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The Transitional Experiences of International Students

Studying in the United States

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Abstract

This study sought to explore the real-life experiences of two international students and the impact on their transition to a United States college. A narrative qualitative approach was used to incorporate the stories of international students as shared by their own words. Their stories were used to identify similarities and differences including resources they utilized and their interactions with others. International students all share different cultural backgrounds and characteristics. Nonetheless, they will each have their own unique experiences, as well as have different ways of reacting and responding to those experiences. We must put in the effort of listening to and understanding their experiences so that we may understand who they are as individuals and improve the way in which we assist them throughout their transition.

Key Words: International students, transition, orientation, culture shock

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all the Student Affairs professionals who consistently devote time and energy to the growth and development of college students. It is because of existing professionals in Student Affairs why I find myself pursuing a career in the field. It is my hope that this research can provide current and future professionals with an insight into the experiences of international students so that we can continue to have an impact on these students throughout their academic journey.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The United States remains the top host country for international students, reaching a new high of roughly 1.1 million international students as of the 2017 and 2018 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2019). Approximately 734,000 came from Asian specific countries, and approximately 186,000 came from the country of India alone (Institute of International Education, 2019). Those coming from India make up approximately 17.3% of the entire international student population, making up one of the largest international student populations to date (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2018). The Institute of International Education (2019), reported that international students make a significant financial impact to the U.S. higher education system, contributing $42.4 billion to the economy through tuition, room and board, and other expenses; and this data is from to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

International students experience a variety of challenges upon their arrival to the United States, challenges that include various stressors resulting from the personal, demographic, and/or social makeup of an acculturating individual and the host culture. (Wadsworth, Hecht, and Jung, 2008). As students leave home and establish their place among a new environment, cognitions and associated behaviors and emotions may not adequately conform to what is traditionally experienced or expressed by individuals in the new university environment. As an international student begins their academic journey at an American institution, they will undoubtedly come across several roadblocks that inhibit both their personal and academic development. Challenges may include culture shock, academic problems, social skills including lack in the English fluency, confusion about gender roles, loyalty to family and culture of origin, and financial difficulties (Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, and Pace, 2014). Challenges will vary for each individual,

including the specific types of challenges and the degree at which they will experience those

challenges. Individuals will go through a different process in their personal development, as well

as at a different rate (Andrade, 2006). Individuals will also have different strategies of seeking

out resources to cope with their adjustment process. The acculturation journey will vary among

individuals, since a big determinant of one's journey will depend largely on not only external

factors such as resources the institution provides, but also personality traits and characteristics

the individual holds (Brown and Holloway, 2008). The outcome of one's acculturation journey

will largely depend on the decisions that one makes in how they choose to react and cope with

the adjustment process.

It has been argued that having international students study side by side with American

students is a tremendous asset to the United States, as emphasized by Marie Royce, Assistant

Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs who stated,

> "We need to develop leaders in all fields who can take on our toughest challenges. We
>
> need people who can find solutions that keep us secure and make us more prosperous.
>
> We want to send a message that international education makes us stronger as a country"
>
> (https://www.iie.org/Why-IIE/Announcements/2019/11/Number-of-International-
>
> Students-in-the-United-States-Hits-All-Time-High, 2019).

Welcoming international students allows us to strengthen our ties around the globe, as well as

strengthen various fields as a result of bringing in individuals with various backgrounds who can

take on the toughest challenges and think critically about issues on a national and international

 scale. A big part of our workforce relies on those from various backgrounds to bring forward a

skillset and mindset that can solve real world problems and issues (Institute of International

Education, 2019). Therefore, it is up to higher education professionals to make it a part of their

mission to develop individuals from other countries and prepare them for the real world in the United States, both on a personal and professional level. With that being said, it is important for student affairs professionals to continue learning about the experiences of international students upon their arrival to the United States, so that we may better support them on their road to personal development and academic success (Institute of International Education, 2019; Wu, Garza, and Guzman, 2015).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

I conducted this research because I wanted to explore the experiences of international students as they pursue their education at a midsized public research university located in the Midwest. As someone who came to graduate school in the Midwest after attending college in another part of the United States, I faced some cultural differences and had to adjust to this new environment. Although my challenges were less intense, I observed my roommate who was an international graduate student in their adjustment to this new country, community, and institution. I wanted to understand not only my roommate's experience but to gain insight into how others deal with this decision to study outside of their home country and what their transition looks like from their perspective.

Part of what makes college unique is that we attract a large number of international students from around the world. I was particularly interested in their experiences with balancing both their academics and social life, including the cultural barriers they face throughout this process. In other words, I was curious to see how their acculturation process while assimilating at a college in the United States impacts their academic achievement and social success. I believe that the choice that international students make in pursuing an education in the United States is a valuable one. I also believe that the barriers they face upon their arrival in the country are an

important element in the choices they make thereafter as they go on to pursue their education. Depending on the person, everyone is going to experience different cultural barriers and have different reactions to those barriers. Understanding these challenges and identifying strategies to help the acclimation process of international students is one of the main points of doing this study.

The purpose of this study was to gain greater insight into how international students describe their transition to college in the United States. The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do international students describe their transition to college in the United States?

2.   What resources do international students utilize in their transition to college in the United States?

3. How do international students studying at colleges in the United States describe their social interactions on campus?

Significance of the Study

The United States is an ever-diversifying nation with many of our nation's habitants being people coming from various parts of the world, with many of those people also identifying as people of color. Many of these individuals also make up a significant part of our higher education system. Specifically, international students alone contribute about $42.4 billion in tuition towards our economy (Institute of International Education, 2019). Therefore, it is important that as higher education professionals, welcoming and supporting the transition of international students in a U.S. institution should be a main part of our mission towards supporting academic success and personal development (Institute of International Education, 2019). We must consider the experiences that international students have, both educational and

personal, if we are to set forth strategies to attract internationals students and retain them (Andrade, 2006). For many colleges and universities, international students represent a crucial component of enrollment strategies (Dalton, 1999).

A global survey of the International Association of Universities shows that continuing one's education in another country, including academic achievement, personal growth and independence, the ability to manage identity change, and a stronger sense of self efficacy (Liu, 2019). Another study that was conducted by the Institute for the International Education of Students revealed that to study abroad can be a defining and influential moment in one's educational experience. Liu listed a variety of reasons as to why continuing one's education abroad is beneficial to their long-term career development, such as that it improves language learning or provides the opportunity to learn another language, fosters intellectual understanding, provides one with a global context of the world, provides the opportunity to obtain a diverse array of skills and competency in which one can apply to real world problems. In addition, bringing in more international students also diversifies the workforce, therefore, bringing organizations, companies, and institutions a more diversified and widespread skillset and intellectualism. Ultimately, with the demonstrated evidence that continuing education abroad, one could say that the ultimate goal for obtaining their education abroad is to acquire intercultural competencies so that they may participate in the international world (Liu, 2019). International students bring in international perspectives into the classroom and workplace. Not only do international students have the opportunity to gain a new global perspective, but they also give domestic students the opportunity to learn from their perspective of the global world. To attract more of international students, many institutions across the nation continue to revise

and develop new enrollment strategies that aim to seek out the recruitment of students in foreign countries (Dalton, 1999).

Students have chosen to combine international studies with their various majors. Much of this has to do with the fact that more students are becoming aware of the career advantages and how having an international experience can boost one's competitiveness in the field. Therefore, it is important for U.S. institutions to think about the ways in which we can give more attention to international and global issues. It is important for student affairs leaders to keep a more open mind to international perspectives. For instance, access to higher education is a problem that students face in other countries. With a growing international student body, there is an opportunity to learn about the experiences of these individuals and utilize them by diversifying our classrooms and workplaces with their unique global perspectives.

One of the foremost important reasons that international students are an important component of our higher education body, is in further developing our understanding of multiculturalism and diversity. Various regions of the globe, including Latin America, Africa, Caribbean, Europe, Canada, and Asia including the Pacific Rim, have served as an integral part of our multicultural society and historical legacy. As higher education becomes more aware and competent of our cultural and historical linkages with both our domestic diversity and international roots, the more integrated multiculturalism and internationalization can become in our student affairs practices across U.S. institutions.

Limitations of the Study

There were a variety of limitations that must be addressed. The first limitation was that I, as the researcher, identify as a White male, coming from an upper middle-class background. With this I recognized that I have a significant amount of privilege, as opposed to some of my

counterparts, such as classmates, co-workers, peers, and most importantly the demographic that I am currently researching as part of this study, international students. This is important to mention because due to my racial and ethnic identity, I lacked the experience of what it is like being someone of color living in a predominately white community in the United States. I do not know what it feels like to experience racism or discrimination. Yes, I may have experienced certain forms of cultural shock, but none of those experiences pertain to being someone of color integrating into a predominately white and American society. I may have also experienced various types of learning challenges both in the past and currently; however, none of those challenges are a result of identifying as someone of color, lacking English fluency, and obtaining an education through a foreign higher education system. Nonetheless, I have been privileged with a positive college experience, both in academics and personal growth, an experience that could have been dramatically different if I had been an international student of color coming into the United States with little knowledge of the culture and education system.

One of the strategies I used in order to address this limitation, is by being open minded with my participants and the information they shared with me. It was important that I kept in mind that my participants may have had some experiences that I have not experienced or even have had shared with me in the past. The purpose of my study was to observe and analyze toward understanding the transitional experiences of international students. It was crucial that I be prepared for the unexpected and unlikely stories that my participants may have to share and create a space where they feel safe to share openly and honestly. Which is why I intentionally selected committee members who have had experiences in this area and have a greater level of understanding to help ensure this study is performed with a great deal of care and awareness. Another strategy I used during the interview process, is to start our conversations with more open

ended and broad questions, therefore allowing the participants to take the conversation in any way they find comfortable. In other words, it was important that I was open to allowing my participants lead the conversation. This ensured that I avoid asking questions that are tailored to potential false assumptions and bias. It also ensured that their responses are more reflective of what they experienced and how they feel about those experiences.

A limitation to this study is that the two participants talk about their experiences while at two different locations. One of the participants talked about her experiences while at Eastern Central University, while the other participant talked about her participants while at University of Central Annandale. The two are quite different institutions in their size and location. The two institution are also different in their campus atmospheres and the resources that are provided by various offices. These factors would have an influence on their overall experiences while studying at the institutions.

Another limitation was that participants may at first be hesitant about trusting me. When I approached my prospective participants about being involved in my study, they could have initially questioned my intentions. They could have also questioned my competency about Indian culture, let alone, my knowledge about international students. Most importantly, during the interview process, as I sat down with the participants to ask them questions regarding their experiences, they may have felt inclined to provide responses that they feel will satisfy my needs for the study. There was also the possibility that they could have skewed their responses or leave out certain pieces of information due to being uncomfortable with sharing sensitive information with me.

Another limitation of this study was that it is a general study, and the experiences shared by my participants obviously do not fully reflect those of anyone who identifies as an

international student. Different individuals are going to have various types of experiences, all for different reasons. This is why it was important to conduct a thorough research analysis of international students as a whole and discuss their experiences and what the transitional processes look like for individuals of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. In addition, it was important that I apply multiple theories that were formulated specifically to understand the transitional experiences of international students so that my literature review provides an accurate and representative analysis of the transitional processes of international students in the United States, including specific examples of experiences as told from various viewpoints.

Definitions

In 2006, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics convention used the term "international student" when referring to someone who has crossed borders for the purpose of studying (World News and Reviews). One of the earlier definitions from UNESCO, defined the "international student" as "student who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purposes of education and are now enrolled outside of their country of origin" (Li, Wang, Xiao, 2014, p. 302). UNESCO (2019) exists to develop international cooperation through culture, education, and the sciences toward building a more peaceful world. The definition that will be used throughout this study will be UNESCO's definition of the international student, "students who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin" (http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/international-or-internationally-mobile-students).

The University of California – Berkley (2019) defined the international student as, those who are non-immigrant visitors in the United States who are here temporarily to take classes. In

addition, the University of California – Berkley also identified that an international student must fall under the following three criteria: (1) their intention is to only temporarily stay in the United States; (2) the student does not have legal permanent resident status or citizenship in the United States; (3) "has completed an application for a Visa that will allow them entry in the United States..

These definitions provide an insight into the various ways we can define what an international student is. For the purpose of this study, students who are studying in the United States with a valid student visa and the intention to complete a degree in the United States were considered for participation.

Chapter Summary

The United States remains the top host country for international students, reaching a new high of roughly 1.2 million international students as of the 2016 and 2017 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2019). As the top host country for international students to further their education, it is a vital part of our responsibility in higher education to learn about the experiences of international students, so that we may continue to improve our methodologies in supporting them through their process of academic excellence and personal development. The choice international students make in furthering their education in the U.S. is none other than to seek out more opportunities. Therefore, this is a choice that we as higher education professionals must make a part of our backbone towards the betterment of serving our students. With the research questions provided above the conduction of this thesis will provide new insights on the unique experiences of international students, thus providing a new perspective on how we can use this to shape the way in which we can support them through our efforts in higher education.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The United States remains as the top host country to international students globally, topping 1.09 million students in 2018, a 1.5 increase from the previous year (Institute for International Education, 2019). These students come from all parts of the world, with the largest population today coming from Asia. For many international students, while it may be exciting, it is also a major challenge to make such transition in order to pursue education in the United States. There are a variety of different challenges that international students experience, and because of this, institutions provide services to support this population (Li, Wang, Xiao, 2014; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2002; Shupe, 2007; Andrade, 2006; Lee and Rice, 2007; Elturki, Liu, Hjeltness, and Hellman, 2019). Challenges also pertain to academic abilities and social skills, both of which have a mutual relationship, in that they have an impact on one another (Andrade, 2019; Elturki, Liu, Hjeltness, and Hellman, 2019).

In order to successfully support this population, it is important to understand the process they go through in adjusting to Higher Education in the United States. Lysgaard's (1955) U-Curve model will be described below toward understanding this experience. Additionally, it's important to understand the transition to higher education this population experiences. Once this is understood, then student affairs professionals can provide appropriate, timely, and necessary support services.

U-Curve Model

It has been reported through various research efforts that both domestic and international students experience a number of difficulties upon pursuing their college career. Nonetheless, it is heavily argued that international students face an even larger number and even more extensive

challenges than domestic students (Andrade, 2006). Berry (1997) identified that there are two

fundamental dimensions to acculturation: maintenance of original cultural identity and

maintenance of relations with other groups. For an international student this means staying

connected to their cultural identify from their home country while also learning about and

adapting to the new one. For acculturation, attitudes or strategies were also formulated and

distinguished: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization (Berry, 1997). Those

who value both cultural maintenance and intergroup relations are seen to follow an integrationist

approach. This would include the international student who looks for opportunities to share their

culture with others while also learning from those in their new cultural environment. For

example, they may look to engage in an international culture exchange night program where

there are interactions with a variety of different people who are open to the idea of learning about

new cultures. Those who value cultural maintenance but do not cherish intergroup relations,

probably follow a separatist approach (Segall, Lonner, and Berry, 1998; Berry, 2006). These

international students may be more interested in finding other students from their home country

or those that share similar cultural values and ideals. By contrast, those who value intergroup

relations, but remain uninterested in cultural maintenance, probably follow the assimilationist

approach. This is the international student who may become engaged only with students from the

country they are a visitor in; in this situation they are wanting to learn everything they can about

this new culture and adopt it into the way they live in this new setting. Then, there is the

international student who is there to learn in the classroom and spends a great deal of their time

isolated and engaged in academic pursuits only and may not have any interest in engaging with

others at all. This group values neither intergroup relations nor cultural maintenance and are

likely be marginalized (Ward and Rana-Deuba, 1999; Berry, 1997).

The U-Curve model was first introduced by Lysgaard in 1955 and has since played a traditionally important role in research on sojourners' adjustment. Lysgaard (1955) refers to anyone who leaves their home country to learn and live in another country as a sojourner. The word sojourner in this study is being used to refer to international students studying in the United States. The U-Curve hypothesis has been traditionally used for research in explaining the changing adjustment process of cross-cultural sojourners, starting with positive and new feelings initially, and then followed by feelings of rejection, ending with a compromise or balance in the end (as cited by Chien, 2016). Lysgaard (1955) in developing his U-Curve model identified four stages: honeymoon, disillusionment, adjustment, mastery. The first three will be utilized in this study and are further discussed below.

This model has been used by several researchers studying international students as well as those choosing to live abroad. For example, Chien (2016) conducted a study at a university located in the southwest UK to understand the academic and socio-cultural experiences of international students during their first few months attending the university utilizing the U-Curve model. Chien (2016) pointed out various reasons that explain why such research on U-Curve model was conducted (Chien, 2016). One of those reasons was that international students were highly regarded as being a special and crucial student population in the higher education system, collectively making up a unique niche in the global education department. Another reason is that even though international students make up a very small population of the student body, they still bring benefits to both the host country and country of origin. Therefore, it is important that educators and administrators explore the international student's adjustment in the host country's learning and living environments because it will be detrimental to both students and their host institution if the students find that they are not able to properly and effectively adjust to the

different lifestyle overseas. Chien (2016) utilized the U-Curve hypothesis to describe the

sojourner's adjustment, specifically the sojourner's experience coming into a new culture.

Phase 1: Honeymoon Phase. The honeymoon phase, according to Lysgaard (1955) is

that initial time period when the student first enters the new community. It is made up of two

different stages: initial contact, initial exposure, and then moves from honeymoon phase to

disillusionment.

Initial Contact. Another researcher studying this population, Oberg (2012) identified a

sojourner's experience with culture shock takes place in four different stages: The honeymoon

stage, hostility stage, humor stage, and the at home stage (Oberg, 2012). In the first few weeks

upon arrival to the host country, a sojourner tends to find themselves fascinated and excited

about the new cultural norms and experiences.

Initial Exposure. According to Crowne (2013), emotional intelligence is an ability

which is centered on one's ability to perceive and express emotions in an accurate form, as well

as the ability to adapt by being able to understand emotional knowledge, use feelings to facilitate

thought, and regulate emotions, in not only one's self, but also others (Crowne, 2013). As one is

just entering the United States, they are going to experience a variety of different feelings.

However, immediate feelings upon initial entry into the country and exposure to the host culture,

are likely to going to be similar to those of excitement and euphoria, as one doesn't know quite

yet what to expect. Therefore, one is likely to be in a state of curiosity and wonder (Heyward,

2002). Crowne's (2013) research questions to her study were all set up to prove one common

point, that is whether one's level of exposure to culture influences their cultural and emotional

intelligence (Crowne, 2013). In the Honeymoon phase, initial exposure will likely have the

international student experience some type of feelings, however, they are likely going to be

feelings of excitement, and absent any knowledge or awareness of the consequences that occur

(Heyward, 2002).

   Moving from honeymoon phase to disillusionment.   There are various reasons as to why

someone may have a difficult time adjusting to the different cultural norms in the host country,

let alone knowing the importance of adapting to some degree if they are to be academically

successful. When one is going through this honeymoon period, it is important to remember that

they are not quite aware of the real-life consequences and hardships that occur as a result of

trying to adapt. At this moment of time, all they can feel are feelings of euphoria and excitement

as a result of just being in a different country. They haven't quite yet reached the level of cultural

competence needed to interpret and make meaning of the symbols. At this point in time, they are

comfortable with being in the host country while sticking to their cultural roots they learned back

in their home country. One may be unaware of the fact that the United States in particular

is dominated by Western values such as individualism, independence, and self-exploration, not

to mention the periodic racism and discrimination that occurs. The individual hasn't quite

comprehended the role that individual identity plays in society, including education (Kodama,

McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2002). However, it is only a matter of time before one begins to

become more aware of the role that culture plays in society and how people interact with each

other in society. Eventually, the individual will hit the second phase in Lysgaard's (1955) U-

Curve Model.

  Oberg (2012) identified that this honeymoon phase only lasts for so long as they soon

realize that they really do have to assimilate into the new culture and deal with the seriously

different conditions. When the sojourner realizes that they have to put in the effort to assimilate

as a part of their international student experience, this is the stage that Oberg likes to define as

'culture shock' (Oberg, 2012). As international students make the effort of adjusting to the new culture and climate, they begin to attribute cognitive and emotional meanings to places, including artifacts and items that make up an environment (Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, and Pace, 2014).

Phase 2: Disillusionment Phase. Stage 2 in Lysgaard's (1955) U-Curve Model is a period of disenchantment which is when the individual has finally become aware of the drastic differences in culture, and has realized how much of an impact one's understanding of such cultural norms has on their ability function in a social context (Heyward, 2002). During this phase, the individual has come to the point where they must negotiate the mores of their culture with that of the host culture, which leads to one stressing over the decision of whether to accept the primacy of Euro-American cultural values (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2002).

There are multiple different perspectives in which researchers view the adjustment for international students. For instance, some researchers examine the international adjustment experience through a lens that focuses primarily on the consequences that occur as a result of the struggle of living in another country, and labeling the life changes of the individual as a 'stressor' as a way of conceptualizing the negative outcomes that come with being a sojourner (Shupe, 2007). Another way in which researchers examine the adjustment experience of international students is through a lens that places adaptation as dependent variable, and thus examines the factors that likely lead to stresses and challenges of adaptation (Shupe, 2007).

Language. International students tend to undergo more sudden and unexpecting changes as a result of transitioning to a host country to further their education, thus being forced to face the challenges and subsequent consequences that occur while adapting to a new culture (Shupe, 2007). For instance, a huge dominating factor that plays a role in an international student's

sociocultural adjustment process is their ability to speak English fluently. Those who do not yet speak the English language, or speak it fluently for that matter, face the sociocultural adjustment difficulties that pertain to both their academic experience and social experience (Carrillo, Hong and Pace, 2014).

Andrade (2006) conducted a study in Australia where seventy-six percent of the non-native English speakers enrolled in one department at an Australian university were judged to required intensive English language support as based on a writing sample. This group would be compared to a group of native-English speakers. Results of the study showed that higher outcomes were correlated with stronger writing skills for both groups (Andrade, 2006). Another study was done by Ramsay, Jones, and Barker (2007), who also conducted a study at an Australian university using first year international students. Ramsay and colleagues (2007) founded that they had difficulties understanding the lectures, specifically having to do with the vocabulary used and the speed at which lectures were given, not to mention having tutors who spoke too fast or gave little input. Another group consisting of local students also faced difficulties with not necessarily following lectures, however, finding that they disliked the instructors' policies (Ramsay, et al., 2007). Overall, the two groups differed in their identification of learning support systems, with international students identifying their support systems as coming down to developing critical thinking skills and feedback on writing skills, while the local students found their support systems as developing peer support groups and using collaborative study (Andrade, 2006).

