labeling with processed foods, and therefore believed that the foods they formerly consumed were fresh and healthy. The participants mentioned that fast food restaurants in their home countries were expensive and the units offered traditional food items (like rice in Indonesia).

When asked about meals, most of the students (80%) said that meals are home cooked, occur mostly at homes on a daily basis, are varied, filling, and small in portion size, and take place at a specific time during the day. Breakfast is around 8:00 a.m., lunch is around 1:00 p.m., and dinner is around 7:00 p.m., with limited desserts and snacking, and no late night meal. Most of the participants drank traditional tea (90%) (black or green tea leaves brewed and boiled in water for several minutes) the majority of the time.

Usually the woman of the household, such as a mother or wife, provided and prepared the meal. One male student from Pakistan summed up these patterns:

Back home we ate all sorts of foods. We have all sorts of cuisines over there; I’ve eaten all types of foods from my home country. I ate with my family because I lived with
them. Friends, at least I had one meal with them, maybe lunch, and then I met with my family for dinner.

Another student from Iraq said:

A homemade meal, rice is the major dish, bread of course in the breakfast, lunch, and dinner. For breakfast I ate eggs and drank tea and I never drank coffee. I ate bean or fresh okra stew with rice for lunch.

**B. Eating patterns in the United States.** The main foods the participants eat in the United States were associated with an American diet; according to this study, defined as: foods that are not native to the individual home country and are commonly high in fat, meats, and sugar; and low in fresh fruits and vegetables; however, this food chose by participants and cannot represent all American foods.

Students who moved to the United States indicated a higher consumption of fried food, meats, sugar, salt, convenience food (frozen, cans, and ready to eat food), cereals, bread, dairy products, soda beverages, snacks, desserts, and less fruits and vegetables. The majority of the students mentioned drinking coffee in the United States instead of tea and skipping breakfast or eating a light breakfast. The students agreed that traditional food items are different in the United States than in their home country in terms of price and quality. It is difficult to find the ingredients of traditional food in most of the local stores in the United States. The students said that the traditional food items in the United States are modified or processed (i.e. have too much salt and sugar). An Asian female student said:

I eat more meat here than in China, especially for lunch and dinner. For breakfast I have milk and cereal. I don’t drink soy milk anymore, it’s not common here. I don’t really drink tea as often and sometimes I’ll drink coffee. And since I go to school and my schedule is different, my lunch is different every day. Sometimes it may be at 12 o’clock, sometimes 2 o’clock. I might have snacks like energy bar after lunch. I didn’t do that in China.

When asked about meals most of the students said meal patterns were unstructured, the students were consuming more meals in the United States (four meals) at different times according to free time and what was available. The portions provided at meals were larger. Most of the students were eating alone or with friends. Some of the students tried to cook but the majority of them were eating convenience foods or in the fast food restaurants due to lack of time and cooking skills. A Muslim student said:

When I came to the States my food changed a lot. For example, I eat cereal with milk and coffee in the breakfast, no more tea. I go to Subway for lunch twice a week or cook in the home some salad and cheese sandwich. I eat alone. I don’t consume traditional food because it is not available here near the campus and in most of the regular stores they don’t have Halal food.
2. Influences on Dietary Habits Changes after Migration

Students referred to the food environment, individual preferences, religion, time, and campus environment as the major factors that influence the process of dietary habits change and the adaptation to the U.S. culture.

**Food environment.** This environment is a collection of several factors such as: place where food is obtained, food prices, community characteristics, restaurant proximity, store availability, and other factors that influence individual’s food choices and eating habits (Willis & Buck, 2007).

Subcategories of food environment are food access and food availability.

**Food access.** Food access, according to this study, was defined as having sufficient resources economically and physically to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Food access is also associated with economic factors, time of immigration, and/or employment status (Winham, 2009). Across the focus groups, access to the fast and convenience foods were easy, while traditional food items were difficult to obtain. The factors that play the major role in food access are (a) economics and (b) transportation.

**A. Economic influences in the United States.** Food cost plays a role in the dietary pattern changes. The participants from Middle East and Asia said that meat and vegetables are in the same price range in the United States, whereas in the home country vegetables are cheaper than meat, so the student prefer to buy meat products in the United States. A student from Malaysia said: “I consume more meat here because it is cheaper compared to fruits and vegetables.”

The participants agreed that fast and convenience food is cheaper and this makes them consume more of these items; furthermore, the traditional food items are more expensive and poor in quality. A participant from Turkey said: “The food in Turkish stores in the United States have a passed expiration date or is very near, like a few months, so I can’t save it for a long time, and it is expensive.”

**B. Transportation.** The participants mentioned that the traditional stores were located in big cities while convenience food stores and fast food restaurants are within walking distance. Public transportation to the traditional stores is limited, especially in the Northeast universities. The students rely on friends who have cars for trips to the stores, or they go to shop as a group once weekly or monthly. A student in one of the Northeastern universities said: “The first year I didn’t have a car so that was a struggle. I would ask my friends to take me or get things for me. The public transportation is bad here.”

**Food availability.** Food availability was defined as: having available quantities of food on a consistent basis near a person’s living area (Yusuf et al., 2001). The participants mentioned that there are fewer traditional food ingredients available in the United States, whereas there are more American food choices. In general there is less fresh produce in the United States. A participant from Korea said:

The biggest thing influencing my diet in United States is the system of the grocery in America. In Korea we have many kinds of food stores near home especially small stores
for fruits and vegetables so we consumed fresh food daily. But in the United States the stores are not close by.

Across the focus groups, food availability was dependent on the area (Northeast vs. Midwest). The traditional food availability was more difficult in the Northeast than in the Midwest because the universities in the Midwest were situated in major cities. The students agreed that traditional food stores were only found in major cities (at two to three hours away). An Asian student in one of the Northeastern universities said:

There is nowhere I can get the Japanese food in Scranton, Pennsylvania. I would drive two or three hours to New Jersey or Philadelphia to get Japanese food. That’s the main problem I have in Scranton.

The unavailability of traditional food made some students ask parents to ship the traditional ingredients from the home country every couple of months. A female student from Korea said: “My mother ships the ingredients from Korea to me every three to six months. Even if the shipment is expensive she still does that.”

**Individual preferences.** Every student has unique likes and dislikes concerning food. In general most prefer traditional food, a good quality product, and a variety of produce. Some of the students tried to cook traditional foods while others adapted to the U.S. culture. A male participant from Saudi Arabia said:

I tried to cook by myself, bring the recipes and bring all the spices. I never cooked before. I tried to adapt myself to United States. In the morning it can be cereal or eggs. In Saudi Arabia I never ate cereal.

**Religious influences.** Muslim students were concerned about consuming Halal food (foods that are allowed under Islamic guidelines). Due to the limited access to the Halal food items in the United States, they are consuming fewer meats, eating less in restaurants and on campus. One of the Muslim participants in Northeastern University said:

I eat less chicken because of my religion. I can’t find Halal meat here. I haven’t seen any Halal food in the stores. Even in the big stores like Giant or Wal-Mart there are no Halal foods.

**Time.** Most of the students claimed that busy schedules were one of the factors that made them consume more convenient and ready to eat food. Attending classes, working, and studying, on a daily basis makes the students eat convenience foods instead of cooking or eating healthy foods. One student in one of the Midwest universities said, “There is a store near the dorm, but I don’t go there because I don’t have time. I must plan ahead to cook and eat healthy on a busy schedule.”

**Campus environment.** The students mentioned that the campus environment and geographical area play major roles on dietary habits changes. The students’ dietary patterns changed because of the meal plans (students living in the dorm being forced to have meal plans).
Several students agreed that the buffet-like style in the cafeteria and having salt and sugar available on tables makes them consume more food on campus, and it has led to weight gain. An Asian student in one of the Northeastern universities said: “They should construct a better healthy meal plan for students. Having salt on the table allows people to keep adding more salt.” The students also said that foods are more expensive on campus with less variety, “I’m trying to avoid food on campus because it is very expensive and I’m not sure about the quality.”

3. Resistance to Changes in Dietary Patterns

There were different factors that led to a resistance to changes in dietary behavior from a traditional diet to more of an American diet. Family structure influenced dietary change. For example, students who have a spouse with them reported fewer changes on dietary habits; while students who have children with them in the United States reported more changes in dietary habits. A female participant from Indonesia said:

I have to study and take care of my kids. I skip my breakfast because I’m busy with my kids and I don’t have time. Sometimes I try to cook rice but my children don’t really like rice so I will replace it.

Most of the participants see eating at home, cooking, and preparing traditional meals as a way to resist the dietary habits changes and to eat healthier. Some students prepare food when they go to work because it is cheaper and healthier. A participant said:

I prefer to bring my own food that I made to campus because it’s healthier, cheaper, and traditional. When you buy chicken in the store it costs three dollars, but if you buy a sandwich it also costs 3 dollars, so if you cook by yourself you will save money that way.

Ethnic restaurants in the United States also play a role in the resistance. The participants consider the ethnic restaurants poor representations of traditional food, and they are more expensive than fast food restaurants. A student from Japan said:

For Japanese food, we don’t use much salt or oil. In the United States, they use salt, oil, and sugar; they just put everything. Sometimes when I go to a Japanese restaurant it is owned by different people, not Japanese people. They just use the name of the Japanese restaurant, but how they prepare the food is totally different. That’s why I don’t eat there.

4. Consequences of Dietary Pattern Changes

Participants in all focus groups responded that health consequences and feelings of guilt are the main consequences of dietary habit changes.

Health consequences. The students reported that they are concerned about health. After the move to the United States, the participants reported a variety of health problems, including high blood pressure, increased blood glucose levels, and increased cholesterol levels (as self-reported by participants). A male student from China said: “I had to reduce my amount of sugar in the United States because my sugar level was high and my friend had problems with diabetes after he moved here.”
The majority of the participants reported weight gain in the United States due to eating more meals, eating outside the home, and exercising less because of busy schedules and cold weather in the United States. The students confided that foods products in the United States are large in size and sweeter in general in comparison with home countries. A female student from Iraq said:

When you go to the restaurant in the United States the dish is very big; even the drinks are so big. Beverages in the United States are sweeter than in Iraq. I think that’s why I gained weight; because there is a lot of food that is too sweet combined with a lack of exercise. Even if I order ice cream and I say I want one scoop, the scoop is too big.

Female student from Korea said:

The grocery stores here have big products like a gallon of milk. In Korea we only have a quarter gallon. They also have more prepared foods, which have more chemicals, and that affects my body.

The students are trying to modify eating habits to become healthier by choosing restaurants with less fried products like Subway. Some of the participants connected bad taste of food and unhealthy food to inorganic food products and the use of hormones in meat products. Male students from Indonesia said: “I’m gaining weight while I am eating healthy food because of the hormones they used in the food’s processing and I do not exercise.”

Feelings of guilt. Several participants reported feelings of guilt in the United States due to eating more meals and consuming unhealthy food. Additionally, Muslim students felt mentally ill because of not consuming Halal food. The Halal food is not readily accessible in the United States, especially in the Northeast. A Muslim student said: “The diet will not be just better if there was more Halal, but also it will be better for our mental health as international students.”

Discussion

There are several changes to dietary habits such as: skipping breakfast, eating fewer fruits and vegetables, and convenience food consumption are universal among college-age students and are not specific to international or domestic students (Deshpande, Basil, & Basil, 2009; Huang, Song, Schemmel, & Hoerr, 1994). However, this study showed that there are several unique challenges such as: the limitation in the food availability and access, and consequences of dietary habit changes specifically related to international students’ dietary habits as a result of adapting to the U.S. culture. In this study, the consequences of dietary changes were associated with undesirable health outcomes including weight gain, increased blood glucose levels, increased cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and mental problems (as self-reported by participants). There are several factors that may contribute to these changes, including food environment, campus environment, time, religion, and individual preferences.

The information on factors associated with the adaptation of the international populations’ diets in the United States is limited. Past research for this population has focused on
the dietary habits of international students in general (Chatterjee, 2008). This was one of the few studies, to our knowledge, that examine the factors that influence the dietary habits of college-age international students in the United States from various origins and ethnic groups.

On the basis of the study, college-age international students faced difficulties with dietary habits after moving to the United States. Prior studies confirm these findings in terms of international students’ dietary changes post-immigration from a diet of traditional food to more Western dietary behaviors (Brittin & Obeidat, 2011; Devine, Connors, Sobal & Bisogni, 2003; Edwards, Hartwell, & Brown, 2011; Pan, Dixon, Himburg, & Huffman, 1999; Roshania, Narayan, & Oza-Frank, 2008; Willis & Nkwocha, 2006; Yeh et al., 2008).

For example, Pan et al. (1999) collected information on changes in the dietary habits among 63 Asian students in the United States who had been in the United States at least three months before the start of the study. The study reported significant increases in the consumption of fats, snack, dairy products, and fast food. However, Pan et al. (1999) reported decrease in the number of meals consumed per day primarily because of the students’ class timetables; this was not reported in our population.

Furthermore, several factors have been shown to influence the dietary intake of international students. Participants mentioned that the lack of consumption of traditional food is due to high costs, poor quality, lack of time, and limited access. These finding are consistent with earlier studies that examined the dietary intake changes post immigration (Devine, Connors, Sobal & Bisogni, 2003; Willis & Buck, 2007; Yeh et al., 2008). Yeh et al. (2008) showed that the high cost of fruit and vegetables and the lack of energy and preparation-time were common barriers to consuming traditional foods among African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian international populations in North Carolina.

Lastly, findings from the sample of college-age international students of this study underscore the possible connection between dietary acculturation and health outcomes in the United States, this was supported by previous research in the United Kingdom, which surveyed 226 international postgraduate students (Edwards, Hartwell, & Brown, 2010). The findings showed that overall food neophobia increased three months post-immigration. Both Asian and European students reported small changes in eating habits. This study demonstrated that individuals showing neophobia had poor food habits with a possibility of negative health consequences due to their overall changed food consumption patterns (Edwards, Hartwell, & Brown, 2010).

Other researchers also found evidence of negative health outcomes for international populations in the United States such as excessive weight gain, obesity, food neophobia, and diabetes (Edwards, Hartwell, & Brown, 2010; Jabber, Brown, Hammad, Zhu, & Herman, 2003; Mansell, Bennett, Northway, Mead, & Moseley, 2004; McDonald, & Kennedy, 2005; Rondinelli et al., 2011; Roshania, Narayan, & Oza-Frank, 2008). However, the role of dietary acculturation on weight gain and other health measures in international students needs to be further explored.

**Limitations**

Several limitations associated with this study should be noted. A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study; due to the limited number of participants from only two geographical areas in the United States, cultural limitation might exist and caution must be taken when generalizing these results onto the overall international student population. However, this study
could provide a framework of exploring dietary acculturation in other universities’ international students. The focus group interview format enhanced data through participant interaction, but may reduce response time of individuals who are less verbal and able to share perspectives (Mansell et al., 2004).

The analysis style in this qualitative study used subjective interpretation to identify the themes; however, three independent coders were used to check for consistency and to improve reliability of findings. One of the limitations that must be considered when analyzing data is the limited ability of the participant to fully express his or her thoughts and opinions by English language. Some of the participants did not speak English as a first language. This is certainly something to consider in the future.

Implications for Future Practice and Research

Knowledge of food choices and preferences as well as the factors that influence eating habits of international students from various ethnic groups is necessary in order to provide effective nutrition education and care to an increasingly diverse population (Brittin & Obeidat, 2011). The present findings could have practical implications informing the development of university policies that facilitate a healthy food environment that is culturally appropriate for international students. We believe that implementing new practices would be beneficial for both the university and the student body. The university will attract more international students and thus increase its diversity; not only the international, but also the American students could benefit from these changes. Implementing dietary programs to improve the nutritional health of students is not a unique claim to international students. The health of everyone concerned would most likely improve with implementing specific programs. Therefore, this research suggests that the university work with the food service companies to offer a wider variety of foods and more dietary options for international students such as offering Halal food items to Muslim students. Several U.S. universities have a high percentage of Muslim students, but only a few universities offer Halal food (Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America [IFANCA], 2011). Students, even freshmen who have no choice but to live in on-campus dormitories, were not offered meals that adhered to their dietary needs (IFANCA, 2011).

It is also advised that the university bring together local farmer’s markets with food service companies on campus. Ethnic food stores could be invited to participate as well; it may be beneficial for all parties to implement a system in which each store corresponds with a day of the week. This fixed schedule would help students remember when they could obtain certain traditional foods, and it would also encourage the merchants to devote one day per week to the success of this endeavor. International students would possibly benefit from having a kitchen available in their dormitories. In general, these practices would provide fresher and healthier food choices for everyone.

The university, during new student orientations and special programming throughout the semester, could increase awareness of international and ethnic food stores in addition to American grocery stores. It is important to let students of all backgrounds, especially international, know the array of available food options and be introduced to their new food environment. If not already occurring, shuttle services could be provided that incorporate routes to diverse places, including traditional stores and restaurants. Furthermore, the university could partner with area businesses in order to provide its students with more flexible meal plan spending options in which students could use the university food allotment at local grocers. This
could lead to increased levels of student satisfaction as students will have more varied dietary options. In turn, the university would support the local communities and economies. Carrying out these recommendations has the potential to offset negative consequences associated with the change in dietary habits of international students post-immigration.

**Conclusion**

The international students face many dietary challenges as a result of adapting to the U.S. culture. In this study, the consequences of dietary changes were associated with undesirable health outcomes including weight gain, increased blood glucose levels, and mental problems (as self-reported by participants). There are several factors that may contribute to these changes, including campus environment, individual preferences, and food environment.

Knowledge of food practices and preferences of international students from various ethnic groups is necessary in order to provide effective nutrition education and care to an increasingly diverse population. Our findings highlight the need for university nutrition policies and nutrition service providers to recognize the real nutrition needs of the international students. However, the role of dietary acculturation on weight gain and other health measures in international students needs to be further explored.

**References**


**Appendix 1  Focus Group Questions**

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| **Dietary change** | 1. Tell me about what you ate before coming to the United States?  
2. What foods do you eat in the United States?  
   a. How do you access these foods?  
3. How has your diet changed since you came to the United States?  
   a. What caused this change if there was change? |
| **Food access** | 1. How easy is it to obtain your food,  
   a. in terms of cost,  
   b. availability, and  
   c. preparation?  
2. What is your perception of the cost of food in the United States in general? What food do you view as being “inexpensive” or “expensive”?  
3. What transportation methods do you use to go to the markets where you buy your food? How often do you go? |
4. Who prepares the foods you eat here in the United States? How is this different than in your home country?
5. If you buy traditional food, where do you buy it?

Food choice

1. Describe what you eat throughout the day?
2. What influences what you eat now?
3. How do you decide on what food you eat in the United States?
4. What you feel about the quality of food compared to your home country?
5. If your diet has changed since coming to the United States, do you think it affected your health, and if so how?

About the Authors

AMIR ALAKAAM, M.B.Ch.B, M.S., is a licensed physician in Iraq and a Fulbright Scholar (2010) with a Master of Science in Nutrition from Marywood University, PA. Currently, he is a Graduate Assistant and a doctoral candidate in the Department of Nutrition and Food Systems, University of Southern Mississippi. Email: amir.alakaam@eagles.usm.edu

DIANA C. CASTELLANOS, Ph.D., R.D. is Assistant Professor in School of Education and Health Sciences, University of Dayton, OH. Email: dianacuycastellanos@gmail.com

JESSICA BODZIO, M.S., R.D., L.D.N. is a faculty and DPD director in Nutrition and Dietetics Department, Marywood University, PA. Email: jbodzio@marywood.edu

LEE HARRISON, Ph.D., R.D., F.A.D.A., C.N.S.D., C.M.F.C is a chairperson, professor in Nutrition and Dietetics Department, Marywood University, PA. Email:harrisonl@marywood.edu

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Evaluating the Struggles with International Students and Local Community Participation

Weronika A. Kusek, PhD
Department of Earth, Environmental, and Geographical Sciences
Northern Michigan University (USA)

Abstract

International students are not only important for universities, but even more so to the host communities, towns and regions where higher education institutions are located. This pilot study looked at a public university located in a small college town in Ohio. The study explored the relationship between international students and the local community. Data for this study was collected through questionnaires and conversations with international students from seven different countries, and complemented by participant observations. The outcomes of this study suggest that international students at the subject university feel a low level of engagement with the local community. Student questionnaires and conversations indicated that their daily schedules in the United States contained fewer activities and social interactions than in their home towns. The study explored potential reasons for this difference in daily routines and community engagement, as expressed by interviewed students.

Keywords: International Students, Higher Education, Local Communities, Student Engagement

The United States (U.S.) issued almost a half million student visas in 2011 and 400,000 the year before (United States Department of State, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of State (2012), the number of international student visas sought and issued is expected to steadily increase in the upcoming years. Based on observed trends over the last several decades, along with projected increases in students seeking educational opportunities abroad, academics have been analyzing international students’ experiences in host countries (Bystydzienski & Resnik, 1994; Gebhard, 2012; Ghosh & Wang, 2003) and acknowledging specific issues such as perceived discrimination, loss of social status, loneliness and academic performance (McNamara & Harris 1997; Rawlings & Sue, 2013; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). According to McFadden, Maash-Fladung, & Mallett (2012), universities in the United States are strategically recruiting students to their campuses for further income generation and to raise their institutions’ international profile. McFadden et al. (2012,) noted, “Universities and colleges strive to create an
environment on their campuses that is reflective of today’s society and the world. [...] Populating our campuses with international students will encourage both international and domestic students to develop intercultural proficiency” (p. 158).

What is missing from the existing studies is a discussion concerning the relationship between international students and the local communities in which they reside while attending American institutions. International students are often limited by their own cultures and are sometimes confused with the American culture presented to them upon arrival (Ee, 2013). According to Ee (2013), the cultural shock experienced by international students in the USA has resulted in a noticeable separation and distancing from the main campus and community populations – sometimes further fueled by micro aggressions by the host population against the language and race of international students. A separation from the local community leads to international students generally gathering with students from similar cultural backgrounds and treating the outside world as unsupportive or even dangerous to their cultural values and lifestyles. International students tend to create temporary, small relational communities to survive their tenure at an American university, and they do not always participate in community activities outside of the campus because they find comfort through familiarity with people from their culture and background. The isolation of international students should be concerning because one of the motivating factors to study abroad is to immerse oneself in the culture of the host country. Conversely, their lack of wider community involvement makes them absent from the cumulative definition of the community outside the campus. What results, is not only a separation among the ‘locals’ and the ‘internationals,’ but also a lack of cultural exchange, which would be beneficial for both international students and the host community (Ahamad & Szpara, 2003; Callaway, 2010; Ee, 2013; Hodge, 2002; Sabry & Bruna, 2007).

This pilot study looked at a public university located in a small college town in Ohio as a case-study to explore the relationships international students have with the local community that hosts the university.

International Student Mobility and Community

Among host countries around the world, the United States is the number one destination for international students (Kretovics, 2011). Hazen and Alberts (2006) suggest that foreign students are attracted to the United States because of the quality of education, opportunities to study/conduct research in their fields of particular interest, employability, and the funding opportunities available to them (especially at the graduate level). The Association of International Educators estimates that foreign students and their dependents contributed approximately $20.23 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2010-2011 academic year (NAFSA, 2012), which according to McFadden et al. (2012) makes international students “a key factor in promoting economic development” (p. 158). International students are not only important for universities, but even more so to the host communities, towns and regions where these higher education institutions are located.

