EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT USING
THE NSSE FRAMEWORK

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EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT USING

THE NSSE FRAMEWORK

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For Jeaneth Puriel Barrios and Alexander Jeffrey Foot
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Jeaneth you are the core inspiration in my life. Since we began planning our lives together, you have instilled in me the confidence and determination to achieve more than what I thought I could do. Thank you for your strength and encouragement and I am grateful for your patience and support over the last four years. You have made me work harder than I thought I could and you are the sole reason why this dissertation is complete. Thank you for everything you have done for me and with me, Jeaneth.

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EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT USING THE NSSE FRAMEWORK

Jeffrey Foot

Dr. Joyce Piveral and Dr. Phil Messner, Dissertation Supervisors

ABSTRACT

International students at this Midwest regional state university represent a variety of cultures and educational systems. They differ from the majority student population in terms of cultural and academic preparation for university and employ various strategies to be successful. This presents a challenge to educational leaders to understand how international students perceive their engagement in academic behavior.

The purpose of this study was to elicit international student responses to understand international student academic engagement at a Midwest regional state university by qualitatively researching how international students perceive their academic engagement activities. Understanding how this unique and varied population is educated and served effectively is central to practice in higher education.

Framed by the research setting, the problem, and purpose, the research question was: What are the academic engagement patterns that emerge among international students at a Midwest regional state university?

This research was a qualitative case study using focus groups comprised and sorted into newly arrived and experienced international students and further sorted into geographically or culturally similar groups where possible. Five focus groups consisting of a total of fourteen students were interviewed. The data were then analyzed using a data
management tool to allow themes to emerge from the data. The thematic data were then filtered using the NSSE theoretical framework.

Key findings of the study indicate common success strategies listed international students employ may change as students adapt to the academic climate and that not all international students employ similar strategies. The strategies may resonate with the NSSE theoretical framework, but seem to be coping strategies when students first arrive rather than positive educational behaviors NSSE seeks to highlight. Further, international students’ academic needs vary depending on country of origin and home culture and these needs change over time. Additionally, understanding nuanced international student needs will provide administrators and faculty with practical guidance to enhance international student academic engagement and assist students to develop meaningful and positive success strategies.

Finally, this research provided an understanding of the individual variables that intertwine to make up the international student experience at this institution. It revealed international students learning outcomes are inextricably linked with their American counterparts and how together each gain from the other’s knowledge. Understanding how students perceive their environment aided in the creation of new knowledge that international students and difference in classrooms can also lead to higher level academic skills acquisition and result in educational and social fulfillment for all students.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

There were 582,984 higher education international students representing 3.9% of the roughly fifteen million university students in the United States during the 2006-2007 academic year (Bhandari & Chow, 2007). Government, academia, and business understand the importance of international students and the relationships they bring to this country. Despite the relatively small number of higher education international students compared to the total collegiate student population in the United States, the importance of international students’ presence is not overlooked by educational leaders.

Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005) assert there are educational value-added properties of having international students on campus. The value-added properties include international university students’ academic skill, added cultural insight, resulting potential strategic partnerships, global good will, and revenue generation. However, this population’s academic behavior remains largely a mystery. Milton J. Bennett (1998) stated, “The study of intercultural communication has tried to answer the question, ‘How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?’” (p. 1). This study attempted to understand how international students perceive their academic engagement when they do not share a common cultural experience of the majority of students or faculty at the host university.

Given the cultural difference between international university students and the host culture, as well as the professed importance of hosting and educating international students, a need exists for higher education leaders to understand how international students are academically engaging. In order to provide improved educational programs
and services, an understanding of how students perceive their learning experiences is elemental. This study explored international university students’ academic engagement using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) theoretical framework (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007) to focus the research findings.

NSSE is designed to assess students’ perceptions of their level of involvement in educationally sound practices (Kuh, 2001). The NSSE framework seeks to measure in-class experiences, class preparation, interactions with instructors, interaction with diverse student populations, curriculum delivery and design, course work load, peer collaboration, and community services involvement (Kuh, 2001). The NSSE filter provided boundaries to the qualitative data elicited by the research questions.

The research questions guiding the qualitative study sought to reveal how international students at a Midwest regional four year public university, herein referred to as “university,” engage in academic practices and discover which programs and services are accessed in certain time periods. The research questions revealed perceptions of programs and services international university students have and how this perception affects their academic engagement.

This chapter will provide background information, briefly describe the conceptual underpinnings for this study, address the purpose of the study, identify the statement of the problem and research questions, outline the limitations of the study, and define key terms to be used in the study.

Background

International student presence on higher education campuses is the result of deliberate actions by students and by the universities that recruit and host them. The
result was steady growth of international students in the United States. In the 1945-1946 academic year, the Christian Science Monitor reported there were 10,445 foreign nationals studying the United States. In 1948 NAFSA (now known as The Association of International Educators), reports it “was founded as the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers to promote the professional development of American college and university officials responsible for assisting and advising the 25,000 foreign students who had come to study in the United States after World War II” (NAFSA Website). Steady growth tinged with brief periods of relative decline in international numbers saw 564,766 international students in the United States during the 2006 - 2007 academic year or 3.9% of all students in institutions of higher education in the United States (Koh & Bhandari, 2007). The presence of international students consistently grew due to international students’ demand for high quality education (Bochner, 1973). Additionally, United States college administrators demonstrated a desire to recruit and host international students.