Culture Shock. "Culture is a set of values that belong to a society" (Nieto and Booth, 2010, p. 6). In their article *International Students Views on Local Culture: Turkish Experience,* Cetin, Bahar, and Griffiths (2017) defined culture as "everything that makes up a person's entire

way of life, such as food, clothes, music, entertainment, and so on" (p. 471*)*. "Shock is

understood as the stimulus for acquisition of culture specific skills that are required to engage in

new social interactions" (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, and Todman, 2008 p. 65)*. Oberg (1960)

mentioned that culture shock results from the loss of familiar signs or symbols upon entry to

another culture Cultural competence is "the ability to successfully teach students who come from

different cultures other than your own" (Diller and Moule, 2005, p. 2)*. It includes

one's behaviors, beliefs, and worldviews. The way in which a culture's structure is formed is

largely influenced by the society they are surrounded by, including specific situations that occur

in the social environment. With that being said, one's values are likely to vary between different

groups. Nonetheless, Nieto and Booth (2010) point out that it is important to keep in an open

mind when learning about cultures belonging to other individuals and groups, which can be done

without abandoning and disregarding one's own culture. One's culture is a dynamic construct,

even when it remains stable. Nonetheless, a dynamic culture is likely to change when one is

placed under different circumstances, such as exposing one's self to different people, going

through different experiences, or moving to another country, where the dominant cultural

makeup is entirely different. As one person from one culture encounters a society that primarily

falls under a different culture, there are likely going to be major adjustments made to the

individual's own culture, depending on their level of involvement and assimilation (Nieto and

Booth, 2010). How one chooses to adjust as a result of their exposure to a different culture

largely depends on their mental capacity, more specifically, their emotional intelligence

(Crowne, 2013). This is the case since one's level of emotional intelligence will determine their

ability to keep an open mind to the different cultural perspectives while remaining true to their

own cultural values (Nieto and Booth, 2010).

A three-stage model of adjustment formulated by Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) was used to describe the adjustment process in the context of the relationship between the individual and the cultural environment. This model would also be known as the Developmental Model for Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The model was developed to better articulate how people construe the difference in various cultures. Using a grounded theory approach, Bennett and colleagues were able to identify six orientations that individuals seem to transition through towards their acquisition of intercultural competence. The model makes the assumption that as one's experience of cultural difference takes into account world views and becomes more compounded, the more their competence in intercultural relations increases (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman, 2003). This model mentions how it is required of the student to make cognitive shifts and change his or her role in the environment if they are to adjust to the cultural environment (Hammer, et al. 2003; Shupe, 2007). The DMIS is not meant to explain the changes in one's attitudes and behaviors, rather it is to model the changes in one's worldview structure, where observable behavior and self-reported attitudes that occur within each stage are expressive to the state of the underlying worldview (Hammer, et al., 2003).

As one is going through the adjustment process regarding both their academics and social life, they will likely experience what is called 'intercultural sensitivity' which is explained in a developmental model created by Bennett (2017). This model was created to explain how people make meaning of and understand cultural difference. While using a grounded theory approach, Bennett additionally applied concepts having to do with cybernetic constructivism to his construct of intercultural competence. Doing this, Bennett was able to identify six orientations that people transition through before they reach intercultural competence. The significance of this model is that it implies that one develops a more sophisticated and complex makeup of

intercultural difference and will eventually find themselves developing competence in intercultural relations. According to the constructivist view as Bennett applied to his model, experience isn't so much an outcome as a result of being in a vicinity of events as they occur, rather it is more of the action which one takes to make meaning of such events. "The more perceptual and conceptual discriminations that can be brought to bear on the event, the more complex will be the construction of the event, and thus the richer will be the experience" (Hammer, et al., 2003, p. 423). The extent to which the individual experiences any degree of cultural difference is the 'event' in and of itself, therefore, the value of the experience is dependent on how well one is able to construe the cultural difference.

To dive deeper into the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, the process begins with what is known as ethnocentrism, which is the view that the world revolves around one's self and one's own culture (Hammer, et al., 2003). According to Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003), the process then ends with the stage known as ethnorelativism, which is the exact opposite of ethnocentrism. For international students ethnorelativism occurs as the individual has is exposed to and begins to understand and thus incorporates multiple world views beyond just their own. In the first stage, ethnocentrism, one experiences three different orientations: denial, defense, and minimization (Hammer, et al., 2003). In denial orientation, an individual may believe that there is only one true existing culture, and that is their own. In addition, they may also believe that their views of culture are universal; in other words, it is likely that everyone else has similar if not the same views as they do (Hammer, et al., 2003). For example, an international student from India may be having a conversation with a classmate who is a domestic student born with an American cultural background. Let's say that are having a conversation about independence and going out into the real world. The international student

may come from a culture that places great value on family and grew up in a multigenerational

home and feels great responsibility for taking care of the family. Because the American student

and the international student may engage in a disagreement because they believe that their

cultural values are the only existing ones and exist as fact, in other words, they aren't subjective

(Kelly and Moogan, 2012; Pritchard and Skinner, 2002; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee

2002).

In the defense orientation, one believes that their culture is experienced as the only viable

one, and in addition, become more critical of other cultures. Individuals are willing to blame the

existence of cultural differences for the troubles taking place in society (Hammer, et al., 2003;

Bennett, 2017). People going through this orientation are defensive against cultural differences

and view cultural difference as harmful to the existence of their own culture. Individuals are able

to easily identify and perceive cultural differences as they occur (Hammer, et al., 2003; Chen,

1997). An individual at this stage may be roommates with a domestic student in a residence hall,

and they each choose to decorate their room in a way that represents their cultural identity from

their home country. Either roommate may use a cultural icon such as a flag or symbol that could

be considered offensive to the other roommate causing one or both to go on the defensive or

attack with the other. Perhaps, they may even take it as a sign that their cultural origin is seen as

inferior by most Americans (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2002; Shupe, 2007; Chen,

1997).

The minimization orientation is the state in which elements of one's own cultural

worldview are experienced as universal; individuals at this stage may expect there to be more

similarities between their own culture and that of their counterparts (Hammer, et al., 2003).

Cultural Differences that were once defined in the *defense* stage, are now minimized in favor of

what one assumes are the more pertinent elements between themselves and other people

(Bennett, 2017). In addition, they may feel insistent on correcting the behavior and actions of

others in order to match their expectations. In other words, being a country infused with racism

and hatred towards different cultures, one may feel inclined to protect the sanctity of their own

culture by masking it in the shadow of cultural similarities (Hammer, et al., 2003; Chen, 1997).

One going through this orientation may be sitting through a lecture on politics. The lecture topic

is about the American political system. Students in the class share their opinions about how great

of a country the United States is and how we are supposedly the dominant country for various

reasons. The international student sitting among the class may go on to share their opinion about

what they truly think of the American political system and go on to mention our history of

oppression and prejudice against people of color, thus contradicting some of the things that their

classmates are mentioning. The international student in this case has explained their view on the

American political system from their perspective of being a non-American citizen. Thus, they are

mentioning things regarding America's history that some of their American domestic

counterparts may choose to ignore due to their bias desire to shed positive light on their own

country.

In the second stage of ethnorelativism, one also experiences three different orientations:

acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Hammer, et al., 2003). It would be discovered through

this developmental model, that finding success in ethnorelativism would eliminate one's stress

levels as a result of having to adapt to the host country. In addition, it would also enhance one's

overall experience of traveling in a different country, as one would discover the ways in which

they utilize the experience as a learning opportunity for self-development and growth (Milstein,

2005). According to Hammer and Gudykunst (1987) the adaptation process ''involves working out a fit between the person and the new cultural environment'' (*P*. 107).

Other models have been used to explain the adjustment in a new cultural environment, such as Kim and Ruben's (1988) intercultural transformation theory, which described the student's role as dynamic and self-reflective, which requires one to frequently adjust with the expectation that they may fail in every turn. The experience of cross-cultural adaptation is one that is both problematic as there are challenges that lie ahead, and growth producing as one chooses to make meaning of the experience (Milstein, 2005). The point of this process is to allow one to learn through trial and error, therefore, allowing one to cope with the consequences that occur as a result of the adjustment process, and thus allowing them to grow in a way that is on the basis of knowledge and skill (Shupe, 2007). ''Despite, or rather because of, the difficulties crossing cultures entails, people do and must change some of their old ways so as to carry out their daily activities and achieve improved quality of life in the new environment'' (Kim, 2001, p. 21). While the adaptation process does involve troublesome and problematic experiences, it is through these experiences in which one is exposed to the cultural difference that will forever shape them as they adapt. One adaptation experience will allow them to change, particularly with their communication, behavior, and perspectives. For example, an international student working on an assigned group project will experience cultural differences in the concept of teamwork and collaboration. An international student invited to a party with some friends will experience differences in social norms, such how people casually talk and interact, including the verbal language and slang being used (Rui and Wang, 2015; Kim and Gudykunst, 2005). Nonetheless, it is through these exchanges one eventually begins to discover their self-efficacy (Milstein, 2005).

Intercultural literacy has been defined as the understandings, competencies, attitudes, language proficiencies, participation and identities necessary for successful cross-cultural engagement. In Heyward's (2002) *International to Intercultural: Redefining the International School for a Globalized World,* it was proposed the concept of intercultural literacy in a way that challenges the narrow and cultural constructs. First, it defines literacy as including competencies, attitudes and identities in addition to understandings. Second, it proposes a literacy that crosses cultural boundaries. In other words, the intercultural literate person is going to possess the understandings, competencies, attitudes and identities necessary for successful living and working in a cross-cultural or pluralist setting. Therefore, one now has the background necessary to effectively 'read' a second culture, as well as interpret the meanings behind it in a context that is practical in our day-to-day lives (Heyward, 2002).

The concept of culture shock has been very useful and influential when talking about the difficulties that one experiences when confronted with the challenge of adjusting to a second culture (Hammer, et al., 2003; Shupe, 2007; Crowne, 2013). There have been times when the term culture shock has been described as an illness, which in turn has been disempowering and misleadingly negative, as it characterizes the experiences of confronting an alien culture as leading to physical, psychological and emotional trauma before going through adjustment (Crowne, 2013). An alternative and more positive view on culture shock has thus been brought to light, describing the experience as more of a learning experience (Heyward, 2002). The term 'culture shock' and how it is defined by Oberg (1960) is one that is relatively popular; however, there have been other terms that have come to light as possible alternatives to "culture shock" (Oberg, 1960). For instance, some theorist and authors prefer to use terms such as, culture fatigue (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, and Topping, 2008; Heggins and Jackson, 2003; Oberg, 1954),

language shock (Brown and Holloway, 2008; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, and Topping, 2008; Oberg, 1960), and role shock (Ward, Furnham and Bochner, 2001; Oberg, 1960). "Role shock is defined as the stresses wither accompanying the major discrepancies between anticipated or encountered roles or the sudden and significant departure from familiar roles which are "played differently" in the new setting or replaced altogether by new and unfamiliar roles" (Minkler and Biller, 1979, p. 125). The term has been repeatedly renamed and redefined, such as the coined term, 'cultural adjustment stress' (Oberg, .

    Sociocultural Adjustment. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) formulated a three-stage model to describe the adjustment process for international students. They described adjustment as the process of "working out a fit between the person and the new cultural environment" (p.107). This requires the sojourner to make cognitive shifts and change his or her role. This model would become known as the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Shupe, 2007). The mode was originally developed by Bennett (2017) to construe cultural difference. While formulating the model, Bennett was able to come up with six orientations that individuals seem to transition through during the process of intercultural competence. The underlying assumption behind the model is that as one's experience of intercultural difference with other cultural groups increasingly become more complex, the more they become competent with intercultural relations (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman, 2003).

    It is important to remember that experience in intercultural relations isn't so much a product of being in the vicinity of events as they occur, nor is being at the right place at the right time (Hammer, et al., 2003). Rather, it is more so a product as a result of one's ability and effort in construing and making meaning of the events. The more perceptual and conceptual role that discrimination plays in the event, the more complex it will be to construe and make meaning of

the cues following the event, thus making it a more valuable experience. In 'intercultural relations,' the 'event' is the cultural difference that the individual experiences, therefore, depending on how pervasiveness of the cultural difference, will determine how much the individual will get to truly experience (Hammer, et al., 2003).

Social psychology's social identity theory serves as a basis for the hypothesized cultural distance-conflict relation. According to Shupe (2007), the basis for the social identity theory is that many individuals think of themselves as belonging to a variety of social groups, all of which contribute to some portion of one's identity. Because the social groups that one identifies as belonging to may have implications to one sees themselves, individuals are more likely going to perceive their in-groups in a favorable light relative to how they perceive other groups (Shupe, 2007). Oberg (1960) who studied and wrote about culture shock identified that it stems from the fact that international students go through a series of adjustments with some producing anxiety as a result of the loss of familiar signs and symbols. In other words, as one enters a new culture, familiar cues will likely begin to disappear. As this is happening, they are learning through social cues and through the development of their identity in this new environment.

Moving from disillusionment to recovery. Moving to the third stage largely surrounds the sojourner's ability to speak the dominant language at a relatively fluent level, in this case that language being English. Once the sojourner can do this, they will likely find that they are able to better communicate and interact with people of the host country. Through the investment of acquiring English fluency, one can get to know people of the host country, as well as conational, thus overcoming culture shock. It is important to keep in mind that one going through the third stage is not still battling various difficulties. It just comes down to one's decision to overcome those difficulties by accepting the different norms as 'just another way of living,' as opposed to

rejecting or denying those norms entirely. In the fourth stage, one will not only accept the culture, but also find some enjoyment or satisfaction with the host culture as well. In addition to these four stages, Oberg (1954) also suggested the possibility of their being a similar experience when one decides to move back to their home country. It has been suggested that as a result of their return to their home culture, one may experience reverse culture shock. Therefore, it has been predicted that culture shock is an experience that simply cannot be avoided as long as one wish to adapt to a new culture where the norms are significantly different (Mizuno, 2012).

      Phase 3: Recovery. Crowne (2013) introduced the term "national culture exposure" in her article, which she cited Hofstede (1994) as being credited with defining the term (Crowne, 2013). Hofstede (1994) defined the term as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1994, p. 1). It is what makes up the social context in which various behaviors belonging to another culture are understood by the student. It is important to understand if one is to comprehend the way in which an international student organizes their thoughts and how they use it to shape their own behavior (Shupe, 2007). The degree to which one is exposed to the various cultural cues, include both visible and invisible layers of culture. Visible layers may include physical artifacts such as buildings and statues, as well as food and dress attire. On the other hand, invisible may include values and beliefs. Nonetheless, for international students to be in the same environment as those who share these cultural values, they will no doubt notice many of the cultural cues, to which they will go through this honeymoon phase. During this phase, it is more so about the initial and immediate feelings the students will experience upon exposure, without experiencing the consequences quite just yet (Ward, Furnham, Bochner, 2001; Heyward, 2002). Nonetheless, it is the national culture exposure that forms the bridge between the honeymoon phase and diffusion

phase, which is when the students will begin to be more aware of the drastic differences between their culture and the host culture (Nieto and Booth, 2010; Crowne, 2013).

Challenges can pertain to various different aspects of one's college experience, whether that is their academic achievement, social adjustment, or personal growth. There is the common assumption of international students relating to their social adjustment and academic experience, such as that international students don't like to associate with others from different cultural backgrounds, and that they wish to associate with only those who fall under a similar cultural background if not the same background. There are also comments made about international students such as, that they are reserved and don't wish to get involved in class discussions. While these assumptions may be true in some cases, or even many cases, there are powerful explanations behind the academic and social behaviors of international students. Remember, international students only just came from an entirely different country where culture and lifestyle are likely to be very different than here in the United States. Also remember that the education systems and institutional structures are likely going to share some distinguishable characteristics to that of the systems and structures here in the United States (Andrade, 2006).

Critique of theory. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963, 1966) extended the concept even further, making it into a W-curve. This new concept would describe the experience of the international student in both their adaption to a foreign culture and readjustment to the home culture. The W-Curve adaptation indicates the resocialization process that one goes through upon return to their home country, as a result of increased exposure to the host culture as over their home culture. The sojourner will eventually re-adjust back to their home culture, however, their association with the host culture will likely result in a change in their attitudes towards their home culture (Oberg, 1960). This new model was given a second dip, which describes there-

entry crisis that one goes through in their final readjustment period, however, this dip is usually less intense than the dip that takes place during stage 2. The concepts of the U-curve and W-Curve are intended to reflect the experience of culture shock.

Theoretical Perspectives

In order to understand how international students are adjusting to college in the United States it is important to look at it from a theoretical perspective. This thesis will utilize Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Identity Development Theory, also known as the seven vectors, as well as Bandura' (1971) Social Learning Theory. The seven vectors were originally developed to make sense of adolescent and early adulthood development, nonetheless, Chickering and Reisser applied them to older adults as well. Chickering's and Reisser's seven vectors will be utilized to discuss the international student experience through each of the seven vectors. Each vector indicates a particular task which one goes through during their identity development process. In a specific vector, one goes through a different experience in which they acquire an interpersonal skill that allows them to adapt to the host culture, and thus allows them to personally develop (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Bandura's Social Learning Theory allows us to comprehend the bridge between behaviorism and cognition. The theory focuses on how one's cognitive factors are involved in the learning process. Bandura believed that people typically act as informational processors where they constantly think about their behaviors and how their actions lead to certain consequences. Observational learning could not work without some sort of cognitive process taking place. In other words, the Social Learning Theory assumes that one does not imitate a behavior immediately after having observed it, rather they go through a mediational process that ultimately leads to their decision of whether or not to use the behavior learned through their own actions (Bandura, 1971; McLeod, 2011).

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Theory of Identity Development. The theory of identity development by Chickering and Reisser (1993) has seven vectors. The first four vectors are: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, and developing mature interpersonal relationships. These four vectors are important to get to the fifth vector which is establishing identity. The last two vectors are developing purpose and developing integrity. Each vector will be further described below.

Developing competency. The first vector under Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of identity development is developing competence. There are three types of competency one develops: intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. In order to develop competence, one must observe behavior as it is carried out by other individuals, such as faculty, classmates, friends, co-workers, and even strangers (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). For international students it is likely that intellectual competency development becomes a primary priority as they adjust to the US higher education system. This comes in to play as they sit in class and learn how to interact with their peers as well as the instructor; that is they observe the behavior and begin to adapt to similar styles. However, they may also experience physical and manual development in establishing their routines and observing the behaviors of their American and other international classmates. Interpersonal competence is about learning to communicate, interact, and begin to develop leadership skills. For the international student this may be more challenging as they face different cultural and racial environments and learn to maneuver through them while studying (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Kodoma, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, (2002) identified that there may challenges present as the students face different value systems related to education, finances, and even racism and prejudice.

Managing emotions. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) second vector is managing emotions. Managing emotions is about learning how to read others' expressions of emotions while at the same time expressing appropriate emotions by the individual. (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). What might be culturally appropriate in one environment may not translate well to another and the student may need to learn through observation and interaction how to express their own emotions while interpreting what others are expressing. For example, in some cultures it is not appropriate to make eye contact with authority figures while in other cultures it is expected. Zhou, Snape, and Todman (2008) who studied international students' adjustment to higher education in the United States emphasized that there are two general explanations for the association between international students studying into the U.S. and the psychological issues that occur as a result. One reason was that there are predisposing factors that could lead to transition in the first place, such as certain characteristics or traits regarding the individual: grief and bereavement (movement as response to loss and possibly resulting in further loss), fatalism (abandonment of control or, in contrast, a reactive attempt to seize control), and selective expectations of enhancement of life quality (that might be more or less realistic) (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, and Todman, 2008). The second reason was one's mental health status could be a factor in one's experiences in the host country, including negative life events, lack of social support networks and the impact of value differences (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, and Todman, 2008; Torres, Jones, and Renn 2009). It has been argued that individuals going through a cultural transition are more willing to proactively adjust and solve problems as a result of culture shock, rather than be passive victims of trauma as a result of going through a stressed induced event, or in this case, the experience of culture shock (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, and Todman, 2008).

"Coping is the changing of thoughts and actions to manage the external and/or internal demands for a stressful event" (Tan and Winkelman, 2004, p. 2). Coping is seen as a stabilizing factor that helps one to maintain their psychological adjustment during times of stress. In other words, coping efforts may be helpful when used accordingly to combat high levels of stressors (Tan and Winkelman, 2004). Crowne (2013) talks about emotional intelligence and how it can be used in one's cultural adjustment process. Emotional intelligence has been defined as an ability which focuses on how one perceives and expresses emotions accurately and adaptively; along with the ability to understand what emotions mean and convey, use feelings to enhance one's understanding thought processes, as well as the ability to regulate not only one's own emotions, but also others. Cultural intelligence on the other hand is defined as "multifaceted competency consisting of cultural knowledge, the practice of mindfulness, and the repertoire of behavioral skills'' (Crowne, 2013, p. 6). Cultural intelligence is considered as the extent to which one is able to act and behave appropriately in accordance with various types of cultures (Crowne, 2013).

Emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence share a mutual role in one's cultural exposure experiences (Crowne, 2013; Brislin, Worthley, and Macnab, 2006). For instance, an international student being exposed to different cultures, will undoubtedly experience a change in not only their cultural intelligence, but their emotional intelligence as well (Crowne, 2013). Exposing oneself to a different culture will allow individuals to pick up some of the behavioral cues from that culture, thus learning about how to act and behave appropriately as a result of observing and even experiencing situations (Bandura, 1971). For example, an international student who attends a football game at their college in the United States may begin to learn school cheers, rules of the game, and identify appropriate attire and behavior for attending such

an event and through it all they are learning about school pride. Moreover, skills that one gains as a result of developing one's cultural intelligence, will likely enhance one's emotional intelligence as well. In gaining a sense of school pride, the international student is likely going to feel a greater sense of connection to the institutional community. It has been discovered that living and working in an environment comprised of various cultures will enhance one's own understanding of others' moods, emotions, and personality types, all components that make up emotional intelligence (Ward and Kennedy, 1993). As one is developing competence in a culture, they will likely develop emotional intelligence skills in addition because they will have to understand people's emotions in order to comprehend what they convey as they communicate or behave in a certain way (Heyward, 2002). As one learns to manage their emotions, they will begin to learn how to become more independent when dealing with various issues or problems should they occur throughout one's college experience (Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Crowne, 2013).

  Moving through autonomy toward interdependence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) emphasized that a key developmental step for students is learning to function with relative self-efficacy, hold themselves responsible for pursuing self-chosen goals, and rely less on others' opinions when making life choices. For one to move forward in life, they must understand the roles of both emotional and instrumental independence, and eventually, they must recognize and accept interdependence (Ward and Kennedy, 1993, Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2001). Emotional independence requires that one has the freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection and approval from other individuals. It all starts with separation from one's family, including their parents, and his happens physically for international students when they choose to leave their home country to attend college. For international students that

emotional dependence is likely to transfer to reliance on peers, nonparental adults, and occupational or institutional reference groups as they transition to the new environment. At some point, as one begins to strengthen their level independence, the less support one will need, as well as the more of a desire to pursue life goals and interests, even if it means risking the loss of friends, peer groups, and even status (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Foubert, Nixon, Sisson, Barnes, 2005; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2001). Instrumental independence has two major components: the ability to organize one's priorities and solve problems through self-directing and independent decision making, as well as the ability to be mobile (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). One should be able to think critically where one is able to turn ideas into overt action, as well as know how to find the right information and where to find the right resources (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

The idea of moving through autonomy to develop stronger interdependence allows one to enable healthier forms of utilizing one's resources, in a way that is productive, constructive, and appropriate to the situation (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2001). For instance, one will begin to revise and think about the relationships they have with others, including members of the family. Relationships based on equality and reciprocity replace the older, less consciously chosen peer bonds. One's interpersonal relationships will begin to broaden and include that of the community, general society, and the world. For those international students this is necessary to find success and personal happiness abroad, that is they need to form those relationships that will help sustain them during their time in higher education. The desire to feel included and finding social groups to be a part of will become better balanced, as one now knows what and who to look for in a friend (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Through a study that was conducted to investigate the relationship between sociocultural and psychological aspects of cross-cultural adaptation, Ye (2006) was able to conclude that social support networks have been found to moderate the effect of stress in predicting depression, hopelessness, and even suicidal ideation. Social support can come in various modes, such as tangible assistance, informational support, and emotional support; as well as social support groups play a crucial role in coping with stress. What makes social support all the more unique is that for many, it is embedded in the structure of their social relationships. Social support is extremely crucial for many international students because they are typically far away from their families, both physically and emotionally. Therefore, the traditional forms of support that they once relied on may not be so reliable now that they have relocated, not only to college but to a new country. Therefore, one may need to seek out new forms of support or resources to assist them with the coping process of various issues that arise (Ye, 2006). Chickering's and Reisser's (1993) stage moving through autonomy towards interdependence, is important because we see that they now must rely on themselves to seek out the support that will be most effective for coping with the issues that arise. As one develops their autonomy, they will begin to figure out what social support groups to be a part of because they will begin to select based on those that will be most effective with helping them cope with various stress issues (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships. Chickering and Reisser (1993) emphasize that developing mature interpersonal relationships requires to major components: tolerance and appreciation of differences, and capacity for intimacy. What Chickering and Reisser meant by tolerance is that one is able to respond to people in their own right rather than as stereotypes or transference objects calling for particular conventions. Being aware, open

minded, curious and objective allows one to rethink and filter first impressions, reduce bias, increase empathy, and enjoy diversity (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). International students may take a bit longer to reach this stage in relation to the U.S. students; however, they may more quickly develop these relationships with other international students because they are experiencing similar things and can relate to one another in a different way.