American universities emphasize increasing their international student population each year – recognizing the value in increased diversity, but also towards generating revenue (Adnett, 2010; Altback, 2004; Haigh, 2002; McFadden et al., 2012). In realizing the importance of attracting international students to their campuses, administrators have not only created special offices and departments to serve international student populations on campuses, but institutions are also adopting sophisticated strategies and marketing techniques to recruit students in their
home countries (Fischer, 2011; Haigh, 2010; Mallett & McFadden, 2009; McBurne, 2000; Warwick, 1999). The competitive nature among institutions to attract international students is fueled by many challenges faced by universities in the United States; including demographic shifts among the student body – or what some scholars refer to as the privatization of universities (Kretovics, 2011). Administrators seek new students who are able to not only cover their tuition without the support of lenders, but who can also successfully complete their degrees within a short period of time to improve the rank of a university – thus “feeding this country’s obsession with winning” (Kretovics, 2011, p. 11).

The attractiveness of international students has resulted in the fact that American universities are now competing with one another in this global market (Kretovics, 2011). In order to prevail, universities in the U.S. have started to look into issues that international students face while on campus, such as culture shock (Adler, 1975; Oberg, 1960; Rawlings & Sue, 2013), adjustment problems (Gebhard, 2012), linguistic barriers (Kuo, 2011), immigration restrictions (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Starobin, 2006) and psychological distress associated with moving to a foreign country (Bennett, 1986). These issues have been studied and assistance programs targeting these problems have been implemented on many American campuses. There are dedicated offices that offer advice and support needed to ease the transition to an American institution (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Global education offices organize academic support programs that include: writing institutes/workshops, library resources, orientation sessions and regular meetings to offer support for students who arrive from all over the globe. Despite much emphasis on providing and offering a supportive/welcoming environment, it seems many universities have not yet taken advantage of leveraging their local communities to achieve the same competitive advantage.

In relating community to this discussion, the independent movement of people is argued to be fueled by globalization, which continues to have an impact on spatial contestations and local interactions (Castree, 2003; Oxfeld, 1998; Wall, 2000). Researchers across disciplines came to the consensus that community interactions are essential for cultural adaptation (Ruben & Kealey, 1979). Central to this argument is how people strive to achieve a sense of community (Castellini, Colombo, Maffeis, and Montali, 2011; Keller, 2003; Tinder 1980; Trager, 2001). Geographically, communities are defined by boundaries (Agnew, 1987); however, Massey and Jess (1995) further argued that people construct personal and communal identities to purposely separate themselves from the rest of the society. It is the very spaces people reside in that allows individuals to define the physical boundaries and create specific identities (Suttles, 1972) and a sense of belonging (Block, 2009). Poplin (1979) notes, communities “involve homes, shops, and cultural venues that define the local setting. People residing in a location interact among each other in place based locations to structure a ‘sense of belonging’” (p. 23). Moreover, Suttles (1972) pointed out that “people use territory, space, and movement to build collective representations that have communicative value” (p. 7). The potential absence of international students in the “homes, shops, and cultural venues that define the local setting”, can therefore be perceived to mean that, quite literally, international students are thus absent from the larger local community that defines its boundaries via these venues. As Suttles (1972) indicated, that absence translates into the way the community as a whole perceives itself, and how it is perceived from the outside –university towns fail to communicate the international, multicultural wealth that they are concealing within university walls.
Case-Study: Ohio Public University and the Host Town

The study subjects were a public university in Ohio and the town in which the university is located. The town has a local population of 29,000 residents, which constitutes just over a half of population in this area. The other half of the population comes from Ohio Public University (fictional name for this study) which hosts 27,000 undergraduate and graduate students on the main campus. Of the student population, two thousand are international students from approximately 99 different countries. The number of international admissions at the university has been growing every year, and there was an increase of 35% in international enrollment between the 2010 and 2011 academic years (Kent State University, 2011). Most international students come from China (772 students), Saudi Arabia (309 students), and India (142 students) (Kent State University, 2011). Among these international students at Ohio Public University, 20% reside in dormitories, 15% in apartments and private homes, directly contributing to the town’s economy, and 5% with their immediate or extended families. Contributions to the local economy extend beyond funds spent on accommodations. While specific data for the student population at Ohio Public University is not available, in general over 8.5% of international students in Ohio are married and 85% of them bring their families to reside with them in Ohio (NAFSA, 2012). Thus, the town hosting Ohio Public University was able to benefit from a portion of the net foreign student contribution to Ohio’s economy estimated at over $662 million for the 2010-2011 academic year (NAFSA, 2012). Ohio Public University and the host town also benefit from less tangible products of hosting a large population of international students. International students provide diverse perspectives in their academic work, and improve the overall educational experience for all students enrolled at the university. Finally, despite the fact that they remain unexplored, international students also bring a wide variety of consumer behaviors and lifestyle preferences that could fuel the existing businesses in this college town, but also inspire the creation of a diversity of cultural, culinary, and entertainment options. It is therefore crucial for the University and the town to continue to attract a broad and diverse population from around the world.

Research Method

This research was designed as a qualitative pilot study. Cultural geographers, among other researchers with social science background, are interested in the spatiality of everyday life at multiple and fluid scales (Holloway & Hubbard 2000) and often find qualitative methodologies central to conducting successful and thorough research projects (Kusek & Smiley, 2014). Qualitative methodologies, such as interviews or descriptive questionnaires, are well-suited to provide an insight into personal and lived experiences of research subjects (Jackson 1983). In order to assess international students’ perceptions of their host community at Ohio Public University, the researcher applied a descriptive questionnaire (see Appendix 1) supplemented by unstructured post-survey conversations with participants and participant observation. For this pilot study, 26 students completed the questionnaires and participated in subsequent conversations (see Appendix 1). The group of participants was diverse in terms of nationality, representing China (7 students), India (7 students), Saudi Arabia (6 students), Bangladesh (2), Poland (2), Tanzania (1), and the Philippines (1). Twenty participants were undergraduate students and six were graduate students. At the time of this study, 11 participants lived in Ohio with their families, and eight of these families had children.
The research was conducted within the town hosting the Ohio Public University, at both on-campus locations and off-campus student homes. On-campus locations included the university library, dining halls, and student center. The principal investigator attended a variety of social events on campus organized by the office of Global Education such as the International Cook-Off, and the Saudi Day on campus. The principal investigator also dined with participants in off-campus ethnic restaurants, and visited students at their homes to observe their daily activities.

To recruit students to participate in this pilot study the researcher required support from the University’s Global Education Office. The director sent out an invitation to students explaining the purpose of the study. The participants of this study volunteered to participate in the research, and were contacted by the researcher to set up interview and questionnaire meetings. The study began by asking participants to complete two questionnaires. One questionnaire pertained to how students spend time during an average day in their home towns in their country of origin, and the other questionnaire was focused on the students’ lifestyle in their current town in Ohio. Both questionnaires were designed around blank time blocks for each half-hour and participants were asked to fill-in appropriate time-blocks with descriptions of activities they perform in the college town as well as their home towns during designated hours of the day. By assessing both activities, those at home and in the United States, the questionnaire offered the researcher insight into differences in the students’ lifestyle in the American-based college town compared to the participants’ home. After the questionnaires were completed, the researcher engaged in conversations with all study participants, and employed participant observation to gain further insight into the participants’ lifestyles.

Post-interview conversations allowed the researcher to further discuss matters and experiences pertinent to critically understanding the differences between the daily routines of the participants in their home countries and how their daily routines in the United States differ or have been altered to adjust to a changing lifestyle. Participant observations further supplemented and supported the knowledge acquired from the questionnaire and conversations. In this regard, the data gathered for this study guided the interpretation and the direction of the analysis. Incorporating multiple methods reinforces and strengthens meanings that emerge (Elwood, 2010). Participant observation complemented other research methods by challenging existing perspectives and allowed the researcher to gain a subsequent detail and understanding into the lives of the research participants in their collective gatherings and evaluate their activities. For example, attending invitations to Saudi Day on campus allowed the researcher to experience Saudi Arabian culture, and this allowed for additional conversations with students, thus offering further insight into the life of this particular student population in their Ohio residence and how they interact while abroad. Additionally, the students from India also invited the researcher to their cultural functions, meals, and gatherings offering further insight into the students’ lifestyles in the college town. During participant observations, numerous topics were discussed such as struggles adjusting to the American reality, frustrations associated with being away from home and common familiarities and general difficulties residing in a foreign country. To touch on these topics and to further develop an understanding based on the objectives of this study, during participant observations conversations were directed at soliciting information regarding the students’ perceptions of the college town and the community.

It is important to highlight that this study was not explicitly designed to account for cultural differences between the local town and specific ethnic groups of international students, but rather at identifying broad patterns in behaviors, perceptions, and preferences which may
inhibit community engagement. Nevertheless, during the data collection process, it became evident that in addition to general themes, individual ethnic groups have varying cultural reasons for their perceptions, preferences, and lifestyle choices. I felt that highlighting these cultural peculiarities would emphasize the diversity of needs that local communities may account in developing a strategy for the engagement of international students.

Answers to questionnaires were reviewed by the researcher with consideration for the information gathered via follow-up conversations and participant observation. In interpreting the data gathered, the researched focused on identifying common themes but also highlighting interesting comments or opinions which could serve as a foundation for further research.

Findings

It is important to first recognize and acknowledge the engagement and participation of international students in this research aimed at understanding the presence of international students in host university communities. Based on the results and discussion below, this study of international students at a major university in Ohio indicates that the international students do not necessarily feel engaged in their local city community.

This observation first derives from comparing international students’ lives in their home countries and their lives in Ohio. The researcher found that students are satisfied with the university and the quality of education they are receiving, but they suffer from the lack of involvement in the local community. Several students have indicated that the college town is too small, too isolated and is insufficiently exciting. Three students mentioned that after completing thirty credit hours they are planning to transfer to a different school, and this decision is based on the physical environment, not the quality of education. All participants agreed that they are satisfied with the quality of education that the university provides, and they appreciate the campus facilities that the institution offers. At the same time, one student claimed that this smaller college town, although quite boring, is a good place when you arrive to the U.S. with family. He said: “it is safe here, and I don’t have to worry about my wife”.

Based on the students participating in this study, international students in this college town in Ohio have a strong connection to campus but not to the greater town community. The majority of these students’ lives do not exceed beyond the university campus. The questionnaires indicate that students who participated in this pilot project rarely visit shops in the downtown area and only occasionally visit restaurants. When comparing the activities students would partake in at home to the college town in Ohio, big differences in general everyday lifestyles were observed. There were several examples of students who led much more socially active lives when at home: in particular Chinese students indicated that in China they spent a lot of their spare time in malls and meeting friends for coffee or ice-cream, and such activities were mostly absent from their experiences in Ohio. The students from Saudi Arabia indicated that in their country of origin they interact more often with other males by playing soccer, spending their spare time in male-only locales, going to smoke Hookahs, visiting mosques or racing cars in the desert.

When students were asked to include the places where they spend their spare time in the American college town, the majority of the students included university buildings such as the student center, university library, computer labs or the recreational center. The library and recreational center were the most commonly listed places in the questionnaire. The only place outside of campus acknowledged by all students participating in this survey was the local
Walmart because most of them later mentioned this is where they shop for groceries. In fact, one student from Saudi Arabia told me that “all the employees in Walmart know me by now, because this is the only place I go to.” The only other store several students included in the questionnaire was the International Home Market, which is an international food store located in downtown, and Target which is several miles away in a neighboring town.

Several students from Saudi Arabia, China and India indicated that they do not feel comfortable going into downtown. For example, one Chinese student specified that they do not go to bars because, as the student noted: “my parents told me not to go to bars as nothing good happens there. I would go but only with an American friend.” This comment was interesting in the sense that it relates back to the theoretical framework introduced earlier – a sense of belonging is established when people residing in a location interact with each other in place based locations. Thus, a key to community engagement of international students may lie in providing opportunities for international students to interact personally with domestic students in local community locations. Unfortunately, as Gebhard (2012, p. 187) points out, creating these place based locations for domestic and international students may be difficult due to initial barriers to communication. Gebhard (2012) provides an example of a female Thai student who feels uncomfortable with her American roommate “sitting on her bed with shoes on or by changing her clothes in front of her.” Such cultural differences often make it uncomfortable for both the international student and the domestic student to personally interact. Consequently, international/domestic students fail to create the opportunity to share experiences in local community locations. As discussed by students in conversations, several students noted the fact that people from different cultures do not always feel comfortable reviewing lifestyle related questions with domestic students; rather hoping to establish relationships organically - which can take months, if not years, to develop.

Fifteen of the student participants indicated they typically meet with other people from their own ethnic communities regularly—such as private spaces (i.e. someone’s home). Although it is determined in this study that students tend to gather with other students from similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds, it has also been discussed that international students often meet with other international students from different countries to share unique aspects/elements of their culture. This was made evident by several students who mentioned in conversations that on weekends and evenings it is common practice to visit friends and share meals with other fellow international students. It was also common for students to attend on-campus activities organized by campus organizations or the Global Education Office. A student from Tanzania said:

I love gathering with my international friends on weekends. Although, we come from different corners of the world we can relate to each other. We have the same problems, we face cultural and financial obstacles, and we all miss home. We cook together, talk, watch pictures from our countries, and pray together.

When students described their eating habits many differences could be observed, some of which should be considered by local businesses in this college town. During conversations with several Saudi students, believe that the college town should have more diverse restaurants that would cater to their tastes, and more importantly restaurants should be open at later hours that suit their living style. One student said: “the only place you can eat dinner at 11pm is Sheetz [gas station with ready-food section].” This is a major cultural difference that has been observed
where it is more common for restaurants to remain open later in Middle Eastern countries because of the local climate—because it is cooler in the late-evening and early-morning hours.

In addition to eating patterns as an obstacle to community engagement, students from India and Poland identified pricing as an impediment to more frequently visiting community food venues. Students from India and Poland expressed the belief that food is overpriced and is not diverse enough. Indian students mentioned, for instance, the Student Center which serves Indian food but noted that the selection is very limited and pricy. Four Indian students wrote on the questionnaire that on Saturdays they have lunch at an Indian restaurant located in a nearby small town. The Polish doctoral students said that due to the relatively high prices in restaurants they only go to restaurants on special occasions such as anniversaries or birthdays and ‘name-days’ that they celebrate.

The questionnaires also indicated that the Saudi Arabian, Indian and Chinese students do not feel comfortable with going to places that serve alcohol or where alcohol is being consumed. Therefore, if there are bars that serve food at night, international students tend to avoid these establishments because many of these students do not perceive them as safe or welcoming spaces. There are a host of investment opportunities that could aim to create spaces which international students (especially those arriving from non-Western cultures) would consider safe alternatives, and such establishments which may also attract a local crowd because of the opportunity to experience another cultural setting. For example, there is one Hookah bar, however Saudi students who were interviewed did not find it a desirable or safe place to visit. Saudi students noted that in their home country they regularly attended Hookah bars, but in Ohio they were instead gathering together at their apartments to engage in Hookah smoking. When the Saudi students were asked to provide a reason for this difference, their response was that they perceive the downtown area in the evening as iniquitous. Perceptions of places may create barriers, and sometimes misunderstanding places can make community interactions difficult for international students. As Ruben and Kealey (1979) note, community interactions are essential for cultural adaptation, and any isolation creates an environment of separation and exclusion. This has been observed in this study.

Several students from different background commented on religion. Chinese students noted the importance of local worship places towards accommodating the international population. One student from China for instance found the local church very welcoming, and said that he visits a local church each week. When asked about his experience with the church, he mentioned “the church staff is very nice, welcoming and provides free dinner once a week.” Saudi students indicated that when they are in Saudi Arabia they frequently visit Mosques, but in the college town such opportunities are very limited. Other responses indicated curiosity about religious life which was absent at home. One student noted: “I do not know what religion is all about, you know in China I never went to church. I would like to go to church here in the United States to see what it is.” This shows that international students are interested in experiencing the local culture, but as acknowledged above, many find it difficult to establish relationships which, in the end, is necessary to enable international students to pursue their curiosity.

One final point to consider, migrants maintain transnational networks with their families and friends and never fully feel like they have moved to another country (Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008). Students who participated in this project stay in touch often with their family back home. All students marked Skype - the internet-based voice and video application - as a means of communicating with family back home as either their daily or weekly activity. Skype video-conferencing enables students to maintain their personal networks at home on a regular basis but
at the same time it limits their interaction with the local community in the United States. Capitalizing on such lifestyle changes may be another opportunity to involve international students in the entertainment activities in Ohio – maybe pioneering Skype-enabled restaurants is one revolutionary idea which may just work.

Conclusion

Although the number of students who participated in this study was small, the objectives of this pilot study were to identify future areas for research to evaluate in more depth the struggles that international students have with immersing themselves in the local community. While inconclusive and requiring further analysis, this study pointed to a large gap between the diversity of locations and activities pursued by international students in their home towns and the American host university town. For the author, the areas of particular interest can be identified around three themes. First, international students are either most comfortable among others students from their cultural/regional background, or among other international students. What is interesting is that in addition to limiting their personal network, groups of international students also limit their use of locations to private residences and university property. Exploring the decisions behind selecting their personal network of friends, and selecting the location for cultivating that network could be one area of further study. One reason that may be influencing the selection of location is fear and misperception. Many students featured in this study identified the downtown location as unsafe, or iniquitous. At the same time, they indicated that they use those establishments which are essential to maintaining their daily functions – shopping for groceries, reading, studying, communicating with family. Thus, a second area of study could focus on how centralizing essential services and retail offerings in close proximity to nightlife offerings of university towns could influence their general appeal to international students. Finally, while not unanimously quoted by all students, some students mentioned the cost of engaging in activities outside of the university as discouraging. International students come from diverse backgrounds and represent varying levels of affluence. Nevertheless, the principal investigator would like to understand what types of free or university sponsored activities could be organized by university towns to remove pricing from the list of obstacles to community engagement. These topics of inquiry generally and individually represent an underexplored area and more research is needed to assess such perspectives and perceptions of the international student experiences. While this study has indicated certain patterns, behaviors and perceptions that international students at this major university in Ohio exhibit, the nature of such research can be replicated by university towns across the U.S. to further identify similarities, or to determine if other case-specific trends emerge. Based on the findings of this pilot study, the impact from subsequent work will result in attempts to establish programs aimed at making international students feel more involved/engaged in the lifestyles and the physical environment of the local community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I have collected data for this article while I was working on my doctoral degree at Kent State University. I would like to thank the Department of Geography at Kent State University for facilitating an academic environment where students felt encouraged to work on projects that
were independent of their doctoral dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. Nick Wise for his support and mentorship during the writing process.

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About the Author

Weronika Kusek is an assistant professor in the Department of Earth, Environmental and Geographical Sciences at Northern Michigan University. Dr. Kusek is a human geographer interested in migration, globalization, urbanism, and qualitative methods used in cultural geography. She completed her PhD from Kent State University. E-mail: wkusek@nmu.edu

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International Students’ Enhanced Academic Performance: Effects of Campus Resources

Delphine N. Banjong (Doctoral Student)
Department of Teaching & Learning
University of North Dakota (USA)

Abstract

This article investigates international students’ challenges, such as financial, English proficiency, loneliness/homesickness in the United States. In addition, it assesses how these students coped with such difficulties by making use of resources on campus, such as an international center, writing center, counseling center, and the student success center. Based on 344 responses, the results indicated that international students with language difficulties sought help from the writing and student success centers while those who reported financial stress and loneliness had visited the counseling center.

Keywords: international students; academic performance; challenges; campus resources

International students constitute a good proportion of student population in universities and colleges in the United States (Open Doors Report, 2013). International student enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities has increased by 7%, to a total of 819,644, with most of the students contributing coming from China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia (Open Doors, 2013). When international students move to foreign countries, they face challenges as they try to adjust to their new environments (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Some of these challenges are anticipated while others are not foreseen. International students manage to cope with these problems as they shift from their cultural norms and adapt to the way of life in their new environments. Acculturation is often quite challenging, coupled with the fact that these students also face academic pressure. These difficulties tend to have negative consequences on these students’ health and academic achievement (Kilinc & Granello, 2003). Some of the prominent difficulties of international students include culture shock, homesickness, loss of social support, discrimination, language barriers, loneliness, depression, and anxiety (Faleel et al., 2012; McClure, 2007; Zhao et al., 2008), and these difficulties upset their academic performance.

A number of studies have looked at the experiences and challenges of international students (; Kuo, 2011; Lee, 2010; Tucker & Ang, 2007), but a few studies have examined how these international students still succeed academically despite the odds (Tseng & Newton, 2002).
This study seeks to investigate the problems of international students at a university in the Midwest and assess how these students had been able to manage their difficulties partly by making use of campus resources.

International students experience difficulty adjusting to their new environments and new ways of life. Shih and Brown (2000) noted that international students generally faced more adjustment problems than did U.S. students, and that the top five adjustment problems were (1) lack of English proficiency, (2) inadequate financial resources, (3) problems in social adjustment or integration, (4) problems in daily living, and (5) loneliness or homesickness. Shih and Brown (2000), in concert with Wan et al. (1992), posited that these adjustment difficulties tended to affect international students’ academic performance, mental and physical health, level of satisfaction with their cross-cultural experiences, and attitudes toward the host nations as they seek to adapt to their new environment. However, international students do not seek counseling like domestic students do (Misra & Castillo, 2004) because some of them view the word counseling as a negative term (Onabule & Boes, 2013), and they might not be familiar with the counseling process (Olivas & Li, 2006). Nevertheless, Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) showed that the writing center has been of great help to international students with the composition of their papers.

Shih and Brown (2000) defined acculturation as a dynamic process of relating to a dominant group by which a minority group selectively adopts its value system and cultural practices when involved in the processes of integrating with, and differentiating from, the dominant group and that such changes result in three possible outcomes. These outcomes include (a) assimilation wherein a person from a minority group replaces his/her own culture with the host culture’s attitudes, values, and behaviors; (b) resistance to assimilation wherein a person from a minority group clings to his/her own culture and resists the host country’s culture (Suinn et al., 1995); and (c) biculturalism wherein a person from a minority culture adopts aspects from both his/her own culture and the host culture; (Suinn et al., 1995). While Suinn uses the term biculturalism, Gibson (1998) uses the term accommodation and acculturation without assimilation to explain that the student retains his/her home culture but learns and participates in the culture of the host countries, thereby, blending the two cultures to facilitate their adaptation. The type of culture these students adopt determines the magnitude of stress they experience.

The acculturative stressors encountered by international students have been known to lead to mental and psychological illnesses, such as depression and anxiety. Some scholars such as Parr, Bradley, and Bingi (1992) believe that international students are a resilient group, but many studies have shown that the challenges faced by these students, particularly in the early stages of their stay in the United States as they adjust to their new educational and social environment (Sherry et al., 2010).

The stressors experienced by international students in U.S. colleges and universities have resulted in conflicts between the students and faculty supervisors in some instances. International student-supervisor conflicts have been found to result from international students’ lack of English proficiency, unclear expectations, lack of openness, time, and feedback (Adrian-Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007). However, the advisors know that international students are hardworking (Nguyen, 2013). Research has found that host nation students generally seek help from their supervisors only on academic or vocational problems but turn to friends or other sources for help on emotional and other personal problems (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986). This seeking of help is not the same with international students who look up to their supervisors for almost everything, given that they are generally unfamiliar with their new society. Unfortunately,
due to cultural disparities, international students often find it difficult at the initial stages to get along with some supervisors (Adrian-Taylor et al., 2007) and understanding coursework. Many of these students possess an accent that makes it difficult for some American professors to understand them when they speak, and students themselves have difficulties hearing the professors’ accent when they just come into the United States (Kuo, 2011), and this affects their level of communication.

The purpose of the present work was to investigate the problems of international students in a U.S. Midwestern University and to assess how these students have been able to manage their difficulties, partly by making use of campus resources, such as the international center, student success center, counseling center, and the writing center. This study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) Did international students at the target university face challenges? Did such challenges adversely affect their school performance? 2) How useful are campus resources to this group of students?