Higher educational leaders desire to recruit and host students from other countries and that desire is rooted in several beliefs. Currently international student recruitment and education is understood to provide cultural insight, potential strategic partnerships, and global good will. However, real and potential revenue generation from out-of-state tuition rates sadly drive some administrators to recruit international students. In Missouri in 2007, NAFSA estimated international students generated $56,011,000 in tuition revenue after all institutional scholarships had been subtracted from the total (NAFSA Economic Impact Statements). However, the sheer presence of diverse students has intangible positive attributes for the host campuses.
Recently, it has been argued international students help foster educational benefits for the larger student population. Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005) outline how government, academia, and business recognize the importance and the benefits derived from the presence of a diverse body of people within higher education organizations. Gurin (1999) asserts structural diversity is one of three important factors contributing to higher education environments that support robust critical thinking, debate, democratic development, and positive self identity. Further, structural diversity is understood to be an important factor in providing environments conducive to positive student social and academic development as outlined in Astin (1993) as well as Chickering and Gamson (1987). International students are a heterogeneous group who represent varying cultures, perspectives, and talent to a vast majority of higher education institutions in the United States today; their presence can help deliver varied viewpoints and perspectives that are highly desirable to generate university classroom discussion and potentially increase student learning.

However, the mere presence of international students does not ensure positive learning outcomes for international students. Despite the general knowledge and recognition of the importance of international students on university campuses, little is known about how they engage in effective educational practices. This lack of knowledge may conceal critical programmatic or academic service gaps international students may encounter. Ironically, most current research focuses on international students’ responses to surveys designed by United States citizens and developed for United States students (Carini, Kuh, & Zhao, 2005; Pike, Kuh & Gonyea, 2007; Kuh & Umbach, 2005). This body of research provides valuable comparisons between United States and international
students (Carini, Kuh, & Zhao, 2005). It also outlines the impact of international student presence on diversity measurements (Kuh & Umbach, 2005; Pike, Kuh & Gonyea, 2007), but little research exists describing the perspectives international students have regarding the academic and educational environment they encounter on individual campuses and how this impacts their academic engagement, retention, personal development, skill acquisition, learning, and success. This study aims to address this gap in the knowledge.

*Conceptual underpinnings of the study*

![Concept map: Hermeneutic paradigm study exploring gap in existing research of international student issues.](image)

*Figure 1. Concept map: Hermeneutic paradigm study exploring gap in existing research of international student issues.*

Conceptualized as a crucial piece of positive learning practices and helping to create positive learning environments, international students’ presence contributes to multicultural learning outcomes and environments (Gurin, 1999). Further, certain courses
of this institution’s core curriculum and associated learning outcomes are designed to foster multicultural or intercultural understanding among all students. The institutional website states it “is committed to preparing broadly-educated and engaged citizens for a world of constant change.” The preparation is measured, in part, by multicultural competencies as outlined in its Strategic Educational Key Quality Indicators. A desired institutional condition for fostering multicultural understanding is implied in this directive; the presence of international students. The university, therefore, desires international student success in this environment.

The desire for international student success is important in terms of the conceptual underpinning of this study. A large part of the literature concerning international students’ success is aimed at the processes and functions of welcoming international students to American university environments. There are two general fields examined when researchers currently address international student issues. On one hand, acculturation and adaptation studies examine the campus factors impacting international students and their transition to college in the United States. On the other is the study of international students’ academic issues; specifically, classroom problems including language issues, unfamiliar teaching styles, class structure differences, testing concerns, and plagiarism. This study will address the connective middle ground of academic engagement to explore how international undergraduate students engage academically (see Figure 1).

The existing research of international student issues does not address academic engagement fully so the focus of this study was undergraduate international student academic engagement and student involvement. Supporting this conceptual framework
for studying the issue was interculturally sensitive, qualitative research. This study used qualitative research methods to explicate how international students perceive this academic environment and to understand how their academic engagement is shaped by those perceptions. Practically, this study did not try to compare populations or descriptively interpret different behavior of international students. Rather, it used qualitative methods that promoted a nonuniversalistic research stance, as outlined in Lonner and Berry (1986) who posit no objective universal realities exist. Found within a hermeneutic paradigm, this stance allowed the study to be cross-cultural in nature to foster a range of responses from the numerous cultures encountered when studying international students. Moreover, this stance freed the researcher to interpret how the students are interacting with their environment.