A study was conducted by Elturki, Liu, Hjeltness, and Hellman (2019), where they examined the academic and social experiences of 40 international students in an undergraduate pathway program at Washington State University. While many of the participants reported having enjoyed their experiences at the institution and the town of Pullman, they also reported having found it difficult to make friends and interact with the domestic students. The primary reason behind the difficulty in developing relationships was due to the language barriers, along with other cultural differences (Elturki, Liu, Hjeltness, and Hellman, 2019). According to Shupe (2007), the extent to which individuals of different cultures interact may depend on the distance between cultural backgrounds of the individuals involved. In addition, the extent to which the two individuals can relate to each other will depend on perceptions of similarities and dissimilarities. In other words, in the case of someone perceiving the existence of dissimilarities between each other, the lesser one will desire to have any sort of contact (Shupe, 2007). This takes us back to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory regarding developing relationships, in that for one to successfully develop relationships with others, it requires one to have great tolerance of the existing differences of other people, including cultural differences. There may be a great cultural difference between two individuals, as explained by Shupe (2007), however, it is up to those individuals to break down the barrier and develop a mature interpersonal relationship.

Nonetheless, in order to do so, they must be tolerant of one another's cultural differences, as well as take into appreciation of their differences (Shupe, 2007).

    Establishing Identity. To establish one's identity depends in part on the other first four vectors previously mentioned: Developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, and developing mature interpersonal relationships (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Developing identity involves a number of different elements: one's physical attributes and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context, understanding of one's self based on their roles and type of lifestyle, understanding of one's self based on other's perceptions and feedback, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and stability and integration in their personal lives (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). With international students, establishing one's identity may also involve reflecting on one's family of origin and ethnic heritage, finding one's self based on religious or cultural tradition, and reflecting on one's self through a social and historical context. In everyday life, identity is going to be determined by one's ability to find roles and styles at work and home, and in one's free time that are genuine expressions of who they really are, thus sharpening their self-definition (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

    Whether or not one decides that during their time in college is the time to "find oneself" is entirely up to them. For many, their college years will be the time to establish their identity, however, this is not the case for all of them. The question of when the right time is to establish one's identity can depend on a number of factors, including level of importance to the individual, environmental context, racial/ethnic disparities between the individual and the host culture, and peer groups. For instance, in the case of international students, depending on the population size of those who identify as Indian or members of other minority groups, an international student

from India may potentially experience one of two things: experience some level of racial discrimination or, conversely, become part of a community that consists of and/or welcomes members of the Indian community. It is also possible that one may experience both a community that welcomes them and instances of discrimination simultaneously. For instance, one may be welcomed by individuals who identify with other minority groups, yet those individuals may still say and do things that could potentially come off as offensive towards that individual's culture or race (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2001). Contact between cultures is both a creative and reactive process which leads to generating new customs and values and stimulating resistance. However, there are times where instead the clash between two or more cultures can lead to cultural domination and homogenization (Berry, 2011).

In order to offer a conceptual framework in which to accurately explain racial and ethnic issues that international students experience, Lee and Rice (2007) described these experiences as indirect and direct forms of 'neo-racism,' also known as 'new-racism' which is discrimination based on culture and national order. "Neo-racism rationalizes the subordination of people of color on the basis of culture, which is of course acquired through acculturation within an ethnic group, while traditional racism rationalizes it fundamentally in terms of biology. Neo-racism is still racism in that it functions to maintain racial hierarchies of oppression" (Lee and Rice, 2007, p. 389). It has been an increasing norm for discrimination to be justified by natural cultural differences or national origin, rather than by physical characteristics alone. As a result, this justification will win over the fight against racism by appealing to natural tendencies to preserve group cultural identity – in this case, the dominant group. Hidden somewhere within neo-racism, are the notions of cultural and national superiority and an increasing rationale for marginalizing or assimilating groups in a globalized world. It is important to note that neo-racism does not

replace biological racism, rather it disguises it by encouraging exclusion based on natural attributes or national origin of the oppressed (Lee and Rice, 2007).

White racial identity theories support the idea that individuals who are members of a majority culture must understand and acknowledge the privilege their social status gives them in order to find some sort of appreciation in diversity, without imposing majority culture on members of minority groups. With that being said, for those who identify as members of minority groups will go through a different process of racial identity development. It is also important to keep in mind that minority groups will likely have little to no power or say in what is considered as socially acceptable. How society views and perceives the privileges that come with being a member of a majority group, will influence the level of importance and value society chooses to give to the identities of minority group members. For instance, the majority views of privilege and oppression may have historical biases, and thus may promote a negative image of the minority group and its members. This in turn can create hostility and tension between the beliefs of two or more cultural groups, and those of society (Torres, Jones, and Renn, 2009). Worrell, Cross, and Vandiver (2001) talked about understanding racial and ethnic identity for people of color as being a process of one making the decision to not believe the negative stereotypes and images about their race or ethnicity, and instead move towards a more internalized and integrated sense of self with positive views about one's race or ethnic background. In other words, one becomes comfortable with valuing the differences between their own culture and that of society, as well as their close circle of peers (Cross and Vandiver, 2001).

Developing Purpose. In order to develop purpose, one experiences an increasing ability to be intentional, to analyze and compare one's interests and options, clarify and establish goals, make plans, and most importantly, be persistent no matter the obstacles that get in the way

(Chickering and Reisser, 1993). International students, as they enter this vector may be considering their future plans and how they are shifting from returning home to considering staying in the country and what that might mean to family and friends. They may also be struggling with telling family members that their plans have changed, and they are no longer following the plans set for them because they are now establishing their own purpose based on their own identity (Singaravelu, White, and Bringaze, 2005; Chaves, 2006). One must be committed to developing plans ready for action, as well as a set of priorities that integrate the following elements: vocational plans and aspirations, personal interests, and interpersonal and family commitments (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Chaves, 2006). In the case of an international student on a temporary student visa, one may have to think about their plan of action when the times comes time to return to their home country. This may also mean having to think about their priorities toward what they consider to be the most important to them. Many individuals raised into an Asian culture grow up with the idea that loyalty towards family and parents are more important than anything else. However, at a time when one is working towards a career goal and developing independence, one may run into a crossroads in respects to what they must consider as priority over the other (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2002; Chaves, 2006). At this point, for international students, they may have established a vocational path they are proud of with goals for their future, independent of outside forces influencing them. One must also remind themselves to take all their desired goals and unify them into one meaningful purpose. Lastly, they must believe in this purpose and be intentional always (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

For many individuals coming from another country, especially those of the Asian culture, it is common for one's purpose to connect closely to their academic achievement (Heyward,

2002; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2002). This largely depends on the amount and quality of support that the individual receives from the institution and various individuals (Dipeolu, Kang, and Cooper, 2008). For instance, if one faces little challenge in their academic coursework, they may feel complacent and subsequently believe that there is no real benefit to their personal development. However, if one is being challenged in their coursework, they could potentially regress to earlier forms of behavior that are less adaptive, but they may also choose to step up to the challenge and think about how they can change their modes of behavior. Nonetheless, when one is being challenged, they have more of an opportunity to seek out effective resources and develop a level of self-efficacy to establish a solid foundation of purpose (Chickering, 1994; Chaves, 2006). Singaravelu, White, and Bringaze (2005) emphasized that increasing pressure from parents and family increases one's sense of competitiveness among students and makes academic achievement a huge part of one's individual status, as well as family status in the community. A study was conducted on minority college student populations in the United States which showed that parental and family influence is a major factor in one's career decision making process (Singaravelu, White, and Bringaze, 2005). The study examined career development between Asian international, non-Asian international, and domestic students, including the external and environmental factors that influence their decision-making process. Environmental factors include family, friends, teachers, counselors, as well as government (Singaravelu, White, and Bringaze, 2005). Researchers have been producing data for years that has shown that various societies from around the world emphasize the importance of collective identity, emotional dependence, and the importance of family (Kim, Atkinson, & Umemoto, 2001; Triandis, 1995; Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe, 2003, Myers-Walls, Frias, Kwon, Ko, Lu, 2011). A student coming from an Asian cultural background may begin college with a clear

purpose in mind, however, as their academic and career interest begin to shift or change over time, one may or may not have the freedom to change or alter their purpose, due to high expectations coming from their family to pursue a specific field (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2002).

   Developing Integrity. Similar to one's experience in establishing their identity and developing their core purpose, core values and beliefs provide the foundation for interpreting experience, guiding behavior, and maintaining self-respect, all collectively leading to the development of integrity (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Higbee, 2002). Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated that developing integrity doesn't occur without going through three sequential stages. The first stage is "humanizing values-shifting away from automatic application of uncompromising beliefs and using principled thinking balancing one's own self-interest with the interests of one's fellow human beings" (Chickering and Reisser, 1993, p. 51). This is where an individual tends to shift away from absolute rules and laws, to a point of view that is more relevant to today's standards, thus thinking about how created rules shape our society and the purposes that these rules are meant to serve. An example could be when an international student was raised into a household where they were taught that they have a responsibility to serve and remain loyal to their parents and what their parents think and believe. However, as this international student begins to be exposed to a new culture and ways of thinking they will reflect more about society's rules as a whole as opposed to the rules of their own household; thus beginning to believe that they have a responsibility to make their own life choice and pursue a future that they desire. They may have even thought about how even though they have a responsibility to their family, they also have a responsibility to themselves (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

As the individual moves in to the second stage ''personalizing values-consciously affirming core values and beliefs while respecting other points of view'' (Chickering and Reisser, 1993, p. 51). During this stage, they realize that they must take responsibility for themselves and take responsibility for their identity, which includes making decisions that reflect their personal values. An individual at this stage may be at the point where they must select the social groups with whom they want to associate. An international student may join a more progressive or conservative group where previously they would not have. Lastly, "developing congruence-matching personal values with socially responsible behavior" (Chickering and Reisser, 1993, p. 51). Individuals tend to select guidelines that best suit themselves and their life situations. In this last stage, one is at the point where they can finally say that they are comfortable with making their own decisions, as they have now found their niche. One is now comfortable with recovering from the mistakes they have made and holding a firm grasp onto their life choices. International students at this point may be comfortable explaining to family and friends back home their newfound identity and purpose and explain how it is how they wish to lead their life moving forward. At this point in the process, one may have a good grasp onto societal rules and expectations, as well as their personal values. Therefore, they have found their place amongst society and are now able to stand firm with their own life choices and seek alternative routes in recovering from life problems (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Transition to Higher Education

Everyone experiences transitions at some point in their life, whether those transitions are results of events or nonevents, anticipated or unanticipated (Schlossberg, 1981; Chaves, 2006; Crowne, 2013). These transitions alter our lives, including our roles, relationships, routines, assumptions, and overall our personal and academic development. Transitions do take time,

including people's reactions to the change. Schlossberg's (1995) Transition Model provided a

foundation for which one begins to change as a result of going through various life events and

situations. The model provides a systematic framework for counselors, psychologists, social

workers and others as they listen to and learn about the experiences of individuals. Schlossberg's

model supports the notion that all individuals are unique, and everyone has different experiences,

all occurring for various reasons. For example, we cannot assume that all international students

coming to study in the United States will experience the same challenges and success, or that

they will adjust to their new environment in the same way. "A transition can be said to occur if

an event or non-event results in a change of assumptions about oneself and the world and thus

requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationship" (Schlossberg, 1995, p.5).

The transitional experience has also been described by Susan Barclay (2017) in her journal entry,

Schlossberg's Transition Theory as "an event that creates a disruption of role, routine, and

relationships for the individual experiencing the transition" (Barclay, p. 24, 2017). According to

Schlossberg (1981) the transition model has three major parts. (1) Approaching transitions:

Transition identification and transition processes. (2) Taking stock of coping resources: self,

support, strategies, situation. (3) Taking charge: Strengthening resources. Approaching

transitions is what identifies the nature of the transition and provides the best perspective for how

one should deal with the transition (Schlossberg, 1995).

      Schlossberg's Transition Model. According to Schlossberg (1995) the change may be

either anticipated or unanticipated. In the case of international students, they anticipate the

change they will go through in coming to a foreign country to study, however they may not

anticipate all the situations and experiences they will go through (Kotewa, 1995). Transition

process is where the individual is currently in their transition, and they must make decisions in

how they will cope with the transition, whether that means utilizing external resources or their own inner strengths (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995). The four S's refer to the individual's Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies. ⌷Strengthening resources refers to one taking their provided resources and figuring out how to utilize them better or more efficiently in the future. In other words, it is up the individual on how to best utilize their resources, or four S's (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995; Kotewa, 1995).

Self. Self is the person's inner strength and emotional power that they utilize in order to cope with the situation (Schlossberg, 2011). People tend to attach meaning and purpose to their life experiences. If international students are to have a smooth transition process with an increased sense of purpose, it is crucial that they remain aware of their own beliefs, self-perceived abilities, perceptions, and attitudes (Barclay, 2017). As international students come in to higher education in the United States they may become hyper aware of who they are and examine their belief systems, attitudes, and how they see themselves as well as how others perceive them.

Anderson, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Goodman (2012) claimed that there are two domains in which to look at and assess one's sense of self: personal and demographic characteristics, and psychological resources. As discussed previously international students become aware of their personal and demographic characteristics rather quickly. While this may influence their psychological well-being, they may not be aware of how to access resources or even afraid of accessing them because of cultural norms. Schlossberg (1981) identified eight characteristics that make up one's individual self: psychosocial competence; sex and sex role identification; age and life stages; state of health; race-ethnicity; socioeconomic status; value

orientation; and previous experience with a transition of a similar nature. All of these impact the international student's transition into higher education in the United States in a variety of ways.

Situation. The situation refers to the specific situation that the individual is experiencing at a given point in time (Schlossberg, 2011). Regardless of what the situation is, it is likely a transitional state at which the person is in while on their developmental journey. In this study the transition is coming into higher education in a country that is not native to the student. One's transition has been described by Schlossberg (1981) as a time in one's life when they are going through a period of life changes, both obvious life changes, and ones that are more subtle changes. For the international student, attending college in a foreign country is an obvious life changing experience, one that is likely to have small unanticipated changes as well.

It is each of these individual changes that serve as their own particular situation and these situations can occur as a result of a number of reasons. For instance, situations can be either internal or external. Internal would imply that the situation occurring came about as a result of a deliberate decision on the part of the individual (Schlossberg, 1981). Students making the decision to leave their home country and culture to attend college in a foreign land would be considered intentional and deliberate. External on the other hand would imply that the situation occurred as a result of actions of other individuals or outside circumstances (Schlossberg, 1981). For example, the international student being placed with a domestic student in a residence hall that they did not select. Another element that makes up the context of a specific event is the timing. It is said that there exists a social prescribed timetable for the ordering of major life events, and in addition, most adults typically have what is called a built in social clock, which they use to determine whether they were on time or off time in respects to a particular life event (Schlossberg, 1981, 2011). A situation can either occur on time or off time. A situation occurring

off time would likely carry social and psychological penalties (Schlossberg, 1981; Barclay, 2017). The individual in this case would likely consider themselves as abnormal, since their behavior is considered out of the deviant. On the other hand, situations that occur on time are typically those that are expected, or in which one was looking forward towards. For most international students they must plan months if not years in advance to study abroad and they expect this to happen; however, they may not end up in the exact location they anticipated going. For example, an international student may apply to 3-5 colleges in the United States and have a ranking of their first choice and their fifth choice and may end up attending their last choice institution which may be quite unexpected. It is important to note that not all life events on scheduled, since some of them occur as a result of circumstance or forces by which we have absolutely no control. There are also life events in which we expect to occur since they are the ones that we hope to serve as a foundation by which we grow and develop (Schlossberg, 1981, 2011).

Many life events are expected, whether it is because they are general, inevitable, or because they are the result of deliberate decisions, or because their onset was a gradual occurrence (Schlossberg, 1981). In these types of situations, individuals can at least prepare to some degree for what may happen, including seeking out any resources or assistance that they may need to utilize, or develop strategies in order to have a smooth transition. This is where international student resource offices can play an important role as they work with this population on a regular basis and understand the variety of situations that students may be coming from and coming in to and can provide orientation and resources that will help the student succeed. On the other hand, changes may also occur unexpectedly or suddenly, there may not be any room for rehearsal or preparation. Typically, the individual in this case will go

through a period of apathy, distaste, among other emotions, as a result of what just happened. International student resource offices anticipate these experiences and work to maintain communication and offer support as they experience these various emotions.

Another element that makes up a situation is the duration for which it happened (Schlossberg, 1981). Another difficulty in facing dramatic life changes in addition to the stated above, is also the expected duration for which it occurs. For instance, a change that is viewed as only being temporary is likely going to be viewed differently than a situation that has a more permanent lasting effect. An individual will likely be more assured if they are experiencing a life event that even though may be emotionally or mentally draining, only lasts for a short period of time. As for life events that occur for extended periods of time or are said to have a permanent lasting effect, the individual will run into a delay in their developmental process (Schlossberg, 1981). For example, an international student may experience culture shock in respects to English fluency. The individual realizes that they must adjust by becoming fluent in the English language to at least some degree, especially if they are to be successful in their program of study. This would be considered as an event that is more long term, since they now must go about the task of learning English in addition to what they are studying (Schlossberg, 1981). A temporary event that an individual may experience may include separating from their significant other. While this event may be traumatic or heart breaking to the individual, this type of event would likely only last for a short while, to which the individual would likely eventually get over it (Schlossberg, 1981; Barclay, 2017).

The degree of stress that one endures throughout the process is also important in understanding the situation (Barclay, 2017). The situational factors discussed as described above will also impact the degree of stress, as well as one's personality traits and characteristics

(Schlossberg, 1981). Any change taking place, regardless of whether the end result was a gain or a loss, or whether it was predominately positive or negative in effect, the individual will likely incur at least some degree of stress. Schlossberg (1981) argued that one's degree of stress is not so much dependent on the nature of the event itself, rather it is more dependent on the balance between the individual's deficits and gains (Schlossberg, 1981). In other words, it is not so much about the event itself, rather it is more about the individual's success in utilizing the appropriate resources and strategies to cope, and how that balances with the severity and loss as a result of the event (Schlossberg, 1981; Barclay, 2017). For example, an international student may have experienced racism or discrimination for the very first time by a domestic student. An event such as this can be detrimental to one's mental state; however, the individual may be able to utilize resources such as the international student resource center or push forth certain strategies learned, such as interacting with more co-nationals or other individuals of color or finding a community of individuals where they find themselves comfortable. In this case, the individual may then find that they are able to cope with the situation with more ease and assurance (Schlossberg, 1981; Barclay, 2017).

Strategies. Coping strategies are the ways in which one tries to change or alter the situation, reframe the situation, as well as deal with the stress that follows (Schlossberg, 1981). The one who can flexibly use various strategies is the one who is better able to cope (Schlossberg, 2011). Taking hold of one's coping strategies is a two-fold process. First, the individual must identify what resources are available to them. For example, a student may have difficulty sitting in on lectures and taking in the material being taught. This challenge may require that one seek out extra assistance for their assignments, projects, and preparation for exams. Nonetheless, there are a number of different resources that a student can utilize, whether

it means reaching out to other classmates, instructor, attending tutoring sessions, or readjusting their studying habits. The student must choose the resource or resources that they believe not only will be the most effective, but that they are also comfortable with utilizing. In other words, the type of strategy being utilize should also allow one to manage the stress and psychological burden that the situation places on them (Schlossberg, 1981; Barclay, 2017).

Second, the individual in transition must decide which of the four strategy types to utilize as a vehicle for their transition process. The four options include: modifying the situation, changing the meaning of the situation, controlling or managing the situation, or taking deliberate action (Schlossberg, 1981). Which option the individual ends up choosing as their strategy, largely depends on their individual self and type of situation they are experiencing. For example, two individuals may struggle with the class lectures, perhaps even for similar reasons, however, they still may handle the situation differently by utilizing different strategies. One of the students may choose to modify the situation because they have developed a strong sense of autonomy and independence, therefore, they insist on learning new ways in which they can take the material and better retain it for future use. In other words, this individual may think about how they can readjust their studying habits. The other student, however, may choose to take deliberate action as a result of finding the class to be too stressful or difficult to cope with. Through this strategy, the individual may choose to reach out to their advisor to drop the class, or they may just choose to skip the class the lectures altogether (Barclay, 2017). One decision making strategy they may utilize is thinking about both how the strategy will impact their ability to cope with the situation they are experiencing, and how it will enhance their personal development, both mentally and physically (Schlossberg, 1981; Barclay, 2017).

Support. Schlossberg (1981) addressed adaptation by defining it as, "a process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition, to integrating the transition into his or her life" (p. 7). The ability for individuals to successfully adapt is largely dependent on the environment that one is in. Environment should be understood as having three general aspects: interpersonal support systems, institutional supports, and physical setting (Schlossberg, 1981). For one to have social support they need to be surrounded by significant others because this is an important element to one's level of general support that they receive in order to cope with various situations. Those who receive large amounts of support, whether from friends, family, mentors, and network of friends, are less likely to suffer from stress related issues, including health and mental, as well as one's level of motivation (Schlossberg, 1981; Kotewa, 1995). As international students travel to their new educational home, they need to connect with people who will become their friends and mentors so they can get the support they need to be successful. The support that one receives during their transitional period is critical to their mental state and how they react to an experience or situation. (Schlossberg, 2008). This is where international student resource offices can work to create supportive environments and create opportunities for students to connect with others and form those relationships.

Institutions typically have counseling and mental health services of some sort, where individuals have someone to talk with when they face challenges. However, individuals may be hesitant about sharing their experiences with anyone else for a couple of reasons. The first reason is that one may have been raised into a culture where society has a different attitude on expressing and sharing of feelings. In Mori's (2000) article on, *Addressing the Mental Health Concerns of International Students,* they emphasized that mental health services have been significantly underused by the general international student population. Even at times when

international students may seek out services to help cope with their mental health and other

issues, this population is still more likely than Americans to terminate their relationships with

therapeutic services (Mori, 2000). In American culture, many individuals are raised with the

notion that one's individual mental self is due to the strong belief that one must seek out

autonomy as part of one's journey towards success (Mori, 2000). International students perceive

their mental health problems as more of a product of phenomenological forces that are beyond

one's control. Therefore, many of them fail to see how their mental health problems can be

managed or controlled by mental health and counseling services (Mori, 2000).