Method

Participants

At the time when this study was carried out, the university had a total international student population of 1,077 (Undergraduate students numbered 694, graduate students numbered 263, and dependents of students defined as either spouses or children of international students numbered 120). The respondents to the study were 349 international students enrolled at the university, resulting in a response rate of 36.5%. The gender of the respondents were 198 male and 146 female. The respondents were from four different continents: North America, including Belize, Canada, Grenada, and Jamaica (n = 45); Asia, including China, Taiwan, Korea, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Philippines, Iran, Japan, and Bangladesh (n = 172); Europe, including France, England, Germany, Norway, UK, Ukraine, Czech Rep. Croatia, and Albania (n = 38); and Africa, including Egypt, Cameroon, Kenya, Zambia, Togo, Nigeria, Liberia, Ghana, Eritrea, and Tanzania (n = 89).

Instrument

The author designed the questionnaire for this study consisting of three parts: (1) demographics, (2) students’ needs/problems, and (3) campus facilities. Questions on demographics covered information about the age, gender, country of origin, educational level, length of stay in the United States, funding sources for students, and visa status. Questions under students’ needs and/or problems focused on financial crises, English proficiency, and loneliness/homesickness. Questions on campus facilities investigated the students’ level of interaction and assistance they have had from the international center, writing center, student success center, and counseling center at the university. One dependent variable question was asked to assess the academic success level of international students. Students responded to all questions, except those on demographics, on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The descriptive statistics on these scales are displayed in the appendix section.

In order to assess the effects of the lack of English proficiency, loneliness/homesickness, and the financial life of international students on their academic performance, a factor analysis was conducted with these three different scales. Varimax rotation was used to determine the distinct constructs into meaningful and comparable measures. The validity of the data obtained
was determined using an exploratory factor analysis. Internal reliability was found to be sufficient for all of the scales, \( \alpha = .69-.89 \), and the scale distributions all approached normality (that is, skewness and kurtosis less than or equal to +1.00). From the factor analysis, a fourth factor emerged, which the researcher labeled “technology.” Some items on the scales were removed due to negative, weak, or cross loadings on other factors. In the end, there were four factors, which will be used for further analysis in this study. These factors were (1) lack of English proficiency, (2) loneliness/homesickness, (3) financial life, and (4) technology. The dependent variable in this study was students’ academic success and the following question was asked, “How successful do you feel you are in your studies?” Students responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 “very unsuccessful” to 5 “very successful.” Students spent an average of 8.6 minutes to complete the survey. Usable responses total 344 while five (5) were incomplete and, thus, rejected.

**Procedure**

In the beginning of Fall 2013, an online survey/questionnaire was designed by the author and sent to all international students, except for their dependents, to be completed at the U.S. Midwestern University where the study was conducted. The survey was sent to the students through the International Center and re-sent after one week, so that the survey remained open for a total of two weeks. Participants were asked to respond based on how they felt about each statement. A total of 344 students had completed the questionnaire. Students were encouraged to complete the survey but no additional incentive was given to participants.

**Results**

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the challenges of international students and their academic success. English proficiency had a significant negative correlation value of \( r (325) = -.46, p<.001 \) in relation to academic success. These students were the most negatively affected with regards to school outcomes. Loneliness and homesickness had a significant negative correlation with academic success of \( r (321) = -.325, p<.001 \). This result suggests that students who lived in solitude, or who had little social interaction, and felt depressed (as a consequence of homesickness) tended not to focus on their studies. This was then reflected in their poor school outcomes.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>( \alpha )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Academic Success</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.46**</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. English Proficiency</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>.895</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Loneliness and Home Sickness</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.895</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Finance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.717</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Technology</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.611</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* \( p<.05; ** p<.001.\)

The third obstacle of international students was financial needs. A significant negative correlation of \( r (332) = -.24, p<.001 \) was found between financial needs and academic
achievement. Technological challenges had a correlation value of only \( r (321) = -0.13 \ p<0.05 \). There was a significant negative correlation between stressors experienced by foreign students and their academic performance (see Table 1).

Students who reported English language difficulties were largely found to have visited the writing and success centers to seek help with homework. Such visits positively impacted the academic outcome of international students. Visits to the writing center gave a significant positive correlation of \( r (325) = 0.371, p<0.001 \) in relation to academic performance, while visits to the success center gave a correlation value of \( r (320) = 0.268 \ p<0.001 \) with respect to academic achievement. Students who reported having felt lonely and homesick in their new environment were found to have visited the counseling center. These visits had a positive effect on their school outcome, giving a significant correlation value of \( r (331) =0.15, \ p<0.001 \). Financially needy students were also reported to have sought counseling. A significant correlation of \( r (332) = -0.141, \ p<0.001 \) with respect to school outcome was found in this regard. In general, International Students with challenges sought help around campus in one way or another. Campus facilities proved resourceful and helpful to international students, improving their academic performance.

Next, the success level of international students had significantly negative correlation with campus facilities. Students who felt least successful in their courses appeared to have visited the success center the most, giving a negative correlation value of \( r (329) = -0.43, \ p<0.001 \). Counseling service center was negatively correlated with the academic success of international students\( (r (334) = -0.372, p<0.001) \) (see Table 2).

### Table 2

<table>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Academic Success</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. International Center</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.40 **</td>
<td>0.29 **</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Writing Center</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.55 **</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Student Success Center</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.27 **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Counseling Center</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** \( p<0.05; \  \ p<0.001 \).

Lastly, a negative correlation with respect to school success of \( r (334) = -0.232, \ p<0.001 \) was found for low performing international students who sought help from the writing center. Visits to the international center did not show any correlation with the challenges of international students. The correlation coefficients in this case were insignificant, which means that virtually all international students visit the international center irrespective of whether they are stressed or not. Comparing the writing center to the international center, a positive significant correlation coefficient of \( r (334) = 0.397, p<0.001 \) was found, implying that students who visited the writing center also visited the international center (see Table 2).

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to investigate how challenges of international students predicted their future academic performance. A significant regression equation was found \((F(4, 298) = 25.212, \ P < .001)\), with an \( R^2 \) value of 26%. This result implied that 26% of the failure of international students resulted from the problems they faced or that the
removal of these challenges could improve the academic outcome of international students by at least 26%.

The role of campus resources in predicting the academic outcome of international students was also probed through multiple linear regression analysis. A significant regression equation was found \( F(4, 326) = 30.187, P < .001 \), with an \( R^2 \) value of 27%. These results showed that if international students were encouraged to pay visits to the different centers on campus to seek help, their school performance could improve by at least 27%. In general, the different campus resources proved to be resourceful to international students and motivating students to visit these centers would improve international students’ life and performance.

**Discussion**

International students faced various challenges, with English proficiency being the most challenging for this set of students. The academic performance of international students could greatly improve if they seek help from campus resources concerning the challenges they face.

Lack of English proficiency is a major problem faced by international students, which is not surprising since without proficiency in a language of instruction, students are neither able to fully follow lectures and understand notes from such lectures, nor write assessment tests and exams properly. Kuo (2011) found that graduate international students could not understand class lectures because of the speed with which the professors lectured coupled with their accents. Lack of English proficiency has widely been reported in the literature as a key obstacle to international students. For example, Shih and Brown (2000), as well as Zhai (2002), observed that a deficiency in the English language topped the list of problems of international students. While investigating adjustment problems of international students, Gebhard (2012) found that some international students could not even express themselves clearly in English during the participants’ interviews.

In the current study, a strong positive correlation was found between English language barriers and visitation to the writing and student success centers on the campus involved in the study. Students who reported difficulties with English language were found to have visited these centers, and such visits apparently impacted their school outcome positively. Sherry et al., (2010) also found the Writing and American Language Centers particularly helpful to international students with language difficulties. With the lack of English proficiency, making new friends can be difficult; international students are likely to develop a complex and such forces will play into their academic success.

Loneliness/homesickness constituted the next level of crises faced by international students in this study. This study found loneliness and homesickness to adversely impact the academic output of these students. Telbis et al. (2014) showed that students who had high confidence in their community acceptance also displayed proportionate confidence in the completion of their programs of study. It seems plausible that loneliness leads to stress and depression, and results from the inability of foreign students to immediately blend into a new society and meet up with their studies. Language barriers are among the crises that breed timidity, fear, and isolation among international students. Such isolation often degenerates to depression, which, in turn, affects academic achievement.

Loneliness and homesickness often decrease among international students the longer they stay in their new environment (Sawir et al., 2008). Building new social networks is often a challenge to these students, particularly when the language barrier is present. However,
international students who make friends with students of other nationalities are often found to be happier, more fulfilled, and less homesick (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). Counseling centers on campuses have been reported to improve international students’ ordeal of loneliness but are generally less utilized by these students in comparison to domestic students (Misra & Castillo, 2004). In this present study, students who felt lonely went to the counseling center to seek help. Onabule and Boes (2013) observed that some international students perceived the counseling center negatively, which seems to suggest that such students felt that only students with special disabilities or problems needed to go there for counseling. Consequently, such students did not feel needful enough to have visited the center.

Financial pressure adversely impacts international students’ level of school performance and moderates their decisions to quit school or persevere in their studies (Bennett, 2003). Financial pressure on international students owes its explanation to the fact that such students generally are required to pay more tuition than domestic students, and exchange rates may be unfavorable to them such that a small amount of money in the currency of their host country is equivalent to a large sum of money in their home country (Geo, 2008). In the present study, students who had financial crises had poor academic performance. These students, because they could not handle the stress associated with the lack of finance, ended up going to the counseling center to seek help.

The next reported obstacle to international students in this study was technology. Encountering new advanced technology can be a nightmare and demoralizing when a person is unable to find a way around accommodating themselves to the technology. International students from developing countries, in particular, frequently encounter new unfamiliar technology when they travel to study in western countries. In this study, some of these students were unable to type well, use blackboard on school websites to interact with course professors, download course material, or do homework. Such challenges often lead to frustration and poor academic performance.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

A limitation of this study was the fact that only one campus was involved. The study generalized international students from all cultures and did not consider the fact that these students had different backgrounds and hence might solve challenges in different ways. Neither did the study consider the fact that undergraduate or graduate students could face different challenges. Future studies should consider more universities to ensure that the results would not be campus-specific and void of diversity from a variety of campuses. Also, research should be carried out to determine if international students from different cultures and the different academic levels (e.g., first year, second year, etc.) face different challenges and how they go about solving those challenges. A mixed-method study could also be considered, which would present an opportunity to explore both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a more in-depth discovery of patterns, practices, and the traditions of international students, which was beyond the scope of the current study.

**Implications**

This study reveals the importance of campus resources to international students, and so, they should be encouraged to visit these centers for help. More awareness about the location and functioning of these centers needs to be done since some students indicated that they did not
know where to find help on campus. International centers should reinforce their efforts of sensitizing the international students about the resources on campus. Sensitization of international students is very important especially on their arrival. If these students know about the campus resources early, this information will help them to adapt easily and reduce challenges thereby improving their school performance.

New international students are suggested to be paired with other international students who are mentors on campus who have already been in the U.S. for at least a year. The student who has been in the U.S. should know about the resources on campus and have received help from them. Pairing these sets of international students will ease adaption for the new student because the mentors have been in the U.S. for a while, and they will be able to direct the new students to campus resources where they can seek help. This knowledge will help the new student reduce challenges and more easily adapt to the system and, hence, improve in their academic performance.

REFERENCES


Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/opendoors


### Appendix

Scales for Challenges and Campus Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>en_1</td>
<td>I find difficulties understanding my professor’s accent.</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en_2</td>
<td>My professors have difficulties understanding my accent.</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en_3</td>
<td>I find it difficult to communicate my idea in class</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en_4</td>
<td>I have difficulties writing down my idea</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en_5</td>
<td>My professors teach much material in a single class.</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en_6</td>
<td>My reading speed is slow</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en_7</td>
<td>I have to read my notes over and over before understanding</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en_8</td>
<td>The academic workload often gets me down.</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en_9</td>
<td>My typing speed is slow. *</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulties using Blackboard</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulties accessing campus connection</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know where to ask for academic help. R</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I lack confidence when asking a question in class</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Loneliness and Homesickness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I lack companionship.</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a lot in common with the people around me. R</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My interest and ideas are not shared by those around me.</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel left out.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that no one understands me well.</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel isolated from others.</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel shy among the people I interact with.</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having close relationships has been difficult to me.</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have the foodstuff I Like to eat. *</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulties taking care of my hair. *</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel free to discuss my personal problems with others.</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Financial Life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult for me to meet my basic needs.</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I send money to my family back in my country*</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am personally responsible for my needs. *</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live a comfortable life with the income I earn. R</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am dependent upon others for my personal needs. R*</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to pay all of my bills on time. R*</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have always struggled financially.</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Help received from different centers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The international center has been of help to me.</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The writing center has been of help to me.</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student success center has been useful to me.</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been to the counseling center for counseling.</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Success in your studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How successful do you feel you are in your studies?</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Participants responded on scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree.* “R” indicates that item was reverse coded. * Indicates items that were removed prior to final analyses.

**About the Author:**

**DELPHINE N. BANJONG** is a Graduate Research Assistant in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota. E-mail: delphine.banjong@my.und.edu

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Meeting the Needs of Chinese English Language Learners at Writing Centers in America: A Proposed Culturally Responsive Model

Peizhen Wang (Doctoral Student)
Crystal Machado, EdD
Department of Professional Studies in Education
Indiana University of Pennsylvania (USA)

Abstract

This paper describes the ways in which Writing Centers (WC) currently serve English Language Learners (ELL) at American universities. The authors argue that the pedagogy offered at these centers does not always meet the needs of the Chinese ELLs who make up the largest population of ELLs at American universities. The proposed supplemental model they recommend, which is grounded in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), has the potential to better meet the needs of Chinese ELLs. The authors identify obstacles to successful implementation of the proposed model and ways in which these, and gaps in research, can be addressed by directors of Writing Centers.

Keywords: Chinese, English Language Learners, Writing Centers, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Program Evaluation

Academic writing is a significant part of students’ academic learning and is difficult for a large majority of native speakers of English (NSE); but it is even more so for international students who are often English Language Learners (ELL). With the large influx of international students at American universities, higher education faculty, researchers, and administrators need to address this growing minority’s needs, particularly in their social and academic lives. The extent to which writing centers (WC), which were developed to meet the needs of NSE, meet the needs of a population that now includes many more local and international ELLs should be examined.

This paper will first provide readers with an overview of the changing demographics in American higher education. It will focus on Chinese ELLs’ experiences with WC, primarily because Chinese students comprise the largest group of international students at American universities, and also because the lead author, a Chinese ELL herself, has had personal experiences with both WC and the students they serve. Following a description of the cultural differences between Chinese and American students and the related influence on academic writing, the paper will describe challenges faced by Chinese ELLs at WCs. The paper will then explain how some of these challenges can be mitigated by using Culturally Responsive
Pedagogy (CRP) as a guiding theory to inform the philosophy, programming, and tutor-tutee interactions that take place at the WC. Finally, the paper will identify obstacles to successful implementation of the proposed program, as well as ways in which these obstacles, and gaps in research, can be addressed by directors of Writing Centers.

**Changing Demographics in the Higher Education Classrooms of America**

The student body of American schools has become increasingly diverse, culturally and linguistically, due to the growing numbers of immigrants from all over the world (Banks, 2010; de Araujo, 2011; Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999; Matsuda, Fruit, & Lamm, 2006), including countries in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa; this has resulted in an increase in bilingual and multilingual learners in college classrooms. American colleges and universities educate 40 percent more international students than a decade ago. The seven percent increase last year resulted in a record high of 819,644 international students (Open Doors Report, 2013). The 55,000 increase from 2011/2012 includes proportionately more students from Saudi Arabia and China. With a 21 percent increase in Chinese students the Chinese international student population has soared to 235,000 students (Open Doors Report, 2013).

Andrade (2006) found that international students, compared to their American counterparts, have limited access to social and emotional support from family and friends, especially in the early stages of their college lives. Additionally, studies show that international students’ social and academic adjustment in American colleges and universities could be negatively influenced due to limited proficiency in English (Andrade, 2006; de Araujo, 2011; Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000). In recent years, the *New York Times* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* have been urging institutions of higher education to address the challenges faced by Chinese students studying in America (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011; Fischer, 2013). To provide Chinese students with the support they need to gain proficiency in spoken and written English, it is essential that educators and directors of WCs understand how their needs differ from those of their American counterparts.

**Chinese English Language Learners’ Needs**

Academic language, both oral and written, is a fundamental requirement for college students. Because academic language includes formal speaking, comprehending, and writing, it is not acquired as easily as conversational language (Rodriguez & Gomez, 2008). Academic writing is one of the basic skills that leads to academic achievement and future success in students’ professions (Elander, Harrington, Norton, Robinson, & Reddy, 2006; Salamonson, Koch, Weaver, Everett, & Jackson, 2010; Weaver & Jackson, 2011). Academic writing competence is essential for people who need to communicate socially and professionally (Yu & He, 2010). Weaver and Jackson (2011) found that writing is difficult for most students, regardless of their background. Students who speak English as a second or third language face additional challenges as they try to master critical skills (Kasper, 1997; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Salamonson, Everett, Koch, Andrew, & Davidson, 2008; Zhang, 2008). Shei (2005), who studied 15 Chinese graduate students, recommends additional research to examine the factors that contribute to excellence in Chinese ELLs’ academic writing.

Yu and He (2010) emphasize the importance of understanding the factors that influence thinking, which is the basis of good writing. More than two decades ago, Cai (1993) and Fox...
(1994) found that the primary obstacles hindering clear expressions in academic writing are cultural factors that influence ways of thinking, and not factors related to low English proficiency. Research by Huang and Brown (2009) and Li (2007) confirms that cultural differences continue to explain the limitations of Chinese ELLs’ writing. A lack of awareness about Chinese students’ rhetorical habits, which come from their cultural and ideological backgrounds, could result in the belief that Chinese students produce “bad writing” (Cai, 1993). A deeper understanding of how people of diverse backgrounds think will make it easier to tailor services to their needs.

Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan (2001) found that people growing up in diverse cultural backgrounds have different ways of thinking. Triandis’s (1980) groundbreaking book on subjective culture, the first *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, and Hofstede’s (1980) highly influential book, *Culture’s Consequences*, led to an explosion of cross-cultural research in the field of psychology that explores the constructs of individualism and collectivism and the ways in which these constructs explain cultural differences. Hofstede found four dimensions of cultural differences between nations. He found that people raised in modern developed nations (e.g., the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands) had higher levels of individualism than those in traditional, developing nations (e.g., Guatemala, Pakistan, and Thailand), who had higher levels of collectivism. American students, who tend to have an individualist orientation, value individual freedom, personal success, and self-expression; conversely, people with a collectivistic orientation, like many Chinese international students, value relationships, group harmony, and group success (Donkor, 2011). More recently, Williams (2011), who studied help-seeking and self-efficacy behavior in 671 undergraduates measured by frequency of WC visitations, found that ELL students were more active help-seekers than their domestic counterparts. They speculated that this was due to ELLs’ attribution tendencies; research documents that Asian students are more likely to attribute academic success to internal and controllable factors than American students.

Additionally, the differences in the ways students perceive the world are further shaped by the types of education they receive. The education that American students receive is typically based on the belief that students are innately curious about the world, eager to explore, and favor originality in learning (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; J. Li, 2011; Nisbett et al., 2001). Students raised in America, on average, have had the opportunity to experience a classroom environment that encourages critical thinking, questioning, group discussions, peer review, and independent thinking. As such, American students tend to think analytically, and this is reflected both in speaking and in writing. However, students raised in China, who are influenced by Confucian and Taoist philosophies, tend to think holistically and are not encouraged to question the teachers’ authority (Eckstein, Kalaydjian, Miranda, Mitchell, Mohamed, Smith-Palinkas, York, & Zollner, 2003).

The standardized test-based educational system Chinese students experience encourages rote memorization (Li, 2011; Li, 2007; Wen, 2006). Very seldom are students encouraged to question ideas in textbooks and scholarly articles. Students are expected to give thoughtful answers instead of personal or unstructured answers (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Scholars have found that Chinese students perceive peer review or peer feedback to be an ineffective way of learning, because critique has the potential to disrupt group relationships and group harmony, which they value greatly (Carson & Nelson, 1996; X. Li, 2007). How effectively are the unique needs of Chinese ELLs met when they move from China to America?
Writing Centers in America: Is Anything Missing?

This section provides an overview of the services provided by American universities to help students improve their use of academic language and a description of the challenges faced by Chinese ELLs who frequent writing centers.

Services Provided by American Writing Centers

WCs were initially developed to meet the needs of NSEs in the 1970s in response to the literacy crisis. As the student bodies at American universities started to become ethnically and linguistically diverse, WCs started to serve increasing numbers of local and international ELLs. WCs play an important role in the academic lives of American and international students by providing academic writing support for college students across disciplines. They help students become accomplished writers in course assignments or other writing-intensive tasks by offering one-on-one tutoring, workshops, etc. (Mahaffy, 2007). The primary focus of WCs tends to be on students’ rhetorical writing, such as organization and coherence, which are non-linguistic and aimed at higher-order thinking (Nakamaru, 2010; Wang, 2012).

Only 3% of 4-year public universities employed professional tutors with advanced degrees (Writing Center Research Report, 2007-2008). Peer tutoring has gained popularity in WCs over the last couple of decades, largely because of the widely held perception that having similar experiences helps tutors to interact and communicate more effectively with tutees who come for help (Williams & Severino, 2004). Tutors are typically peer students who have strong English writing skills and comprehensive knowledge about the English language.

Historically, WCs have been marginalized in the academy. Carino (2002), through analysis of the rhetoric of promotional materials and in-house correspondence from 20 WCs at various 2- and 4-year institutions, found that WCs come under fire because outsiders assume that tutors write papers for students, which constitutes ethical misconduct. Others question the tutors’ ability to meet the academic writing needs of disciplines that are very disparate (Carino, 2002). Rodby (2002) observed, through discussions with English Department tutors, that they were often leery of textual practices and values of other disciplines. Carino (2002) also observed that WCs employed a forceful rhetoric to help faculty recognize that WCs are places that supplement the work being done in traditional classrooms and not “grammar mills” (2002, p. 97).

The non-directive approach, which is favored by WCs across America, was challenged by Clark (1990) in her paper, *Maintaining Chaos in the Writing Center: A Critical Perspective on Writing Center Dogma*. Shamoon and Burns (1996) encouraged WCs to question the appropriateness of relying on one method to meet the needs of students that have diverse needs. They recommended a master-apprentice model that is grounded in methods that are more directive. The proposed supplemental program described in this paper illustrates how traditional and non-traditional approaches can be melded together to meet the needs of Chinese ELLs.

Challenges Faced by Chinese English Language Learners at Writing Centers

In 1984, Hawkins indicated that WCs were a “fertile ground for study” (p. xiv); more than a decade later, Murphy (1997) lamented the “absolute bankruptcy of writing center scholarship.” While the increase in ELLs in K-12 American classrooms has led to an increase in research in the field of K-12 education, there is limited research that examines what needs to be
done to support these students and international ELLs who come to America for undergraduate and graduate study. ELLs have not had the substantial English writing experiences that their American counterparts have had (Powers, 1993). They need help, not just with writing, but also with language learning (Nakamaru, 2010). Besides high-level thinking problems, such as content organization and rhetoric style, ELLs need assistance with sentence-level issues (Brendel, 2012; Nakamaru, 2010). There is a growing awareness, both at the institutional and program levels that people who work with ELLs need a comprehensive skill set. Unfortunately, ELLs do not always have access to second-language writing specialists, administrators, and instructors trained to provide service to diverse populations (Matsuda et al., 2006).