The NSSE theoretical framework provided the filter to understand undergraduate international student responses of their professed academic behavior and how these interactions fall within the parameters of successful academic engagement patterns as outlined in that body of research (see Chapter 2). This study was designed to more fully elucidate and amplify academic engagement experiences that international students encounter at this institution.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is a lack of information concerning international student academic engagement at this University. Resources are allocated for international student recruitment and programming, but little is known how international students engage in educational practices and therefore derive educational benefit from their experiences.
While quantitative data have been collected for several years, they have not been analyzed to improve programming or services for international students. Additionally, detailed qualitative research about university international students’ academic engagement has not been conducted. Without knowledge of how these students are experiencing their education, concerned administrators and higher education practitioners at this institution are left to use their tacit knowledge to program for this population. Resources have been allocated to increase the international student population at this institution with little understanding of their required needs.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand international student academic engagement at this university by qualitatively researching how international students perceive the academic activities they choose to do or are required to do. Research regarding diverse student populations on American university campuses highlights the need for administrators and educators to be conscious of specific ways in which these populations possess varying needs majority university students do not (Carini, Kuh, & Zhao, 2005; Kuh & Umbach, 2005; Kezar, 2007). The NSSE framework guided the analysis of engagement patterns because NSSE data have been used by other researchers to determine exactly how specific students within specific institutions engaged in effective educational practices (Laird, et al., 2007). This study provides educational leaders with qualitative data collection methods and analysis that attempts to explain international student academic engagement and may provide a procedural roadmap for other researchers with similar needs at other institutions.
Research Question

Framed by the research setting, the problem, and purpose, the research question was: What are the academic engagement patterns that emerge among international students at a Midwest regional state university?

Supporting the main research question, these sub questions were addressed:

a. What is an international student study schedule?

b. How do international students interact with faculty?

c. What academic and social support programs and services do international students use?

d. What perceptions of those programs and services do international students have?

e. What are the perceptions of international students with regard to their overall academic experience?

Research Information Collection and Analysis

All international undergraduate students at the institution under study were invited to participate via e-mail to come to an informational presentation about the study. After they had heard the presentation, they were invited to fill out a consent form that was used to arrange a time to participate in a focus group. Focus groups were sorted first by experience, then by region, then by number of students. When the students arrived at their scheduled focus group, standard protocol consisting of an opening speech explaining how the focus groups was to be conducted and a protection of their rights as participants was delivered. A written confidentiality statement and a biographic consent form was read and given to all participants before the interview questions were asked. If
students chose to continue, the biographic consent form asked students to create and use a pseudonym, state their citizenship, and indicate the number of credit hours they have completed and how many credit hours in which they were currently enrolled. Each student was asked to place their pseudonym on a name tag for use during the focus group.

Figure 2. Participant selection, focus group assembly, data collection, and making meaning was a four step process with each step containing several related processes.

During the focus group interview session, each student used their pseudonym to protect their anonymity. Data was collected by the confidentiality statement which also served as a biographic consent form. An audio recording of students’ responses in the focus group meetings was the main data collected. Focus group meetings were transcribed. Data were analyzed using open coding, axial coding, and theme development. The analysis was filtered through the NSSE theoretical framework to find congruent themes in chapter five.
Importance of the Study

Given the lack of profound knowledge at this institution concerning the level of international student engagement in academic practices, this study provides a qualitative account of how students are engaging in educational practices. While quantitative data have been collected for several years, detailed research about international students has not been completed to date. Without additional knowledge of this population, concerned administrators and higher education practitioners at this institution are left to use their tacit knowledge of the international student population to deductively create programs and services that may benefit international students.

In order to best serve and advocate for international university student services and related programs, practitioners need rich data to support service and program proposals for international students. Resources have been allocated to increase structural diversity at this institution and the presence of international and underrepresented students is understood to provide a positive academic atmosphere. This population’s impact on university policy and programs has been studied by various researchers in the past to reveal differences in patterns of academic engagement and the effects on campus climate (Carini, Kuh, & Zhao, 2005; Kezar, 2007; Kuh & Umbach, 2005; Laird, et al., 2007), but only on a large scale. The findings and resulting implications from these studies suggest more research is needed at individual institutions to determine whether the diverse student populations are engaging at the same levels as majority students. Furthermore, one study (Kuh & Umbach, 2005) asserts overall campus climate can be assessed by investigating responses to varying groups of questions within the sub sets of
the NSSE. Filtering focus group data through the NSSE theoretical framework will help focus findings on engagement theory rather than focusing on adjustment and academic problems.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the number of students who participated. Further, this research is not particularly transferrable to other institutions or to future students. Rather the study looked to provide a glimpse of current international students’ perception of their current academic engagement patterns at this university.

Beyond these common limitations of qualitative research rests a profound limitation not addressed by this study but may serve as impetus for future research. Notably, the very strength using the NSSE as a theoretical framework lens to focus the findings is its ultimate weakness.

As Kuh (2001) states, the NSSE survey is built on a research tradition attempting to elucidate “conditions that promote student learning” (p. 12). Ewell (2004) confirms NSSE addresses the needs of American colleges to assess student perception thus performance in critical thinking, problem solving, and communication by measuring the conditions that promote student learning. In this sense, and in an American cultural context, NSSE has true value. Indeed Kuh, Carini and Zhao (2005) report in one study investigating international students in American colleges that little is known of the “extent to which (international students) engage in other effective educational practices--activities decades of research show are associated with high levels of learning and personal development” (p. 210). Essentially, Kuh, Carini and Zhao are proclaiming the theories are sound and may be transferable to other populations.
However, Pearce and Kang (1987) assert an ethnocentric research approach is created when one assumes positive cultural conditions are transferrable to individuals from another culture. NSSE was not specifically designed to address varying cultures which international students may represent; it is an American instrument designed to address American learning environments. It is, at best, a western culture based instrument designed to measure culturally desired campus climate and student behavior; therefore it is not a cross-cultural tool designed for international students.