Pascarellalla and Terenzini (2005) developed a theory that assesses student change in a

college setting. They suggested that students bring with them different background

characteristics: personality traits, academic aptitude, family background, secondary school

achievement, and experiences, all of which are factored in when an individual interacts with their

surrounding environment (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). In turn, the nature and quality of the

interactions one has with their environment and its accessible resources determines one's level of

integration and adaptation with the social systems of the institution. Nonetheless, the higher

one's level of integration and adaptation, the more likely that individual will persist at the

institution (Pascarella and Terensini, 2005). Tinto (1975) assessed the different reasons as to why

student may rethink their first year of college. He emphasized that there are a variety of factors

that determine one's personal and academic success during their first year and their decision to

stay, including academic difficulty, adjustment difficulty, goals, commitments, finances, fit,

involvement, and learning.

Students' pre-college traits include their socioeconomic background, preparation for

college-level work, as well as demographics (Long, 2012; Torres, Jones, and Renn, 2009). In

other words, students who come from relatively wealthier backgrounds and attend college

preparatory schools will be presented with significantly differently opportunities and experience

different challenges than those coming from working class backgrounds and less academically

proficient secondary schools. Then there are structural and organization characteristics which are

defined by the institutions size, selectivity, geographic location, secular or faith affiliation, and

residential character (Torres, Jones, and Renn, 2009; Ryan, 2007). Collectively, these

characteristics make up the overall culture or environment of the campus. The variable,

socializing agents on campus is determined by the frequency, content, and quality of one-on-one

and group interactions between students and other students, as well as students and faculty,

administrators, and professors (Long, 2012). Lastly, the variable, quality of effort put forth by

the students will be directly impacted by the fourth variable, socializing agents on campus, as

well as impacted by their own individual characteristics and cultural norms and expectations of

the college or university (Long, 2012). It is important to think about each of these five variables

as defined by Pascarella and his theory on student development (as cited by Long, 2012).

In examining student-faculty interaction as one of the variables suggested in Pascarella

and Terenizin's (1991) theory of student development, it is important to keep in mind the

fundamental and natural human need, which is the need for positive interactions with others so

that one may feel like they belong and cared about. Some sort of interaction between a student

and faculty member or professor is inevitable. However, it is the frequency and quality of those

interactions, as well as the content involved in those interactions that varies depending on

various factors as indicated by Pascarella. International student resource offices that provide

intentional opportunities for students and faculty as well as international and domestic students

to interact and have quality experiences will benefit the overall experience. Transitioning issues

for international students focus primarily on language issues, in this case, lacking English fluency. Andrade (2006) noted that professors do in fact notice a distinctive difference in challenges that international students face compared to domestic students. Andrade (2006) would note in her article that English fluency was the main difficulty that international students would face, thus requiring assistance from the professors as it would negatively impact their academic performance (Andrade, 2006). Faculty-student interactions can have a powerful impact on a student's academic motivation and their self-concept of academic achievement. For instance, Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2012) noted that informal faculty-student interactions can have an even bigger effect on a student's motivation than the typical predictors of academic performance such as, secondary school performance or academic aptitude. Initial interactions also have an influence in increasing the value on academic achievement perceived by the general student population, as well as having an impact on the general student culture, a culture that typically does not value such achievement otherwise (Kamaraju, et al., 2012).

For students just transitioning into college, mentoring may even be considered more important and crucial to one's academic achievement than peer support (Kamaraju, et al., 2012). Hence, faculty members play a huge role in the college experience for many students relying on those unique interactions while transitioning to college, as it allows the student to integrate their academic and extracurricular experiences during that first year. It has also been held that substantive student-faculty interactions have an influence on a student's vocational preparation and intellectual development (Kamaraju, et al., 2012). Thus, Komarraju and colleagues (2012) suggested that these interactions that students have with faculty have a multidimensional influence, on both their cognitive and emotional conditions. This in turn validates the importance of relationships between students and faculty (Komarraju, et al., 2012). Keep in mind that the

research done by Komarraju and colleagues, as well as Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and his

theory on student development, did not focus primarily on international students, but included

students transitioning to college in general (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Nonetheless, these

are challenges that still pertain to many international students and their life experiences

(Komarraju, et al., 2012).

It is both goal and institutional commitments that serve as both predictors and reflectors

of the individual's experiences, disappointments and satisfactions, in that collegiate environment

(Tinto, 1975). For instance, an international student will likely enter a U.S. institution with

certain expectations about the institution including its social and academic climate. In addition,

they will also have expectations in respects to how they will perform in that setting. Nonetheless,

an international student's expectations are going to be shaped by the culture they were raised in,

as well as the academic background they come from. Their expectations are shaped by that of the

type of academic and social system that were once a part of (Tinto, 1975; Crowne, 2013; Torres,

Jones, and Renn, 2009). In Tinto's (2012) work on retention and persistence, a sense of

belonging to a particular setting is eminent to one's success at a college or university. And this

can be applied to international students studying in the United States. Individuals must be able to

engage and find themselves as a member of the community, including its students, academics,

and professional staff if they are to successfully achieve their end goals. Those working with

international students on the college campus need to identify ways to help engage this population

in to different parts of the campus. Some ways institutions do this is through host family

programs, domestic and international student buddy opportunities, and through international

student organizations. The end result of Tinto's research is that one finds the energy to commit to

be a part of a group or community, even when challenges arise, and obstacles stand in the way.

The student has to put the energy in to taking advantage of established programs designed for them or look for other opportunities to connect where possible. In addition, this allows the individuals to discover other smaller communities of individuals whom they may share more commonalities with, as well as allowing the individual to grow closer to the institution as a whole (Tinto, 2012).

Tinto (2012) emphasizes that engagement does matter however, it is not as much the act of engaging that is important; rather it is about the perceptions one has of those experiences, and the meaning that they derive from those experiences that defines their sense of belonging. When international students are finding places they connect in meaningful ways they will have a greater sense of connection to the institution and those surrounding them. In other words, while belonging can be a reflection of prior experiences, it is shaped by the broader campus climate and their perceptions of their daily interactions with other individuals, including students, faculty, and administrators, and the messages that their interactions convey about their belonging (Tinto, 2012). As international students acclimate to the campus it is in those interchanges with others on the campus, including faculty, staff, and students, who will help them define their sense of belonging. Students who perceive themselves as belonging are more likely to persist because their sense of belonging not only leads to more motivation, but also shapes their ability to engage others in a way that furthers their persistence (Tinto, 2012). It takes energy and desire to be involved and to make one's way on campus. International students, much like their domestic counterparts need to put that energy in to establish their place on campus and make meaning of their experience. By contrast, one's sense of not belonging or feeling out of place will likely lead to withdrawal from engagement or interaction with other individuals and the campus environment, thus leading to a lack of motivation to persist (Tinto, 2012).

Milem and Berger (1997) talk about Tinto's (1975) theory on student development and Tinto indicates that the process of integrating into the academic and social system of an institution includes as a result of the student successfully navigating the following stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. The separation stage involves disassociating away from the norms back in their home country (Milem and Berger, 1997). These norms include not only those held by one's family or household, but also those of friendship groups and other past communities or social groups one may have been affiliated with. In the transitioning stage, the student will find that they have successfully disassociated themselves from the norms of their past lives but have not quite yet adopted the norms of their new environment (Milem and Berger, 1997). In this stage an international student may tell family and friends back home information that shows they are still connected to their past identity while actively searching out opportunities that will help them shape the new one. The incorporation stage is when the student has successfully adopted the norms of their current institution's environment, thus officially having integrated into the community (Milem and Berger, 1997). However, it is important to keep in mind that successful integration into the host community does not necessarily lead to perseverance or determination towards academic achievement (Milem and Burger, 1997).

As the student enters the new environment, they are immediately exposed to the new cultural norms, as well as attitudes, values, and behaviors (Milem and Berger, 1997; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Kamaraju, et al., 2012). These norms and qualities about the environment are going to likely catch them by surprise as they differ greatly from that of their home country. Initially, the student may reject the norms of the host culture, insisting that they stick to the cultural norms of their home culture. However, there is also the possibility of rejecting the cultural norms of their home culture, in other words, norms held by their family and friends. The

decision to reject the norms of their family and friends usually starts out as anticipatory socialization as the student make the quick decision to leave home to pursue college.

Chapter Summary

This chapter dives into the acculturation experiences of international students using a few different adjustment and transitional theories as applied to college students. One of the major theories applied to this research is the U-Curve Theory developed by Lysgaard (1955). Each individual will go through different experiences and have different ways of reacting and responding to said situations. Nonetheless, the U-Curve Model provides a universal picture of what that process looks like. The other major theories incorporated into the literature review were Chickering's and Reisser's (1993) identity development model and Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) theory of transition. These are used to understand the developmental and transitional challenges that students may face as they attend college in a foreign country.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The intended purpose of this study was to use a qualitative approach to understand the transitional process for international students pursuing an education at an institution in the United States. The goal was to draw real life observations of their actions and behavior, as well as gather information regarding their experiences as told in their own words. Data collection was used to understand their everyday life experiences and situations including both perks and challenges, and how specific situations have an impact on their personal and academic development. The goal was to also understand what resources they utilize, both internal and external resources, and why they choose those specific resources. Overall, this study sought to gain insight into their societal experiences as they socialize and interact with various groups and individuals at an institution in the United States.

Design of the Study

The proposed study is a qualitative research study. A qualitative study begins with strategies that involve inductive reasoning for collecting and analyzing qualitative data with the goal of telling the participant's story from their perspective (Charmaz, 2009). A qualitative grounded theory approach allowed the *why* questions to be explored while still preserving the complexity of social life, thus being able to understand research participants' social constructions in everyday life (Charmaz, 2008).

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted by sitting down with each of the participants one on one, with a recording device, which they were informed of prior to the interview (Wimpenny and Gass, 2000). One on one interviews were a necessary component to the conduction of this study because there must be some relationship

between the researcher and the participants of the study. In other words, while the participants may provide useful information to the study, it is important that the researcher has some level of control over what kind of information is gathered so that they may tailor it to answer the specific research questions that they are trying to answer (Wimpenny and Gass, 2000). There must be a balance between the collection of data in the natural environment, and data collected directly from the participants (Wimpenny and Gass, 2000). One on one interviews were beneficial to my study because allowed me to make connections between the experiences they share and the behavior they carry out in their natural environment

Participants

Potential participants included undergraduate students who identify as an international student, holding a student Visa and are currently in either their sophomore or junior year and enrolled full time at a midsized public research institution located in the Midwest. Participants were collected through consultation with the International Student Office. In addition, the researcher also attended one of the International Student Committee meetings in order to solicit any potential interest. Participants had to be enrolled as a full-time student at the institution of the research study, identify as an international student, and plan on remaining enrolled at the institution until they completed their degree. Because recruitment of participants did not garner candidates the recruitment process was altered to include graduate students who were international students. And one participants who was in their undergraduate was involved and one who is in a graduate program participated. Participants were assigned a number 1 or 2 and this will be used for all data collected beyond their informed consent form. In the final stages a pseudonym was developed in place of the participant number.

Ursa. Ursa is a 21-year-old international student from India. She identifies as an Indian woman, coming from the country of India. She is an undergraduate student in her third year at Eastern Central University. She completed high school back in her home country of India before coming to the United States. Ursa is originally a management major but decided to switch to finance. In addition to her studies, she also holds a job with the Dining Department working at the campus food court. She also has a cousin who currently lives and works about three hours away. While not involved in any extracurricular activities currently, she was previously involved in the Student Senate of Student Government. Ursa does not quite know what her plans are post-graduation but plans on pursuing a career in business.

Caroline. Caroline is a 25-year-old international graduate student from the Bahamas. She identifies as a Black woman and as ethnically Bahamian. She completed one year of college in the Bahamas before coming to the United States to complete her undergraduate degree at the Central Earth College and acquired a bachelor's degree in speech pathology. She is currently a 2nd year graduate student at Eastern Central University enrolled in the College Student Affairs graduate program. She works as a graduate assistant for Residential Life and Housing and lives on campus in a residence hall. She has been involved in numerous extracurricular activities such as, National Residence Hall Honorary, President Leadership Fellows, Residence Hall Association, Caribbean Student Association, and has served as an admissions ambassador. She is currently a member of the Black Graduate Association at her graduate institution. Even though she is a graduate student at Eastern Central University, her shared experiences pertain to her time as an undergraduate student at Central Earth College. This was done so that more valuable data regarding her transitional experiences could be collected.

Research Site

The study was conducted at a four-year public research institution located in the Midwest. The research site has a total enrollment of 7,806 students, with approximately 332 of those students being international students, representing 61 countries. The highest number of international students at the institution selected come from India, thus they will be intentionally sought out for participation. However, Caroline addressed her experiences at another institution that she attended as an undergraduate. During data collection, the researcher met with participants at a location that was a public space on campus, and where the participants felt like they were the most comfortable. The institution has an International Student Office which serves as the hub for international students to seek out assistance and resources for them to better adjust within the institution and its environment.

Instruments

When participants agreed to participate in the study they were presented with a demographic sheet (Appendix A) and a copy of the consent form (Appendix B). The researcher went over the consent form with the participant to explain the entire research process. On this form the participants' number was written and was the only document that the participant name and number appeared together. The participants were also provided a demographic information sheet at the initial meeting asking basic information about their background. Participants were instructed to fill out information they are comfortable sharing. Following this the researcher and participant identified a day, time, and location for the researcher to interview the participant.

Two Interviews occurred face to face, and the researcher and participants were the only two individuals in the space at which the interviews were being conducted. The interviews were conducted using primary questions that were used to gather general information related to the

research questions for this study. The researcher followed up with secondary questions that dived deeper into the participants' specific experiences and situations, as well as any other information the participant chose to provide. Once the researcher went through all his questions and gathered all the needed information, the researcher concluded the interview by thanking the participants for their time.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Interview responses were recorded using a recording device. In addition, the researcher utilized a journal and pen to record any additional information he felt was pertinent to the study. Responses were then transcribed into a Microsoft document, which was used to draw conclusions and dedications.

Once data was collected from all the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews, while also completing checks for validity and accuracy. The researcher consulted with their advisor and thesis committee members, as well as referenced related sources and literature in order to ensure validity and accuracy in the transcribed interviews. The researcher made sure that the methods used throughout the study were clearly defined and easily transferable.

After the transcriptions were created, they were then coded to identify any themes or patterns that could be used for analysis (Saldana, 2013). Coding is the identification of topics, issues, similarities, and differences that are revealed in the participants' narratives and shared experiences, and subsequently, interpreted by the researcher (Sutton and Auston, 2015). The coding process is what allowed the researcher to understand the experiences and everything that factors into those experiences from the perspective of the participants (Sutton and Auston, 2015). The data was coded via the method of open coding, then axial coding, then selective coding, and

finally conditional coding. After the researcher completed the coding process, themes and phenomena were identified and transcribed, integrated with the data and research, and interpreted (Creswell, 1998).

Treatment of Data

The transcribing process was done in order to ensure proper facilitation of analysis of the data (Sutton and Auston, 2015). Interview responses were recorded and then transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Documents will contain the participants' number and not their name, and all identifying information (i.e. institutional identifiers, faculty names, etc.) were changed during the transcription portion. While transcribing the data collected from the interviews, the researcher underwent thorough checks for validity and accuracy, as well checked for grammatical and spelling mistakes (Sutton and Auston, 2015; Merriam, 2009). During the transcription process, the researcher also inserted notations for pauses, emotional or behavioral cues, body language, or any noises that the participants makes in the interview (Sutton and Auston, 2015).

Audio recordings were used on a device that was password protected and only the primary research has access to. Audio recordings did not have the participants name attached to them and the participant was not be asked to state their name during the interview. Transcriptions were kept on a password protected computer and hard copies were stored in a locked cabinet only the researcher had access to. All research will be maintained for three years in compliance with Institutional Research standards.

Chapter Summary

This research study utilized a approach to acquire an understanding that allowed the researcher to answer the stated research questions. The researcher conducted the study using

semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the participants one on one. During the

interviews, data was recorded via a recording device, to which the researcher also took additional

notes regarding any addition nonverbal behavior and impressions the researcher observed. Data

collected from the interviews were transcribed and subsequently coded in order to make out any

existing patterns or trends that could be used to draw an analysis. The researcher informed the

participants and guaranteed that all data will remain confidential throughout the conduction of

the study.

Chapter IV

Narratives

This chapter provides the students' narratives. The purpose of this chapter is to share the experiences of the participants in their own words and from their unique perspectives. To truly comprehend their experiences as international students enrolled at a college in the United States, it is important that their stories are accurately written out just as they were described and interpreted by the participants themselves. The chapter consists of a narrative for each of the two participants that begins before understanding their transition, which is to provide insight in to what led them and prepared them to make this transition. From the moment they started to think about education abroad, to where they are today, this chapter provides an insight into their journey to the United States as it adds to understanding the purpose of this study more fully.

Ursa

Ursa is an undergraduate female from India. She says she comes from a small town and follows the Hindu religion. She is currently in her Junior year studying at ECU. She identified that she is majoring in finance with a management minor. She has been in the United States for three years. She claims to not have any plans yet for when she graduates from ECU, only that she hopes to acquire a job that is finance related.

> OK. I'm from India. International student, of course. And I'm an Indian. I follow Hinduism and I'm a junior finance major with management minor. And it's been three years I've been in the United States. Okay, so since the beginning, my parents always wanted me to study abroad. But the final decision that, oh it will it will be United States of America, and I will go on my student visa, it was like when I was in my 12th grade and my final exams was in the month of March 2016.

Background. Ursa describes growing up in a small town and in a household with strict values. "But, you know, as my parents are really strict and I'm from a small town in India, so I won't talk about the whole India, whole parents, but just I'm from a very small town." Being that the education system in India is traditionally very challenging and strict; she received an education that was enforced by discipline.

> You know, parents like you have to do your homework and you have to get good grades.
> If you don't get good grades, then not even your parents... You know, your relatives, your
> neighbors, Indian mentality is very interference. You do have to do homework and then
> you have to do two plus hours of studies and you have to go to tutoring and study there.
> You just have to study every day. You cannot do anything else but study. So, parents are
> strict.

Not only was her high school curriculum more challenging, the teachers hold students up to high standards and expectations.

> They don't tolerate what American professors tolerate. That is the thing I'm so happy to
> talk about. Because, you know, I don't know about college professors in India because
> I haven't attended university or college life in India. But high school teachers are very
> strict. You are not allowed to have phone in your class. You are not allowed to eat or
> drink any kind of cool drinks in your classroom. And you are supposed to, you know, be
> well-dressed and you're supposed to maintain discipline. You are supposed to respect
> teachers and you are not supposed to use any kind of abusing language. And if you do so,
> the punishment would be very strict.

Ursa talked about the cultural aspects of her life in India and how it influenced her life, especially academics. "I'm from a state named Gugarat in India. And, you

know, Gugarati people, my cast is Jati." She would point out that this placed significant pressure on Ursa ;

> You have to study a lot. And then if you don't study, it's very easy that you will fail. I mean, and, you know, it affects your mental health because as I said that, you know, people interfere not only your parents, but outside people, they interfere a lot. And if you fail, people talk about it. So it's like, it affects negatively in mental health.

Ursa made it very clear that there was a cultural expectation that one must excel in their academics, and if you don't then you will not only be looked down upon by your family, but members of the community as well.

> So it was always a pressure to be at least an average student, not like. It's not a pressure to be a high [high achieving student], but if you don't want to be a lower category, because people are going to be like, oh, that is very dumb.

> Ursa identified herself as a procrastinator but followed it up by stating that she believes she is a relatively good student. In addition to academics, Ursa would emphasize that she had to live by a strict set of rules while at home too. She pointed out how not only your family members, but because she was from a small town, members of the community would have their expectations of her.

> But, you know, as my parents are really strict and I'm from a small town in India, so I won't talk about the whole India, whole parents, but just I'm from a very small town. So there, you know, you aren't really friends with guys. You know, they'll be like, oh, do you have a boyfriend? It's a very big thing in my town, not in the whole India, in my town. They'll be like, you cannot be seen by anyone from your city that you are alone with the guy in street or in movie theater. They'll be like, oh, this girl is seeing that guy.

And then they'll gossip about you and they'll be, you know, so families are afraid. They

don't want their kid to be talked about in a negative way. And this is negative to them.

Ursa grew up learning a culture that emphasized the importance of discipline and

obedience, a structure that would have a profound impact on her personal development.

Considering attending college abroad. Ursa knew since before high school that she

wanted to pursue the United States for her college education as she wanted to get out of India.

"But I knew that I didn't want to study further in India since the beginning. I wanted to come

here." She talked about her attraction to the U.S college education, "So it's [college in the U.S.]

like very, you know, organized, structured and really like point to point... Practical. You know,

it's very different from Indian education system. So I really like that." Having grown up in a very

strict household and perceiving to not have a lot of freedom, Ursa was ready for a new

experience.

I didn't have a cell phone. I had laptop, but I didn't have Internet. So without Internet,

you cannot do anything. I just used to watch television, you know or watch movies and

television or go out and play with friends. You know, in my, Near my home, are like just

go for a walk with my mom or like just like helped her in the kitchen or do my homework

or just like go hang out with friends. You have to ask permission for that and you don't

really get permission. I mean, my life was completely off from the Internet. I didn't have

Instagram or Facebook, or even like didn't have Internet till I was 16 years old. So, you

know, it was really different compared to an American teenage kid.

There was no particular reason as to why she was so keen on the US to further her studies, only

that she knew that it would a different experience and she was ready for that new chapter in her

life.

I just wanted to come. My family wanted to send me abroad for studies and I just wanted

to come. And I always knew that the education system is very much progressive and

more like practical and more easy and more flexible. Stuff like that. So I wanted to come.

I was lucky enough to get a visa. The whole process of getting a visa is all about luck.

Like it's very very hard to get a visa.

Not only was Ursa ready for the experience of immersing herself in a different country

with different cultures, she was also ready to have the opportunity and freedom to live her life.

"My parents are very strict so I would say that I was definitely ready to be on my own, you

know, the freedom, I need more freedom." One of the things Ursa would mention as part of

decision process to pursue the US was that she identifies as Gugarati. Her and her parents were

aware of the large population of Gugaraties in the US. To them, this was all the more reason for

why they should consider the US as their first option because they saw this as an opportunity to

be in a country that was welcoming of her people.

There are a lot of Gugaratis in America. If you Google, there be like, I don't know,

55,000 Jati in America. And my last name, Smith, there are like so many Smith's in the

United States. So it's like... it's in our... I don't know, in our culture. In Smith last name

culture, we have to go out of India. We have to settle out of India. And the United States

is the first option.

While excited about the idea of potentially having the opportunity to attend college, she

would go on to say that she was having feelings of anxiety about the process too. The reason for

these feelings were because she knew that the application process of student visas was very

competitive and that it is very difficult time get a visa.

> To get the US visa is extremely difficult and to get to US in the first attempt is
>
> very very difficult. It's about luck. Doesn't matter how good you are in studies and how
>
> good your English is or how good you're presenting yourself in the interview. If you, if
>
> you don't have in your destiny, you're not going to come to the United States.