Scholars have begun to examine and describe the needs of English language writers, and the cultural challenges that American tutors face in responding to ELLs at the linguistic level (Nakamaru, 2010; Williams, 2002). The influence that American tutors at WCs have on ELLs’ language learning is still being debated (Nakamaru, 2010). It is becoming apparent that strategies that work with native English speakers who visit WCs might not always meet the needs of multilingual learners. Since the 1990s, scholars have been discussing the ways in which tutorial strategies should be adjusted so that they are compatible with the ways in which multilingual writers think and learn (Williams &Severino, 2004).

Using a qualitative method, Wang (2012) studied 16 dyads of student writers (ELLs) and tutor informants from WCs at two state universities in Pennsylvania and Ohio at both undergraduate and graduate levels. She found that ELLs’ perspectives of tutoring pedagogy mismatched tutors’ training and practice. Wang found that tutees, especially English language writers, regard student tutors as instructors and expect tutors to teach them how to write (Wang, 2012). Weigle and Nelson (2004) found that the tutors’ roles depend on their backgrounds and tutees’ English proficiency levels. The tutors at American WCs, who are often native English speakers, provide English-only tutoring, which might not be enough, especially for students with limited English proficiency (Wang, 2012). Tutors are typically trained to collaborate with tutees in Socratic ways (Thonus, 2004; Williams, 2002). They interact with their tutees by asking questions and giving advice; they then help them to find answers or solutions without being authorities. Research conducted over the last couple of decades suggests that American tutors do not always understand their tutees’ needs. Thonus (2004) and Wang (2012) found that many do not feel confident enough to give their ELL tutees sufficient assistance. Additionally, Wang (2012) found that they do not feel responsible for English language writers’ learning progress. She indicated that ELLs’ academic needs would be better met if they had access to multilingual and multicultural facilities where they received instruction that aligns with their cultures.

Could Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Address Some of the Challenges?

The influence of culture on learning has been well documented in the literature (Gay, 2000, 2002; Roseberry, McIntyre, & Gonzalez, 2001). Freeman and Freeman (2008) indicate that knowing one’s student gains critical importance when one is working with ELLs; this includes knowing who they are, where they have come from, and what strengths they bring to the classroom. All ELLs are not alike; some might have had adequate formal schooling, while others might be long-term ELLs. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), which has gained popularity in K-12 schools that include ethnically diverse students, is a pedagogy that could benefit many students in higher education, especially those who visit WCs.
What is Culturally Responsive Pedagogy?

Until the 1970s, white middle-class culture, language, and values were regarded as the norm, and everything else, including the language, literacy, and culture of students of color, was perceived as inferior. The goal of deficit approaches, according to Paris (2012), was to “eradicate the linguistic, literacy, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities, and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices” (p. 93). Following the publication of Gloria Ladson-Billings’ landmark article, Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, the abbreviations CRP (for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy or Culturally Responsive Pedagogy) and CRT (for Culturally Responsive Teaching) used synonymously, became ubiquitous in education research circles. Ladson-Billings called for “a culturally relevant pedagogy that would propose to do three things – produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order” (1995, p.474). Gay defined CRP as the use of “cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (2002, p. 106). Santamaria (2009) highlighted the powerful influence that CRP can have on students because it:

affirms students’ cultures, viewing them as transformative and emancipatory strengths (rather than deficits);incorporates students’ cultures in the teaching process, thus empowering them to take ownership of their learning; and leads to their increased participation in societal activities. (pp.226-227)

Fundamentally, culturally responsive teachers value the “funds of knowledge” that students bring with them (Roseberry, McIntyre, & Gonzalez, 2001), understand and appreciate their diverse backgrounds, and respond to students’ needs with cultural sensitivity. Because it is based on constructivism, collaboration is emphasized during the process of teaching and learning, and students are given opportunities to contribute to the instructional content (Callins, 2006; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2001; Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006; Stroder, 2008; Wlodkowski& Ginsberg, 1995).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Practice: Illustrative Examples

There is a gap between college faculty members’ and elementary school teachers’ documented use of CRP (Donkor, 2011). Searches of multiple databases using the key words “CRP,”“CRT,” and “higher education” yielded between 19 and103 articles. This literature provided very few examples of what could be characterized as CRP, and there were no articles that explicitly described how CRP was used to provide international students with necessary support for academic writing. Descriptions, when provided, reflected changes in classroom procedures initiated by individual faculty (Mendelsohn, 2002; Ronesi, 2001), rather than changes in philosophy, content, or strategy within courses or across departments and divisions. Consistent with Donkor’s (2011) observation, it was apparent that traditional and contemporary teaching, guided by a mono-cultural curriculum and the lecture method, were often devoid of references to cultural differences.

Database searches using the keywords “CRP,”“CRT,” and “K-12 schools” yielded between 339 and 643 articles. A large proportion of those articles concerning college teaching related to the work faculty are doing to prepare pre-service and in-service teachers to work with diverse K-12 student populations. The majority of the studies that were qualitative in nature
describe how CRP is being enacted by teachers in K-12 classrooms and the influence CRP had on diverse students’ social and academic needs (Bonner, & Adams, 2012; Gay, 2000; Kelly-Jackson & Jackson, 2011). This literature supports Lopez’s (2011) argument that culturally relevant teaching practices do not happen by chance. The three K-12 examples presented below, in the absence of higher education examples, confirm that CRP “requires teachers to be critically aware and agentive in their classroom, drawing on relevant socio-cultural theories and creating their own purposeful practice” (Lopez, 2011, p.76).

Using a grounded theory case study approach Bonner and Adams (2012) researched the way Ms. Finley (see example 1) enacted CRP in her fifth grade mathematic classroom. They were able to develop a working theory of culturally responsive mathematics theory, which rests on the four interconnected, foundational cornerstones communication, knowledge, trust/relationships, and constant reflection/revision, which have implications for teachers who teach other content areas and writing center tutors.

Example 1. Ms. Finley’s Mathematics Classroom. Ms. Finley’s teaching was based on a strong command of mathematics content and pedagogy knowledge and knowledge of the community. Her students were placed at the center of her practice. To ensure that students received help at home she ran a night class for parents. Additionally, she visited students and families in the neighborhoods to gain insight into her students’ lives and encourage parents to be involved in their children’s education. Seamlessly, she wove the insights she gained through these interactions, along with personal anecdotes of challenges she faced as she tried to empower her students to become agents of social change.

Rejecting the deficit approach, she employed a variety of verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to engage and empower her students. Music, similar to that which students saw on Black Entertainment Television, became an integral part of mathematics lessons. Choral responses, similar to that which her students used in church, were used to reinforce concepts, and enhance student involvement. As a warm demander she cultivated a trusting relationship; she told students how much she cared, set high expectations for them, and helped them reach their goals. Her students taught her what was hip, and not hip. She reflected and revised her curriculum constantly; using both student-generated alternative approaches to explain troubling mathematics concepts and their impromptu ideas.

Using a case study approach Kelly-Jackson and Jackson (2011) studied the pedagogy of a sixth grade science teacher who taught at one of the four county schools referred to as the Corridor of Shame. Of the eight teachers who completed the questionnaire, Sammie’s (pseudonym) pedagogy was representative of the literature on CRP. Additional data were collected through multiple sources both during and after school hours to highlight the ways in which Sammie embraced the notion of CRP. Example 2 provides a brief overview of Sammie’s pedagogy.

Example 2. Ms. Sammie’s Grade 6 Science Classroom. The school where Sammie taught, which included predominantly African American students, had been ranked below average in absolute rating for three years prior to the study. Sammie positioned herself as a learner and demonstrated a keen sense of purpose as a science educator. To actively engage students in the construction of knowledge and motivate them intrinsically, Sammie developed a
curriculum around students’ interests. She gave students an opportunity to dialogue about lessons and units, generate ideas, and set goals. The value she placed on collaborative learning was reflected in the way the furniture was arranged in groups, the learning spaces she created for exploration and hands-on work, the assignments she designed, and the expectation that each student fulfills a role that ensures group success.

Sammie demonstrated, in numerous ways, her commitment to learning from parents, the community, her colleagues, and students. She established a fluid relationship with her students beyond the science classroom by taking on the role of cheerleading coach. “She was firm, yet flexible about classroom expectations and helped students understand the meaning of consequences” (Kelly-Jackson & Jackson, 2011, p.411). She encouraged students to hang out in her classroom on game night to keep them out of trouble and required ‘cheer moms’ to bring in snacks so students did not have a reason to leave.

The pedagogical approaches employed by teachers can help students develop cultural competence, critical consciousness and the ability to interrogate the discursive structures; skills needed now more than ever, given the social trends and demographic shifts. The third example, drawn from Lopez’s (2011) case study, highlights the common elements of CRP and critical literacy, and how this was practiced by an English teacher in a heterogeneous and “truly multi-cultural” sub-urban, multiracial, multiethnic, multi-lingual and multi-faith 12 grade English classroom.

**Example 3. Ms. Meriah’s Grade 12 English Classroom.** Concerned about the cross-racial tensions and level of student engagement she witnessed in her classroom and school, Ms. Meriah, a teacher in Southern Ontario, Canada used CRP to re-conceptualize her 12 grade Writer’s Craft class. She “took the students in her diverse multicultural classroom on a journey of deconstructing and reconstructing how they view different forms of poetry, knowledge that is privileged and not privileged, and their own understanding of people who do not look like them” (Lopez, 2011, p.76). Data sources included journals, classroom observations, and dialogues. Inquiry-group meetings were a source of data collection and analysis. In this safe learning space she formally and informally teased out and deconstructed her teaching with a critical friend.

Ms. Mariah engaged her sub-urban students in reading poetry written by urban youth. Students wrote their critiques in their journal. Students were asked to respond to the questions: “How did you feel while you were reading the poems? Were you able to relate to the experiences described? If so, how? If not, why not?” (p.83) and “How are they different from me? How are they like me? What do I need to learn? What do I need to unlearn?” (p.84). Deconstruction and critique of the poems in small and large groups gave them the opportunity to gain exposure to multiple perspectives as they examined the authors’ position, their assumptions and biases, and their own experiences. Unaccustomed to talking about race and its impact on society so openly, the emotionally charged discussions were initially uncomfortable for many, especially the white students. As the discomfort dissipated students began to realize how this form of writing could be used to express issues they faced. Towards the end of the unit, students constructed performance poetry based on their own experiences. This form of poetry empowered students to verbalize the injustices in their own lives. This prompted some students to become involved in...
student councils so they could talk about these issues. Students’ journal entries showed a growing awareness of “the other” and how oppression works in multiple ways.

As evident from the three illustrative examples presented above, a single formula does not exist; CRP is multidimensional in nature. A common ingredient is the belief that all students can learn; a willingness to modify curriculum, instruction, and assessment procedures to allow students to reach their potential; and commitment to social equity and justice.

**Writing Centers in America: A Culturally Responsive Supplemental Model**

WCs are places for ELLs to seek assistance outside formal courses. The benefits to ELLs who visit WCs would be maximized if the services offered there were grounded in CRP. The proposed model below describes the design of a supplemental program that would benefit all ELLs in general, and Chinese ELLs in particular.

**Target Population**

The supplemental program described in this section would be ideal for Chinese students who have moved to America to work on undergraduate and/or graduate degrees at English-language-dominant colleges and universities. Each of these students would typically have a mastery of learning in the Chinese language, a variety of rich personal and educational experiences, and a detailed knowledge of Chinese culture and history. Prior to coming to America, they would have learned English through “formal and metalinguistically-oriented” classroom instruction (Harklau et al., 1999). To gain admission into an American college or university, they each would have passed a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) examination. Their test scores would have to meet or exceed university requirements. Therefore, they would have proven basic proficiency in spoken and written English.

**Design and Core Components of the Program**

**Purpose of the Supplemental Program.** The purpose of this supplemental program would be to provide culturally responsive assistance based on the characteristics and academic needs of Chinese ELLs in an English-language-dominant learning environment. This social and academic support would allow students to adapt more easily to different educational environments.

**Tutors.** Tutors would be university-employed Chinese graduate assistants with a high level of proficiency in spoken and written English and experiences similar to the targeted tutees, or university professors, or members of the community who would like to dedicate themselves to helping Chinese international students voluntarily. Tutors would have one-on-one long-term relationships with their tutees, instead of conferencing with different tutees every time; this would allow them to build a rapport with their assigned tutees and truly understand their tutees’ individual and unique needs.

**Training Provided to Tutors.** Yancey (2002), through her analysis of logs maintained by graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in tutoring courses, found that recording and reflecting on data relating to tutors’ verbal and nonverbal interactions with their tutees allows the tutors to create reflective spaces for “tutor-as-agent” and “tutor-as-learner.” In her article, The
Return of the Suppressed: Tutoring Stories in a Transitional Space. Welch (2002) explained how her analysis of tutors’ stories often included a first story, the “theory” or “wish,” and a second story, the “practice” or “reality.” She also explained how “official stories of tutoring lose some of their officialness and how suppressed stories gain visibility” when both are examined as stories that bear further exploration (p.206). She recommended that the central focus should not be on the “language barrier” but the “barrier to imaging the range of concerns, interests, and abilities that tutees bring.” Therefore, prior to working with ELLs, tutors should be taught how to maintain and use logs for reflective purposes and how to make sense of the conflicting stories embedded in their reflections. Reflecting on this data would allow them to notice particularities, differences, and patterns in not only their tutees’ behaviors, but also their own. They would be taught how to use the data to understand their growth, form their identities as tutors, see the other in their tutees, and foster tutorial agency.

Instead of focusing on basic interpersonal communication skills that Cummins (1981) called “surface” manifestations of language, including technical features like pronunciation, grammar, spelling, and basic vocabulary, tutors should be trained to create learning environments that support CRP and taught how to provide tutees with in-depth assistance in the four components reflected in Figure 1, namely, use of their first language to broaden background knowledge, cultural literacy, information literacy, and metacognitive skills.

1. Use of First Language to Broaden Background Knowledge.

Weaver and Jackson (2011) found that two major difficulties in academic writing for ELLs are understanding subject content in English and expressing their understanding of the content in English. Prior knowledge is a significant factor that affects students’ understanding of new information (Ormrod, 2008). It is also an essential predictor of students’ success with reading comprehension (Fisher & Frey, 2009; Vaughn & Bos, 2012). It is a misconception that ELLs need to read everything in English to improve their learning. For language learners with limited proficiency in English, reading nothing but English texts only increases barriers to learning and does not help with writing.

Krashen, who has done extensive work in second language learning, found that instruction in students’ native languages aids comprehension and language development (2000). Cummins (1981), distinguishing between social and academic language proficiency, maintained that academic language proficiency transfers from one language to the next. Research done over the last two decades has confirmed that this continues to be true: students’ second-language writing proficiencies positively correlate to their first language proficiencies, and literacy skills can be transferred across languages (Rodriguez & Gomez, 2008; Zhang, 2008). Tutors should
encourage Chinese ELLs to read relevant content in Chinese first, to gain conceptual understanding, and then read the information in English. Understanding the content in their native language will help them to connect to the content in English more easily. This will make it easier for them to write.

Using a tutee’s first language to help with second-language learning should only be used as a transition strategy. This approach should be employed in earlier stages of learning in new language environments, because it is faster for students to acquire knowledge in their first languages. Gradually students should be encouraged to engage in authentic English reading. The more knowledge a person has, the easier he/she will be able to make connections to new information. Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) found that skill in speaking English had a greater impact on writing quality than did knowledge of English grammar. Thus, ELLS should also be encouraged to practice speaking English.

Translating English, instead of freely writing in English, is commonly used in a foreign language learning environment, especially in China. This approach might work for students with limited proficiency that find it difficult to think in English, but it has limited benefits for students with higher levels of proficiency in English (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1992). To learn how to think in English, students need considerable practice. Tutors should be taught how to engage tutees in free reading, which has been identified as an effective approach (Lee, 2005) to developing a deeper understanding of the English language.

2. Cultural Literacy. Writing in another language is a process of cultural learning (X. Li, 2007), as well as a process of personal growth. To bridge the gap in knowledge between Chinese students and their American counterparts, tutors should provide Chinese ELLs with information about Western thinking and writing, the American educational system, Western learning styles, and Western values. This will help them to understand the classroom environment, instructor and peer expectations, and the individualistic learning paradigm that prevails at American universities. It would also help them to adapt to Americans’ perceptions of “appropriate” English writing, logic and rhetoric.

3. Information Literacy. Academic writing is a complex process of discovery “that involves brainstorming, multiple drafting, feedback practices, revision, and final editing” (Zhang, 2008, p. 96). Academic writing is also influenced by a student’s information literacy (Lin, 2007), or the skills of locating, evaluating, and using information effectively, which is essential for people living in the Information Age (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000). It is also an essential part of independent learning, and it is especially important for college students who work on multiple assignments simultaneously. They need to learn how to skim, scan, and quickly evaluate written text in order to acquire knowledge that relates to different content areas.

Librarians at American universities typically engage students in information literacy-related activities. Additionally, some instructors integrate information literacy into their English as a Second Language (ESL) courses to meet the unique needs of ELLs as well (Conteh-Morgan, 2001). A culturally responsive program for Chinese ELLs should pay special attention to information literacy by highlighting its value (Lin, 2007). Information literacy skills should be taught explicitly to facilitate a deeper understanding of the concepts taught in students’ classes. Students enrolled in such as supplementary program should be taught how to gain access to university resources associated with their learning, including online and physical library resources, and how to identify and use resources when involved in different writing projects.
They should also be taught basic studying skills, like how to identify main ideas or topic sentences, an approach commonly used with English texts, but not with Chinese texts.

4. Metacognitive Skills. Metacognition deals with knowledge of one’s own learning and thinking, as well as processes to enhance learning (Ormrod, 2008). Metacognition, as it relates to literacy development, aids individuals in identifying personal strengths and weaknesses when learning and writing in another language. Research has shown that metacognition is one of the essential factors that influence students’ second-language learning and proficiency in second-language writing (Devine, Railey, & Boshoff, 1993; Kasper, 1997; Vandergrift, 2005; Yu & He, 2010).

Familiarizing students with information about cultural differences in thinking will provide them the opportunity to further develop their metacognitive skills. Additionally, the program should provide students with instruction that allows them to become aware of their own processes of learning and writing. They should be taught how to plan to improve their writing accordingly. Instruction should target development of knowledge and skills in five areas: 1) knowing effective and ineffective learning strategies through self-evaluation; 2) being aware of one’s own capabilities and making realistic goals that can be accomplished; 3) making plans with learning tasks that are likely to effectively achieve goals; 4) monitoring one’s own learning processes and progress; and 5) self-motivation (Anderson, 2002; Ormrod, 2008).

Format of Tutoring Sessions. Tutees should be offered both group instruction and individual tutoring sessions. The four components presented in Figure 1 can be seamlessly integrated into both. Initially, tutors should meet with their tutees for four hours per week, and the number of contact hours will be reduced as tutees gain confidence and English proficiency. For the first few sessions, in groups, tutors should focus on cultural literacy and information literacy. When appropriate, tutors should use Chinese to explain complicated concepts and to provide examples from Chinese media and popular culture to help tutees connect more easily with the new material. This bilingual interaction between tutors and tutees will limit the amount of frustration that tutees face with tutors who are NES.

During individual sessions, tutees should identify their individual difficulties or needs as they relate to learning and academic writing. Tutees can then be taught how to interpret the expectations outlined in syllabi, writing requirements, and rubrics; provided with opportunities to ask about the university, American culture, the educational system, and available resources; and taught how to organize this information in culturally relevant ways. Tutees should be encouraged to contact their tutors for additional assistance.

Potential Obstacles to Implementation of the Proposed Supplemental Program

The proposed supplemental program, which was developed in response to needs expressed by Chinese ELLs, requires that the tutor be of the same racial and linguistic background as the tutee. WC directors who wish to start a supplemental program should recognize and address some of the obstacles listed below.

1. The biggest challenge to successful implementation of this supplemental program is overturning the conscious and unconscious ways in which ethnocentric practices continue to prevail at institutions of higher education. It will take a lot more than good intentions to combat
the negative sentiments concerning immigrants that continue to be rampant in small university towns (Foner, 2005). A systemic approach is needed to change “the largely monocultural character of public discourse in education” (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008) that prevails at many Western institutions.

2. WCs are often staffed with NES tutors that are predominantly white. Replacing NES tutors with Chinese ELL tutors who are proficient in English could have political ramifications at WCs but also within English Departments, who often expect WCs to hire students enrolled in their programs.

3. It would be difficult to project the number of Chinese international students who are both proficient in English and willing to work with Chinese ELLs. WC directors would have to reach out to program coordinators across disciplines and International Student Offices to identify and recruit Chinese students with high levels of proficiency.

4. Recruiting Chinese ELLs to serve as tutors and requiring that they establish long-term relationships with tutees could prove cost-prohibitive. Legally, international students are only allowed to work on campus for 20 hours a week. WC directors can reach out to program directors to identify Chinese students who are proficient in English and offer these students full-time and part-time graduate assistantships.

5. Chinese ELLs who are unaware of the literature that documents the benefits of using first-language instruction to promote second-language acquisition might perceive that they will grasp English more quickly if they are teamed with NES tutors (Huo, Chng & Ma, 2006). This obstacle can easily be addressed in the orientation programs offered to newly enrolled international students by the International Student Offices at the beginning of each semester.

Conclusions and Recommendations

WCs serve the academy’s academic mission in ways that are different from the traditional classroom approach. That which makes them different also gives them the opportunity to innovate and experiment across disciplinary and organizational borders (Carino, 2002). By situating the work of WCs as integral to the institution’s mission, WC directors can challenge the negative perceptions associated with WCs. Carino (2002) suggests that “directors must inform without confusing, must educate without condescending, must promise without bluffing, must assert without offending, and must offer help without promising civility” (p. 92).

Empirical and best practice research cited in this paper shows that, while WCs successfully meet the needs of NES students who struggle with academic writing, they do not always meet the needs of Chinese students who make up the largest group of international students at American universities. Directors of WCs, staff, and tutees need to recognize that Chinese students’ writing styles are influenced by factors, like the Chinese educational system, social values, and life philosophy, which are significantly different from those in American culture. WC directors who immerse themselves in best practice and empirical literature that relates to ELLs’ needs and alternative tutoring approaches will be better equipped to provide services that meet the needs of ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse students’ unique needs.

The research cited in this paper establishes the need for descriptive and evaluative
research relating to existing pedagogical practices at WCs and the extent to which these reflect institutional commitment to diversity. This research, when coupled with research on WC administration, for which there is also a need (Harris, 2002), will allow WCs to serve these subpopulations appropriately.

WCs are microcosms of the changes and redefinitions that the academy is undergoing, and therefore WC directors need to become agents of change. Evaluative research will allow WCs to determine if the non-directive approach that is currently being offered to Chinese ELLs is actually working. If not, non-directive alternative approaches described by Shamoon and Burns (1995) or other supplemental programs which are grounded in CRP, like the one described in this paper, should be explored. Recognizing and overcoming each of the obstacles outlined in this paper would be important first steps toward creating culturally responsive and socially relevant WCs.

REFERENCES


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**About the Authors:**

**CRYSTAL MACHADO** is Associate Professor in the Department of Professional Studies in Education at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), where she works with pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators. Her research interests include multicultural and global education, reflective practice, innovative web-based technology, mentoring, and organizational change. E-mail: cmachado@iup.edu

**PEIZHEN WANG** is a Chinese international student in her fourth year of doctoral study in the Department of Professional Studies in Education at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her program is Curriculum & Instruction. Her interests lie in multicultural education and teaching/learning strategies. E-mail: thlr@iup.edu

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Expectations and Experiences of Inbound Students: Perspectives from Sweden

Per A Nilsson, MA
International Director, Communication and International Relations Office
Umeå University (Sweden)

Abstract

This paper explores expectations and outcomes for inbound students at Umeå University, Sweden, comparing their expectations with what they actually experienced. Based on an initial sample of 296 students, 116 answered surveys before and after experiencing of studying abroad. The same individuals have been followed. Most of the respondents’ expectations were fulfilled. Hence, the comprehension of what to expect when it comes to ‘personal’ experiences was shown to be in line with the respondents’ expectations. However, the ‘academic’ experiences seemed to be more difficult to grasp in advance. Some respondents also changed their opinions regarding some of their expectations. The study has followed the same individuals over time and adds new knowledge to the field of student mobility.