This limitation is substantial, but the qualitative nature of the study had an advantage. Qualitative questions elicited personal responses of students’ perception of engagement in academic practices. These data explained how international students are interacting in this learning environment with more clarity and specificity than NSSE could. The participants described behavior that would not show up on the NSSE because of cultural differences, but may be adding value to their educational experience nonetheless.

*Definition of Key Terms*

Academic engagement – a term used to describe a general theoretical approach to a set of agreed-upon practices believed to add value to a student’s educational environment and positively impact learning outcomes. Examples include: in-class experiences, class preparation, interactions with instructors, interaction with diverse student populations, curriculum delivery and design, course work load, peer collaboration, and community services involvement.

Acculturation – a process and an outcome of cross cultural contact that takes place at the group and individual level (Berry, Kim & Boski, 1987).
CBP – Customs and Border Protection. Officers (US Citizens only) are posted at Ports of Entry across the United States of America and in certain foreign cities to inspect travelers entering the United States from abroad.

College Student Report- developed specifically for the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). In this study, as is common with higher education administrators, “NSSE” and College Student Report will be interchangeable terms.

DHS – Department of Homeland Security. Federal government department that replaced the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). New sub-departments of CBP, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services are under direct control of DHS.

Engagement – NSSE is designed to assess students’ perceptions of their level of involvement in educationally sound practices (Kuh, 2001). This level of involvement is generally termed student academic engagement. The NSSE framework seeks to measure in-class experiences, class preparation, interactions with instructors, interaction with diverse student populations, curriculum delivery and design, course work load, peer collaboration, and community services involvement (Kuh, 2001).

E-companion – an electronic, online, supplementary aid to classes at this university. The course syllabus, assignments, class PowerPoint and instructional aids, threaded discussions, e-mail function to other members of the class, and other electronic documents can be accessed by all enrolled students of that course for the duration of the course.

F-1 Visa – a non-immigrant class visa obtained from American Department of State posts outside of the United States of America. This class of visa is restricted to
individuals eligible for a course of study at a Student and Exchange Visitor Information System approved institution.

Form DS-2019 - a biographic, programmatic, and temporal document an accepted student receives from DOS approved American-based universities for the J Exchange program. This document is used to apply for an J-1 student visa. Once this form is used to enter the country it becomes the student’s legal proof of maintaining student status.

Form I-20 – a biographic, programmatic, and temporal document an accepted student receives from SEVP approved American-based universities. This document is used to apply for an F-1 student visa. Once this form is used to enter the country it becomes the student’s legal proof of maintaining student status.

Freshmen Seminar – Freshmen students are grouped by major and take a 14 week, one hour credit course designed to provide basic skills and knowledge.

Immigration regulations - (for the purposes of this paper) a portion of the Code of Federal Regulations found in Chapter 8, Section 214, Part (f) that deals with the specific rules any student in F-1 status

International student – (for the purposes of this paper) a student holding non-US citizenship, schooled in a non-US country who has entered the United States of America on an F-1 (student) visa to complete a full course of study at an institution of higher education.

- Newly arrived international students - students who have accumulated no more than 36 hours of institutional credit
- Experienced international students - students who have accumulated more than 36 hours of institutional credit
International orientation – (for the purposes of this paper) a set of collaborative programs and services provided by offices charged with the general well-being and immigration regulation compliance of international students.

(International student) issues – loosely defined field concerning sojourner (student) acculturalization, host campus climate, dedicated services such as immigration paperwork, counseling, career services and intercultural training.

J-1 Visa – a non-immigrant class exchange visitor visa issued by sponsoring agencies to a host of academic and vocational visitors. Students and scholars is one of the classes under this visa.

POE – Port of Entry. Any land, air or sea border entry point to the United States of America

Regional focus groups - students from similar global regions. Given the number of participants, it may be necessary to sort participants by region (see Chapter 3).

SEVP/SEVIS – Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) acts as the bridge for varied government organizations which have an interest in information on foreign students. SEVP uses web-based technology, known as Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to create biographic documents (See Forms I-20 and DS-2019 above) track and monitor schools and programs, students, exchange visitors and their dependents throughout the duration of approved participation within the U.S. education system. SEVP collects, maintains and provides the information so only legitimate foreign students or exchange visitors gain entry to the United States. The result is an easily accessible information system providing timely information to the Department of State, U.S. CBP, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement
and United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (United States Immigration and Customs Webpage).

Sojourner – term used for students studying in another country. It can be used for any student from any country studying temporarily from a short term faculty led program to a student studying a full degree or academic career abroad.

TDC – Talent Development Center. A service office located at this institution designed to provide instructional support and tutoring.

USICE – United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Enforcement department responsible for arrests, deportations, and SEVP.

USCIS - United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. Benefits processing department oversees work authorizations, naturalizations, visa status reinstatements, etc.