The way she described it was that it all came down to one's destiny. "If you didn't get the visa, then it wasn't in your destiny to go to the US; it wasn't meant to be." In other words, to her, it is all about luck, regardless of who are you, where you come from, and how smart you are. Ursa claims that this was also part of the reason as to why she chose not to tell her friends because she didn't want people gossiping about it before she secured her student visa.

> I'm from Gujarat, but I grew up in a different state named Chhattisgarh. And there it's
>
> very uncommon for people to go out of India to study. It's extremely rare in my
>
> city. There are like two other people maybe out of India or whatever.

After officially receiving her student visa, she still avoided telling too many people since she didn't want people to gossip about it and potentially single her out given the rare circumstance of someone from her town leaving India to study. She claimed that she did tell a couple of friends, including her best friend whom she hung out with regularly.

Deciding to attend college abroad. Ursa shared information that led to her decision to study abroad. "So since the beginning, my parents always wanted me to study abroad." However, they didn't make the decision of her studying in the United States until her last year of high school.

> But the final decision that, oh it will be United States of America, and I will go on my
>
> student visa, it was like when I was in my 12th grade and my final exams was in the
>
> month of March 2016.

Ursa remembers being enthusiastic about studying in the United State,

I just wanted to come. My family wanted to send me abroad for studies and I just wanted

to come. And I always knew that the education system is very much progressive and

more like practical and more easy and more flexible.

She was also enthusiastic about the idea of being able to explore a different country with a

different culture.

I was just excited about coming here and I was just excited about getting the visa and I

was just excited about, you know, studying in a diverse community you know, like in

between. I would be living in such an interesting place. So many kind of people like, you

know, all those people. I think I was excited about that.

In addition to having the conversation with her parents, she reached out to her brother

who is currently living and working in the United States. Her brother provided her with

information regarding the visa application process, as well as advised her to prepare well for the

TOEFL and SAT exams. Ursa emphasized that she is not the ambitious type, and that it was her

parents who really did most of the digging of information regarding college in the US and the

application process. She claims that she enrolled herself at an institution in India and other

people did the work on her behalf, while she just went along with it.

I enrolled myself in an institution in one of India's states, and they did everything on my

behalf. I don't have any plans and I haven't researched about it. As I said, I don't really

have long term goals. After listening to me, maybe you can figured out that I'm not really

ambitious." In fact, other than having conversations with her parents and brother, Ursa

claims that she did not contribute much to the process.

When asked what in particular she was looking for when looking at institutions, she responded with, "I wasn't." When asked why the United States was her choice location, Ursa had no other response other than she just because she wanted to come.

I just wanted to come. My family wanted to send me abroad for studies and I just wanted to come. And I always knew that the education system is very much progressive and more like practical and more easy and more flexible. Stuff like that. So I wanted to come. I was lucky enough to get a visa. The whole process of getting a visa is all about luck. Like it's very very hard to get a visa.

She spoke about the influence her family members had on her choosing to pursue to study outside of India. Ursa also identified how excited she was to study somewhere else,

I was just excited about coming here and I was just excited about getting the visa and I was just excited about, you know, studying in a diverse community you know, like in between. I would be living in such an interesting place. So many kind
 of people like, you know, all those people. I think I was excited about that.

When it was time to figure out what school she would be attending, she emphasized, "There was nothing I was looking for. I didn't really think about that. I was just applying." One of the things that Ursa said her parents were just slightly worried about was the fact that the US has colder winters. Therefore, her parents were concerned with whether their daughter would be comfortable with the dramatic shift in weather.

I thought like, you know, it may be really cold here because in India, it doesn't get this cold. So maybe that I thought about this but I wasn't worried. I wouldn't say worried, but I thought about it would be so cold. Will I like it? Will I be able to adjust to it? But other than that, I was excited.

While trying to figure out what she would study, she claimed that she had always known she wanted to pursue something in business which led her to pick a management concentration. However, she shared,

> Because I didn't like accounting and I wanted to do something in business. I didn't like marketing and I was originally management but decided to switch. And I don't like computers or technology. So that was a no to management. So I think this is the choice. I don't like math, but I can do finance math. I think I can tolerate it.

She identified that her brother was helpful in picking her original major, "Just my brother, not anything else. I didn't search or research about anything. I didn't talk to people." She waited to make her decision until she came to the United States of America.

Caroline

Caroline, is originally from the Bahamas and a former undergraduate student at University of Central Annandale and is now a current graduate student at Eastern Central University. She identifies as a Black Bahamian woman. She says she practices Christianity. She is currently in her second year of graduate school at ECU. She has been in the United States for approximately seven years.

Background. Caroline grew up in a strict household and attended high school at a private institution. She remembers being involved with her academics throughout high school, and claims she never really faced any serious challenges. "High school I think I was very focused. I was heavily involved too on my academic side, but I would say that I was very focus driven. I didn't have any challenges like academically." Attending a relatively small high school, she recalls being able to develop positive connections with her teachers, to which those people would support and mentor her.

Especially since I went to a private school, a very small school, small compared to most

like traditionally private and public schools within the United States. So I think all of my

teachers played some type of role model.

After completing high school while in her home country, she made the decision to enroll

at a university for a year to get used to college and all the aspects of it. "I actually did a year at

the University back home. It was more so to get myself acquainted and also to figure out where

I would be financially and planning scholarships and stuff like that."

Outside of her academics, Caroline spoke about being a girl guide at one point which she

described is the equivalent to the girl scouts in the United States. Caroline was also heavily

involved with her church where she served the community there. She emphasized that her time

growing up was mostly spent being involved with her church.

I would say more still church. I think growing up, that's mainly what I would do. So I

think I spent a lot of my time in that, but also the rest of my time I was involved in church

activities because I served on the altar, I got involved in so much other stuff. So a lot of

my time is formed around in church.

When prompted to talk about the friend groups she had growing up Caroline talked about

having a small set of friends who remained constant throughout her life.

I would say most of my friend groups were kind of the same people. But I think most of

my friend groups, a lot of my friends are jokesters. They love to live the life a little more

than how I probably did when I was younger. Like, I kind of grew up to obey the rules

and all that. So I think most of them are very focused, mostly.

When asked if she still keeps in touch with any of her friends from back home, she said, "Most of the friends I hung out with in high school I still talk to today. Most of us are still working on our first degree or second degrees."

Considering Attending College Abroad. Growing up in the Bahamas in a very religious household, Caroline believes she had a desire to attend college when she was younger. "I think I had some desire in maybe grade 10 or 11. Because during that time they started to talk about you know the PSAT and all that other stuff." She also spoke about how she learned about various universities while in school.

> We had universities coming in to speak with us so at that point it was something I knew I
> had a desire for but it wasn't something that was set in stone because financially I knew
> that my family wouldn't be able to afford it.

When asked about who influenced her decision to attend college, she shared that both parents, but especially her mom was a big part of her decision to pursue college. In fact, her parents had thought about sending her to the US for a long time.

> I would say my mom had the biggest influence because both of my parents, they
> never went to college. I mean, my dad, he did like some type of accounting
> certificate, whereas my mom, she has a like certain certificates as well. But her biggest
> thing was that they always wanted me to seek a better opportunity for myself and she was
> like she couldn't afford any opportunities to go off to school, so she wanted to make sure
> I was able to do that.

She remembers having the conversation with her parents about not only attending college, but also potentially attending college in a different country. "When I applied to go off to school, the year I was graduating, I applied, and I got accepted, but financially it was

impossible." While her father did support her for the most part, he did remain skeptical due to the large expense that it would bear. Nonetheless, without any college degree, her parents wanted to make sure that she had that opportunity that they never had.

There was no other reason for why Caroline wanted to pursue the US for college other than from what she heard about there being a lot of opportunities. "I think everybody's always taught us to like seek better opportunities." She also highlighted some of the differences between school in the Bahamas and the United States explaining the influence that it had on her decision as well.

> At that time, the institution back home, when I was there, the college basically, all the information that we know, all the information that people usually have about it is that, you know you know, it's impossible for you to graduate within four years. Most people graduate within six. So it was more so the opportunity that I can go out and study for four years, whereas I can stay here and study for five years. And I knew that, OK. I wanted to see the best opportunity and staying home was a last resort.

Deciding to Attend College Abroad. With the help of her parents, Caroline started out by researching universities in the United States, as well as looking at financial support and scholarships that may be available. She and her mom even attended a session held by the US Embassy which was directed towards prospective newly admitted students.

> I think a lot of it was just warming up. And my mom did a lot of like reading up on things and then the U.S. embassy had like one or two sessions for newly admitted students. This is back home, the embassy back home had a session where you would go in and you'd find out what to expect. You know, when you want to enter the country, well, this stuff, you know, all those like policies and all that. So me and my mom went to one or

two sessions and just found out more information from other people and did a lot of like digging on the web sites and stuff like that and then coming on, actually coming into the United States, I think the good thing about it is I had people with me, so I had my best friend.

Caroline also spoke with her godmother and together, consulted with a professional in higher education who shared with them various opportunities including scholarships for international students. "I'm talking to one of my godmothers and we ended up talking to this guy. He was basically the director of education within like the Bahamas or whatever, and he was in charge of scholarships."

While she was originally interested in pursuing a degree in psychology, she later discovered a pathway program for speech pathology students. She was informed that the government will pay for your education if you agree to come back to the country and work for the government upon receipt of your degree.

While researching colleges and universities in the US, Caroline was particularly keen on institutions that were known for their international student population and provided resources to international students. Caroline spoke about working with a university consultant who she paid to look at different institutions in the US based off the information she provided.

I actually went through this lady. She's basically a consultant for some universities. So basically what she does is she, you pay a consultation fee and she goes ahead and she takes information; you know, the type of major, what you're looking for. And then she goes ahead and finds institutions for you that could well either match you with a scholarship or give you get a good financial package.

Eventually, it came down to deciding between two colleges, each providing her different financial aid packages.

> So at that time, I told them all the information I needed and I think she came back to me with at least two to four schools and that was between the University of East Empire and the Central Earth College.

Even though they did not offer her a scholarship, Caroline shared how money ultimately influenced her decision. "I didn't get a scholarship like from CEC; but they gave their international students in-state tuition. So compared to University of East Empire, it was much cheaper, although I wanted to go to East Empire." Caroline went on to emphasize the two biggest reasons she selected the institution she attended, "I think more so I went to CEC because I wanted to get a degree. And I think what it attracted me was a package and the program."

When prompted to talk about how she prepared to come to the United States for college she shared,

> I didn't really have any worries coming into CEC. I think more so it was just coming to a different town. You know, not even a different town but just a different place. I think… Not in a bad way, but it's like me discovering about certain places, and I want to say that a lot of places I didn't generally know about until like figuring out where I wanted to go.

For Caroline, she was ready to make the adjustment and went in with an open mind and a willingness to explore. "And I mean, of course, coming from a small town, that similar privilege that you have, you know, knowing certain people in certain places."

As Caroline discussed her process for selecting a major, she mentioned how she knew that she wanted to do psychology. "So for undergrad, I actually wanted to get my degree in

psychology." Nonetheless, because there was the burden of having to pay for it, she mentioned

how she had a conversation with her godmother and together they consulted with a higher

education professional who happened to oversee scholarships. "I'm talking to one

of my godmothers and we ended up talking to this guy. He was basically the director

of education within like the Bahamas or whatever, and he was in charge of scholarships."

It came down to her asking the questions of, "What are some opportunities or what is a

better time for me to get a scholarship?" While she originally intended to pursue psychology, she

would ultimately be admitted into CEC in their Speech Pathology Program due to the funding

opportunity that came with it.

> So it's more so we had a conversation and we had to figure out, okay, well, these are lists
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> of scholarships that the government guaranteed to give you scholarships for. So at that
>
> time, I still wanted to do psychology because I wanted to be a child and adolescent
>
> psychologist.

Caroline ended up choosing speech pathology because she was presented with a unique

opportunity that psychology did not offer.

> So at that time we talked and we talked about ideology, such as speech therapy, because
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> that's something that back home we actually need. So they're willing to pay for students
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> to go off and guarantee that they'll come back and teach or come back and work for the
>
> government. So at that time, I said, okay, well, you know, I could incorporate being a
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> child and adolescent psychology into audiology. So that's how I decided that I wanted to
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> do speech path. I will say after like the first year I knew that I didn't want to do it
>
> anymore because this was something I had wholehearted interest in.

Caroline went on to emphasize that she would like to continue her education and pursue a PhD., as she wishes to become a higher-level administrator in higher education or potentially a university president.

> I mean, for me and I always knew I wanted a PhD. I see myself eventually moving up the ladder. So longtime like I definitely want to be president of a university. So it means I gotta go get my PhD., start with those, dean of students. So I have a lot of different rules that I want to accomplish, it's just how do I go ahead and map them into that one ultimate goal of being a president?

Summary

The two participants shared each of their own experiences prior to their arrival to the United States. Each participant talked about their specific experiences, including emotions that they were going through throughout these experiences. These experiences include various factors that have influenced their decision to pursue the United States for college. Both the participants had something to say that defines them as individuals. In other words, their stories serve as a foundation for who they are as people. Following, their stories are further articulated to understand their process of adjustment throughout their academic journey.

Chapter V

Analysis

This chapter analyzes the participant's journeys and how their experiences provide insight into their transition to college in the United States. The chapter seeks to provide information about their transition, the resources they utilized, and how they describe their social interactions at their college in the United States. While analyzing each of the participant's stories, it was important to observe how their experiences were unique and how they were similar to one another.

Transition to the United States.

The participants were asked questions regarding their transitions to the United States and their adjustment to the campus. The most common themes that emerged included developing relationships, adjustment to the different education system, homesickness, and experiences with racism and discrimination. The participants detail their transitional experiences in their own words, providing insight into their experiences, how they responded or reacted to them, and how they have transformed as a result. This section is broken down into the themes of arrival, orientation, first couple of weeks, and the first semester to understand the various stages of their transition.

Arrival. In talking about the transition to college in the U.S. participants were asked to talk about their arrival and first days in the country and at the institution. Ursa arrived to the US and was greeted by her cousin who drove her to Eastern Central University's campus. Ursa refers to her cousin as her brother, as this is part of her culture. "I just landed and then my brother picked me up from the airport and then he drove me to [town of the university]." Her brother chose to stay with her at the institution for a couple of days in the beginning. "My brother was

their doing orientation with me." She went through the international student orientation where she met some of the other international students and her future roommate. When Caroline arrived to the United States, she was not greeted by anyone, "Well, I came out with my best friend and one of my other classmates [from home]." She came with individuals she knew from her home country.

Orientation to the Institution. Both participants spoke about the orientation process that was provided to only international students and their involvement in it. Caroline went through the international student orientation and talked about how it was useful in that she was shown around campus and was informed of certain campus resources.

> From what I could remember, it was like two or three days, I think, and each day had different stuff. But it was with international students, all international students who came back to that year. And we all like separated, like they put places and teams I think we had like a meet up every day. I can remember they had like a global leader or something.

Caroline went on to talk about various offices they went to and the services they learned about that they could use.

Ursa, who also went through an orientation described it as helpful since they provided them all with a tour around campus and informed them of various resources such as the Accounts Office, Career Services, and the Health Clinic.

> We just moved around campus, like everywhere. And we found some strangers who showed us everything. And it was just like getting to know people and getting to know campus. It was that simple, and like perfect. It was just like some lectures and some like, just showing classes, taking math placement. You know, all the campus tour and different

things, like, health center, taking some vaccines and something like that. You know, career service and the health center and all the things that career services has to offer. When I asked her how she picked her roommate, Ursa responded,

During orientation. She [her roommate] was the only one undergrad and she was the only one from a South Asian country. Either South Asian or East Asian, I don't know. So, like, I just looked and she was like, of my age. She knew my language. She was the only one when I was looking and there was no people undergrad. I mean, not for my Asian country. An Asian Country means I don't count Chinese or Japanese or you know, because like they're not very similar to us. But people from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, these are very similar people, you know. She was from Nepal.

Caroline also spoke about her roommate selection process, she shared, "I was randomly selected through random roommate picking. So I lived with three girls, my freshmen year." Caroline shared that she was the only international student in the room.

Early days. Participants were asked to speak about their first experiences at the institution post orientation. During the first couple of days, Ursa claimed that she was not really surprised by a whole lot. When asked if she was excited about anything, she responded with, "To be honest, nothing much. However, she did go on to say "I was basically excited all the time. I was just excited." Caroline remembers experiencing several feelings having just entered the US. "I don't know. I think I was just happy." She went on to say "I think for me it was more I think I was kind of sad. I think because I'm am the only child, so it's like leaving my mom." But Caroline did come to college with people she knew from home. "But I also think it was like a good feeling, like I was never afraid. I had like comfort because, you know, I came with my best friend. So I knew I automatically had him for support."

A couple of weeks in and as classes are getting ready to begin, Ursa shared some of the new feelings she experienced,

But kind of I was nervous about studies and professor and of course, would I be able to understand the English and you know, the lectures and the exams. So little bit nervousness was there, but not in the after part. It was like in myself conscious somewhere. But other than that, it was just excitement.

Ursa claimed that all she felt were feelings of excitement. "I was basically excited all the time. I was just excited." However, those feelings were combined with feelings of nervousness as well, particularly with her classes, "I was nervous about studies and professors and of course, would I be able to understand the English and you know, and the lectures and the exams."

Both participants went through a range of feelings during those first few days. From feeling excited to be in a new county and meet new people to how it was to be in an American classroom and how that would work. Experiencing a form or orientation geared specifically to international students helped connect them to people they could rely on during this time, such as friends and roommates.

First Couple of Weeks. The two participants were asked to share their experiences in the first few weeks of their first semester. This was marked by interactions with others, feelings of homesickness, and adjusting to the American culture as well as academic experiences. Ursa shared that she remembers it being a smooth transition. "It was like simple. I liked it. The transition wasn't really difficult. I was just like, it went smooth." However, after classes began she talked about how that changed, "Kind of overwhelming, but kind of... Kind of overwhelming, but kind not, you know." While Ursa talked about her experiences with classes, Caroline on the other hand talked about her experiences with meeting new people and creating

friends. "I think more it was like I got acclimated and met my roommates. I think I started to see who really were my friends" She also described how she tried to get more involved during this time. "I started to try to become involved within my like, I was RHA rep., So I started to get like involved." These interactions with others impacted their early weeks.

Homesickness. Both participants were asked about feelings of homesickness. Ursa shared, "Initially I was, I mean, so, so happy and excited that I didn't get homesick at all." Ursa shared that to deal with this she spent her time working to get to know her friends more and hang out with them. When Caroline was asked about homesickness, she responded saying that she did feel homesick at times. "It's hard to remember. I would say that I probably did sometimes, but not too much." She went on to speak about having a support group of friends including other Bahamian international students with her and how they helped her, "Because I had my best friend, you know, because I had other people that didn't feel homesick." Both participants explained that they would talk to their parents just about every day. Ursa spoke about how she would talk to her parents and friends from home during this time, "Oh every day, every single day I would talk. Caroline stated that she talked to her parents during this time, "Probably every day."

American Culture. The participants were asked if anything surprised them upon their arrival to the US regarding the American people, environment, and culture. When asked if anything surprised her, Ursa responded saying, "I don't know. I mean, I really don't easily get surprised. Because everything is like, oh, I knew this. Whatever you see, and think I see, I already know this. So, you know, I don't get surprised." However, she talked about what she noticed about Americans, "People don't talk here. People don't talk. People are just in their phone while talking, while eating, while ordering, while studying, while sitting, while commuting.

Everywhere people are on their phone." She compared this to her observations of her friends

back home, "They talk. They talk. They talk a lot. Even when there is wifi, even if they have

phone they talk."

Caroline described how she was surprised by how Americans responded and acted to

diversity related things,

> I think a lot of it is a blur. I think for me it was just more so about realizing that it was a
>
> melting pot of different cultures. I think coming in from the Bahamas and going to a
>
> different country you kind of realize that it's not just you, like, I'm so used to be in a
>
> place where 80 to 90 percent of the population is someone who looks like me, all
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> whohave the same origins like me, so I think coming over and seeing that there's different
>
> multitudes of that. I visited the United States before, but actually to go ahead and live, it
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> just was so different because my roommate didn't look like me. You know, I came in
>
> with other international students who were not from places like me. So I think it was just
>
> more interesting to see the diverse amount of people and see how to incorporate all that
>
> into one culture.

These participants identified that part of their early adjustment to studying in the US was

impacted by their understanding and interpretation of American culture. They identified coming

in and thinking they understood the culture but learned new insights about it as they went.

Academics. For the participants, academics was a big part of their experience in the first

few weeks. Participants were asked to talk about their early academic experiences. Ursa spoke

about her experiences in classes during the first couple of weeks. "It was like simple. I liked it.

The transition wasn't really difficult. I was just like, it went smooth." When asked about her

thoughts regarding the instructors, she responded with, "Yeah, they are very chill." However, she

did express, "But it was also, like, you know, kind of overwhelming, because I was this international student, and all these other people, like, they are all American."

> Caroline talked about her experiences during the first couple of weeks as classes started;
>
> I don't know. I think it was OK. I do think like looking back, I think some part of it was kind of intimidating. I do not remember talking as much in some of my classes. But I think it was just interesting to have the perspectives and stuff. But I also think I was very much so in my own little bubble.

She also talked about her impressions of her instructors and how her connections with the instructor here differed to her connections with instructors back in her home country.

> No one ever made me feel like no type of way of like, oh, you don't belong. I think it's a little different when compared to when I was getting my... When I was at my school back home. The college, I think the professors were more like laid back.
>
> These first impressions that the participants had were about how they were perceived and how they saw those around them. They identified wanting to not stand out and be accepted in the classroom.

First Semester. To gain greater insight in the transitional experiences both participants were asked to share their experiences and transition throughout the semester. Several things played a role in this part of their transition. Most importantly was their academic life, and their adjustment to this part of their experience.

Academics. They both had things to say about their experiences academically and how they struggled with their academics in some way during that first semester. Ursa discussed her challenges with academics,

I took this math class. And I was just, I was that kind of student, you know, who hated that class. You know, I was ignoring, procrastinating, even, I missed the exam. That was the first time ever in this past two years that I missed my exam. And I was just not giving... Because I hated that class, and it was so difficult for me. And I just didn't like it. I didn't enjoy it. So it was the difficult part. Other than that, everything was perfect.

Caroline talked about her academic challenges and how it would be a learning moment for during the adjustment process.

I think academically I did struggle a lot because, I remember, I think my first school year I got like a 2.69 and I think it was because I got like two bad grades. There wasn't any bad grade; it was two C's, two B's. So I think it was like, as much as I knew that I went to, you know, I did a year back home, I think it was just that adjustment now to being in an new semester? I think that was the biggest thing, which was adjusting. And also just knowing that it's different. I think, for me, I was like OK, I'm still in college, but I'm still doing homework at my dining table or in my room at back home, whereas so now I didn't have someone to say, okay, are you doing your work? And I think it was just a whole different experience. The classes challenged to me, but also I think I was prepared for it, but it was just a big adjustment.

Caroline would go on to discuss her perceptions of the different educational systems;

I think institutions of higher education within the states are very structured. I mean, I think back home we are trying to retain that structure. You know, we are doing things that are necessarily to be an institution or being a university. But I feel as though we don't have as much resources as needed [back home].