Key words: Inbound Students, Student Mobility, Experiences and Expectations, Sweden.

Nowadays, a growing number of university students have become ‘mobile’, with more opportunities than ever before to study abroad. One important reason for this is the increase in courses taught in English in non-English speaking countries. For that very reason, Sweden has seen a large increase in inbound international students in the last decade. The language of instruction is a critical factor for receiving international students. The wide range of courses and programs taught in English makes it easier to recruit international degree students, accept incoming exchange students, and cooperate with international partner universities. Consequently, Sweden has emerged as a new player on the global education market. When Sweden introduced tuition fees for non-European students in 2011, a sharp drop in new enrollments was observed (see Table 1). It is noteworthy that domestic students and students from within Europe are able to study without paying tuition fees. This option is now available to most students, and many will have an international study experience during their studies. Thus, emphasizes Knight (2012), international student mobility has transformed the higher education landscape. Since the 1970s, the number of students studying abroad has increased considerably worldwide. Approximately
800,000 university students were enrolled in studies outside their country of citizenship in 1975, compared to over four million today (OECD, 2013). Therefore, for many students, international education and student mobility have become an important part of their university experience.

**Table 1**

Inbound students in Sweden, new enrollments for academic years 2003/04 – 2012/13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Exchange Students</th>
<th>Degree Students</th>
<th>Fee-paying Students</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/04</td>
<td>8,800</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>14,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/05</td>
<td>9,600</td>
<td>6,700</td>
<td></td>
<td>16,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/06</td>
<td>10,100</td>
<td>8,100</td>
<td></td>
<td>18,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/07</td>
<td>10,900</td>
<td>8,200</td>
<td></td>
<td>19,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/08</td>
<td>11,800</td>
<td>9,800</td>
<td></td>
<td>21,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/09</td>
<td>12,700</td>
<td>11,600</td>
<td></td>
<td>24,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/10</td>
<td>13,800</td>
<td>12,900</td>
<td></td>
<td>26,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>14,600</td>
<td>14,700</td>
<td></td>
<td>29,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>14,800</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td></td>
<td>20,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/13</td>
<td>14,700</td>
<td>6,900</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>21,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Students studying abroad lead to questions about their expectations and how these are met. By choosing to study abroad, students take a significant step in setting in motion their own individual life projects, and it can be assumed that they have dreams and aspirations of having a great experience, be it for academic or personal development. However, little is known regarding whether the students’ expectations are fulfilled after studying abroad. Thus, learning more about whether and how expectations are met is crucial both for a deeper understanding of student mobility, and understanding the rationales and drivers behind it. This article deals with international student mobility. Students’ expectations are compared with what they actually experienced while studying abroad. They arrive with a set of expectations, and depart with their own experiences of having studied abroad, and all are influenced by their studies, their environment, the cost of living, etc. The aim here is to study the expectations inbound students had when enrolling, and the experience they gained after approximately six months of studying in Sweden. This study, following the same students over a period of time, adds new knowledge to the field of student mobility when it comes to inbound students’ expectations and experiences.

**Conceptual Framework**

*Push-Pull models*

External and internal environment play an important role for mobility and internationalization in general. The interplay of multiple push and pull variables is complex. Some variables have hindered mobility but many more have enabled it to grow for decades worldwide (Choudaha & de Witt, 2014). The conceptual framework of this study was inspired by ‘Push-Pull’ models (e.g. Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001; Li & Bray, 2007) in order to learn more about students’ expectations related to student mobility. We know, based on these models that economic and social forces can push students abroad, and cultural awareness and curiosity about another country can attract or pull them. However, some have observed a reversed push-pull force (Li & Bray, 2007), positive forces at home and negative forces abroad can also explain why some students stay put or decide to study closer to home. It is obvious that many factors can
attract students to study abroad. Their expectations depend on, among other things, the length of time spent studying abroad. Therefore, it can be argued that most international students are prompted by a mixture of expectations, including the motives of typical tourists such as the desire to experience something different from everyday life.

The Push-Pull model is used in this study in order to understand the rationales and drivers behind student mobility. Economic and social forces in the students’ home countries serve to push them abroad, and they expect work and career opportunities as well as a decent salary. Similarly, cultural experiences, personal development, and linguistic improvements are often major reasons why students choose to study abroad (Maiworm & Teichler, 1996; Teichler, 2002; Bracht, Engel, Jonson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler, 2006; Thissen & Ederveen, 2006). Consequently, the choice of study destination depends on a variety of pull factors such as knowledge and awareness of the host country, personal recommendations, cost issues, the ‘environment’, geographic proximity, and social links (Mazzarol, Kemp & Savery, 1997).

**Pull motives**

Most studies show that students’ expect to experience a new culture and to develop as a person, but that they also expect an international experience to be positive for their career (cf. the Swedish International Program Office for Education and Training 2002; 2008; Centre for International Mobility, the Swedish Council for Higher Education and Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education, 2013). Thus, their expectations include personal expectations, and not just strictly academic ones. However, their expectations also concern the length of the study period abroad. Exchange students are looking for a broader experience from a temporary study period at a foreign university. This includes the learning experience, e.g. with high-quality education, favorable learning environments, high-quality lectures and tutors, etc. although exchange students seem to value the total experience of having studied abroad.

**Push motives**

The possibilities of increasing one’s chances of getting a job is an important motive, but it seems to be more important to students to have degree mobility; this is one important reason why many will pay tuitions fees to earn a degree from a foreign university (OECD, 2013). Consequently, there are push motives such as migration or increasing employability on one’s home labor market. In parts of the world, for instance Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, acquiring an education at a higher education institution is very difficult because of the lack of relevant study opportunities at home (OECD, 2013).

Degree mobility is less rigid and the decision to enroll can quickly change (i.e., be more “spontaneous”), at least in comparison with exchange students participating in an organized activity based on a signed agreement between partner universities, planned months ahead of time. Degree students stay abroad for an entire program of study, for instance to earn a Master’s Degree. In conclusion, many studies show that students’ motives for studying abroad can be grouped into three main categories related to personal growth, career, and academic aspects (cf. Centre for International Mobility, the Swedish Council for Higher Education and Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education, 2013).

**Follow-up Studies**

Outcomes of experiencing studying abroad can be difficult to evaluate depending on when follow-up studies take place. This can range from immediately after a period abroad to several
years later, but it also depends on whether the studies target exchange students or international students in general. Moreover, the country studied can explain why results from follow-up studies can differ. For example, students in the Nordic countries have good opportunities for financial support when studying abroad which other students around the world lack (Centre for International Mobility, the Swedish Council for Higher Education and Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education, 2013).

Employability and Career

Some follow-up studies have focused on employability and career, and the question of whether having studied abroad leads to a greater probability of employment after finishing one’s degree. Lianos, Asteriou and Agiomirgianakis (2004) conducted a study of Greek graduates of foreign universities who sought employment in Greece. Greece has the highest number of students studying in other EU member states. According to the study, Greeks who graduates from European universities outside Greece are better placed on the Greek labor market from an employability point of view.

Bracht et al. (2006) concluded that former Erasmus students cannot count on higher income or status but are more often employed in international work assignments and are often internationally mobile, compared to their immobile peers. Only former Erasmus students from Central and Eastern European countries can generally count on better career opportunities than their immobile peers, i.e. students from nations joining EU late. A study by Maiworm and Teichler (1996) shows that Erasmus students often find work that allows them to exploit the distinctive skills they gained while studying abroad. Norris and Gillespie (2009) found that studying abroad truly does change one’s life, as the respondents’ career choices were affected by the experience of studying abroad. In addition, mobile students more frequently have jobs with international work assignments (Wiers-Jenssen, 2013).

Academic Achievements

Other follow-up studies have focused on academic achievements. From the outset in the early 1990s, academic achievements were on the Erasmus agenda (Teichler, 2004). However, several studies (cf. the Swedish International Program Office for Education and Training, 2002; 2008) indicate that students appreciate the broad spectrum of experiences they have when temporarily studying abroad. Furthermore, some follow-up studies have emphasized the learning experience of temporarily studying in Europe (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). Experiencing a year abroad led to linguistic improvements, the cultural experience of living in another country, and further general personal development. While career prospects improved after studying abroad, academic learning experiences were less significant. These findings are similar to those of many other studies of student mobility (e.g. Maiworm & Teichler, 1996; Teichler, 2002). Hence, Teichler (2004) emphasizes the experiences the students have of daily life in another European country, including all its elements, as an asset and an important learning experience.

Life Satisfaction

Some studies focus on life satisfaction and the extent of one’s social network (Gomes, Berry, Alzougool & Chang, 2014). Some studies indicate the extent of loneliness and/or isolation among international students (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland & Ramia, 2008).

The expectations and experiences of studying abroad are multifaceted. What motivates some students to study abroad might be an obstacle for others. For instance, friends and family might
be a major reason for not studying abroad or an important source of encouragement to actually do so (Centre for International Mobility, the Swedish Council for Higher Education and Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education, 2013).

Research Method

Participants

The survey was directed at inbound international students coming to Umeå University, a comprehensive university in northern Sweden with 33,000 students, in the 2008-2009 academic year. Participants were recruited from the group of inbound students enrolling at Umeå University, prior to the beginning of the fall semester. The university had a total of 1,761 international students in the 2008-2009 academic year, and the number of international students enrolled for the 2008 fall semester comprised approximately 425 exchange students and 350 international degree students. When students arrive at Umeå University, they are offered an introduction week, an orientation course, to get started as students. During this orientation, approximately 400 students meet “face-to-face”. All the international students attending the orientation week were invited and encouraged to participate in the survey as part of a quality assessment program.

There were 296 responses to the first survey (139 male and 156 female, one missing value), yielding a response rate of 74%. The follow-up survey distributed six months later, was directed at the 296 students who had answered the first questionnaire, received 116 responses, yielding a total response rate of 39%. Drop-outs in the follow-up survey were mainly the result of students having changed their e-mail address and therefore could not reached. Also, after finishing the fall semester at Umeå University, some of the exchange students returned to their home institution to continue their studies, and perhaps lost interest in answering the second survey. Thus, of the initial sample of 296 students, 116 answered both surveys, and data from these respondents are used in this article. An analysis of the drop-outs between the first and second data collection indicates no bias with respect to gender, age or study program (see Table 2). Therefore the data set constitutes a panel.

Research Procedure

The first survey was carried out as a hand-out paper survey in August 2008, prior to the fall semester. The follow-up survey was a web-based questionnaire issued during the 2009 spring semester (March). The students answered questions about their previous experiences of travelling and living abroad, their motives for enrolling in an international study program, their choice of study destination, and their expectations (such as learning Swedish, courses taught in English, experiencing winter, attractive courses, reputation of the university, standard of accommodation). The questions covered the students’ perception of Sweden, difficulties getting to know Swedes and making friends, and the attraction of an informal lifestyle. In the first survey, when the students had just arrived, the scale ‘not important’ to ‘very important’ was used for the components; ‘Sweden is an expensive country’, ‘Experience winter’, ‘The informal lifestyle in Sweden’, ‘Difficult to make friends’, ‘The reputation of Umeå University’, ‘Attractive courses at Umeå University’, ‘Many courses taught in English’, and ‘High standard of accommodation’.
Table 2
A comparison between the first survey and the panel (i.e. answering both surveys)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First survey n = 296</th>
<th>Panel n = 116</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>156 (53%)</td>
<td>57 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>139 (47%)</td>
<td>59 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean age</strong></td>
<td>23.3 ±2.8</td>
<td>24.5 ±2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citizenship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU/EEA</td>
<td>196 (66%)</td>
<td>85 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-EU/EEA</td>
<td>95 (32%)</td>
<td>29 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5 (2%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field of studies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>17 (6%)</td>
<td>12 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences (incl. Law &amp; Business)</td>
<td>162 (55%)</td>
<td>52 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training</td>
<td>12 (4%)</td>
<td>6 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences and Technology</td>
<td>59 (20%)</td>
<td>25 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine and Odontology</td>
<td>22 (7%)</td>
<td>12 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>9 (3%)</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Fine Arts</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>13 (4%)</td>
<td>6 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of studies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange students (1 or 2 semesters)</td>
<td>244 (83%)</td>
<td>95 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree students (3 or more semesters)</td>
<td>51 (17%)</td>
<td>21 (18%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All statistical analysis was performed using SPSS, version 17.0 for Windows. A statistical data evaluation was performed using non-parametric tests, as some of the samples were not normally distributed. The Wilcoxon signed ranked test was used to study paired observations, (e.g. to compare the respondents answers after studying for more than six months with their answers they gave when they had just arrived in Sweden). The Mann-Whitney test was used to compare differences between groups. The level of statistical significance was set to P < 0.05. A principal component analysis (PCA) was also performed. Scree tests were used to determine the number of components to be included. These components also had eigenvalues > 1. Direct oblimin rotation was used.

**Results**

The panel (i.e. respondents answering both surveys) shows that the students came from 35 different countries and that approximately 70% of them were citizens of a European country. Most came from Germany (n=40) and France (n=13). There was a total of 95 exchange students. Their mean age was 24.5; 59 were men and 57 women. One fourth had visited Sweden before, and 9% had family or friends in Umeå. Most of the students had no, or very limited, knowledge of the Swedish language. However, 97% of them expressed that they wanted to learn Swedish. Less than half of the respondents studied Social Sciences (including Law and Business), 22%
studied Natural Sciences and Technology and the rest studied Humanities, Fine Arts, Teacher Education, Healthcare, Odontology and Medicine.

The respondents were experienced travelers, and seemed to be internationally experienced, having visited a large part of the world before coming to Sweden. Most of them had previously studied, traveled and/or worked in a foreign country. They had previously visited Europe (80%), the Nordic countries (38%), North America (33%), Asia (23%), Africa (18%), South America (11%), the Middle East (7%), and Oceania (7%).

Table 3
How can your expectations best be described?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s going to be an adventure</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s going to be nice to change study environment</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll be able to study in a more stimulating academic milieu</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will be interesting to learn about another culture</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying abroad will make it easier to get a job</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can learn another language</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s going to be nice to live in another climate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other matters</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about their expectations, respondents answered that their decision to study abroad was more about their personal than their strictly academic expectations. Important personal statements were that they wished to experience an ‘adventure’ or a ‘change of study environment’, and that it would be ‘interesting to meet another culture’. Moreover, studying in a more ‘stimulating academic milieu’ was important. In addition, when the respondents answered a single question about why they had chosen Umeå University, 57% cited the university as a study destination and 41% cited the northern Sweden location of the city of Umeå. What did the respondents actually experience at Umeå University after more than six months of studies (see Table 4)? Students have expectations before enrolling at a foreign university; in the respondents’ reports of their ‘personal’ experiences, their pre-assumptions were different from how they had experienced it to be. Notable is their expectation that the cost of living would be similar to that at home. Their expectation of winter and the informal lifestyle in Sweden were lower than their actual experiences proved to be, and they enjoyed these aspects more than they had expected to. The respondents also reported that it had been easier than expected to make friends, and that they had positive associations regarding working and living outside their home country. The respondents had high expectations when it came to developing as a human being and, in their actual experiences; this had been more than fulfilled.

Regarding academic expectations, the respondents experienced that the university had a better reputation than expected, and that the courses were also more preferable than they had expected. Furthermore, the number of courses taught in English was a positive experience. However, the respondents did not develop their language skills as much as they would have
liked. They also found the quality of courses was not better than at home. In addition, the respondents found that the standard of accommodation was better than they had expected.

Table 4
A comparison: what did the respondents experience after more than six months of studies in a foreign country?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic experiences</th>
<th>Before n=116</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>After n=116</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop language skills</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High standard of accommodation</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive courses at Umeå University</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reputation of Umeå University</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many courses taught in English</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of courses higher than at home</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal experiences</th>
<th>Before n=116</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>After n=116</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop as a human being</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change and new experiences</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>0.237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience winter</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The informal lifestyle in Sweden</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>0.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work outside my home country</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to make friends</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>0.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive country</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A Likert scale was used in the survey, and results 5, 6, and 7 on the scale are shown in the table.

Factors that are of significance to inbound students are identified in the crossover matrices (Tables 5 and 6). Inbound students have many and varied expectations when it comes to studying abroad. According to this study, most of the respondents’ expectations were fulfilled, but did they change their opinions after six months of studies abroad? In Table 5, respondents’ personal experiences are compared with their expectations in a crossover matrix. On a general level, the pattern is quite stable. The vast majority of the respondents who had positive expectations were still positive after experiencing studying abroad, especially concerning personal development, reflected in aspects like ‘develop as a human being’ and ‘change and new experiences’. However, one can also note that some changed their views during their stay, especially regarding aspects such as ‘winter’, ‘informal lifestyle’ and ‘working internationally’. However, the high cost of living seems to have surprised the respondents; approximately 46% changed their views on this aspect. Furthermore, making friends proved to be easier than expected. A quarter of the respondents changed their views after experiencing studying abroad. Thus, for these two components, one can see a shift in stance before and after studying abroad. Moreover, many respondents changed from a negative to a positive stance on aspects such as the university’s reputation (22%), and accommodation (38%). Similarly, when it came to the quality of the courses, the respondents had expected it to be ‘higher than at home’; approximately 27% changed their views on this from positive to negative.
Table 5  
Crossovers – respondents’ personal expectations in advance compared with their experiences after a period of studying abroad.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sweden an expensive country</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience winter</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The informal lifestyle in Sweden</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work outside my home country</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Develop as a human being</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change and new experience</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficult to make friends</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6  
Crossovers – respondents’ academic expectations in advance compared with their experiences after studying abroad.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The reputation of Umeå University</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing value</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attractive courses at Umeå University</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Many courses taught in English</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Develop language skills</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High standard of accommodation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The quality of courses higher than at home</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (+)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (-) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectation (+) and the experience (-)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, in Table 6, respondents’ academic experiences are compared with their expectations in a crossover matrix. Here the pattern is less stable than for personal experiences.
Principal component analysis (PCA)

A principal components analysis (PCA) was done for a more rigorous analysis of the determinantes. The PCA identified five significant components (eigenvalues 2.65, 1.56, 1.47, 1.20, and 1.06). The full model explained 61.2% of the variance. The first component captured the largest variation in the material and explained 20.4% of the variance. The other four components together explained 40.8% of the variance. The aspects that highly contributed to component one were: the reputation of Umeå University, the standard of accommodation, the informal lifestyle in Sweden, and developing language skills. In components two and four, language skills contributed highly together with the quality of courses being better than at home. In component three, the aspects change and new experiences and developing as a human being contributed highly. In component five, the many courses taught in English contributed highly.

Main Findings and Discussion

The Umeå University case is a limited study and was chosen because of good collaboration with its international office. Furthermore, the study relied on a relatively small group of inbound students. Also, the students were followed up after a comparatively short period of time. Moreover, the self-constructed questionnaire about the students’ expectations, previous experience of travelling etc., was not validated, which is also a weakness. Additionally, the case is from a university in Northern Europe, Scandinavia. These limitations will of course make any conclusions drawn from the study tentative.

This study has followed the same individuals over time in order to learn more about whether and how their expectations were met. The respondents’ experiences were somewhat different from their expectations, but when it comes to aspects like ‘personal development’ and ‘develop as a human being’, their expectations were fulfilled. It should be emphasized that the experience of studying abroad made the respondents more determined to work internationally; about 55% of them were positive before experiencing studying abroad and they stayed positive. Approximately 16% changed their stance from negative to positive. Thus, the respondents had a positive outlook on working outside their home country.

This study has shown that a period abroad change the respondents’ perspectives and, for some of them, the long-term impact could be a career in an international business or organizations; this is a missed opportunity for those who do not participate in experiencing a period of studying abroad. The main results from the study indicate that the respondents’ expectations were in accordance with what they actually experienced. However, they changed their opinions on many of aspects after having personally experienced studying abroad. Thus, experiencing a period of studying abroad includes many aspects, some of which are difficult to foresee. The increase in the number of courses taught in English in non-English speaking countries has given students worldwide more options to study abroad. This development has made many universities more attractive, and the wide range of courses and programs taught in English has made it easier to recruit international students. The emergence of new players on the international education market has been beneficial to countries like Sweden. However, for students, tuition fees, and the costs of living in a foreign country are of the utmost importance. The fact that Sweden introduced tuition fees for non-European students in 2011 emphasizes the importance of meeting students’ expectations in order not to harm the reputation of the study destination. The reputation of an institution or particular program is very important, as are relaxed immigration policies, for encouraging international students to enter the labor market.
after finishing their degree. Hence, to pull students to a study destination, a university needs to be perceived as attractive.

The rationales and drivers for student mobility can be mirrored by Push-Pull models, but in order to expect something you first need knowledge about what to expect. Inbound students seem to have a strong pull reason for studying abroad, although the students in this study misjudged some of the challenges of student mobility. This study shows they were reasonably able to predict aspects of their lives such as personal development in a foreign country. Among the aspects that surprised them was the cost of living, which is easy to learn about in advance.

This study confirms that academic learning is not generally superior to other experiences (Thissen & Ederveen, 2006; Teichler, 2012). However, the attractiveness of the courses and the reputation of the university are important. The findings in this study indicate that a period of studying abroad enriches students’ lives, but they also confirm that a fraction of students study abroad; students who are internationally experienced. It is clear that these students see studying abroad not only as an opportunity but also as a way to use the experience as a merit later in life.

It seems as if the international students were looking for a cultural rather than academic experience. However, some studies have shown that academic and cultural learning during a study period are closely intertwined (Teichler, 2012). It is surprising to note that current students do not have an accurate understanding of what they can expect, considering that many have a global lifestyle and good knowledge of what is happening in the world. Could it be that students simply become mobile rather than choosing to be (Carlson, 2012)?

**Conclusion**

This study has focused on student mobility, following the same individuals over time, and it has added new knowledge to the field of student mobility when it comes to inbound students’ expectations and what they actually experience. However, student mobility is changing. Academic mobility started with people to people and then developed to mobility within specific programs. According to Knight (2014), the next step will be international education hubs. Similarly, cross-border education was first about cooperation between universities and has now developed into a commercially driven framework. What kind of impact will this have on student mobility in the future?

In Europe, approximately 200,000 students participate annually in the Erasmus mobility program. For them, as found by Teichler (2004), learning to perceive and appreciate diversity will probably continue to be an important part of the experience of being exchange students studying abroad. Furthermore, how universities communicate with potential international students needs to be improved, and the academic and personal achievements that are possible when studying abroad need to be emphasized. If students are better prepared, their expectations will be more in aligned with their experiences. In other words, to have accurate expectations for studying abroad one needs to be well informed. Consequently, the marketing and communication of courses and programs should focus on aspects such as personal development and the establishment of new relationships when studying abroad.

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About the Author

PER A. NILSSON is working as the International Director at Umeå University in Sweden. In 1982, I received a Bachelor of Science from Umeå University. In 1983, I was rewarded a Master of Arts from University of Minnesota. In 2011, I participated in an international monitoring committee for internationalization at Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Finland.