Summary

This study explored international student academic engagement in educational practices at a regional Midwest university. Using the NSSE conceptual framework to recognize validated engagement patterns as a data filter, the study elucidated international student academic engagement. The findings provide faculty and administrators with a better understanding of the multiple ways international students engage in their academic environment at this institution.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research and scholarship that have provided the study of international student issues with its major concepts will be highlighted in this chapter. Furthermore, I distinguish how these concepts provide the underpinnings and context of this study in order to establish an understanding of international student academic engagement. The major theoretical conceptual components undergirding this study are international student adjustment and acculturation theory including intercultural competency research as well as student engagement research theory. First, I trace the development of acculturation studies and relevant research on intercultural competency as it relates directly with international students. I then outline the research lineage leading to the development of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Next, key interrelated issues are highlighted in existing research to provide a solid groundwork to understand the perceptions international students have of their educational experiences at universities and colleges in the United States.

Review of International Student Issues Research

International students are one sector of myriad higher education special populations under study in the United States. The etiology of international student issues has been explored in traditional social sciences including psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Another academic discipline focused on international student issues is communications. In the literature concerning international students these fields comprise most of the research up until the mid 1990s. At this time, specific higher education fields, including student development-centered groups such as the American College
Professionals Association and student affairs professional research began to investigate this population. Concurrently, psychological and communication fields began to merge into the intercultural communication and competency research that dominates research today.

**Historic Development and Scope**

Advances in the field progressed international offices’ practice from a counseling model in which international students are seen as patients going through a psychologically stressful period in their lives, as evidenced in studies exemplified by Furnham and Trezise (1983), to a realization that personal growth and cultural adaptation are an iterative process (Bennett, 1998; Kim, 2001). The field now acknowledges this adaptive process can be aided by various programs and networks of support for international students. Understanding international student presence on American campuses in the modern age is a relatively new phenomenon; this section will provide an overview of some milestone research in the second half of the 20th Century that paved the way for the current understanding and resulting research in this area.

Despite the historic international content inherent in language studies, political science, anthropology, political science, and history, among others, it was not until after World War II when specialized issues of international students were studied as a specific topic. Examples of international university student issues include motivation to leave their home country, adjustment to a new culture, adjustment of the host institution to serve them, and interpersonal and intergroup issues of new populations among American students. Later, these issues became dedicated academic disciplines or integral subjects to existing academic disciplines.
Several academic fields have carried the mantle of investigating international student issues including psychology, sociology, and communications. Today, specific fields including international studies, relations, business, and education along with cultural studies/multiculturalism, social justice, race relations and intercultural competency are a part of the American higher education spectrum. Borrowing heavily from these fields, education pedagogy has focused on teaching to diverse classroom environments in the United States while educational administration has focused on dealing with underrepresented populations, equity, and school diversity. The research from these fields has focused on issues such as adaptation to the university, teaching methods for these new populations, and problems encountered by students. However, specific research on international student academic engagement is sparse so this body of related literature concerning diverse student populations becomes relevant to provide a background of knowledge to investigate the related yet distinct issue of international, undergraduate, academic engagement.

Related Research

There are two general areas of research related to international students. These areas focus on adjustment issues facing students and problems arising in classrooms as reported from the hosts. Additionally, it will be necessary to make inferences from related literature concerning other special populations given the paucity of research specifically related to international student academic engagement.

In order to comprehend the development of international student research issues, it is necessary investigate literature describing sojourner entry into other cultures and the issues arising from this interaction. The term culture shock was coined in 1954 by
Kalervo Oberg. This term asserted the existence of a natural phase individuals encounter when confronting new cultures (Lonner, in foreword of Furnham & Bochner, 1986/1989). Furnham and Bochner provide a detailed account of the psychological effects of contact with an unfamiliar culture which forms the basis of any sojourner orientation – an important concept in order to understand international student issues.

Culture shock and researchers’ understanding of the duality of the process progressed from the 1950s to some of the first research on international students. Specifically, psychological research focused on motivating factors that drove students to leave their home countries. Bochner (1973), in a study of 69 Asian students, found the vast majority had chosen to study in another country to gain academic qualifications. Furnham (1988) supports this finding by stating “acquisition of qualifications and experience ranked as the single most important reason for going to a foreign university” (p. 44). Cultural studies begun in the late 60s attempted to compare and contrast cultural group traits. Hofstede (1980) identified four dimensions of culture; power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity. It was the first study looking specifically at culture as a primary source of difference in humans (Hofstede).

Springing forth from these four dimensions, Hofstede (1980) presents the seminal idea of culture distance and it thus pervades subsequent research. Culture distance outlines the difficulty individuals have if they come from a culture much different – based on the four dimensions - from the host culture. This idea is a core theory when understanding international students in the United States. However, understanding why students come, how they are affected by the new culture, and the challenges they face given their cultural differences make up only half of the requisite knowledge base.
During the 1970s and 80s, acculturation, cross-cultural research, multicultural approaches, and pluralistic environment creation became the focus of research. Research focused on sojourner acculturation issues after arrival in a new culture (Furnham, 1987; Berry, Boski, Kim, 1987). Research in culture shock, including its causes and implications, now had an historical dimension and traditional descriptions had given way to new descriptions; a fledgling field of intercultural learning began to grow (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Culture shock and the negative connotations attached to the term spawned similar terms with less negative implications. Leading the acculturation research, Gudykunst and Kim (1987; 2001; 2003), Kim (1988), and Gudykunst (1993) developed a theory focused on the communication patterns and adaption of sojourners to unfamiliar settings – usually with American campuses as the focus.