When asked to describe their classroom experiences and how they have changed since the first couple of weeks, both participants had things to say about their relationships with their instructors. Ursa talked about the challenges she had with reaching out to professors, "I just don't know how to do it. I am just too introverted to talk. I don't know how to do it. But so many people suggest to me to do that." Ursa also discussed how she would notice how professors treat students differently and formulate relationships with some students.

> I know that for a fact that the students who professors like, because professors have lot of context, right. And if they recommend you for an internship, then you're going to get it. You know, I mean, that's how it works everywhere I feel like. And they don't recommend every student, there are like a hundred students in a class, but they only like, there few favorites, I think. And if you make that good relationship, If you maintain good GPA, I don't know. But I never had that kind of relationship with any professor.

Ursa talked about how she does have the desire to reach out to professors more,

> Yeah. Yeah. Of course. Some students have this ability to make a close relationship with professor then they [faculty] help in, you know, resume, an internship, and stuff and networking. But till now, I haven't had the chance to make that kind of strong relationship with any professor.

Caroline talked about her relationships with her professors as being very different from her relationships with instructors in her home country,

> When I was at my school back home. The college, I think the professors were more like laidback. I think it was more of like. I don't know, I think for me it is more of a better connection because, you know, they identify as me. So I think it was just fairly laid back.

Caroline also talked about her relationships with her professors during this time,

I think my first few classes, I experienced interactions. As I got into my undergraduate, like into my major, I think a lot of interactions I had with so many professors were very negative. So, I mean, I had one or two professors that were really amazing, like really nice. But then I think overall, at that point I kind of realized I was like the odd one out, if that makes sense.

As the semester progressed the participants observed more about their academic experience which influenced their experience and their transition.

Racial Issues. Ursa and Caroline both experienced racism as international students at their institutions which were predominately White. Ursa talked about her experiences with microagressions in particular with the way she spoke.

Since my first semester to this time, so many people have told me, firstly, oh, where are you from? And I say I'm from India, and then so many people have told me this. Oh, your English is really nice. They, like they are shocked that I am able to speak like this. I mean, I know I don't have an American accent, I mean I still like... But I know there's so many people like, oh your English is good. So many people has told me, like... Your English is also good. If your English is good, then my English is not good. And they ask me, oh how long have you been learning English? I'm like, I have not been learning. I don't know what to say. I mean, just like you were born, like I was born, like I mean, you know, I used to go kindergarten and I studied everything in English since my nursery school, you guys call it here, kindergarten.

Ursa remembers being treated differently than some of her coworkers at her job with the University Food Court.

I mean, you know the supervisor I talked about? I think with him, I felt like that. I used to work in a ship, in an assistantship. And there was like another two girls. One was, if I may say, you know, Black African and one was White American. And he was so perfect with both of them, like so so nice, so friendly. And towards me, he was always rude for like no reason, every, every single time. So, I literally felt like racism, kind of.

As Ursa continued to talk about her experiences with the University Food Court, she started talking about how these experiences also pertained to her English fluency.

Some of my workers, they are like, oh you speak good, but I don't understand what you are speaking. They say that to me. How am I supposed to understand what they are speaking? They just get irritated.

Ursa continued to discuss her reactions to those experiences.

I mean and I cannot see it then because I don't know, you know, ruin my relationship because of the students when they don't know what you mean. I want to anything to have a good relationship with the people I have been working with since past three years. But I was so mad just one day, like it was like last week I feel like. I was training this girl and she was slow and everyone was working there and they were like so mad and they were like... And they were all so mad at me. I don't know for what reason. I mean, she's not doing good, she's doing mistakes.

Caroline shared her experience dealing with racism while trying to make a purchase with her Bahamian card.

I think my biggest expense was I didn't realize how prevalent racism until like coming and living full time. I think I remember one time I was an international student. My undergrad required you to take a TB. I remember asking this lady to swipe my Bahamian

card because I have a debit card for my bank account back home and at that time I asked

her to swipe it and I said, if it doesn't go through, like I have money to pay. And she

literally was like she looked at me and she was like, don't you have to have a certain

amount of money to actually come to come here?

Caroline continued to talk about her reaction to the situation.

I think in that moment I was very frustrated, and I remember talking to my mom. I think

she was kind of frustrated. But, you know, looking back at it now, I think if I was who I

am now, I probably just said something smart, you know? So now it doesn't really affect

me, but it's just like pure ignorance that someone would say something like that.

Caroline talked about how her experiences with racism also pertain to being watched

while in public settings. "I think more so, what I talked about... I think a lot of it just something

like, you know, being watched, you know, going to Wal-Mart, and, you know, being a black

person watched."

Caroline also talked about a time during her undergrad where she was told that she would

be a diversity pick,

I remember my advisor telling me, you'll most likely be a diversity pick like... To this

day, and I will always remember that, because at that point like, she was

like, 'Your grades won't get you anywhere else. The only way you get in is because, you

know schools have to meet that quota, so you will be a diversity pick.'

Friend Groups. The participants were asked to share how their friend groups may have

changed later on in the first semester. Ursa stated,

I still have, I'm still friends with those people who have left the town of Dano, you know,

like through social media. But I'm like, still have good relationships with even the people

who are not in the town of Dano, elsewhere, and even the people who are here right now.

So, I think... I'm friends with everyone.

Caroline talked about her friend groups as staying roughly the same,

I still have the same friends. I still really had the constant same amount of friends that I

had from when I started. I think at that point it was like people are starting to get more

involved, but I still have my best friend, you know. My friend who came in my spring

semester. I still had like a couple of Bahemians that I was still talking to when we came

together, so we were still all close.

Present Day. Ursa and Caroline were asked to share how they have changed up to

present day. The participants shared about how they have been influenced as they have adapted

and how they have learned to work within the academic culture in the US. Ursa talked about

how she continues to procrastinate the same just as she did in the past. "I think I'm just like...

Personally, right? I'm still the same in studies. I used to procrastinate at that. I'm procrastinating

right now. So that has not changed at all." She Continued,

I'm similar, but personal changes, like I've just become more strong. I was really

naive when I came, and I you know, I used to have so much expectations from everyone,

even people who are not close to me and now I'm just like, I'm very strong. I don't really

cry easily. Earlier, I just used to cry very easily. Someone saying something mean to me,

you know, I'll get hurt and I'll cry, even if at work or anywhere. But now I'm just like,

you know, I don't use bad words, but I just like...

Caroline talked about her transformation, "I'm just someone who's proud to be who I am,

and just trying to live my best life." She also shared how college has helped her learn more about

herself,

I think for me, I am completely different. I think in undergrad, you know, people always say, you know you are so innocent, you know. I think I had a very, I have had tunnel vision. I think coming in and being in this program now is like made me more of who I am and I'm able to like be my authentic self, but also be appreciative of my culture and who I am as a person and where I'm from. So I think I'm not the kind of person when I came to the United States in 2014.

Influences. The participants identified what influenced them the most since their arrival to the United States. Ursa responded with, "People and situations." And she went on to provide a specific experience,

So earlier like, two years ago, I had a roommate who was like nine years older than me. She was doing her second masters. And she was very much organized and she was very much, you know, money management kind of stuff. Go to gym. Eat only healthy food and apply for internships and just be productive every day, you know? And she was like don't waste money. Don't go to restaurants. Just go at home and eat healthy. So I was becoming more like her and I used to stay with her, like, you know, I didn't waste money. I used to eat healthy at home. I used to do my homework in time because I was sharing room with her. So that influenced me. Now I have another roommate. She is a year younger than me. And she's like wild. And she likes to party. She likes to, you know, to be honest, break rules. She likes to just go over and beyond limits, so I'm kinda, she like, she makes no mistakes. So that's how people change you.

When Caroline was asked what the biggest influence for her since her arrival to the United States has been, she stated, "I think the culture." She was asked to give a specific experience she had, to which she responded with,

I think for me, being in my undergrad and being around Bahamians, I knew that I had

that culture. You know, we would cook food and cook things that are from back home.

And even like doing my internship over the summer, being around Caribbean people,

being around people that share some of the same ideologies, as you, so yeah.

Caroline also cited her extracurricular involvements as having a big influence,

I think the majority of them, all the organizations I was involved in; paved some type of

way to be where I want to be. So I think a lot of those organizations, I just joined because

I wanted to join them. But not realizing that in that moment, in that time, that

organization is serving an even bigger purpose on my life. So I think if I was not so

heavily involved within those admissions... With being an admissions ambassador or

president leadership fellow or being an RA, I probably... Not probably, I wouldn't have

been here today, if that makes sense. I probably would have been somewhere trying to

get my... Get my degree in speech path and probably hating it every step of the way. I

think a lot of those organizations paved the way for me.

The participants identified how people influenced their experience. These experiences

came through roommates and involvement. Having people like them and not like them impacted

their experience at their institutions.

Academics. Academics played a big role in that initial transition so asking about it

beyond that early period provided further insight. Ursa and Caroline were asked to share how

they have adapted to the US system of Education. Ursa stated,

It's just easy. So it's not really difficult to adapt, because the exams are easy. So the most

important thing is exam, right. Because you just have to study for exam and get good

grades. So if exams are easy, then you don't have to study a lot. I talked about differences

in exams. In India, like you have to write very long, like three hour long exams, like so long answers. You have to write a lot. You have to remember a lot, study a lot. Here, it's different.

Caroline talked about her overall transitional experience to the US system of Education. She cited her pursuing a master's degree as being a proud moment for her. "I think I have adapted pretty well, I'm here. I'm getting a masters. So I'm thinking I have adapted pretty much." However, she also did mention that as she looks back on it, she does regret having not pursued even more opportunities such as study abroad. "I think I want to take more opportunities. I think I've taken a lot of opportunities, but if I could go back, I would study abroad."

The Utilization of Resources

Every college provides a variety of resources to its students. Understanding which resources are utilized by the international students is important in helping set them up for success. The participants were asked about their utilization of resources and those they wish they either had or utilized more of. They both explained their experiences using resources for different reasons. Resources used included people such as family members and friends. The common themes include orientation, emotional and mental health support including support groups, resources most useful, and resources they lacked.

Orientation. In talking about what made their transition smoother, Ursa and Caroline talked about their international orientation experiences upon arriving to campus, and how this helped them learn about resources, meet other international students, and find their way around campus. Both reported having found their orientations helpful, particularly because it served as a way for them to learn about the different resources on campus. Ursa stated, "They told us about, you know, career services and the health center and, you know, all the things that career services

has to offer." Caroline also discussed how she learned about different resources through the orientation.

> I think during my international orientation, they did inform us about student accounts. They talked about international engagement. That's what it was called there, so that's the international office. And then housing, that was a big thing and the health clinic.

One of the resources that both Ursa and Caroline took advantage of as well was taking a tour of the campus led by upper-class international students. Ursa talked about her tour;

> So the you know, the international ambassadors? They took us everywhere and they were very cooperative, and they showed everything in the campus. So maybe like the first two days, I would say the international ambassadors, because I didn't know anyone.

Caroline also shared her experience with her campus tour. We all like separated, like they put places and teams I think we had like a meet up every day. I can remember they had like, you know, like a global leader or something, can't remember. And then they were to lead a group throughout those three days.

For these women, those connections to other international students who could guide them around campus was important. Those individuals also helped them identify resources available.

Emotional and mental health support. Going to another country to study can be both exciting and overwhelming as both participants identified in talking about their transition to college in the US. Participants were asked how they coped with this in order to understand what their support systems looked like and in identifying what resources they utilized to deal with this experience. They spoke about utilizing their family, friends, and campus resources which are further explained below.

Family Support. Ursa and Caroline both talked about how they turned to family as a resource for their means of emotional support. Each talked about calling their parents daily when the first arrived in the US. Ursa responded, "I used to talk like almost every day or every week. Yeah, usually every day at home and every week with friends." Caroline having been in the US longer now could not remember exactly but was sure that early on it was daily.

While both have had experiences where they have reached out to family for support, their reasons for doing so are vastly different. When asked who among her family she primarily turns to for support, Ursa responded with, "My brother;" identifying the cousin who lived close by. Ursa shares one particular moment where she had to turn to this person;

> In my first semester, I failed one of my classes, and before failing, I knew that I'm going to fail. I just, I knew I wasn't doing good. And I knew there's nothing I could do to make it better. It was computer applications and I hated it. And it was like, I don't know, I didn't like the class. So you know, that time, he supported me. He's like, it's okay. It's your first semester. Something is new. It's Okay. He's just supported me, you know? And he was like cooperative and easy to talk to.

Caroline talked about how she would have to turn to her family for support. "I think I relied on a lot of support on my family. I think that was the biggest thing, support from my family and my support system." When asked who among her family did she rely on the most, she responded with,

> I think that I talk to my mom the most out of all my family. I think my mom provides a lot of that guidance, that spiritual guidance for me. My dad, we talk very rarely, we don't talk very rarely, but we talk once a month, whenever I need money.

Caroline talked more about her situations where she needs to reach out to her family for support;

> I feel it as though it's a lot of times it's just me reaching out and I know like they have their lives going on, but a lot of times it's just me doing that reaching out because I need help. So it's like I know that I don't talk to them every day, but if I need something or my back is against the wall, I can call and say, OK, well this is what I need, can you help me out?

After being in the US for several years and completing her undergraduate degree Caroline was able to identify how her relationship with her family has shifted and how she uses them differently now compared to in the past.

> I think it's also just more of a sense of self independence, like my mom always says, you always ask me for everything. And not in a bad way, but because that's just my... I know my mom is going to have back no matter what... and if she doesn't have it, she's going to find a way to get it. I can ask my mom and I know she might not have it, so I be like, OK well, let me ask my God mom or ask my dad. So I think it's more of just going to that independence and if I don't have that, I don't have it.

These participants identified the important role their families play in supporting them not only through their transition but throughout their life. For Caroline it has been her mom and for Ursa it was her cousin who is also in the United States and can be easily contacted.

Friend/Peer Support. Ursa and Caroline each spoke about friends as a resource as well. Ursa discussed how she utilizes friends from home as well as friends around here for emotional support.

I always rely on some of the other people for emotional support. I don't think I'm

someone with emotional independence. It's always my best friends. Even if they are in

India or if they are here, I have always been privileged enough to have good people

around me. So I always like, two or three girl friends in my life, I always rely on them,

like almost every day of my life.

Caroline also talked about how she uses her friends when she is feeling a little homesick.

Because she came to college with several friends she looked at how they were acting. "I never

really had any emotional issues because I had my best friend, you know, because I had other

people that didn't feel homesick." According to Caroline, it was the people who she had

befriended or associated with which is why she didn't feel as homesick. She mentioned that there

were people whom she was with in college as well as people whom she knew elsewhere in the

United States pursuing college,

I think a lot to my best friend in my bachelor's. She lives in Florida. And she was she

went off a semester ahead of me. So I think I relied a lot on her to help. I did rely on a lot

of my friends back home for support as well as with my best friend. I relied a lot on him

and then the friends I actually made at CEC too.

Relying on someone either on the same campus, in the United States, or back in their

home country was one way these participants dealt with their transition to college. For the most

part what they utilized these individuals for was making connections, facing challenges, and

dealing with homesickness.

Campus Resources. The participants were asked if they relied on any additional

resources such as campus resources and international student resources for support into the first

semester, Ursa responded with, "I Never used any of that resources, to be honest." However, she did continue to say,

> Just library. I didn't have... I mean I had laptop, but it was so so slow, so I just used to go to the library. I just used the computer in the library, always. I love the library.
>
> I cannot study at home usually.

While Caroline didn't specifically say she used any resources from the International Student Office, she did state, "I noticed that the school provided many resources for international students which I thought was really cool."

Caroline continued to state,

> I think I just continued to rely on a lot of support on my family. I think that was the biggest thing, support from my family and my support system. So like my family, my close friends, I relied a lot of them to help see me through.

Caroline also pointed out that in addition to her family and friends, she found that she was also able to rely on the connections she developed with other Bahamian international students.

> I think it was more so just having that second family? I think Bahamians at UCF they kind of try to establish that community. So we all have like a WhatsApp group. So, I mean, although I never really go out to stuff like that, it's just more so of being in that community. And then one of my good friends, she came to my undergrad in my spring semester. So, having her there was good because then she had become like my support person. So just having someone to go eat in the cafeteria with
>
> or, you know, go to a program with, or go to the gym, stuff like that.

Additional Resources. The participants were asked to talk about resources they wish they had or had more of, and resources they found to be most useful. Both participants discussed how family and peers were a big part of their support system. However, they were asked to share any campus resources they found to be helpful. Ursa talked about the resources the found to be most useful, however, none of them were campus resources. Ursa was asked more specifically if she used any of the resources provided by the different offices on campus and her response was, "I didn't use any of that." Caroline talked about how the most useful resources for her has been the opportunities provided by the institution for international students. "I think just the opportunities they afford international students. You know, being able to... get a job... Being able to get higher educations. I think those are some things that are good factors."

Social Interactions

The participants were asked questions regarding their social interactions in both their home countries and in the United States. Their friend groups and social interactions did change over time, but in different ways. The common themes are friend groups, involvement, faculty and staff, and jobs.

Friend Groups. Ursa and Caroline were asked to talk about their social experiences in and outside of school.

When Ursa and Caroline arrived to the US and went through their International Student Orientation, they both talked about how they were able to connect and interact with other students from the beginning. Ursa would meet her roommate, also an international student, and ultimately become friends with her. "I found a roommate. And then I became friends with her, she was from Nepal." Caroline talked about her experience, "So I really connected with the other Bahamians that came at the same time as us."

In describing her friend group Ursa shared,

Oh, I still have very few friends, like all international student pretty much, very

comfortable with a few friends. But they're like very very very good and close

friends. So like, quantity over quality. Even in the India, I have very few people. Here I

also have very few people. It was never a lot of people, it was never that case. I think it's

just what we do is similar, even there we just you know, if you watch a movie or if we

hang out, if we go out and eat or if we just like talk and talk or we walk and talk. So here,

I do the same thing. So there's nothing really different on how I maintain friendships or

what we do as friends.

Caroline talked about her friend group as being small. "At that point [early in her time at

the college], I had like three or four people that I just talked to. And they were mostly, they were

the people that I came with." She also explained. "I think also a majority of Bahamians like

literally the Bahamians that I came with, we were all pretty cool. So, I've started to meet other

Bahamians there [already at the institution]."

The participants also talked about social activities with their friend groups. For Ursa, she

stated that she would mostly do laid back and indoor activities.

Sometimes we just talk, talk about everything and everything. Sometimes we watch

movies. Sometimes we cook together. Sometimes, we play cards. Or sometimes, we play

other like, you know, like they see things like they see games like you know in different

games, from back home. Or, sometimes we just go for a walk or sometimes we go to gym

together. Sometimes we go to dinner together.

Ursa discussed how in addition to that, she among other international students would be

invited to events held by the international organizaiton.

The only outside event I used to go was [international organization] events, and that's how I used to meet new people, and that's the fun. And even like the [international organization] people have, you know, different location. They have the different, you know, small house parties or whatever. And they used to invite people initially. So I just used to go there. That's the outside event I think I have been to.

Caroline was asked about what she did with friends, and her response was, "I just was very involved in the RHA and within like the houses stuff that they had going on so I did that."

When Ursa was asked how her friend groups have changed over time, her shared,

I still have, I'm still friends with those people who have left [college town], you know, like through social media. But I'm like, still have good relationships with even the people who are not in [college town], elsewhere, and even the people who are here right now. So, I think... I'm friends with everyone.

Caroline spoke about how her friend groups would change.

I think spring semester was really good. I think I do remember having a lot of issues like friend group wise, I think, like I had one girl in particular. She left. And then I had some falling out with friends. It was nothing I did this long. So I think it was a lot of a lot of time for growth and change. I started to realize who were my friends.

For both of these participants their relationships were mainly around other international students, and those they became connected through their involvement. They both also acknowledged how their friendships changed over time.

Interactions with Faculty/Staff. Part of the experience students have on campus is interacting with faculty and staff for a variety of reasons. Both participants were asked to talk

about their social interactions with their instructors and other staff on campus. Ursa described her interactions with her instructors as very minimal since she did not speak to them much.

> I only talk to professors when I have questions about any stuff that I don't understand, or I have to go through my exam again. Other than that, nothing other than... I never had, I never meet them, you know.

She also shared what she observed in relation to how her fellow classmates related to instructors.

> Some students have this ability to make a close relationship with a professor and then they help in, you know, resume, an internship, and stuff and networking. But until now, I haven't had the chance to make that kind of strong relationship with any professor.

Ursa continued, "I just don't know how to do it. I am just too introverted to talk. I don't know how to do it. But so many people suggest to me to do that." She was then asked if she wishes she could reach out to instructors more. She responded with,

> Yeah. Yeah. Of course. Because I know that for a fact that the students who professor likes, because professors have lot of context, right. And if they recommend you for an internship, then you're going to get it. You know, I mean, that's how it works everywhere I feel like. And they don't do recommend every student, there are like a hundred students in a class, but they only like, their few favorites, I think. And if you make that good relationship, if you maintain good GPA, I don't know. But I never had that kind of relationship with any professor.

Caroline talked about her interactions with her instructors. She emphasized that many of those interactions were not always positive ones.

I think my first few classes, I experienced many interactions. As I got into my

undergraduate, like into my major, I think a lot of interactions I had with so many

professors were very negative. I had one or two professors that were really amazing,

like really nice. But then I think overall, at that point I kind of realized I was like the odd

one out, if that makes sense.

Involvements. Colleges in the US provide all sorts of opportunities for students to

become involved; however, in other countries this isn't necessarily the case so identifying ways

that international students get involved on campus was important. The participants were asked to

share what kinds of social activities they did with their friend groups.

Caroline shared how she become involved because of special activities geared

specifically for international students. "So my undergrad does a Welcome Week. They usually

have like a freshman picnic. So one of the organizations that I was involved with, I met them

through the freshman picnic." She then went on to talk about how meeting a specific person at

this event would lead her to meet other students.

So she just sat and she talked to me. And then the other one, I think I met them, too

during move in. Because international students move on campus before regular move in,

so it was during some with activities they had. One of the girls, she saw me and she was

just like, you know, nice talking to you after we rarely talked. And then it was like a few

days later they brought us cookies to our room, and then they started to build that

connection with us and started talking.

She would go on to describe how these relationships got her further involved,. "So, the

girl who I spoke to during Welcome Week, she talked to me about this organization, the College

Christian Campus Ministry and asked if I was interested in joining."

Ursa also spoke about her involvements, "I joined Student Government. Jennifer, she's in Student Government and she just influenced me and forced me to join." However, Ursa eventually left the organization, "It was boring so I left. I didn't enjoy the meetings." When asked if she had the desire to get involved in any additional extra-curriculars, she responded with, "I don't want to."

Caroline shared how her extra-curricular involvements further developed,

So in my undergrad, I was really involved, so I was involved in the Caribbean Student Association for my three years there, so that was a good time. I was involved in the International Residence Hall Honorary, which is this is the organization, the Residence Hall Association houses and was involved in that. I was also involved in the President Leadership Fellows.

Each student will find their own comfort in becoming engaged on campus. For one participant becoming involved led to getting further involved. The other participant became involved in one thing and did not enjoy her experience as much, and thus chose to not get involved in other organizations.