E-mail: per.nilsson@adm.umu.se

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Summer Study-Abroad Program as Experiential Learning:
Examining Similarities and Differences in International Communication

Kenneth J. Levine, PhD
Michelle E. Garland (Doctoral Student)
School of Communication Studies
University of Tennessee (USA)

Abstract

This paper examines how the study-abroad experience enhances intercultural communication competence. This study used Bennett’s (1986, 1993) model of ethnorelative typology of acceptance, adaptation, and integration to explore intercultural communication competency. Central to intercultural communication competency is intercultural sensitivity and modified perceptions of cultural differences. A pre-test/post-test open-ended questionnaire design was utilized to uncover what was learned by students while participating in a four-week summer study-abroad program in Paris and Brussels. Based on 110 participants over 16 years, results indicated that both sensitivity to and understanding of cultural differences are heightened as a result of the study-abroad experience. Further, these findings provided support for outcomes showing attainment of intercultural communication competency learning objectives.

Keywords -- Study-Abroad; Experiential Learning; Intercultural Sensitivity; International Communication; Assessment

Colleges and universities nationwide are adding courses on international and intercultural communication to their curriculum as a way to prepare their students for the global workplace which awaits them. As part of this process, both on-campus and study-abroad courses have been initiated and expanded to enhance students’ knowledge of and sensitivity toward other cultures (Driskill, Arjannikova, & Schneider, 2010). Study abroad courses specifically allow for a more authentic educational experience, “an opportunity of observing society by living in physical and social conditions utterly unconnected with his own” (Battsek, 1962, p. 228). While international and intercultural campus initiatives are important and beneficial, nothing can compare with the
actual experience of being somewhere different and needing to communicate effectively.

According to Hooper (2000), mastery of the process of cross-cultural learning, communication, and human relations is more important than the depth to which one comes to know the culture under study. Based on prior research and instructional goals, Driskill et al. (2010) have created four categories of learning objectives to assist educators in creating effective courses: awareness, knowledge, skills/behavior, and motivation/attitudes. Specifically, these four objectives are: (1) to become more aware of one’s own culture and communication styles and how they differ from that of other cultures (Gaston, 2001); (2) to understand how culture affects the communication process (Millette, Steinfatt, & Hericks, 2000); (3) to develop analytical skills in examining intercultural interactions (Pierson, 1996); and (4) to increase sensitivity to “the complexity of intercultural interactions” (Bradford & Drzewiecka, 1997, p. 2). While the authors believe that all four categories of learning objectives are important, for the purpose of this exploratory study, awareness, knowledge, and attitudes are the central focus.

**Literature Review**

Central to the development of intercultural communication competency is experiential learning and situated cognition (Jacobson, 1996). Experiential learning focuses on the role of experience in the learning process as well as the role of reason operating within the context of experience. Experiential learning has personal involvement, is self-initiated, is pervasive, and is evaluated by the learner, therefore having relevance to the whole person (Schunk, 2012). Personal involvement and pervasiveness are especially important to this study as cognitions and feelings as well as behavioral and attitude changes are explored in relation to the study abroad experience.

In the context of study abroad specifically, situated cognition plays a critical role in the experiential learning process because, according to this theory, learning should be authentic to the context of study and situated in a community of practice. “Learning is a co-constructed process in which all participants change and are transformed through their actions and relations in the world” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 159). Schunk (2012) noted that situated cognition is important to the development of competency. The heart of situated cognition in the context of this study is reflected in the following statement by Battske (1962).

> There is the intrinsic value of being forced into social situations where the security and protection of the home is absent and of gaining an awareness of situations, which does not often come to a young person unless he is forced to take a stand on social matters that have no real meaning for him in his own surroundings. (p. 229)

Lindsey (2005) presented similar findings, stating “study abroad offers a unique opportunity for students to confront both differences and similarities in many aspects of culture and values, as well as develop specific skills in multicultural competence” (p. 232), a process that requires dialogue and discussion, according to Danzig and Jing (2007). In a similar study, Anderson and Rexeisen (2006) found that students who participate in a short-term, non-language-based study abroad program were better able to accept and adapt to differences within culture resulting in improved intercultural sensitivity at the conclusion of such programs.

These findings present a clear implication for the need to measure outcomes centered on
the goal of intercultural communication competency. In the context of experiential learning in study abroad, however, cognition is limited by what the students choose to acknowledge, picking up on what interests them most. This selectivity can impact the outcomes of developing sensitivity through their selective observations.

Intercultural sensitivity, as defined by Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) is “the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences” (p. 422). This concept is central to this study, which seeks to include and examine the communication variable in exploration of the attainment of intercultural sensitivity. Bennett (1993) stated that “probably one of the most threatening ideas encountered by students is this concept of difference and the implications this concept brings along with it” (p. 181). Thus, central to these categories of awareness, knowledge, and attitudes are the concepts of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. Chaney and Martin defined ethnocentrism as “the belief that your own cultural background, including ways of analyzing problems, values, beliefs, language, and verbal and nonverbal communication, is correct” (2011, p. 10). In and of itself, ethnocentrism is not negative. It is when biases are revealed that the negativism of ethnocentrism becomes apparent. According to Pahnos and Butt (1992), these biases can lead to stereotyping, separatism, discrimination, and scapegoating. This challenge stems from the recognition that these cultural differences make students reflect and critique their own worldviews. In many cases, students must step outside of their comfort zone and consider realities that are very different from their preconceived notions of reality. In the globalized world, students come to recognize their own ethnocentrism.

The Bennett model shows that the stages of ethnocentrism lead directly into the stages of ethnorelativism. According to the model, ethnorelativist orientation includes concepts of acceptance (“the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally complex worldviews”), adaptation (“the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture”); and integration (“the state in which one’s experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews”) (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 425). According to the ethnorelativist perspective:

Differences are no longer threatening. It is no longer a question of preserving one’s cultural reality but rather of creating new categories that allow for the coexistence of diverse cultural realities. To evolve, difference is sought rather than feared. (Olson & Kroeger, 2001, p. 122)

Central to the integration stage is contextual evaluation, which is when “the individual is able to analyze and evaluate situations from one or more chosen cultural perspectives” (Olson et al., p. 123).

This study used the Bennett’s ethnorelative typology of acceptance, adaptation, and integration to explore intercultural communication competency with the assumption that the completion of the stages of ethnocentrism are reflected in the stages of ethnorelativism. Central to intercultural communication competency is intercultural sensitivity and modified perceptions of cultural differences, as reflected in the literature. Taken together, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: Do students reflect increased intercultural sensitivity upon the conclusion of the study abroad program?
RQ2: Do students reflect modified understanding of cultural differences upon the conclusion of the study abroad program?
Method

This exploratory study utilized a pre-test/post-test open-ended questionnaire design to uncover what was learned by the students while participating in a four-week summer study-abroad program.

Subjects and Background

Respondents were 110 (82 female, 28 male) undergraduate and graduate students participating in a four-week summer study-abroad program entitled “International Communication and the International Workplace.” The program has been sponsored by four different institutions, therefore the students included in this study were from a mid-sized Midwestern university, a large Midwestern university, a large Southeastern university, and a small New England liberal arts college. All but three of the respondents were United States citizens at the time of their participation in the program. The three non-U.S. students were from Brazil, (female), China (female) and Turkey (male) and were enrolled as full-time students in a United States university during their participation in the program. Each of these students were enrolled in different years of the program; there were never multiple non-U.S. students on any year’s program.

The survey asked very few demographic questions as these instruments were used as part of class instruction. Further, there were no items regarding language fluency (French or otherwise) since a foreign language was only a requirement for communication majors at one of the four universities which sponsored the program. As such, there is no information regarding fluency. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there have been very few students with a fluency in French, however many had one or two years of college-level instruction in Spanish. The classes associated with the program were taught in English.

Procedure

Prior to departure, the students were assigned to answer an “International Communication Questionnaire” created by the instructor specifically for this program as an assessment tool to understand what the students truly learned from the study-abroad experience. In the instructions, students were asked to answer the questions to the best of their knowledge, but not to undertake any research. Further, if they did not know the answer, the students were told that it was okay to leave the response blank. The survey was completed and returned to the professor prior to departure.

To determine cultural sensitivity, the following two questions were asked: (1) What are the role prescriptions (how people are supposed to behave) of a North American? and (2) What are the role prescriptions of a French person? When the instrument was given to the first group of students, the question used the term “American” rather than “North American.” There were questions regarding whether the term “American” also meant Central and South American, as some of these issues are covered in their Spanish language courses. As such, the term was changed to “North American” to insure that those students with a level of knowledge of Spanish language and culture understood that the respondents were to use their own culture in answering the question.

Using the Bennett et al. (2003) definition of intercultural sensitivity, responses regarding role description reflect the student’s “ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences” (p. 422). This description and discrimination therefore indicate understanding. To
determine the level of understanding of cultural differences, the following two questions were asked: (1) What is the biggest difference between the communication style of a North American and that of a French person?; and (2) what is the biggest difference between the organizational communication style of a North American and that of a French person? At the conclusion of the program, the same questionnaire was included as part of the final exam. The only difference was that instructions for the final exam required students to answer each question.

These data were initially collected solely as feedback for the instructor. As such, this project qualified for exempt status from IRB approval as it was comprised of existing data; these data had been used as part of an educational experience, and all identifying information has been removed prior to analysis.

Qualitative software (SPSS Text Analysis for Surveys) was utilized for the analysis of these data. This program both performed word counts and also created categories based on associations between and among words within close proximity to other terms. The top five responses per category were included in the results.

**Findings**

Research question one asked if students reflect increased intercultural sensitivity upon the conclusion of the study abroad program. To understand the change in perspective, the answers to the pre- and post-test responses of the following questions were compared: “What are the role prescriptions of North Americans?” and “What are the role prescriptions of the French?”

There were 34 students that failed to respond to the pre-test question regarding the role prescriptions of North Americans. Of those that did respond, most students responded with short answers and an awareness of certain aspects of the U.S. culture. For example, one respondent answered that “there are fairly few – there is a great deal of value placed on being an individual and free spirit” [1]. The three most common attributes mentioned regarding the U.S. were courteous (19 instances); friendly (18 instances) and loud (13 instances). When loud was included in the answer, the overall response had a negative tone; for example “North Americans are supposed to behave as loud, obnoxious, smiling and very demanding or controlling (self-centered) people” [respondent 26] and “They are loud, obnoxious and ethnocentric” [respondent 3]. The answers also addressed the perceived attributes of North Americans, which also had a negative tone; for example “North Americans are often thought of by the French as big people, sloppily dressed, rude, disrespectful, and loud” [respondent 33] and “According to Europeans: loud, obnoxious, rude, overzealous, wasteful, stupid” [respondent 62].

There were also positive views of the U.S. culture in the responses to the first question. “Friendly” as an adjective was most often combined with polite; for example “In America, people are generally ‘supposed’ to behave politely and friendly to people, even if they do not know them” [respondent 77]; and “People should be friendly, polite, kind, and courteous” [respondent 82]. One respondent addressed differences in role prescriptions within the U.S. In different parts of the U.S. there are different standards for behaving but in general people expect us to be kind, well-mannered, and friendly.” Interestingly, one American respondent used the pronoun “they” when describing their own, U.S., role prescriptions: “They’re supposed to be friendly and nice, polite to people” [respondent 55].

When asked about the role prescriptions of the French, there was considerably more variability. The most common responses were quiet and rude (9 instances each). There were 35 students that failed to respond to this question during the pre-test. Most respondents answered
with a neutral tone when reporting “quiet” as a role prescription; for example, “Quiet, they keep to themselves until they get to know you” [respondent 6] and “French are quiet, compact, and are more proper” [respondent 23]. However, both positive and negative toned responses were also found; for example, “Quiet, rude” [respondent 26]; and “Bien cleve – polite, courteous, quiet, not money oriented; more spontaneous; live for today” [respondent 57]. One respondent addressed a direct comparison of the role prescriptions of North Americans and French: “Just the opposite of Americans. French are supposed to be reserved, quiet, and fit into the mainstream” [respondent 22].

When “rude” was reported, the answers often included additional adjectives with negative connotations; for example, “According to Americans: rude, snide, snotty, impatient, condescending, smelly, socialist” [respondent 62]. However, with some of these comments, disclaimers and other politeness tactics were used; for example, “French people are stereotypically thought of by Americans as arrogant, rude, fashionable, different. Really they care about their country and are helpful when treated with respect and politeness” [respondent 33]. Again, the software program found few overlaps between the terms suggesting that there was tremendous variability in the answers. As this was the pre-test, this amount of variability is not surprising.

The post-test findings for North American role prescriptions were, at the surface level, consistent with the pre-test findings among the students. The number of non-responses for the post-test dropped to nine. The most common responses were “friendly” (26 instances) and “loud” (25 instances). The next most common responses were “smile” and “courteous” (14 instances each). When “friendly” was reported, answers often paired “friendly” with the second tier themes – “smile” and “courteous”. For example; “It is expected that North Americans be [sic] friendly when they are introduced to someone. They believe they should smile and shake hands to be personable” [respondent 8]; “North Americans are usually considered to be friendly because they smile at everyone and we are always supposed to be in a hurry.” [respondent 29]; and “Expected to be independent, friendly, & courteous. Show manners & dress & act according to the situation we are in” [respondent 105]. Because the responses varied between positive, negative and neutral, there was no one theme for these responses. The post-test answers additionally provided more depth in the responses; for example, “North Americans are supposed to be independent, courteous and smile even at strangers, brave and take chances. We are supposed to go after our dreams and even if we fail we are still respected for trying.” [respondent 107].

While “friendly,” “smile,” and “courteous,” were positive prescriptions, the overall tone of the responses was considerably more negative than responses to the pre-test, specifically with regards to comments including the prescription of “loud”. For example, “Americans are loud, obnoxious, and take up lots of space. Many expect the world to be like America and are put out when it is not. Attitude could describe many of us.” [respondent 18]; “North Americans are typically loud, rude, ignorant, friendly; North Americans watch too much TV and don’t spend enough time developing close relationships” [respondent 24]; “Loud, rude, obnoxious, oblivious, dumb, wasteful, arrogant, violent, warmongers” [respondent 62]; and “We are supposed to be loud and obnoxious” [respondent 21]. An interesting note regarding respondent #21, he was one of the only people to use the term “we” rather than “they” when discussing his own culture. Most of the other respondents placed a distance between themselves and their own cultural descriptors.

The post-test findings for French role prescriptions were also consistent with the pre-test
findings among the students, specifically at the surface level. Regarding the post-test for the French, the terms quiet and rude both appeared 14 times, though in very different contexts than in the pre-test. When reporting “quiet” for example, “The French seem to be more conservative than North Americans. They are quiet. They deem relationships to be of great importance and the relationships they make tend to last.” [respondent 13]; “They are much more quiet than we are. The French act more formal towards one another and are more respectful of all people regardless of social class” [respondent 109]; and “Socially acceptable norms are to be quiet and reserved, to only show emotion to those who you genuinely care about” [respondent 92]. These responses indicate an understanding and appreciation that pre-test responses lacked.

When “rude” was reported, the overall tone was negative. Interestingly, the disclaimers and political correctness found in the pre-test were rarely included in the post-test responses. For example, “They are rude and they smell. They have no customer service skills and they work for the better of their group. They want to preserve their own culture” [respondent 6]. However, some responses did address the issue of stereotypes; for example, “The North American often thinks of the French as being rude, arrogant, fashionable, sexual, smelly, wine drinkers, gourmet chefs, fine food eaters – again stereotypes and generalizations” [respondent 33] and “They are reserved, quiet, and rude. They want to preserve their culture and are not always friendly to outsiders.” [respondent 3]. In these responses, we can begin to see that while negative on their face, the answers suggest that there is more understanding of the differences between cultures after spending the month studying in Europe. This can been seen in the response of #102, “Pushy and rude. Or seemingly so to Americans. To the French, I would see my role as just trying to get where I was trying to go through a city of tourists.”

In her ability to recognize her own bias, respondent #102 serves as an example that students learn sensitivity and reflect ethnorelative orientation through indications of acceptance, adaptation, and integration, as identified in Bennett’s model (1986, 1993). Thus, to answer Research Question #1, there appears to be more understanding of both their own and the French culture as a direct result of participating in the study-abroad program.

Research question two asked if students reflect modified understanding of cultural differences upon the conclusion of the study abroad program. To understand the change in perspective, the answers to the pre- and post-test responses of the following questions were compared: “What is the biggest difference between the communication style of a North American and that of a French person?” and “What is the biggest difference between the organizational communication style of a North American and French person?”

On the pre-test, when the students were asked “What is the biggest difference between the communication style of a North American and that of a French person?” they truly had no background understanding of this information. Thirty-three students failed to respond to this question, and there was considerable variability in the answers of those that did respond. Volume was the most prevalent answer with adjectives such as “louder” (8 instances), “loud” (6 instances), and “quiet” (5 instances); for example, “I think the biggest difference between NA and French communication styles is not only volume but also how animated a person is. As stated above, I think NA are more eccentric in their communication. Also much louder” [respondent 76].

“Language” and “formal” were also among the most prevalent answers with six and five mentions respectively. Language, however, was used in two separate contexts; for example, “The language itself” [respondent 3] and “North Americans are very lazy with language. We don’t even speak our own language correctly. We use a lot of slang. French are very proud of
their language and also speak it correctly” [respondent 24]. When “formal” was used in the answer, the tone of the response was mixed; for example, “The French are more formal. No ‘Hey’. Must say ‘Bonjour’ first or some other polite comment before asking a question” [respondent 30], and “French is more impersonal and formal, North American is more relaxed and friendly. The French find Americans to be downright rude” [respondent 89]. Only one student used formal to describe the communication style of North Americans.

That said, stereotypes of both Americans and the French were apparent in the responses. For example, “Seriously Americans speak before thinking. Usually unprepared speech. French people usually do not stutter as much and take time to think about their speech” [respondent 26]; “The biggest difference between the communication style of a North American and that of a French person is motivation. The Americans communicate individually, the French communicate a collective identity” [respondent 31]; “The French use a small bubble of space and speak very quietly to each other. Americans tend to speak loudly and use a lot of small talk which the French don’t.” [respondent 18]; and “We are friendly to just about everyone and the French are only friendly to their friends. Looking eye to eye is big in America, but not in France” [respondent 27].

In terms of their knowledge of organizational communication across cultures, the variability was even more pronounced than for interpersonal communication. Few respondents demonstrated a solid understanding of organizational communication differences. Those that did answered “the French person does not socialize with their co-workers the way that Americans do.” [respondent 30]; “French do not talk to bosses higher up on the hierarchical chart whereas Americans monopolize on friendship to move up in the world.” [respondent 26]; and “The biggest difference is that French organizations have a hierarchy system. Hence, when someone wants to voice a complaint, for example, he has to go through correct channels, i.e., his immediate boss. In America, there is no hierarchy system in organizations. Differences in ranks are not as pronounced as they are in France” [respondent 41].

Beyond the organizational hierarchy structure, other common responses touched on formality and time. When the term “formal” was used, it was attributed to the French. Interestingly, when the terms “relaxed” and “laid-back” were used, they were also attributed to the French in all cases but one. However, this laid-back, relaxed nature tended to represent the nature of the work environment as opposed to the communication styles specifically. When “time” was used, it was used in terms of pace and value. For example, “Time means money to us, but French take their time to get things done” [respondent 5], and “If organizational communication style means how they organize their time, then the French are known as being a highly efficient society that is very well organized. ‘Hustle and Bustle’ is the most common way of life for a typical North American” [respondent 52].

In the post-test, there was much more of an understanding of interrelationships between communication topics in understanding the similarities and differences between the U.S. and the French organizational culture. Several prominent outcomes were expressed in relation to interpersonal communication: context, time, volume, nonverbals, hierarchy and relationships. In regards to context, the responses addressed the differences of high- and low-context cultures. For example, “Besides language the biggest difference is that an American’s communication style is based on low context culture and the French communication style is based on high context culture. Therefore Americans communicate directly, think and act in a linear matter controlled by time constraints. The French however, deal completely with relationships, codes, flexible time, and communicate in a circular mode of thinking and acting.” [respondent 33] and
“The biggest difference is that North America is a low-context culture, meaning the communication is direct, clear, linear and verbal, whereas France is a high-context culture, in which communication is more coded, circular, and indirect. In France, the messages come from body language, the setting, and the relationship between the people involved.” [respondent 41]. Similar to pre-test results, volume and nonverbals such as gestures, body movement, and facial expressions were among the most prominent themes expressed in the responses. However, in regard to post-test results, the responses were more thorough and detailed indicating increased understanding. Examples of these learning outcomes were “Americans are louder, more friendly and more direct in almost any setting” [respondent 3]; and “Well the first and most obvious is volume. North Americans tend to be much louder. The French tend to be quieter, but are more expressive when loud. Gestures are used by both, but facial expression and body language plays a larger role to the French than North Americas.” [respondent 60] One respondent addressed volume and nonverbals with special emphasis on space.

I think we as Americans come across much more relaxed and unsophisticated than the French. Americans slouch and are not respectful of others’ space by taking up a lot and are loud as well. French are much more reserved and quieter. They take up less space, talk quieter, sit straight and within their own space [respondent 37].

This is one of the few respondents who seemed to look at their in-group, Americans, in a more negative light at the conclusion of study abroad. Others, however, also seem to correlate the French with a more positive perception. “Americans are very loud and French are more quiet. The French tend to look more upset or mad, but once you get to know them they are very nice.” [respondent 87]. What is reflected here is not only intercultural sensitivity, again defined as “the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences” (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 422) but also ethnocentrism, which includes concepts of acceptance, adaptation, and integration.

It is important to note that when discussing nonverbal communication, and in many cases verbal communication, the connection to building and sustaining relationships is drawn. For example, “The fact that Americans are friendly. They will smile or talk to anyone. It does not matter if the relationship is close or not.” [respondent 28] and “The French need to form a relationship with a person before they’ll accept you and basically communicate with you. The Americans jump right in and talk with you and smile at you whereas the French need time to get to know you.” [respondent 6].

Relationships, however, also played a prominent role in the responses to the question regarding difference in organizational communication, as seen in the response of respondent #42.

Closer relationships verses independent workers: an American may communicate with the boss and a couple of coworkers. No close, intimate conduct is expected between employees and bosses. However in France, on the other hand, an employee must greet every employee and boss. Drinking out with the boss or engaging in more intimate settings (for example going to a sauna with coworkers and your boss) are not uncommon for French people working together.

Other examples of the learning outcome were “We are more individually productive whereas in France projects are completed because of the vast network of people” [respondent 2]; “I think this relates to the time issue. Americans base their business on time and want to make
money. The French don’t mind things taking a little longer as long as they can keep and build relationships. It is more important to the French to have relationships in business than meeting the deadline at work.” [respondent 37]; and “French work on a large part on a social aspect, creating relationships is very important, also the work standards are lower because it is hard to fire someone after the 6 month trial period. While in America it’s more business all the time, time is important and trying to better oneself in the workplace.” [respondent 80].

Some responses also addressed the differences in the perceptions and realities of the job and job duties. For example, “In an organizational style, North Americans are more assertive, brain stormers, go-getters. French are more reserved, less brainstorming. North Americans want to climb the corporate ladder. French are satisfied with the same job for years and years.” [respondent 12], and “The largest difference between organizational communication of a North American and a French person is the desire to do the task well. A French person takes the project personally responsible and puts a great deal of effort on the project. They expect others to do the same and are quick to point out what others have not done if something is wrong. Americans see it as a job, not a personal investment.” [respondent 26].

A third example reads:

The role of subordinates and the way they deal with university is different than ours. They are tracked into either high school graduates, trade school, or university. They have virtually no choice. This is directly opposite of the American way of life. Americans are raised to be whatever they want. This has a big effect on how subordinates are treated. They’re expected to work and follow orders. Americans offer opinions and develop relationships with their bosses.” [respondent 104].