Along with Gudykunst and Kim, Furnham and Bochner (1986) approached cultural issues from a communications standpoint. Verbal and non-verbal communication carries a set of shared symbolic meaning with a generally predetermined structure that is transmitted and interpreted by others. When people from one culture interact with people from another culture, their cultures are unfamiliar to each other and this places each interacting agency in an uncomfortable situation (Kim, 1988; Gudykunst & Kim, 1987; Ibid, 2001; Ibid, 2003; Furnham & Bochner, 1986). These researchers use the terms culture shock and culture fatigue extensively. Their approach largely operates from a single cultural reference point. Gudykunst and Kim (2003) state “we use predetermined categories to examine selected aspects of the cultures being studied” (p. 53). Gudykunst and Kim’s work largely investigates common process elements of communication all cultures share, adaptation to new environments and the resulting difficulties arising from
one’s own socialization and the environmental factors of the host culture that assist or hinder the adaptation process (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). In the mid to late 90s, interestingly coinciding with the increased ability of people to communicate via the Internet, a competing approach to intercultural communication was becoming popular among international practitioners and a different stance emerged.

In 1998, Bennett edited *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication: Selected Readings* and presented research from various authors that conceived a different approach to understanding our own culture as it relates to others and how to understand the developmental process of moving from an ethnocentric to an ethno-relative way of understanding and behaving. Primarily, the book challenges readers to understand the stages of development through which people can proceed via accidental or determined avenues.

Secondly, the book highlights culture and how culture can, and has, shaped institutions and thought patterns in society, particularly American society. Bennett, supported by contributing authors (1998), describes cultural adaptation as a developmental process. One’s ability to adapt to a new culture includes the ability to understand people’s perceptions are relative. Based in cultural context, those perceptions become reality for that cultural group to which the individual is trying to adapt. To be able to adapt to the social and physical structures in that culture or society, one must be able to essentially perceive another reality (see page 13 – 17 for a further discussion). As he presents in his Development of Intercultural Sensitivity model (Table 1), there are six stages progressing from ethnocentric to ethno-relative stages.
Denial  Defense  Minimization  Acceptance  Adaptation  Integration

<table>
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<th>Ethnocentric Stages</th>
<th>Ethnorelative Stages</th>
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*Figure 3. Experience of Difference diagram describes intercultural stages of development (Bennett, 1998).*

This study relies on Bennett’s model (1998) to support and validate the experience international students’ report because it allows for an intercultural evaluation of their experiences as they relate to their learning. However, it will be useful to highlight research on international student issues in the last ten years and then conclude the chapter with an investigation of student learning and engagement research.

*Review of Recent International Student Issues Research*

Literature on international student issues as defined in this study is scarce and therefore related populations become relevant; for example, research regarding Cambodian student populations at a single institution or Chinese students studying in Taiwan. For various reasons described below this type of research has congruence with international student issues since it explores the cultural aspects of these populations in a specific or general environment.

Beyond the scope of psychological stress associated with cultural and social adaptation, congruent research offers analysis of successful adjustment patterns of specific populations (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007) or descriptions of shared experiences such as sense of belonging of certain non-majority student populations (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007). Hurtado and Carter’s
research challenged Tinto’s (1993) assertions of the seemingly universal benefits of integration into the campus climate. Specifically, they developed empirical measures of sense of belonging for Latino students that took the campus climate into account and asserted a binary relationship between student and campus climate as an operative relationship determining student success. Johnson et al. (2007), reiterate Hurtado and Carter’s assertion that integration, as conceptualized by Tinto, negates campus responsibility and reduces the importance of cultural background. Johnson et al. uncovered “the ways specific college environments contribute to the sense of belonging among students from different racial/ethnic groups in the early stages of their collegiate experience” (p.534). Essentially, European American students and any students who had social or cultural capital of a university environment were likely to perceive a stronger sense of belonging compared to students of color.

For international students, these implications have positive and negative consequence. Definitely, international students lack some degree of cultural capital given their relative inexperience with American educational institutions, thus placing them at a disadvantage to engage academically. Cultural capital is the learned ability to navigate cultural activities, of which a university’s culture is created by the host culture. See discussion in Cole & Espinoza (2008) and general support by Bennett (1998) for more on this phenomenon. Conversely, academic preparedness, as defined in most international admissions criteria, suggests international students will display behavior that should provide them with some ability to experience a sense of belonging on an American campus.
There are two major themes in the literature that directly explore international student issues; adjustment of international students to campus and the inherent difficulties faced by hosts. These themes indicate the maturity level of the field of international education but also reflect attitudes of host campus educators and researchers regarding international students.

The first theme regarding adjustment offers insights into the rationale to recruit international students and the resulting learning outcomes for hosts and international students alike. Gurin (1999), in her milestone legal position defense in the University of Michigan case, explicitly states the benefits of students of color and other underrepresented groups on campus. Other reports proclaim the beneficial experience of international students studying in the United States as they pertain to social, economic, and strategic geopolitical advantages (Connell, 2008). However, there is more research investigating the psychological and social problems international students face (Olanrian, 1996; Selvadurai, 1992; Wan, Chapman and Biggs, 1992). The issues raised by these researchers revolve around two host campus-centered problems; whether American campus programs and services help international students and if the culture of the campus itself provides a stressful atmosphere. They also explored four personal adjustment stressors of different “home educational system” (Terkla, Roscoe & Etish-Andrews, 2007, p. 1), English language difficulty, “creation of new social networks” (Ibid, p. 1) and attempts to solve problems using strategy from their home country.