Jobs. International students are only allowed to work on campus in most situations, and this was certainly the case for the participants in this study. While some may not necessarily see jobs as a form of social interaction, the participants spoke about the opportunities they had to engage with and meet other students and staff through this experience. Ursa talked about her experience with her job with the University Dining Services. She described her social interactions with coworkers and supervisors sharing:

People in food court, like, I mean, not all people have... I don't know what you feel about me, but I think my, you know, the way I communicate, it's pretty clear. People don't have

to ask again. They understand the first time. I say it. You know, the thing, I speak clearly

with my English. But some people, even from my country, you know, South Indians, they

don't really speak, as clearly as I'm doing. And mostly all people from India are South

Indians, so they work in food courts. Some of my workers, they are like, oh you speak

good, but I don't understand what you are speaking. They say that to me. How am I

supposed to understand what they are speaking?

Ursa went on to share that she wished she worked somewhere else where they weren't so tough

on her. "I wish that I worked somewhere else. Food court is so strict"

Caroline talked about what motivated here to seek out a certain job;

I tried to tap into my leadership and speaking skills. So I think I remember a lot of

the Bahamians that I went with and that time, we all like tried to apply to be an RA and

then I applied to be a Camps and Conferences Assistant. So, my involvement with

me being an RA, I was able to go to conferences. So, I think each leadership position

opposition, I had a lot of that opportunity stuff."

Caroline continued to state how her involvements would alter her friend groups and

impacted the way she interacted with others. "Being an RA and on the Hall Council gave me the

skills to socialize with others a lot easier than before."

Caroline emphasized how it was through her position as an RA, among her other

involvements which would pave the way towards what she wanted to do as a career.

I think the majority of them... all organizations I was involved in paved some type of way

to be where I want to be. So I think a lot of those organizations, I just joined because I

wanted to join them. But not realizing that in that moment, in that time, that organization

is serving an even bigger purpose on my life.

Summary

The participant's experiences upon arrival to the United States have been shared and used to address each of the three research questions. Each participant shared experiences pertaining to their transition to the US, the utilization of resources and their social interactions. These give us some insight into the experiences of these two participants as they transitioned to college in the US.

Chapter 6

Discussion

The purpose of the conducted study was to explore the transitions of international students as they pursue college in the United States. This study was guided by three research questions: (1) How do international students describe their transition to college; (2) what resources do international students utilize; (3) how do international students describe their social interactions? This chapter discusses the experiences shared by the participants while utilizing a theoretical framework, as well as presents implications for student affairs professionals and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

International students experience a variety of challenges upon their arrival to the United States. Challenges include various stressors as a result of personal, demographic, and/or social makeup that occur as a result of the individual having to adjust with the host culture (Wadsworth, Hecht, and Jung, 2008). This study provides further evidence that the international students may come across several roadblocks that inhibit both their personal and academic development. Challenges include culture shock, academic barriers, social skills including English fluency, loyalty to family and culture of origin, and financial difficulties (Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, and Pace, 2014). Nonetheless, there are various ways in which international students have combated the challenges that come with adjusting to a new culture. Depending on a variety of factors such as country and culture of origin, gender, among other characteristics and personality traits, individuals will utilize different strategies when coping with the adjustment process (Brown and Holloway, 2008).

Transition to the United States. Both participants in this study discussed their experiences while transitioning to the United States. They talked about their experiences with adjusting to the new culture, developing relationships with others, adjusting to the American education system, and coping with racism and discrimination. However, the two participants would also have very different experiences since they both come from two different countries and cultures and make up two different identities.

Arrival. Lysgaard (1955) identified that international students go through several phases during their time abroad, coining the term U-curve. While talking about their arrival to the United States, they both shared about how excited they were in those first few days. This is what Oberg (2012) spoke about as part of the honeymoon phase. Ursa and Caroline both talked about how they arrived with someone they knew. In Schlossberg's (1981) theory identifying one's support system is an important part of anyone's transition. The participants in this study both identified how having people they knew as part of this initial arrival was important. Ursa was also greeted by her cousin at the airport, while Caroline was not greeted by anyone, but did arrive with a friend from back home. They also went on to speak about how they began to make connections with other international students very early on in their entry process. This is important because it this is where they are first exposed to a different environment consisting of a different culture. Therefore, they will go through a process of developing as they experience this new culture, as emphasized in the Chickering and Reisser (1993) seven vector theory of development.

Orientation. The purpose behind orientation is to increase students' connection and comfort at the institution, in a sense it is a process of acculturation to the institution and the United States system of higher education . Orientation programs range in activities depending on

the institution yet are aimed to aid student transition and achieve student success (Perrine and

Spain, 2009). Schlossberg (1981) in identifying how people transition talked about the

importance of support as well as strategies as they relate to the self and the situation one is in.

Transitioning to college as well as transitioning to the United States is a huge new experience for

any individual. While discussing their experiences going through international student

orientation, they both talked about how they found it helpful because they learned about various

resources that the campus has to offer. Resources they identified as helpful included the

counseling services, student accounts and financial aid, and housing. The participants also shared

how they learned about various student organizations they could become involved in. Chickering

and Reisser (1993) talked about developing competence. This includes intellectual competence,

physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). For

the international student participants in this study developing competence included learning

about the surrounding environment, including what resources are provided and how they could

utilize those resources to their advantage. This may be deemed as particularly challenging in a

new environment because resources that are provided here may not be provided back in their

home country, or resources they were used to having access to may not be available or may be

called something different in the US.

It is through orientation programs where students are able to form connections and

develop meaningful relationships with others, thus develop feelings of connectedness to the

institution (Perrine and Spain, 2008). In the case of the two participants, orientation intentionally

provided them with opportunities to develop relationships with other international students,

including individuals from the same country. They identified that these individuals quickly

became a part of their new life in this environment. It was through orientation where they would develop relationships with other international students, including those from the same country.

In Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vector theory of development, the second vector identifies that managing emotions is crucial in understand how others express their emotions, as well as understanding what their own emotions convey. During orientation, the participants had the opportunity to develop relationships with others, thus formulate their support system consisting of those people. Part of being able to develop healthy relationships requires that one has the ability to understand their own emotions and the emotions of others (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

First Couple of Weeks. Ursa and Caroline discussed their experiences a couple of weeks into the first semester. Ursa remembers it being a smooth transition. However, she also did find classes to be a bit overwhelming. Caroline talked about her experience during the first couple of weeks as becoming more acclimated with her roommates, as well as starting to see who her friends really were.

Coping is a crucial factor in one's process of managing emotions (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Tan and Winkelman (2004) emphasize how coping is a process in which one maintains psychological adjustment during times of stress. The participants talk about how their experiences during the first couple of weeks. These feelings for both participants were a mix of euphoria and sadness or confusion. At some point during their first couple of weeks, both of them admitted to not being sure as to how they should feel. Managing emotions was an eminent process while having to adjust to being outside of their home country and away from their family.

Homesickness. Ursa stated that initially she didn't have any feelings of homesickness due to feeling so excited about being in the United States. She was still in the honeymoon phase as described by Lysgaard (1955). Nonetheless, she did state that she would sometimes feel homesick later on; however, it wasn't anything she couldn't handle due to having a strong support group. This is an example of how Ursa was transitioning out of that honeymoon phase into the disillusionment phase as described by Lysgaard (1955). Caroline discussed how she did feel homesick some of the time; however, she had a strong support group of friends and family whom she was able to reach out to for support. Both participants stated that they would speak with their parents every day or almost every day. Part of managing emotions involves having to cope with stressful situations (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). In the case of the participants, they were both able to rely on friends and family for emotional support during times of homesickness and anxiety. The participants during this time were relying on their support systems from their home countries as well as developing new strategies and systems of support.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) discussed developing competence as being an important phase in the seven vectors in which one begins to understand the cultural significance and meaning of their surrounding environment. The participants discussed what surprised them about the different culture as they were learning to maneuver through it. Ursa talked about how she saw many people sticking to their mobile devices and not socializing as much as they do in her home country. Caroline talked about how she was surprised by the representation of different races and cultures, something she stated she did not see much of in her home country. A crucial part of this phase for the participants was developing an understanding of the culture represented here in the US and the way in which others behave. This is what could be described as

developing cultural competence so that one may effectively manage their emotions and develop relationships with others (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

American Culture. This process of acculturation also firmly moves them from the honeymoon phase described by Lysgaard (1955) to the disillusionment phase. Adjusting to this new environment is a transition that perhaps was not fully anticipated by the participants, at least to the extent to which they felt it. This type of unanticipated transition as described by Schlossberg (1981) can only maneuvered through by individuals when they have the right strategies and support in place to manage it. Both participants picked up on differences between their fellow international students and the behaviors of their American counterparts. Chickering and Reisser (1993) emphasized interpersonal competence as being an important learning process, particularly understanding how people communicate and interact (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Caroline discussed how she was surprised by the amount of diversity that exists in the US, and how she learned to move through the different populations on her campus interacting and working with the different groups. Chickering and Reisser (1993) emphasized how being exposed to a different composition of diversity will have an influence in which one is able to comprehend a different culture (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Academics. Ursa and Caroline both talked about how the first couple of weeks of being in classes was either intimidating or overwhelming due to various reasons. Ursa talked about her experience with transitioning into classes as being smooth. However, she did also find it difficult to reach out to instructors yet had the desire to want to reach out. Caroline talked about how she did have a few negative experiences with professors in the past and that it was a little intimidating due to finding it more challenging to develop connections with professors here in the US, as opposed to instructors back in her home country. Part of the ability to develop

competency is being able to understand how others communicate, therefore learning how to communicate with them to develop relationships (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

      The Utilization of Resources. The participants talked about resources they utilized during their transition while in the United States, as well as resources they lacked and wish they had. Resources allowed them to cope with their transition and work through challenges such as homesickness, academic challenges, as well as social skills and the formulation of relationships. There are resources they lacked and wish they had more of, particularly more international student resources and opportunities, which would have been helpful in their transition process.

      Orientation. Every college provides a variety of resources to its students, as it understands the importance of supporting students through this transition. It is during the orientation in which students have the opportunity to learn about these resources. Both participants discussed having learned about various resources. They talked about receiving information about the accounts office, career services and the health center. Developing competence is about developing an intellectual and interpersonal understanding, as well as physical and manual skills (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). This includes being aware of one's surrounding environment including the available resources and having the confidence to utilize those resources (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Schlossberg (1981) talked about the self as well as support being important in one's transition. How confident the individual is in seeking out the support is important as well as having the knowledge about what is available to them. The level of support is determined by one's surrounding environment including what is provided, which is described as institutional support (Schlossberg, 1981). As international students come into the United States, it is important to inform them about the support systems that the institution

provides so that they become aware. In this study both participants identified having lots of

resources made available but not always accessing them on their own.

   Emotional and Mental Health Support. Going to another country for an extended period

of time to pursue a degree can be emotionally and mentally draining (Li, Wang, Xiao,

2014; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2002; Shupe, 2007; Andrade, 2006; Lee and Rice,

2007; Elturki, Liu, Hjeltness, and Hellman, 2019). This is why the participants described the

various experiences pertaining to their ability to cope with the transition. Each discussed having

turned to family for immediate emotional support. The participants talked about how whenever

they would feel either homesick or upset, they would turn to family first. Schlossberg (1981)

described support as an important part of an individual's interpersonal support system toward

coping with challenging situations. To rely on their family for support was important to both of

them since they were able to cope with the emotional stress they had to bear throughout their

college experience. And for each the use of technology was critical to maintaining those

connections. One participant discussed how she had a brother who lives in the US only a couple

of hours away, and whom she was able to reach out to when needed. To have someone live

within driving distance was important to her mental health. The other participant stated that her

mother in particular provided her with a lot of spiritual guidance. This was crucial for her since

she needed the motivation to work towards her career goals.

   They also stated that they would also turn to their friends for support. International

students need to surround themselves with others including various friendship groups, because

this is a crucial part of one's ability to successfully cope with difficult situations, situations that

particularly bring emotional burdens. In both cases their primary friend groups were made up of

other international students who understood what they were going through. Those who have

larger support systems are less likely to experience situations pertaining to stress (Schlossberg, 1981; Kotewa, 1981). As international students travel to a destination outside of their home country for college, it is important to recognize that they need to connect with others so that they can have the support they need to be successful. The students were also experiencing shifting microsystems as part of their transition.

Bronfenbrenner (1992) described the microsystem as the environment that has the greatest impact and influence on the individual. As these students transitioned away from their family and friends in their home country who had played a significant role on their life now found themselves relying on the friends they were making in this new environment and they saw those back home moving in to their macrosystem and still having an influence but not as great. It is important for individuals to develop relationships with others who are different from them; this requires that one take into account cultural and ethnic identities among groups. For the participants, this may take longer to develop since they were more inclined to develop connections with other international students, as opposed to domestic students. Nonetheless, developing relationships with other international students allowed them to form connections based on those with similar experiences, thus being able to relate to them in some way (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). One of the participants stated that having her connections with other Bahamian international students was like having another family. This exemplifies the importance of having an interpersonal relationship with others, especially those who have had similar experiences.

The participants discussed their experiences coping with challenging situations and using resources to help them cope. From learning about both participants and their challenges, it is important that when one encounters a difficult situation, they take the time to reflect on who they

are as a person. This includes their characteristics, like where they come from, their beliefs, past experiences, and attitudes. For Ursa and Caroline to be self-aware was important so that they could understand how to cope with a situation and understand what resources they needed to utilize. Schlossberg's (1981) theory of transition talks about self as a component to one's ability to cope with a situation; and self has to do with one's inner strength and emotional power when coping with a situation. It is important that one remains aware of their own beliefs, abilities, perceptions, and attitudes (Barclay, 2017). Before Ursa and Caroline utilize any resources, they must first be aware of their own strength and capabilities so that they can identify what resources will be most helpful for them and their situation.

Ursa and Caroline both reported having experienced some type of homesickness, sadness, or confusion during the first couple of weeks. In addition, Ursa and Caroline both experienced challenges pertaining to their academics once classes started. Schlossberg's (1981) theory of transition talks about the situation as referring to the specific situation the individual is experiencing (Schlossberg, 1981). More than likely the individual is probably going through a life transition at the time of the situation, just like Ursa and Caroline. For the participants, experiencing many of these different feelings were unexpected; therefore, they didn't always quite know what to do in order to cope or deal with those feelings. Schlossberg (1981) emphasized that situations can either be internal or external. Internal would mean that the situation occurred as a result of a deliberate action by the individual. External would mean that the situation occurred as a result of other individuals or outside circumstances (Schlossberg, 1981). For the participants in this study they were impacted by both the internal and external.

The participants both made the decision to pursue their college education in the United States, which would make their feelings of sadness, homesickness, confusion, and so on as

internal situations (Schlossberg, 1981). The participants also experienced racism and discrimination; and this would be an external situation because it involved other individuals treating them in a certain way (Schlossberg, 1981). Ursa experienced a situation in which she was struggling with one of her classes and she knew at that point in time was that it was a difficult class and did not enjoy it. It was important for her to take the time to assess why she is struggling specifically, and then figure out how she could push through it, and for her this meant seeking out the right help or assistance. Caroline experienced a situation where she struggled academically during the first semester. Caroline discussed how she reflected on the semester and concluded that it had to do with adjusting to a new culture. She stated she took time to think about what she could do to be better the following semester. It was important for her to understand the specific situation she was experiencing because this is what allowed her to make decisions as to how she would cope with the situation, including what resources to utilize. Ursa and Caroline have experienced situations where they have been able to reflect and try to comprehend why it happened or why they struggled, and finally how they made it through.

The participants experienced a number of challenges upon their arrival to the US. These challenges have not only impacted them personally but have also served as valuable learning opportunities. Caroline shared her experience with racism and what she took away from the experience. She stated that the situation made her feel frustrated as a result. She also stated that if a similar situation were to happen again, she would have responded by educating the individual. Schlossberg (1981) talked about strategies as the way in which one attempts to change or alter a situation, reframe the situation, as well as cope with the stress that occurs as a result . This experience served as a learning outcome for Caroline because she was able to reflect on the situation and think about what she could have done to respond, as well as manage the feelings

she experienced as a result. Schlossberg (1981) emphasized that there are four types of strategies one can utilize: modifying the situation, changing the meaning of the situation, controlling or managing the situation, or taking deliberate action. This situation allowed Caroline to understand what strategies she can utilize if a similar situation were to occur again so that she has more control over the outcome.

Caroline shared that the next time, she would likely say something as a response to the individual. This would be considered as taking deliberate action. She also stated that over time, situations like the one she just experienced, she now just usually ignores them since they are not worth getting too upset about. This would be considered as changing the meaning of the situation. It is important for international students to take the time to reflect on their experiences so that they can identify the key points and use them as learning opportunities. Strategies are what help international students react to situations so that they can continue to thrive in society (Schlossberg, 1981; Barclay, 2017). In order for Ursa and Caroline to continue manage difficult situations, it is crucial that they understand the strategies they can implement so that they may have more control over the outcome.

Ursa and Caroline both discussed their experiences with developing relationships with others including other international students. Both stated that their friends would make up at least part of their support systems. Ursa emphasized that while she had very few friends, she was satisfied with her friend group because they were all people whom she could relate to since they were mostly international students. Caroline also stated that she had very few friends, most of whom were other Bahamian international students. Nonetheless, she remained very close to all of them and was able to rely on them for support. Schlossberg (1981) identified interpersonal support as being an eminent component in one's support system when coping with challenging

situations. It is important for one's support system to be made up of individuals who share similar experiences or have something in common, such as other international students (Schlossberg, 1981). This is what allows them to form a common connection, thus receive the adequate support that they need.

Ursa and Caroline discussed their experiences with utilizing campus resources as a means of support. Both shared having not taken advantage of many of the resources that were provided. Reasons were either because they did not feel the need to or because they felt comfortable with what they had, which was primarily their support groups. This does not necessarily mean that they have not faced challenges, rather it could mean that there is another means of support they find to be more effective. For instance, both stated they would reach out to friends and family for almost anything. In fact, interpersonal support appeared to be the most effective means of support when dealing with challenging situations. Schlossberg (1981) emphasized the importance of institutional support to one's success. It is important for college campuses to create and maintain safe spaces where students can feel comfortable with reaching out for support for any reason. Nonetheless, depending on the individual, one may not feel the need to reach out for any additional support simply because they just do not need it, or they think they can figure it out themselves. It is also important to think about individuals who have their own means in dealing with their mental and physical health (Schlossberg, 1981; Mori, 2000). For some individuals, like Ursa and Caroline, interpersonal support is the more effective means of coping with challenging situations. It is important for one to understand that different individuals need a different means of support. It all depends on the individual and the situation they are experiencing (Schlossberg, 1981; Mori, 2000).

Over the course of the time the participants have been in the US, they have adapted and transformed in profound ways. Caroline defined her transformation after undergrad as becoming more comfortable with being her authentic self. She also stated that she has learned to be more appreciative of her culture. Ursa defined her transformation as having become a stronger woman. She remembers coming into the US as being naïve and having high expectations of others. She stated that she is more emotionally independent and is able to handle difficult situations on her own. The transformations of the two participants shows that they have been able to adapt to the new cultural environment to some extent with and without resources provided by the institution.

Social Interactions. When Ursa and Caroline first arrived the US, they were immediately exposed to a different culture and environment. While Ursa stated that she was not surprised by anything, Caroline stated that she was surprised by the amount of diversity and the representation of different cultures. Lysgaard's (1955) u-curve theory talks about the Honeymoon Phase as the initial time period in which a student first enters a new community. During this time, one is comfortable with being in the host country while sticking to their cultural roots (Lysgaard, 1955). Ursa and Caroline shared that they didn't feel anything but happiness and excitement due to being in an entirely different country. They both expressed excitement for being on this next part of their journey towards receiving a college education. All they could think about at this time was that it was a different climate, therefore, there would be a lot of opportunity to learn and expose one's self to new insights and ideas (Lysgaard, 1955). Nonetheless, they haven't quite understood the meaning that culture will play in their everyday lives (Lygaard, 1955; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, 2002). During orientation, they shared that they would immediately interact with other international students. Ursa shared that she met other international students who came from countries with similar cultures as her. Caroline stated that she met international

students also from the Bahamas. During the Honeymoon Phase of the U-Curve Theory, international students are comfortable with the different culture because they are given the opportunity of interacting with other international students and students with similar cultures as them. In other words, they are able to adhere to their own cultural roots (Lysgaard, 1955). Nonetheless, eventually they will realize that the host culture will play a bigger role into their everyday lives, where they will be exposed to cultures that are drastically different from there's. This will in turn have an impact on their own cultural awareness and identity, thus shift the way they function as a part of society (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 2012).

In understanding the participants experience it was important to understand their social interactions and how they described them throughout their experience. Upon their arrival to the United States, Ursa and Caroline have experienced social interactions that have transformed them and impacted their transition to the US. It is important to assess their interactions with others because it is a crucial component to their overall adaptation to the different cultural climate. The people one chooses to interact with varies between different individuals. In this case, the participants found it easy to develop relationships with other international students because they shared something in common. Social interactions allow international students to learn about others' cultures and experiences, pick up on social cues and behaviors, thus grasping an understanding of the overall social climate.

Friend Groups. Ursa and Caroline discussed their interactions with other students including international students during orientation. Both emphasized that their friend groups remained small; however, they went on to state that they were satisfied with their friends because they would become very close to each other through their time at the institution. Chickering and Reisser (1993) discussed when develop mature interpersonal relationships, international students

may insist on creating relationships with other international students because they will likely have more in common. Both participants stated that they have very positive and healthy relationships with the few friends that they have, because they feel as if they can reach out to them any time, they need some type of support. For these participants, it was important that they had relationships with individuals who share something in common with them, such as being an international student. Having these commonalities allows them to turn to each other for emotional support. The participants found it especially easy to develop relationships with international students who were from the same country. For instance, Caroline met several other Bahamian students during her orientation. The participants were able to develop relationships with domestic students, yet the numbers remained small because they found it to be a lot easier to stick in their circle of international students. The ease at which they were able to develop relationships with domestic students or international students from different countries depended on the similarities they shared. According to Shupe (2007), the extent to which people from different cultures may interact depends largely on the distance between cultural backgrounds (Shupe, 2007). To develop relationships with domestic students or students who are come from vastly different cultures could be a challenge because having only been in the US for a short period of time, one isn't fully competent on many other cultures. Therefore, developing competence of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vector development theory is an eminent process one must go through in order to develop relationships with others who comes from different cultures.

Over time, the participants describe how their friend groups would evolve. Caroline discussed how she would have a falling out with some friends and eventually find out who were really her friends. This would be a result of her finally realizing who she had a truly positive and

meaningful connection with. Part of this was realizing who she could relate to on a cultural level, as well as being able to identify the impact of cultural identities with others so that she could develop an even stronger relationship with them. Shupe (2007) emphasized that there may be a great cultural barrier between two or more individuals, nonetheless, it is up to those individuals to dismantle the barriers and develop a mature interpersonal relationship. This takes tolerations and appreciation of one another's cultural differences (Shupe, 2007). In the end both participants identified that although they made connections with American students they were predominantly staying with those that were international or identified with similar cultural identities to themselves.

  Interactions with Faculty/Staff. Both participants had some level of difficulty with interacting with their professors. Neither identified having faculty play a role in their orientation process, which could have provided a different perspective. Ursa described her interactions with professors as very minimal and they identified that some of this came from different cultural perceptions and experiences that differed from those in their home countries that they had with teachers growing up. Nonetheless, she did state that she had the desire to develop more relationships with them yet found it to be a challenge due to lacking the confidence to reach out. Caroline stated that she had a few negative interactions with professors due to the existence of a cultural barrier and feeling like the odd one out. These barriers blocking the participants from being able to interact positively with their professors is a result of the existing cultural differences or what appears as faculty lacking knowledge about the individuals background.