A fifth prominent learning outcome in relation to organizational communication expressed in the answers was hierarchy, as reflected in the above and following responses. According to one respondent, “Organizational communication is decentralized. - Communication within a company is very horizontal, with peers from different departments collaborating with each other as opposed to a centralized approach where employees merely follow orders from someone higher up. French organizational communication is hierarchical, with each employee following someone else that is higher in the chain of command” [respondent 75]. This dichotomy is expressed by many respondents. Another wrote, the “French organization is run like a monarchy. Each decision comes from the top down, and there is no communication upward or outward. An American organization is egalitarian. Everyone knows his or her place in the organization and feels a part of the process” [respondent 61]. One respondent links the learning outcome of hierarchy with the most prominent learning outcome in regards to organizational communication, time.

The biggest difference would be the structure. In America you can move easily through the company, whereas in France there is a cell structure. You could only talk to the person above you or below you. Also, Americans work much more. It is common to arrive early, leave late and work on weekends. In France, it is common to be late and leave work at work [respondent 28].

As stated above, the most prominent of these learning outcomes was the understanding of
the cultural difference in perception of time, specifically in regards to organizational communication. For example, “A North American lives by the clock and has a beginning and/or deadline for almost everything, while a French person lives by their own time and experiences life in a more relaxed and appreciative manner” [respondent 106]; and “Americans are organized by time. For example at 12 I have an appointment, etc. French organize according to how they feel. For example I will get there around 12. To Americans time is of the essence. To French time is of convenience” [respondent 58]. Another response echoed this understanding of time while also addressing another prominent learning outcome, space.

The biggest difference between organizational communication style is the way the French perceive time and deal with space as compared to America. The French are very relaxed and they value every minute. They are also very space efficient and will keep to themselves at the workplace. Americans are completely different and are very time efficient and organized. However, in the matter of space one typically is relaxed and spread out, owning the space they claim. The French also care how the task is completed and will extend deadlines to get perfection in their work. An American will get the deadline completed and prepare a final product just to finish on time and be in good graces with the employer [respondent 52].

Taken together, there is little doubt that these post-test responses demonstrate a much more solid understanding of the similarities and differences between interpersonal and organizational communication styles in the United States and France in addition to how role prescriptions of each impact communication.

While not examined as a research question, a word count was calculated for these four questions and the means were examined using a one-sample t-test. It was the belief of the authors that increased word counts per question would indicate increased knowledge and understanding. Stated more simply, if students have an increased knowledge and understanding, they will likely have more to say. In all four cases, the mean number of words used in the post-test was significantly higher than in the pretest. More specifically, in answering “What are the role prescriptions of a North American?” the mean word count increased from 10.77 to 21.12 from pre- to post-test, an increase that was statistically significant (t(91)=7.429, p<.000). In answering “What are the role prescriptions of a French person?” the mean word count increased from 10.32 to 20.67, an increase that was statistically significant (t(91)=7.230, p<.000). In answering “What is the biggest difference between the communication style of a North American and that of a French person?” the mean word count increased from 13.45 to 23.76, an increase that was statistically significant (t(91)=11.872, p<.000). In answering “What is the biggest difference between the organizational communication style of a North American and that of a French person?” the mean word count increased from 13.03 to 35.75, an increase that was statistically significant (t(91)=12.21, p<.000).

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of study-abroad is to immerse students into a new and unfamiliar culture. Results indicate that an appreciation for and understanding of the complexities of intercultural communication can be attained through the participation in the summer study-abroad program. When done correctly, this immersion is coupled with formal learning, which explains how and
why a communication event experienced while on the program may – or may not – have succeeded. This process is reflective of situated cognition. At the beginning of the study-abroad experience, the students need to have failed experiences from which to learn. “Why did this happen?” or “They’re rude here,” is, in fact, what you want to hear as feedback. From these failed experiences, learning can occur.

Observation also becomes a prime learning tool for the study-abroad student, and many of the responses, especially the non-verbal communication examples, demonstrate that the respondents were observing their environment while attempting to engage in the new setting. While the authors do not have empirical evidence that there is causality between the student’s observations and the post-test responses, there was definitely an increase in knowledge. This study suggests that to be effective in another culture, people must experience it first-hand and either be observant of or instructed in how to be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences. It is hoped that this sensitivity will cause the students to be willing and able to modify their behavior. Further, these altered behaviors will be received as an indication of respect for the people of the host culture.

There is little research on why a person decides to participate in a study-abroad program. Perhaps the goal of becoming a more competent global communicator is an unwritten prerequisite for participation in a study-abroad program. If “intercultural communication is not a natural human quality” (Olson & Kroeger, 2001, p. 124), there needs to be a desire to learn. Oftentimes, the desire is a byproduct of the study-abroad experience rather than the impetus to participate, but regardless, the outcome is the same. Once obtained, this interest in and desire to understand different cultures becomes a part of the daily experience of life. The authors encourage other study-abroad professionals to engage in research on the question of “why” students go abroad.

The important and exciting results of this study on outcomes of experiential learning through study abroad will hopefully add momentum to the expanding landscape of study-abroad opportunities. This study adds to the existing literature, which has found that while international and intercultural campus initiatives are important and beneficial, nothing can compare with the actual experience of being somewhere different and needing to communicate effectively. This learning experience fosters the type of learning that truly resonates with the students and at the same time achieves the outcomes set out at the start of the course.

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**About the Authors**

KENNETH J. LEVINE is an Associate Professor in the School of Communication Studies at the University of Tennessee. Dr. Levine’s research agenda concentrates on international communication, organizational communication, small group communication and leadership. Dr. Levine is an advocate for the inclusion of international and intercultural material in the classroom and has organized and taught a summer study-abroad program in Paris and Brussels since 1998. E-mail: klevine1@utk.edu

MICHELLE EPSTEIN GARLAND is a doctoral student and Graduate Teaching Associate in the School of Communication Studies at the University of Tennessee. Prior to entering the doctoral program, she taught Business and Professional Communication as a Lecturer for the School of Communication Studies for six years. Her research agenda concentrates on instructional communication, student learning, and higher education assessment and evaluation.

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U.S. Higher Education Classroom Experiences of Undergraduate Chinese International Students

Gabriela Valdez (Doctoral Candidate)
Department of Language, Reading and Culture
The University of Arizona (USA)

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore undergraduate Chinese international students’ perceptions about their classroom experiences in the United States institutions of higher education. Double consciousness, introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois, was used as the theoretical framework for this study. After analyzing the 15 interviews to Chinese international students, the following areas were discussed: comparison of classroom experiences in the United States and China; positive and negative classroom practices in the U.S.; perceptions of the way American faculty and students perceived Chinese international students; and double consciousness of Chinese international students. While most of the participants preferred the American classroom practices over practices in China, their perceptions about the way American students and faculty perceived them were conflicting. The concept of double consciousness also helped to illustrate the internal identity conflict of being Chinese and being “Americanized.”

Keywords: Chinese students, classroom experiences, identity, international students, assumptions, perceptions

The United States attracted 819,644 international students who enrolled in American institutions of higher education during the academic year 2012-2013 according to the Open Doors report (Institute of International Education [IIE]). This number represents a 7.2% increase from the previous academic year and placed the United States as the country with the most international students around the world (Choudaha, Chang, & Kono, 2013). China has been the top country of origin since 2004, sending the largest number of international students around the world to English speaking countries such as the U.S., Australia, the U.K., and Canada (Choudaha et al., 2013). This phenomenon was also observed in enrollment in the United States where 235,597 Chinese international students, the largest group of international students, studied during the academic year 2012-2013. Chinese students were followed by students from India with 96,754
students and students from South Korea with 70,627 that attended institutions of higher education in the United States (IIE, 2013). The increasing number of undergraduate Chinese students, especially in the fields of business and engineering, is drawing attention from higher education administrators; however, researchers and administrators have paid little attention to classroom experiences of international students, especially Chinese students.

What causes international student mobility? One of the factors affecting this increase in international student mobility is the gap between the educational supply and demand of many countries of origin. It was estimated that in 2006 there were around 3,000 Chinese institutions of higher education serving approximately 25.4 million students (The International Comparative Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project, 2009). China has currently the largest higher education system in the world, but only 2.5% of China’s population has access to this educational system.

Access to economic resources is something that also influences the number of students who have the opportunity to study abroad; as an example, it was estimated that in 2006 about 15% of China’s population was considered middle class and had access to resources, nearly 201,619,500 people (Chen & Lu, 2006). The economic affluence of millions of people may impact international student mobility, not to mention the apparent prestige that comes with studying in the U.S., something that is often perceived as a benefit by families of international students. A study conducted about Chinese students study abroad decision-making also supports some of these causes arguing that students’ social influences, perceived high educational quality in specific countries and social-economic pragmatism from China-based research are among the factors that influence Chinese student’s decisions to study abroad and their choice of institution (Liu, Elston, & Zhou, 2013). Similarly, these factors might influence Chinese students’ perceptions about their classroom experiences in the U.S.

Studies published and accessible using three major search engines, namely ERIC, Google Scholar and JSTOR about the classroom experiences of Chinese students in English speaking countries include those in New Zealand (Holmes, 2006), in Canada (Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005), and in Britain (Wang & Byram, 2011), but few studies have been published specifically about classroom experiences of Chinese students in the United States (Hsieh, 2007, Wan, 1999). The purpose of this study is to address the gap in the literature about Chinese students’ experiences in the U.S. higher education system by examining Chinese international students’ perceptions about their classroom experiences using a double consciousness framework. I also intend to further explore the students’ perceptions about classroom participation, sharing indigenous Chinese knowledge in U.S. classrooms, and the way American faculty and American students perceive Chinese students.

The following research questions will guide this study:

• What are some similarities and differences between classroom experiences in the U.S. and China according to participants?
• What U.S. classroom practices are perceived as positive by participants? What U.S. classroom practices are perceived as negative?
• What are the participants’ perceptions about the way American faculty and students perceive Chinese students?
• What part does “double consciousness” play in the classroom experiences of Chinese international students?
Theoretical Framework

The concept of double consciousness was used as the theoretical framework for this study. W.E.B. Du Bois first introduced the concept of double consciousness in 1897 in his essay *Striving of the Negro People* when he referred to an African American’s experience of “twoness” or the experience of being American and Black at the same time, two identities in conflict, according to Du Bois. This concept was also described by Du Bois as a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others…” (Du Bois, 1897) as he explored his own identity and the identity of African Americans as a group. Over the years this theory has been applied in different fields such as education (Lee, 1990), cultural studies (Dayal, 1996), and literature (Adell, 1994). Du Bois’ work has also influenced current theories such as critical race theory, which explores power relations and, whiteness studies which explores white ideology and its invisibility in society.

This study addresses three different issues, previously identified by Dickson (1992), related to the concept of double consciousness: the power of white stereotypes in the lives and thoughts of people of color, the double consciousness created by practical racism, and finally, the internal double consciousness conflict in the individual. Although Dickson (1992) did not apply the concept of double consciousness to Chinese international students, his work represents a relevant analysis of Du Bois’ model of double consciousness.

For the purpose of this article, I argue that Chinese international students experienced a double consciousness while they identified with other Chinese international students, but also tried to disassociate themselves from behaviors which were not generally perceived as positive by U.S. faculty members and students. This study addresses the power of white stereotypes in the lives of the participants, the double consciousness created by practical racism that excludes participants from classroom participation, and students’ individual double consciousness conflict. It is important to clarify that the intention of the use of double consciousness for this article is not to compare the experiences faced by African Americans and Chinese international students, but rather to explore specifically the classroom experiences of Chinese international students through a critical lens that offers a better understanding of this growing population in institutions of higher education in the United States.

Literature Review

The number of studies published about international students’ perceptions of classroom experiences in the United States is limited, especially those that concern Chinese international students. A few researchers, whose work is accessible using three major search engines, namely ERIC, Google Scholar and JSTOR (Chu & Kim, 1999; Heggies & Jackson, 2001; Kim, 2012; Lee, 2009; Liberman, 1994; Major, 2005) have explored the perceptions of Asian students studying in the United States, but only two, a case study by Hsieh (2007) and a case study by Wan (1999), have explored the perception of Chinese students specifically about their classroom experiences in the U.S. The limitation of only two relevant published studies is that the other literature examined, although focusing on Asian students in general, will still have to be carefully generalized to the Chinese international student population.

Of those studies that explored the perceptions of Asian students, including Chinese international students, in the U.S. higher education system, themes of identity change and self-perception appeared consistently in three of them (Chu & Kim, 1999; Hsieh, 2007; Kim, 2012).
For example, Kim (2012) explored students’ identities and self-perceptions in a study that focused on the experiences of 50 Korean graduate students in the United States. In interviews, students expressed a sense of inferiority compared to American graduate students because of their English language ability. A relevant part of Kim’s analysis is the exploration of the development of a new identity of inferiority by Korean students studying in the U.S. This development started with their classroom experiences, in which these formerly high-achieving students quickly learned that they did not have the language ability to perform at the level they were accustomed to in their Korean universities. Students used phrases such as “I now accept my limitations” and “handicap” as ways to describe their new self-image when they compared their classroom performance to that of their American counterparts. Kim (2012) attributed this new identity of inferiority to a series of negative experiences in the students’ academic careers in the U.S.

In a case study by Hsieh (2007), the author explored one Chinese female student’s experience in American classrooms. One of the strengths of a case study when applied to educational research is the type of in-depth information that a researcher can collect from one participant. Conversely, some of the weaknesses are its reliability, validity, and generalizability (Merriam, 2009). Similarly to Kim’s (2012) findings, the participant in Hsieh’s study expressed that she felt invisible and ignored by American students because of her silence during class.

…you know, like a group of American students and you are the only foreigner in that group, then you become like isolated, and you become ignored; you cannot get into their groups or their conversations. I think this is very frustrating… (Hsieh, 2007, p. 384).

According to Hsieh (2007), the participant internalized a deficient self-perception as a useless person in group discussion. The author also observed that the participant perceived that American students attributed this deficiency to her.

Another relevant finding is the importance of students’ social networks, especially those formed with other students from the same home country. As an illustration, in the study by Heggins and Jackson (2003), influencing factors were identified after the researchers recruited Asian international students from a Vietnamese Student Organization at a U.S. university. After individually interviewing 28 students and creating two focus groups of 10 students, researchers determined that difficulties adapting to the campus environment often influenced the students’ comfort levels and feelings of marginalization in school. The researchers also identified social networks as a way to mediate these adjustment problems.

In a study by Major (2005), the author explored co-national support and the adjustment of Asian students in U.S. higher education institutions. A network of compatriots was identified by participants as their main source of mentoring and cross-cultural reference. One student expressed, “… I was on probation... so my [Taiwanese] friends help me choose. I chose some easy and some hard classes. I worked very hard the second semester. My GPA is 3.09 this semester” (Major, 2005, p. 89). This quote illustrates Major’s (2005) claim about the importance of co-national mentoring in the transition from cultural divergence to the adjustment state.

The themes of identity change and self-perception present in the published studies regarding international Asian and Chinese students served as a foundation for the analysis of the data collected for this study. One of the purposes of this present study is to further explore these themes and pay special attention to the role that double consciousness play in the formation of identity and self-perception.
Research Method

Undergraduate students from two Chinese student organizations in a large university in the U.S. southwest were invited to participate. After the interview, students were asked to recommend other Chinese students to participate in the study using a snowball sample system. Most of the students recommended were not part of the two student organizations. A total of 15 students voluntarily participated in a 20-30 minute interview. The number of participants in this study represented less than one percent of the estimated 1,613 Chinese international undergraduate and graduate student population in that specific university. Redundancy of information collected during the interviews was used to determine the size of the participant sample. Thirteen participants were majoring in business, one participant was majoring in engineering, and one participant was majoring in retail and consumer science at the time of the interview. This distribution of majors is consistent with the university’s Chinese international student population where the majority of Chinese students pursue degrees in business. Similarly, the participants’ choice of major is also consistent with the distribution of majors among the overall international student population studying in the United States (IIE, 2013). Participants were in different stages of their undergraduate program, which included five sophomores, seven juniors, and three seniors. Students’ times since arrival to the U.S. varied from one year for the student with the most recent arrival to six years with the student with the longest stay in the U.S.

Interviews were conducted in English, which was the participants’ second or third language. Participants’ English language abilities varied; as an example, the lowest TOEFL score, a test that measures the students’ abilities to read, write, and listen in English, reported by the participants was 68 and the highest was 98 with an average TOEFL score of 81.5, on a scale from 0 to 120 (ETS, 2014). It is important to mention that the time when TOEFL tests were taken by participants also varied and TOEFL scores may not have been a fair representation of the participants’ current English abilities at the time of the interviews.

I conducted all the interviews and as a second language speaker of English I found that it was beneficial for collecting data as many of the participants expressed comfort communicating in English with someone else whose English was not their first language. It is possible that the students did not feel judged about their language abilities as they recognized my English fluency was not at a native level. I believe this second language commonality granted me access to the international student population. Also, my experience being an international student during my undergraduate years may have affected the way data was collected, analyzed and interpreted. At the same time, it is important to recognize the potential bias that members of a specific student organization might have and how this could have affected the data. I am not a member of the group being studied, but I had established a strong working relationship with some of the students being interviewed as we have collaborated on other projects in the past.

A set of 16 questions (appendix 1) guided the interviews with the students. These questions were used to explore the Chinese international students’ perceptions about classroom experiences in the U.S. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed to facilitate analysis. The data analysis stage was conducted using a qualitative analysis software called ATLAS.ti. This software was used to open code the interviews, generate themes, create semantic networks and interpret the results.
Results and Discussion

For the purpose of this study, classroom practices in institutions of higher education in the United States are identified as a group of activities that take place in a classroom setting. These activities include, but are not limited to, classroom discussions, teamwork, presentations, and lectures. Engaging classroom practices facilitate meeting class objectives and goals while fostering an interactive learning environment for students. In the case of Chinese international students, inclusion in these classroom practices is essential for their successful education in the U.S.

After analyzing the interviews, the following themes emerged: comparison of classroom experiences in the United States and China, positive and negative classroom practices in the U.S., perceptions of the way American faculty and students perceived Chinese international students, and double consciousness of Chinese international students.

Comparison of classroom experiences in the United States and China

The majority of the participants compared their undergraduate classroom experiences in the U.S. to those experiences they had in high school in China, as most of them had never attended college in China. The perceptions of classroom experiences in the United States were similar among participants. All of them agreed that they prefer the “more active” teaching style in the U.S., as it was described by one of the participants: “Teaching style in here [U.S.] is more like discussion based, there are often times when we have group discussion, group homework, group project, whereas in China is more like spoon-feeding.” The participant referred to spoon-feeding when the instructor tells students exactly what to do, such as when to take notes, and forces them to memorize information.

Another difference between U.S. and China classroom experiences was the ability of students to ask questions during class in the U.S. Six students said that in China, students are not allowed to ask questions. One student went further and added, “In China, generally, I don’t go to professors’ office hours or ask questions because they give you plenty of instructions, more than you really need to know, so you don’t have to go to their office hours.” When participants were asked about attending professors’ office hours in the U.S., the majority said that they only go to office hours if they are worried about their grades and they mostly talk about their grades. One participant highlighted the difference that “here in the U.S. professors and students are more like friends.” All participants also agreed that students who ask questions and talk in class are the ones that get the most attention from the professor in the U.S. classroom setting, something that usually does not happen in a Chinese classroom.

The students’ perceptions about sharing knowledge and examples from China in the U.S. classrooms was also discussed. Half of the participants said that they have shared examples from China during their classes in the U.S., but the majority of them said it was either during a class with international focus or when the professor had international experience, and he or she was interested in their perspectives. The other half of the participants said that they have not shared any examples from China during their classes. One participant mentioned that the classes he has taken do not relate to China at all. Three other participants said that sharing examples from China in a U.S. classroom setting was inappropriate. One student expressed the following:

It would be inappropriate [to share examples from China] because we have different cultures, ideas and different ethical standards, and if I bring this up in a huge class, it
would cause a huge discussion and sometimes, I think, it’s impolite to do this during class.

Similarly, another student added, “I definitely share my experience, but not from China because I think if you always talk about the Chinese stuff and it might sound like fresh air [fresh perspective] to the class. Sometimes we need to see the problems globally.” The participant’s explanation suggests that for him, seeing and discussing a problem with a U.S. perspective is seen as a global perspective. For this group of participants attending institutions of higher education in the U.S. has provided them the opportunity to be able to compare their experiences in both countries.

Classroom practices in the United States

Classroom practices perceived as positive. Among the classroom practices that were perceived as positive, one in particular was mentioned multiple times by different interviewees, which was peer collaboration. This has been previously referred to as Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), one of the main concepts of sociocultural theory. This concept was founded on the notion of the existence of an area in which learners, who are cognitively ready, are able to develop fully by interacting with more experienced peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Some researchers have written about the importance of peer collaboration between American students and international students and all the benefits associated with these interactions such as language development, and cultural understanding (Valdez, 2015). Students mentioned the benefits of assigned seats because it gives them the opportunity to interact with other students. A student expressed her opinion by saying, “In my business classes I tend to have side discussion with my friend because we are kind of allowed to do so… and it helps me to learn because sometimes the teacher can’t explain as well as my peer does because we think the same way.” This quote is a good example of ZPD and the way this student perceived peer collaboration in class.

The majority of students also said that they like oral presentations and group discussions because it gives them an opportunity to talk and practice their English language and get feedback from their peers. One of the participants mentioned:

I really like it [classroom discussion] because it is a way to express your opinion and also it is more like than just sitting in the lecture and listening to the teacher and hear what they are saying. Actually you have interaction with the teacher and the students, so that would make you more understand the materials.

This statement illustrates the student’s appreciation of a more interactive classroom setting and at the same time, it indicates that the student values interaction with teachers and students.

Classroom practices perceived as negative. Those practices that were perceived as culturally insensitive were identified as negative by participants. A student gave an example of having to play the game “Who Am I?” where a paper with a name of an American celebrity was placed on her back, and she had to figure out the name of the celebrity by asking questions. When the participant was explaining the game, she said, “Many Chinese students did not get it. I feel very awkward in that game because I don’t know the names of the [American] celebrities.”
She went on and added, “I don’t feel comfortable with cultural activities because I lack of this culture. I feel awkward.” This exemplifies many of the assumptions made by professors about common knowledge in class. Similarly, it illustrates a heavy focus on U.S. culture and lack of inclusion of other cultures in classroom practices. I argue that experiences like these can contribute to the internal double-consciousness conflict of Chinese international students.

Students also identified having a high emphasis on oral participation as negative when a grade depends on that participation. A student gave an example of this when she said the following:

This semester I took a class and 25% of the whole grade belonged to participation … and the whole semester even though the professor knows my name he does not ask me question because he knows I’m an international student and he knows oh this student, maybe she does not want to answer the question because she has an accent or she doesn’t know the answer, I don’t want to make her embarrassing like that…

This indicates that the effort by the professor to not single out this international student during class actually excluded the student from an essential classroom activity by not asking her questions, which at the same time was an impediment to earning 25% of her final grade. This experience exemplifies the power of stereotypes in the lives of people of color as the professor used his power in class to apply the stereotype of Chinese students not wanting to speak and participate in class.

Some of the participants indicated a high level of stress linked to speaking in class, specifically when expressing their own opinion or answering questions. A student expressed

… for any question if the teacher just asks your name and ask you to answer it and then sometimes you didn’t pay attention to the class and then maybe you just don’t know the answer it’s kind of awkward and embarrassing.

Her level of stress linked to the public shame of not being able to answer a question during class appeared to be high. This same student later said that it is very difficult for Chinese students to participate in class because of timing and being able to express their own opinions in English quickly to stay on track with the speed of classroom discussion.