Terkla et al. (2007) surveyed 2,558 international undergraduate students in the United States, Ireland, and Amsterdam to identify their perceptions of adjustment difficulty and strengths and weaknesses of universities. They identified twenty items that
caused difficulty including cost of living, dating host country students, being away from friends, being away from family, and writing papers as the top five. There were differences in the responses between male and female, U.S. versus non-U.S. institutions, previous experience in the host country prior to enrollment, on or off campus housing, being a native speaker, and global region origin, but the salient point was the revelation of some universal problems international student reported across countries and continents. These were “difficulty of speaking with faculty or staff members, becoming familiar with college life, making international friends, and frequency of spending time at work” (Ibid, p. 9). Some of the “universal” problems in Terkla et al. (2007) have congruence with the NSSE framework. Examples directly related to Terkla et al. include interactions with instructors, interaction with diverse student populations, curriculum delivery and design, course work load, learning how to effectively collaborate with peers, and working together productively in community services activities (Kuh, 2001).

Garrod and Davis (1999) compiled personal essays written by international students at Dartmouth College that personalize each student’s individual story and fully highlights the range of experiences international students on American higher education campuses encounter. The individual stories present the variety of international student experiences, but commonalties persist in the stories. Central to each story is student development.

Each student has had a transformative experience in the United States, but many of those students made it explicit that it would be wrong to think the United States was the first or last place they developed, or would develop, as humans. The students explain the personal reflection needed to adapt to another culture and how to negotiate living in
two or more cultures simultaneously. The students also relate the gap in experience they recognize when meeting Americans for the first time. They relate how American students are focused on seemingly trivial experiences and seem to be superficially going through the motions of learning and not really wanting to engage in meaningful conversations about the meaning of their courses, college, or life. This finding was echoed in Terkla, Roscoe and Etish-Andrews (2007) who noted international students found meaningful conversations with host nationals were difficult to have. As a result, international students find more comfort in finding friends from their home country or other international students who can relate to these experiences. One student writes, “However little I may have in common with another international student, I can depend on the unspoken understanding that we have both come to terms with being isolated” (Garrod & Davis, 1999, p. 64-65). Through their own words, the students revealed a personal side of their development along a wide array of topics and circumstances. It is this qualitative nature that lends meaning to the stories and student development takes on a life of its own.

Understanding these universal difficulties frames the basic issues, but it does not allow for a complicated understanding of the unique situations which international students face when they arrive on our campuses in terms of academic engagement. The National Survey of Student Engagement instrument, however, measures students’ responses to questions designed to explore the scope of student involvement in educationally sound practices (Kuh, 2001). Sections include questions elucidating in-class experiences and class preparation, interactions with instructors, interaction with diverse student populations, curriculum delivery and design, course work load learning, how to effectively collaborate with peers, and working together productively in
community services activities (Ibid). Using this instrument to filter data garnered by the focus group questions provided an understanding of international university student academic engagement in familiar terms for higher education administrators.

Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005) examined the differences in national data gathered by NSSE and found international students engaged in more educationally effective behavior than American students in their freshman year than did their American counterparts. However, by the senior year, international students resembled American students in their engagement patterns. Carini et al. state, “First year international students surpassed their American counterparts in levels of academic challenge and student-faculty interaction” (p. 223). They also found international students used technology more than their American counterparts. Moreover, Carini et al. found international students “report gaining more in areas that represent desired outcomes of college” (p. 226). This research will be used in the analysis of the qualitative data to provide a framework to understand international student engagement. Further, Carini et al suggest, “institutional researchers, assessment teams, and others who share responsibility for monitoring the quality of student life should determine the extent to which the international student experiences on their campus are similar to or different from these findings” (p. 224-225).

From the research presented in this section, I have presented the overall and specific findings as they relate to international students. It is clear there are adjustment issues to American university cultures faced by international students. These cultural adjustments add stress to students’ lives and this may impact student success. International students have been studied in terms of this adjustment and stress but
relatively little is known about engagement in educational practices. Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005) found national differences but urge others to investigate patterns of engagement on individual campuses. To understand engagement as it relates to international students, it will be necessary to understand the specific research in that field.

Review of Relevant Student Learning and Engagement Research

Conceptually NSSE has roots in theory and research investigating the “conditions that promote student learning” (Kuh, 2001, p. 12). Based in the general field of student development and engagement, NSSE assesses both the institutional environment and choices students make to take part in various forms of educational activities. Kuh (2001), plainly states the research by Astin, Chickering, Gamson, Pascarella, and Terenzini formed the basis for the instrument. Indeed, each researcher is a contributor in some fashion to the NSSE team (Kuh, 2001).