  Both participants found themselves in a place where they simply lacked the confidence to reach out which is likely a result of being in a different culture with a different education system. Over time, they began to pick up on social cues and behaviors that they observed by their peers.

Developing competence as well as autonomy in Chickering and Reisser's (1993) development theory talks about observing the way others behave and communicate as a means to successfully interact with others, including faculty and staff. Being able to approach and talk with faculty about the course requires them to have some level of autonomy. Ursa stated that she lacked the confidence to reach out to professors at first. However, as Ursa would interact and engage with others more, it is possible she would have more confidence to reach out to professors.

  Involvement. Being involved in college can have a huge impact in helping a student with their sense of belonging while in college (Tinto, 2012). Both participants were involved with extracurricular activities at some point during their undergraduate experience. It is worth noting that Caroline is a graduate student and has had more time to reflect on her undergraduate experiences while Ursa is still in the middle of her experience which means they speak differently about their involvement and the decisions about each of these. Ursa was involved with the Student Government Association, which she found as a good learning opportunity despite leaving. Caroline got involved with the Campus Ministry and engaged in various activities that were put on specifically for international students. Caroline would continue getting involved later with the Caribbean Student Association and the International Residence Hall Honorary. Tinto (2012) emphasized that when students are able to find spaces which they can connect with in meaningful ways, they will likely find a greater sense of connection to the institution and the people around them. One thing that both participants had in common was that they wanted to be involved because they were finding their purpose at the institution and identifying their role in the community. They both wanted the opportunity to discover what they were passionate about because they believed that they could contribute to something meaningful in some way.

For Ursa, getting involved with extra curriculars was not particularly of any interest to her in the beginning as she prioritized here academics as more important. Caroline on the other hand discussed how all her extra curriculars paved the way to where she is now. Through her involvement in various activities she was able to establish her purpose. These leadership opportunities also helped her develop as a person, and she was able to talk about how she became a stronger more confident person. Chickering and Reisser (1993) emphasized that part of establishing identity is having a sense of self in a social context. For Caroline to get involved in many different organizations, she was able to view herself through multiple lenses. Caroline was able to construct an identity for herself as a result of her experiences taking on a multitude of roles.

It is crucial that international students are presented with the opportunity to get involved with their campus so that they can understand their true identity and continue to develop as an individual. However, in order to do that, it takes placing one's self in social and engaging environments where one is given the opportunity to work with others towards achieving a common goal (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Being exposed to various opportunities can help students identify those opportunities that will be most enjoyable for them. Not everyone is going to find the right fit, just like Ursa who was forced to join the Student Government Association and ultimately departed after losing interest. The extent to which one can have positive interactions with one's surrounding environment and its accessible resources determines their ability to integrate and adapt with the social systems of the institution. Thus, the more one can integrate and adapt, the more likely that they will persist academically and socially at the institution (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). This is why it is important for Ursa and Caroline to

at least make the effort to get involved with their campus so that they can seek out the opportunity to develop themselves.

   Jobs. One form of involvement that both participants identified was having a job on campus at some point in time. Ursa described her experience working with the University Food Court as being difficult. Ursa's reason for acquiring a job at the food court was to just make a little extra money. While she had some positive relationships, she found her relationships with some co workers and supervisors negative. Caroline discussed her experience in becoming a Resident Assistant and also a Camps and Conferences Assistant. Her reason for wanting to become an RA was due to her desire to tap into her leadership skills. Developing purpose in the seven-vector development theory is when one has the desire to seek out one's interests, establish goals and make plans to achieve those goals (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Caroline became an RA because she believed that it would be an opportunity that would shed light on her future.

   Having an on-campus job would impact the development of both Ursa and Caroline. For Ursa, her job with the University Food Court influenced her understanding how people interact with one another. Although Ursa spoke fluent English she has an Indian accent and she noticed that her coworkers and supervisors would act disrespectful towards her because of this. Ursa did not appreciate the way coworkers and supervisors talked to her and treated her which caused her to feel angry and upset toward them. Schlossberg's (1981) self in her theory of transition talks about how in order to attach meaning to a life experience, one must first be aware of one's self and where they come from (Schlossberg, 1981). Initially, Ursa didn't realize that she was experiencing racism, rather she just interpreted the mistreatment as just being cruel. For her to have interpreted it as racism or discrimination, she had to first be aware of who she was and where she comes from culturally. Ursa's interactions with others was very important to her

because it is her perceptions about her daily interactions with others which gives her a sense of belonging to the environment. It is also through her interactions with her coworkers which gives her the motivation to persist at the institution as a whole (Tinto, 2012).

Getting involved on campus can lead to greater opportunities and experiences where one learns about self and what they want. In Caroline's experience being an RA paved the way to where she wants to be in her career. She decided to pursue some type of involvement on campus because she had the desire to explore new opportunities. She didn't realize that it was through this position which would open the door to where she will be in life. Caroline stated that she initially joined the Hall Council and became an RA just to do it. Tinto (2017) talks about how in order to make meaning of one's experiences, one must get put themselves in a place where they feel a sense of belonging. Caroline wanted to get involved because she believed that her involvements would give her the opportunity to be an active member of the campus (Tinto, 2012). Nonetheless, she would eventually realize that those involvements would serve a bigger purpose in her life. Caroline talked about how these involvements would not only pave the way towards her career, but also changed her as an individual. She stated that because of these opportunities, she was able to interact and communicate with others which in turn influenced the the woman she has become. It is the nature and quality of one's interactions with their surrounding environment which determines their ability to adapts and persist, as well as grow as an individual (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

Implications for student affairs professionals

These students attended two separate undergraduate institutions; however, they spoke of similar experiences. The role of the International Student Office is to assist international students with their transition to college. They do this by providing them with resources, as well as

additional support that they may need in order to better adjust to the climate. They are responsible for reaching out to international students to check in and see how they are coping with their transition, as well as provide them with additional support as needed. The office must first lead their own orientation specifically for international students where those students have the opportunity to learn about the other offices on campus and the resources they provide, as well as get to know the faculty and staff.

International students will use this as an opportunity to get to know the campus and understand the climate. It is during this orientation where the students may connect with other international students, thus formulate a network. Maintaining a network of international students allows them to reach out to one another for support and assist each other during their transition through college and ultimately into the workforce. The orientation will also include faculty and staff from the different colleges and offices so that international students can get know them and develop relationships with them. A series of panels will be held where a solid representation of faculty and staff will answer questions and respond to concerns shared by the students. In addition, meet and greets will be held where students have the opportunity to mingle and socialize with faculty and staff, that way they may begin developing those relationships and know who to reach out to for specific support. The goal of orientation is to provide the international students with the appropriate programming that effectively informs the students of the resources that are available to them, how to utilize those resources, and the appropriate strategies they may take in coping with their transition.

The participants talked about their experiences coping with being in a different country and away from home. They reported that they usually reached out to friends and family for support. It is important that faculty and staff are aware of these challenges and how it may have

an impact on their academic performance in and outside of the classroom. Student affairs professionals should think about how they can get themselves more involved with international student orientation programming where international students have the opportunity to begin formulating those relationships. Another strategy would be to create a faculty/staff panel in which international students ask questions and share concerns. That way, students can learn about normative behaviors from the faculty and staff. This also gives faculty and staff the opportunity to share expectations they have of their students, that way students can begin the semester with a greater understanding of what is expected of them.

The participants both discussed their utilization of resources. However, neither of them stated that they specifically utilized any resources provided by the International Student Office as well as several other resources. The role of the International Student Office is to assist international students on their transition to college by equipping them with the support and resources they need. International students should have the opportunity to develop relationships across offices including the International Student Office so that they know what kind of resources they provide. The International Students Office should check in on their international students on a regular basis so that they may keep better track of whether or not students are utilizing resources, what resources they may need, as well as track their overall transition to college. In addition, other offices on campus should take extra steps in reaching out to international students to ensure that they are fully informed on the resources they provide, as well as seek out ways in which to provide support to those students.

Part of orientation for newly admitted students are required to sit in on a series of panels in which staff among the various offices answer questions and respond to concerns that international students may have. The panel could consist of a staff member to represent each

office under Student Affairs, that way students can be learning about the different offices. This would be helpful because it would direct representatives of each office to be present to share information, that way the information would be accurate and up to date. This would also give the student the opportunity to get to know the different staff on campus.

A program that should be implemented is a social mingle that welcomes domestic students to interact with the newly admitted international students. An important part of assisting international students during their transition to college is providing them with the opportunity to step out of their comfort zones and interact with other students including non-international students. This would provide them with the opportunity to engage and thus learn about the different experiences of those who are originally from the United States as well, thus acquiring an understanding of American customs and life. In addition, domestic students could also serve as a network for international students where they could offer guidance and support on adjusting to the American climate, as well as help them with academics and career preparations. International students could benefit significantly from support coming from domestic students because they would have a perspective of someone who has lived in the United States for an extended period. In addition, international students would benefit immensely from communicating with domestic students in that it would help them practice on their English speaking skills, helping them significantly with their studies and preparations for the professional workforce.

The mental health offices should not only make themselves readily accessible for students but should also provide work shops and seminars for international students. Mental health offices on campus should be teaching international students about the importance of mental health and the steps that should be taken if their own mental health is impacted or they

witness someone else whose mental health is impacted. Many international students potentially come into the US with their only knowledge regarding mental health being the stigmas, thus not truly understanding its importance and influence on individual lives. Programming should be implemented that teaches international students about the prevalent existence of mental health as it pertains to college students, and how we may appropriately and effectively respond to it.

International students may have a difficult time accessing on campus resources due to a couple of different reasons. One reason may be because they simply do not know how. Another reason could be because they do not feel comfortable with reaching out. Lastly, they could simply just not even be aware that such resources exist. Nonetheless, it is important that student affairs professionals identify strategies to connect international students with resources, even when it may appear that they do not need them. One way in which student affairs professionals can connect international students to resources is by implementing programming that connects the different offices and professionals across Student Affairs. A way in which student affairs professionals can help international students navigate various resources is with the use of social media where international students may log on to a social media page and ask questions about how or where to access a specific resources. In addition, students may also be given the option of chatting with a specific professional in case they have a personal issue they would like to address. International students could also use this social media platform to interact with other students including domestics, and learn about the various opportunities on campus including extra curriculars, professional development, student organizations, etc. Social media has been engrained in what we do as student affairs professionals in a huge and revolutionary way. Social media can be applied in a way in which it helps international students get to know and

understand the campus, including the resources and student involvement opportunities that it provides.

Recommendations for future research

There are a few recommendations one should consider when thinking about improvements to this study if it were to be implemented again in the future or used as a basis for further study. This study should be done again with more participants, and at different types of institutions. Having more participants representing more countries would provide a larger representation of the international student experience, as well as having a more consistent population of either undergraduate or graduate students in the study. This would provide more representation to the different experiences including challenges international students face. This is especially crucial toward understanding how their characteristics, cultural background, country of origin, and how that may have different impacts on their experience.

Another implication for future research is field observation which should be implemented by spending at least one full day with each of the participants observing their behavior. This would give the researcher additional insight into the everyday lives and routines of the participants since one would be able to observe their behavior, social interactions, bodily cues, emotions, and reactions. This insight paired with the information provided during the interviews would provide opportunities to make comparisons between the participants' shared experiences and observations of their daily routines. Field observation is a key element to narrating the real-life experiences of international students because it provides the researcher with a visual of their everyday lifestyle.

This study was conducted at a mid-sized public research university located in the Midwest. Nonetheless, it does not represent all universities. This study should be replicated

among other institutions located across the United States. It would be particularly interesting to

conduct the study at institutions that are even more diverse and at institutions located in larger

cities. Doing this, one might find noticeably different experiences shared by participants since

the diversity of the student body and location are both important factors in one's overall

experience studying overseas.

Lastly, while studying the experiences of international students, it is important to think

about the differences between the experiences of international students of color and international

students who identify as White. In addition, it would be helpful to study the different experiences

between international students whose first language is English and international students whose

first language is something else other than English. While international students across the board

face various challenges, it is important to take note that depending on race and ethnicity, as well

as one's fluency in English, one may experience different challenges than others.

Conclusion

This study was conducted in a qualitative manner to observe the experiences of two

international students from two different countries studying in the United States. The presented

research portrays the lived experiences of the two participants. The results of this study

demonstrated that international students do face a variety of challenges upon transitioning to

studying outside of their home country. The participants' experiences were analyzed through

three research questions which asked about their transition, resources they utilized, and their

social interactions. It was through these research questions which captured a visual of their

experiences and how it has changed them as individuals.

The participants faced several challenges which impacted their transition, including

homesickness, academic motivation, developing relationships, as well as racism and

discrimination. Depending on the situation, the participants reacted to their experiences in different ways. To deal with the emotional and stressful burden of their challenges, coping mechanisms were utilized. Coping mechanisms would include either emotional support from family and peers, or self-coping. Their experiences as a result would have an influence on their personal and identity development to some extent. To ease the process of their transition, resources were utilized which would either include on campus resources, or resources acquired elsewhere. The participants in this study reported that they did not utilize many of the on-campus resources that were provided. This could be due to a few different reasons such as they didn't feel like it was necessary, they weren't informed that the resources existed, or they didn't feel comfortable utilizing those resources. The participants experienced various social interactions which have shaped their cultural perspective. Their social interactions occurred with peers including other international students, coworkers and supervisors, and faculty and staff. It was through each of their experiences including the challenges they faced that have shaped their transition to the US in vastly unique ways. As a result, their experiences have paved the way to their adaptation to the different culture and have influenced their development on a personal and academic level.

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Appendix A

Demographic Information Sheet

Home Country:_____

What is your race: _____

Sex: Male   Female   Age: _____

What year in school: _____

What is your program of study:_____

Has this changed since coming to the United States: Yes   No

Where do you live: On campus   Off campus

How many roommates do you live with: _____

Are your roommates international or domestic students? _____

Do you currently or have you in past held a job on campus?   Yes   No

        Where: _____

Have you had or do you currently have any family members studying in the United States?
Please explain below?

Have you attended college prior to coming here to the U.S.? If so, where?

What organizations are you a member of here at the university? Please note if you hold a
        leadership position with the organization.

Appendix B

Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Transitional Experiences of International Students in the United States

Purpose of the Study

It is up to higher education professionals to make it a part of their mission to develop individuals from other countries and prepare them for the real world in the United States, both on a personal and professional level. With that being said, it is important for student affairs professionals to continue learning about the experiences of international students upon their arrival to the United States, so that we may better support them on their road to personal development and academic success (Institute of International Education, 2019) (Wu, Garza, and Guzman, 2015). The aim of this study is to observe your natural behavior in the natural environment, as well as gather information through a semi-structured interview process that will pertain to your experiences as a student here at EIU. Through both field observation and information collected via the interviews, I will analyze and articulate trends or patterns that will allow me to draw conclusions based on your transitional experiences as an international student.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by graduate student Philip Fennell and Dr. Dianne Timm, thesis committee chair, from the Department of Counseling and Higher Education at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you may identify as an international student.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you likely identify as an international student. In addition, you are also enrolled at EIU as a full-time undergraduate student pursuing a degree. Lastly, you are here in the United States on student visa status.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

If you volunteer to continue participation in this study, you will be asked to:

- Provide demographic information, including your year in school, program of study, gender, racial identity, and country of origin.

- Allow me to spend at least one full day with you as you go about carrying on with your usual daily routine, while I observe and collect field notes along the way.

- Participate in a one-on-one interview with me lasting roughly one hour and respond to questions that pertain to your experiences as an international student.

- Have audio of your interview recorded for transcription purposes, which will be laptop protected and not to be shared by anyone but myself, and ultimately destroyed after three years of storage.

- Allow me to take the information collected from both the interview and field observation and transcribed into a Microsoft Word Document.

- Assist me with confirming the validity and reliability of the data, by examining an electronic of the transcription to ensure that the I did misinterpret or misunderstand anything that may have been said.

During the one-on-one interviews, a recording device rented out from the Technology Office will be used to record the entire duration of the interview. After the interview has concluded, I will take the recording device and immediately download the recording on to my personal laptop which is password protected and cannot be accessed by anyone but myself. Once the recording is downloaded, I will then delete the recording from the recording device before returning it. The recording on my computer will then be used when I complete the transcription process, which I will transcribe using a Microsoft Word Document also on my personal laptop.

You as a participant will remain anonymous throughout the entire thesis once it is complete. Instead of using your real name, I will be using a code name such as 'Person 1' or 'Participant,' which will be used to address you throughout the duration of the thesis. During the one-on-one interview, you will not be asked to give out your real name. If you like and if it makes you more comfortable, you may provide a nickname or an alternative name that you use or like others to call you.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Participants may feel uneasy or uncomfortable about sharing any personal information about themselves. They may also feel uneasy about holding a one-on-one conversation with someone who identifies as Caucasian, due to potential lack in trust or uncertainty about my competence and ability to understand such experiences.

There is also the possibility that you may identify as LGBTQ and are hesitant on sharing any information that pertain to your sexual and gender identity.

Outside of unforeseen academic, health, or familial issues, there are no anticipated circumstances under which the research expects to terminate the study.

Should any physical or psychological harm occur to the participant as a result of participation in this study, the researcher will work with the Eastern Illinois University Council Clinic and the Central East to refer the participant to proper medical care.

Through your participation in this study, you may come across a point where you may end up sharing personal or sensitive information. Sharing such information can to some individuals bear a psychological burden on yourself. If this does occur and you do find yourself feeling psychologically unwell before or after sharing any information, you will have the option to inform me what information you wish to be left out of the study. In addition, please also feel free to contact the Counseling Clinic on campus at (217) 581-3413 to reach out to any resources that may available to you.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The international student population in the United States continue make a significant portion of student bodies in higher education. In addition, international students have become a pertinent part of our higher education and workforce development, not to mention contributing to a large amount of tuition to our nation's economy. Therefore, it is important that we as higher education professionals continue to develop and expand on our initiatives that provide our international students with opportunities that enhance their academic and personal success. With your participation in this study, you will be contributing a great deal to the continuing efforts to

understand the transitional experiences that international students face, so that higher education professionals may understand how to meet your needs.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using a personally owned flash drive and laptop. Once all data has been collected from field observation and interviews, I will transcribe the data via Microsoft Word and download and save it to my personal laptop. Recording from the interviews will be downloaded to my personal laptop and transferred to a flash drive which only I will have access to. When transcribing data and using the data to further my thesis, data cannot be linked to any one specific participant, therefore keeping all information throughout the thesis completely confidential. Recordings of the interviews will be kept on a flash drive for approximately three years before they will be permanently destroyed.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

There potentially may be a situation or certain circumstances that warrant my withdraw from conducting this study. If there comes a time where I do decide to withdraw from conducting this study, I will be sure to inform all participants that the study has come to a hault and will no longer be taking place, therefore their participation is no longer needed. If any data were to be collected prior to my decision to withdraw from conducting the study, I will be sure to discard all data safely and appropriately for the sake of the participants' privacy and security.

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Ave.

Charleston, IL   61920

Telephone: (217) 581-8576

E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

I hereby consent to the participation of _____, a minor/subject in the investigation herein described. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my child's participation at any time.

_____   _____

Signature of Minor/Handicapped Subject's Parent or Guardian   Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix C

Interview Protocol 1

1. Tell me about yourself – home country, race/ethnicity, year in school, etc.

2. What is your program of study?
   a. Has this changed?

3. What has been your favorite thing about college in the United States?

4. Tell me about your experiences in education prior to coming to the United States?

   a. What kind of student were you?

   b. What were your teachers like?

   c. How did you spend your time in and out of school?

   d. What influence did your parents have on your education?

   e. What did your friend groups look like?

   f. How did you face challenges in school while growing up?

5. When did you first make the decision to study in the United States? Tell me about that.

   a. Who did you talk with?

   b. Who influenced you?

   c. How did your friends and family react?

   d. Why did you want to come to the United States for college?

6. Tell me about your process of selecting a college or university in the United States.

   a. What were you looking for?

   b. What were you excited about?

   c. What were you worried about.

7. Do you have any family members who are studying in the U.S.?

8. Tell me about your decision to choose your designated major.

    a.   What were some of your influences?

    b.   What were you thinking about in terms of career choice?

    c.   What do you ultimately hope to go on to do with your major?

9.   How did you prepare for your transition to college here in the United States?

    a.   What sort of information did you get? How?

    b.   Who gave you advice? What did they tell you?

    c.   What kind of communication did you have with the institution you would be attending? What information did they provide you with?

10. What were some of your biggest unexpected surprise upon arriving to the United States?

    a.   What were some things you were hoping for?

    b.   What were some things you expected to happen, but didn't?

    c.   What were some things that occurred that you were not expecting?

11. Tell me about your current living arrangements since arriving in the U.S.

    a.   Who have you lived with?

    b.   How did you pick them?

12. Do you hold a job currently?

    a.   Tell me about that process

13. What sorts of things are you involved in? Extracurriculars?

    a.   Tell me about those experiences

Interview Protocol 2

1. Tell me about your first week in the United States – assuming that you were not yet in

    classes?

    a. What was your orientation like?

    b. Who did you connect with as you arrived?

    c. What surprised you?

    d. What emotions were you experiencing?

        i. Describe that for me? Can you give me examples?

    e. How often did you talk with family and friends back home?

2. Tell me about the first couple weeks of school as you started here.

    a. What was it like to sit in classes with American students?

    b. What were your first impressions of faculty at your institution?

    c. What did your friend groups look like at this time?

    d. What was your out of class experience like? What did you do with your time?

    e. Were there any experiences that surprised you? Tell me about that?

    f. At any point in those first couple of weeks did you feel home sick? How did you

        deal with this? Who did you turn to for support during this time?

3. What resources were you made aware of during those first few weeks?

    a. How did you learn about them?

    b. Who did you rely on for support? Tell me more about that? In what way did they

        provide support?

    c. Were there resources you wished you had? Can you explain?

4. Tell me about your first semester of school?

   a. Tell me about the classroom experience and your life as a student that first

      semester?

   b. What type of interactions did you have with faculty at your institution?

   c. What type of interactions did you have with non-faculty staff at the institution?

   d. What did your friend groups look like at this time? Did they change from those

      first couple of weeks?

   e. What was your out of class experience like? What did you do with your time?

   f. Were there any experiences that surprised you? Tell me about that?

   g. What surprised you during that first semester? Tell me about that?

      i. What emotions did you experience –tell me about those?

5. What resources did you utilize that first semester?

   a. How did you learn about them?

   b. Who did you rely on for support? Tell me more about that? In what way did they

      provide support?

   c. Were there resources you wished you had? Can you explain?

6. Tell me about you today

   a. What would your closest friends tell me if I asked them to describe you?

      i. What have your friends and family commented on?

      ii. What has influenced your identity the most since coming here?

   b. How have you adapted to the United States system of education?

      i. Can you talk about the similarities and differences?

   c. How has your daily routine/lifestyle changed/remained the same?

    d.   Describe your friend groups? How have they evolved since coming here?

    e.   Who has the greatest influence on you?

    f.   What resources have helped you the most here in the United States?

7. In the past interview, I asked what you were involved in/with. Tell me about that.

    a.   Organizations – Academic, social, leadership?

8. What do you do for fun?

9. Now that you have been through this whole study and we are at the end of the interview is there anything else you would like to add or that you want me to know about you and your experience?