**Perceptions of the way American faculty and students perceived Chinese students**

**Perceptions of faculty.** Participants’ perceptions were divided when they discussed the way they think American faculty members perceive Chinese international students. Some participants thought instructors have a good perception of Chinese students. Some of them said professors think Chinese students are “hardworking” and that they see the value of Chinese students in American universities. Other participants said that faculty members treat Chinese students the same way they treat American students. On the other hand, the majority said faculty members do not have a positive perception of Chinese students. One participant suggested that instructors profile Chinese students by saying:

I even talked to one of the professors who often catches Chinese students [cheating] and he said that when he is giving an exam, he specifically watch them [Chinese students] if
they are in a cluster, they watch them very closely. I feel like they have some sort of profile of Chinese students specifically in the cheating part.

To support this idea, another student talked about an experience she had in one of her classes where there was assigned seating and two Chinese students happened to be seating next to each other. In that instance, the professor asked the students in front of the entire class to show identification because he thought they were not supposed to be there, in spite of his own assigned seating. The student perceived this action as discrimination because there were a number of American students seated next to each other, and they were not asked to show their identification, an effective illustration of the double consciousness created by practical racism.

Similarly, one other participant questioned the way some faculty members interact with Chinese students. The participant provided the following example:

…after my observation, the other students [American] talk to her [professor] and she is kind of smiling, but when, yesterday, I talk to her, and my group mates as well, and then all my group mates are Chinese as well, and then we try to talk to her and then she is having a bad mood. So I don’t know if it is because yesterday she doesn’t have a good mood or she has a hard time or hard day or she just don’t like me or my group mates.

The student tried to explore other reasons why the professor would not act the same way with American students and with the student’s group of Chinese students, such as having a bad day or a bad mood. The student’s struggle to make sense of the professor’s bias illustrates an internal conflict on the part of the student. It can be argued that these experiences create the perfect environment for Chinese international students to start experiencing an internal conflict of double consciousness.

**Perceptions of American students.** Only two students thought American students had a favorable perception of Chinese students. One of the students first mentioned that American students are very friendly and that he thought they think the same of Chinese students. The majority of students interviewed thought that American students had either a negative perception of Chinese students or two opposite extreme perceptions. Five participants remarked that American students may have a negative perception of Chinese students due to problematic experiences with teamwork. All of the participants that mentioned teamwork were business majors, where an emphasis is placed on teamwork. One student said, “American students get frustrated because Chinese students cannot express their ideas.” Another student mentioned that during group presentations, the team gets points off from the grade if there is no eye contact with the public, which according to the student, is a problem for many Chinese students; another example of an environment that engenders an internal double-consciousness conflict.

Students also brought up some difficulties faced by Chinese students while participating in teamwork or discussions and how these difficulties affect the American students’ perceptions of Chinese international students. One of the participants shared:

I feel like they [American students] have bad experience with team work, especially communications class, I think they can tell that they [Chinese] are kind of lagging off, in terms of, not because they don’t have opinions, but they cannot say it fast enough.
This student attributed overall perceptions of American students to difficult teamwork experience with Chinese students. She added the following:

They [Chinese students] don’t know the right time to cut people off, the right time to jump in. That takes a lot of culture and a lot of experience to ask the right question at the right time, to cut people off at the right time, to jump in at the right time.

It seems that the student shared this observation in an effort to explain why American students had negative experiences with Chinese international students. It also seemed that the student attributed a lack of culture and experience to Chinese international students making them responsible for the American students’ negative experiences.

Double Consciousness

A pattern of what can be referred to as double consciousness was suggested throughout the interviews. The students interviewed for this study showed some signs of double consciousness by identifying with Chinese international students, but also by making an effort to disassociate themselves from characteristics shared by Chinese students, which might be perceived as negative, according to the participants. This disassociation is consistent with Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness and the conflict between two identities. One student identified himself as “Americanized” because he asked too many questions during class, while two other students started to describe themselves with opposite and more American-acceptable characteristics than their Chinese counterparts when asked about the way they thought American faculty or students perceived Chinese students.

The conflict of the identities of being Chinese and being “Americanized” became stronger particularly when speaking about classroom practices that were perceived as negative by American faculty and students. For example, one participant said that she shares examples from China during her classes all the time. This supported her view of being more “Americanized,” as she described it, by speaking and participating in class often. When I asked for a specific example, she struggled and was not able to provide one, despite being in college for four years at the time of the interview. Regarding these conflicting identities, another participant expressed how she did not feel part of the group when students would raise their hands to answer questions in class.

Perceptions of Chinese international students about academic integrity also played an important role in the conflict of identities. All participants disassociated themselves from behaviors related to academic integrity violations, but accepted that it is a widely known stereotype of Chinese international students held by American faculty and students. This illustrates the power of the racial stereotypes in the lives and thoughts of people of color, in this case, Chinese international students.

Conclusion

The perceptions of Chinese international students about their classroom experiences in the United States were very revealing. While most of them preferred the American classroom practices over practices in China, their perceptions about the way American students and faculty perceived them were conflicting. The majority of participants appreciated a “more active” classroom setting, as some of them identified the typical U.S. classroom. Some of the
characteristics that were identified as positive were the flexibility in the classroom setting and the collaboration with peers. On the other hand, practices that were perceived as culturally insensitive, such as activities that required specific knowledge about American culture, were identified as negative by participants.

The majority of the students agreed that American faculty members often do not have favorable perceptions of Chinese international students. Profiling and attributing characteristics such as cheating and unwillingness to participate in class were common examples among participants’ illustrations. At the same time, some participants expressed that American students had negative perceptions of Chinese students mostly based on their experiences working in groups with Chinese students and their lack of contribution to group projects.

Consistent with some of the literature published about the experiences of Asian students in the U.S. (Chu & Kim, 1999; Hsieh, 2007; Kim, 2012), Chinese international students in this study also struggled with identity. The concept of double consciousness helps to illustrate the internal identity conflict of being Chinese and being “Americanized.” Inconsistencies in their examples suggest they may identify with a specific identity, Chinese or “Americanized”, but provide examples of the opposite. As predicted by Dickson (1992), the power of stereotypes in the lives of people of color, in this case Chinese international students; encounters with practical racism; and the internal conflict of identities all played an important role in the manifestation of this double consciousness.

An important finding of this research is how the power of assumptions shapes perceptions in a classroom setting. Assumptions were made by Chinese international students themselves, as well as American faculty and students, according to participants. Some of the assumptions made by Chinese international students included how they perceived the unwillingness of American students to work in teams with Chinese international students and stereotypes of Chinese international students linked to academic integrity violations attributed by professors. Regarding faculty, some participants believed faculty made assumptions about the unwillingness of Chinese international students to participate in class and profile students in issues of cheating and academic dishonesty. Participants also believed that American students made some assumptions about Chinese international students including the inability to contribute to group projects, which is consistent with the assumptions of Chinese international students about group work. This study highlights how embedded cultural assumptions often determine how we perceive others as well as ourselves, especially in a classroom setting, and how this affects our social interaction with others.

The study will add to the limited published literature available about Chinese students’ perspectives of their classroom experiences in the U.S. The results of this study suggest a sense of urgency to provide more resources to faculty in the form of training and professional development to help them create classroom practices that are inclusive for all students and to promote collaboration between Chinese international students and American students. It is also important to create awareness of the effects of cultural assumptions in the higher education classroom setting. Similarly, further research about the experiences of Chinese students is needed, especially with a focus on issues of racism and inequity. Also, future research and interviews with U.S. faculty, students and administrators about Chinese international students could provide a better understanding of the experiences of this specific group of students, the largest group of international students in the U.S.
REFERENCES


**Appendix 1**

**Interview Questions for Chinese Students**

- How would you describe an American classroom compared to China?
- Do you talk in class?
- How much do you talk in class per week compared to U.S. students? Why?
- What is your opinion about classroom discussion?
- Do you feel you get enough instructions and direction from your professor? Can you give me an example?
- Do you go to your professors’ office hours? How often? What do you talk about?
- Do you participate in class?
- Can you describe different classroom activities in which you participate?
- Can you identify a classroom activity in which you feel the most comfortable? Why?
- During classroom discussion, do you share examples from China or your own experience? Can you give me an example?
- How would you describe your interaction with students when you are working in small groups?
- Have you given an oral presentation? What is your opinion about oral presentations?
- How do you think American students/faculty view Chinese students in a classroom setting? Can you give me an example?
- In your opinion, who are the students who get the most attention in class? Why?
- Think of your favorite class so far. Can you tell me why that was your favorite class?
- How many hours per week, outside of classroom, do you work on homework or prepare for class? Can you give me some examples?

**About the Author**

**GABRIELA VALDEZ** is a doctoral candidate (International Education & Global Perspectives/Higher Education Management) at the University of Arizona. She is also an academic advisor for pre-business majors and international internships program at the University of Arizona. E-mail: gvaldez@eller.arizona.edu
Improving Intercultural Education at Chinese Institutions from German Experience

Lihe Huang
Tongji University (China)

While flying on an airplane to Germany, heading to my new appointment as a visiting scholar, I reminded myself that there would likely be some cultural differences upon embarking on this new journey. But after I began my sojourn there, I still found myself surprised by the cultural shock I was experiencing. I had taken for granted that my English education and some reading on German culture and society could provide me adequate knowledge to get along with these “Westerners”.

Germans are unique, as they describe themselves, and interaction in everyday routine as well as in a professional setting gradually allowed me to learn about the characteristics of this country’s culture and its people’s lifestyle and mentality. To be very serious and forthright is one of the qualities in Germans which left me with a profound impression. As an example, one interesting experience occurred during an academic presentation I delivered. Upon completing my talk, I expected some routine or polite appreciation for my well-prepared presentation, but my German audience immediately focused on asking questions of a critical nature after my talk. “In many aspects, we are even much more straightforward than Americans,” I was told by my German colleagues. After a series of similar experiences, I gradually came to believe that these attitudes of critical inquiry, curiosity and earnestness embedded in their culture and national spirit help promote Germans to progress in science and technology. They are modest and unpretentious in the way they seek to improve their products and service, and meanwhile, they are also very proud of their country, as exemplified in a famous German song "Deutschland" originally by the band "Die Prinzen": Wir können stolz auf Deutschland (We can be proud of Germany).

Through the well-designed introductory seminar and study tour arranged by Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which provided the grant for my research on foreign languages teaching and intercultural education in Germany, I familiarized myself with many facts related to the social, economic, political, cultural and historical situation in Germany. I sought to enrich myself with deeper exposure to my new intercultural settings by making efforts to venture out and explore the country and other European countries to gain a better understanding of the cultures. These experiences informed me how the country created numerous masterpieces in science and arts, how its people committed themselves to face the challenges in the process of development, and how the country connected itself to the international arena in a global capacity. Indeed, there were many interesting events and valuable opportunities to learn about Germany and Europe, among which a key highlight included a reception from German President Joachim Gauck and a meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.
Additionally, the interaction and friendship with other fellows from China, America and Russia offered great opportunities to practice real intercultural communication, to learn to respect and admire different cultures and to consider world events from various perspectives in the international arena. The intercultural interaction with Germans and people from other parts of the world also taught me much about diversity and beauty in life, which largely expanded my insight. Meanwhile, it was an excellent opportunity to express China’s philosophies and ideas in an internationally-understandable way and learn about others. Through these experiences, I gained a profound understanding of how significant and important it is to promote intercultural communication and friendship among younger generations from different cultures, beliefs and religions for the sake of a better and more harmonious world in the future.

To me, Germany is a true “Land of Ideas” and has contributed greatly to my academic achievement. Numerous activities, events, exhibitions, workshops or even daily encounters I experienced inspire me to develop more creative ideas in my own research. Thanks to the support by the German Chancellor Fellowship (Bundeskanzler-Stipendium) from Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, I learned much during my year appointment about how German higher education integrates itself into the process of internationalization while keeping its own traditions. Today, great emphasis on intercultural education is advocated at Chinese universities as the importance of cultivating greater numbers of globally-aware individuals has become a priority. The establishment of the global vision and the improvement of intercultural communication skills demand students to acquire basic intercultural knowledge, global awareness, attitudes to respect multiculturalism, and common values in different cultures. Germany's approach to the internationalization of higher education helps students to function competitively around the world, and better understanding the German approach has framed my research, in which I examine how China can benefit from understanding the German experience.

I have investigated both University of Cologne and University of Bremen with regard to improving students’ intercultural competence, and also made a comparison between them and my home university in China regarding international strategy and policy; service for international students; intercultural competence training; building of campus diversity; and intercultural activities organization. Both German universities offer help, training and consultation for international students in order to help them adapt to learning and living in Germany. Various intercultural activities are well organized. In particular, the training and certification of intercultural competence at Bremen University is quite well-developed and very inspiring.

My study argues that intercultural education should be considered important for student outcomes of institutional internationalization, and a co-curricular activity-based intercultural competence training program can improve students’ global-mindedness and intercultural competence. There are two concepts which need to be explained here: First, what is an intercultural activity? Since intercultural competence is gradually developed from one’s social interaction rather than mere knowledge accumulation, intercultural education should be more activity-based instead of pure traditional indoor classroom teaching. The scope of “activity” in my study is quite broad, which includes any interaction related to intercultural or international communication. Both indoor activities (e.g. lectures, workshops and training courses, etc.) and outdoor activities (e.g. group studies or visits, projects in college grounds or the local community, etc.) are involved. Second, why should the program be “co-curricular”? Co-curriculum in the study implies that the academic coursework is related to the out-of-class activities in terms of intercultural education. This is a reflection of UNESCO’s belief that "Intercultural education cannot be just a simple 'add-on' to the regular curriculum. It needs to
concern the learning environment as a whole, as well as other dimensions of educational processes...” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 19). Furthermore, my study advocates that activities in the training program should be organized using English as a lingua franca. In Chinese higher education institutions, College English is a compulsory course for all non-English majors. I agree on the idea that English education should help meet the needs of the internationalization of Chinese higher education, the cultivation of international talents, and the new national development strategies of opening China further to the outside world (Shu, 2013). Both indoor College English teaching and an activity-based training program then constitute a bi-faceted and relatively complete scheme for intercultural competence development, which seems to be pragmatic and effective in Chinese institutions. Certainly, developing intercultural competence with English as a lingua franca does not mean to limit the program’s content to the cultures in English-speaking countries, or to develop specific communicative rules of the target language, but aims to foster students’ appropriate strategies to communicate with people from diverse languages and cultural backgrounds taking English as a tool.

The close exchange between China and Germany provides even more opportunities for people to make good use of their profession and strengths to contribute to the tightening partnership between the two countries. My experience in Germany not only provided me a chance to improve professional skills and develop new insights, but also me to relay helpful information to my home institution in China. Tongji University has a long tradition in developing close ties with Germany, and this experience helps me continue to foster ties and engage in this tradition as a rising faculty. Beyond all of these opportunities I had in Germany, I am very grateful for the help and support from my cooperative supervisors, Prof. Dr. Yasemin Karakaşoğlu and Dr. Susanne Preuschoff, both in the field of intercultural education, and the staff from Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. All that I have experienced and the friendship with the other research fellows and friends in Germany will be unforgettable and everlasting in my mind.

Photo: Lihe Huang with German President Joachim Gauck and Prof. Dr. Helmut Schwarz, President of Humboldt Foundation at a reception in the official residence of the President of Germany.

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LIHE HUANG is a Humboldt Fellow of Germany-based Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, conducting research at University of Cologne and University of Bremen. Mr. Huang is also a member of several academic associations both internationally and in China. He has published over 30 peer-reviewed papers, and undertaken several research projects granted by different institutions at various levels. E-mail: cranehlh@hotmail.com
Book Review

ISSN: 2162-3104 Print/ ISSN: 2166-3750 Online
Volume 5, Issue 2 (2015), pp. 204-205
© Journal of International Students
http://jistudents.org/

Internationalization of East Asian Higher Education


Reviewed by: Seungmin Yun, Oklahoma State University (USA)

This edited volume entails several research studies examining the impact of globalization and internationalization within East Asian educational contexts. While most studies have focused on Westernized perspectives, the book attempts to provide a multidimensional view of globalization and competing arguments concerning internationalization in an East Asian context through international conferences and symposiums.

In Chapter 1, Chan begins by comparing two major higher educational hubs in East Asia: Singapore and Hong Kong. He takes a qualitative approach, including both a systematic and a comprehensive analysis of policies and attempts to investigate and evaluate the recent educational renovation processes in these two major cities, focusing on four major areas: vision of government, cross-border education, marketing strategies, and quality assurance system.

Roberts and Ching, in Chapter 2, look at the process of globalization and internationalization at one Taiwanese university. They investigate the transformational efforts and challenges of the university attempting to move toward recognition as a world-class institution. With this aim, the authors focus not only on the contributions and trials of the professors in teaching and publishing, but also on the important roles of the growing body of international students. The findings illustrate the challenges of the professors regarding competition to establish higher publication records in prestigious international journals, pedagogical modifications to English-medium courses, and academic diversities brought by the increasing number of international students.

The regional background is moved into China in Chapter 3. Welch and Yang examine the internationalization of one regional Chinese university where ethnic minorities are the major population. With this distinctive regional feature, the authors thoroughly explore the historical development of the city under the influence of the former Soviet Union and Mao Tse Tung in order to explain how it has affected the university policies for internationalization. This particular regional and historical feature provides a unique point of view on internationalization and globalization.

Chapter 4 discusses another ethic minority issue with Korean nationals in China. Park and Jacob aim to explore educational challenges and concerns among Korean minority groups and ultimately provide necessary assistance for the Chinese government to develop more efficient educational policies for minorities. The chapter explains that a variety of social,
economic, and political factors significantly affect the minority students’ choices of higher education.

In Chapter 5, Palmer and Cho aim to examine the impact of globalization upon major Korean universities under the theoretical framework of globalization theory and internationalization theory. The authors intend to provide new perspectives toward globalization through thorough consideration of various student issues, faculty issues, and institutional level practices and policies. Findings indicate that Korean universities play a leading role in globalization and local aspiration through offering educational opportunities including the international summer program and the dual-degree program for international students from industrializing countries.

Jon and Kim, in Chapter 6, explore the globalization process and internationalization strategies of Korean and Japanese universities and their efforts to become world-class research universities. The authors indicate that the leading universities in Korea and Japan tend to adopt the policies and strategies developed and utilized in Western academic settings; thus, they value a growing body of international students and a higher demand for English-medium courses. Findings indicate that although English mediated teaching and learning is effective in recruiting international students and being advertised as internationalized research institutions, both faculty and students show concerns regarding the quality of courses, academic pressures and tension.

A critical analysis of two international ranking systems and their impact on internationalization polices in East Asian educational settings is discussed in Chapter 7. Ghazarian provides an overview of two ranking systems which now are prevalently used to evaluate higher education in East Asian contexts. He persists in a critical stance toward the methods employed by the two ranking systems and argues that these ranking systems entail a biased view, favoring highly established Western universities.

Chapter 8 attempts to close this volume by synthesizing all the previous chapters. Wong and Wu touch on two important issues raised in this volume: contextualization versus Westernization in the internationalization process among East Asian higher education institutions and the consequences, either positive or negative, of institutional efforts to become leading world-class universities. They believe that successful internationalization and globalization entail a comprehensive vision from the strong leadership and support from students, faculty, and administrators.

This edited volume, *The Internationalization of East Asian Higher Education: Globalization’s Impact*, provides, from diverse perspectives, an in-depth analysis and better understanding of the policies and practices of higher education institutions in East Asian contexts and their impact and consequences upon universities and education systems as a whole. Each case study reveals culturally and regionally specific features that should be thoroughly considered and are highly applicable to any higher educational settings in terms of globalizations. This book is a must-read for faculty, students, staff, administrators, and governments who are engaged in the process of globalization and internationalization and ultimately wish to pursue better educational prosperity.

SEUNGMIN YUN is a teaching associate in TESL/Linguistics Program in the English department at Oklahoma State University. Her main research interest lies in Intercultural pragmatics, code switching, and teaching ESL/EFL. E-mail: seungmin.yun@okstate.edu
Research Studies in Higher Education: Educating Multicultural College Students


Reviewed by Cory Hamilton and Raul A. Leon, Eastern Michigan University (USA)

Research Studies in Higher Education: Educating Multicultural College Students is a collection of nine studies that examine the experiences of under-represented students enrolled in colleges and universities across the US. Presenting both quantitative and qualitative findings, this book enhances our understanding of current topics such as equity, access, achievement, and retention, focusing on the experiences of students. For international students and scholars, this book offers an insight into significant hurdles faced by many multicultural and non-traditional students and recommendations presented to improve college retention and academic success. This book examines the effectiveness of programs and policies intended to assist students of color, first-generation college students, low-income students, undecided students, and non-traditional students.

The first section of the book includes four chapters that examine the experience of African American and Latino students through a qualitative approach. In chapter 1, Vega and Moore provide an assessment of the lived experience of first-generation African-American and Latino college students with elementary and secondary education. The study identifies critical barriers to college access and retention, including a lack of access to knowledge regarding navigating their education, poor educational instruction prior to college, and a lack of familial, peer, and institutional support. The study recommends that secondary school teachers and counselors build a high-expectation atmosphere while providing students and parents specific knowledge about college access.

Chapter 2 proposes a model for cultivating college predisposition. Larde interviewed first-generation African-American college students and identified three key areas that lead to a desire for and successful matriculation into higher education. These factors were self-determination, academic success, and resourcefulness. The author highlights the importance of supportive staff, self-determination based learning, and access to specific information for parents and students about the college application process.

In Chapter 3, Wood and Hilton interviewed African-American male students and examined the topic of academic success in the context of community colleges. In the final chapter of section one, Brown evaluates the perceived influence of racialized discrimination,
self-efficacy, and institutional support on the academic success of African American male students at a predominantly White institution.

In the first of three chapters on first-generation college students, Andriano employed a quantitative approach to determine if student engagement affected the likelihood of first-generation students participating in study abroad programs. The study claims that participation in study abroad programs results in academic and psycho-social benefits, and benefits for career clarification and preparation.

In Chapter 6, Rondini focuses on low-income students recognizing their limitations as they adjust to a new environment among students of privilege at an elite university. The study brings light to the importance of peer transition groups and outreach materials that can guide low-income students dealing with self-doubt and familial disconnection through a successful transition into college.

Lastly, Chapter 7 presents Davenport’s qualitative study investigating the relationship between involvement and persistence for African American and Hispanic first-generation college students. The most relevant discovery in this study was that identification within a minority group seemed to have more of an impact on persistence than that of first-generation status.

The final section of the book begins with a study that highlights the factors that impact the academic achievement (GPA) of undecided college students. Through a statistical analysis of 852 students, Brown determined that undecided students who had not declared a specific major (NSMs) and undecided students enrolled in a specific major (SMs) showed no significant difference between degree aspirations and self-perception of abilities. Brown’s results suggest that faculty and staff address scheduling options for first year undecided students as they may impact their academic achievement.

In the final chapter, Harpe and Kaniuka share their findings of retention and persistence of 1,000 traditional and non-traditional students amongst a group of community colleges. Harpe and Kaniuka found that while age was not correlated to increased retention through the first year at the community college level, first semester grade point average, application submission dates, enrollment and ethnicity, proved to be significant factors impacting the persistence of students. The researchers recommend staff and faculty prioritize academic support for first year students to promote higher first semester GPAs and to conduct exit interviews to understand individual reasons for student departures.

By combining studies that present both qualitative and quantitative findings and examining a broad span of institutional settings (community colleges, public and private institutions), Terrene Hicks and Abul Pitre provide a collection of research that successfully conveys the issues that a significant population of under-represented students face when transitioning to college. While the book is not specifically focused on international students, international students deal with many of the same issues while transitioning to colleges in the U.S. The recommendations in this book challenge individuals and institutions to truly understand the status of emerging populations in higher education and offer tangible solutions for those working with international students to offer effective academic, personal and social support.

RAUL A. LEON is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs at Eastern Michigan University. His email is rleon1@emich.edu

CORY HAMILTON is a graduate student in Educational Leadership at Eastern Michigan University. His email is chamil18@emich.edu
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