Tracing the research lineage of this school of thought is more effective than an in depth review of each of the authors’ research because of the work by Chickering and Gamson (1987) is summative and thus forms the basis from which all future work would stem in academic engagement. Their article was the culmination of a series of conferences and meetings in the mid 1980s that sought to synthesize the overarching theme of good practice in undergraduate education (Gamson, 1991). This yielded the influential article in 1987 outlining seven good practices. In a later article (Chickering & Gamson, 1999), they cite their original work (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) and reiterate, “good practice in undergraduate education (1) encourages student-faculty contact (2) encourages cooperation among students (3) encourages active learning (4) gives prompt feedback (5) emphasizes time on task (6) communicates high expectations and (7)
respects diverse talents and ways of learning” (p. 76 - bulleting and formatting removed, numbering added). Basically, the environment created by individual institutions impacts student learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Following from Chickering and Gamson’s work on the “Seven Principles,” Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Astin (1993), developed iterative yet cooperative theories of student development or engagement that rest on a seemingly simple understanding of student learning. Essentially, successful students put in time and effort in purposeful educational activities (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Now known in higher education administration as quasi fact, conditions that promote student learning are “level of academic challenge, time on task, and participating in the other educationally purposeful activities directly influence the quality of students learning and overall educational experience” (Kuh, 2001, p. 12).

Through the nineties, the consensus of student involvement coupled with institutional environment became known as “‘best practices’ in teaching and learning” (Ewell, 2004, p. 1). Understanding these best practices, NSSE was developed to assess conditions understood to promote teaching and learning. It was primarily developed to counter the importance of commercial media rankings of colleges in the United States (Ewell, 2004). As Kuh (2001) states, “NSSE annually assesses the extent to which students … are participating in educational practices that are strongly associated with high levels of learning and personal development” (p. 12).

NSSE has been developed from the research lineage of student engagement and provides institutions and their stakeholders with a tool to assess the quality of the educational experience (Ewell, 2004). NSSE is designed to assess students’ perceptions
of their level of involvement in educationally sound practices (Kuh, 2001). The NSSE framework seeks to measure in-class experiences, class preparation, interactions with instructors, interaction with diverse student populations, curriculum delivery and design, course work load, peer collaboration, and community services involvement (Kuh, 2001). The NSSE lens will provide boundaries to the qualitative data elicited by the research questions. In this regard, NSSE provides a reliable and validated theoretical lens to frame and present student engagement and institutional environment from an American perspective.

The juxtaposition of international student issues research with student engagement theory shed understanding on international students’ perceptions and various behaviors in terms of academic engagement. Pulling out their responses and understanding each response from potentially different cultural lenses enunciated and elucidated international university academic engagement in a manner that is clear to American administrators and faithful to the students’ cultural perceptions.

A Need for Specific Research

The intentional presence of international students on most American college campuses indicates a set of functioning desires of the students as well as higher education administrators. In International Affairs Office sponsored marketing surveys, international students consistently report they chose to study in the United States because of the quality of education, educational choice, career opportunities, and prospects of increased income when they return to their home country. Colleges desire diverse student populations for curricular benefits, tuition revenue generation, and institutional goals of cultural exchange, global goodwill, and international security reasons (Yao, 2007). Academic
engagement practices of international students, as a field, is relatively shallow and more research is needed on individual campuses. The findings of the research as it pertained strictly to international students gravitates to the communication, psychological, and cultural conditions student face when leaving their home culture and studying in a new culture. How they engage on campus reveals they are more involved in academic endeavors their first year and resemble American students by their fourth, while showing greater overall gains “in areas that represent desired outcomes of college” (Carini, Kuh, & Zhao, 2005, p. 226). However, there remain questions that need answering at this university. Primarily, what are the engagement patterns that emerge among international students at this university? This question and the research method will be elucidated in the following chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

During the 2006 - 2007 academic year, there were 582,984 international college students in the United States representing 3.9% of all students (Bhandari & Chow, 2007). In the fall of 2008 however, there were 268 international collegiate students from 32 different countries at this university. This institution’s Office of International Affairs calculates international students comprise roughly four percent of the total headcount of all students for the fall 2008 semester.

The institution under study, a Midwest regional state university, is a predominantly white institution. The faculty, administrative, and support staff is predominantly white as well. However, a desire to host international students is evident from the 54 full-sized flag poles in the International Plaza located prominently in a picturesque and central part of campus. Further document analysis of the institutions core values and various official websites revealed a stated desire of administration and faculty to host international students. International students are therefore recruited to attend this university.

International students represent a variety of cultures and educational systems thus differentiating this population from the majority student population. This presents a challenge to educational leaders to understand how international learners academically engage. The demonstrated institutional directive to recruit greater numbers of international students further requires educational leaders to understand how international students perceive their engagement in academic behavior so international students are educated and served effectively. Therefore, a need exists for educational leaders to
understand how international students are academically engaging in academically challenging activities, active and collaborative learning, student - faculty interaction, and how they perceive whether the institution under study is a supportive campus environment for learning.

Bennett (1998) stated “The study of intercultural communication has tried to answer the question, ‘How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?’” (p. 1). Bennett asserts the ability and skill of one to recognize the existence and validity of another’s perspective is the first step to becoming “interculturally” competent. In this vein, this study investigated how international students understand their academic experience when they do not share a common cultural experience with the host university and the vast majority of its administrators and faculty.

Research Setting

Using anecdotal reports gathered by the researcher, international students have been hosted at this University since at least the mid 1950s. However, this institution began keeping detailed reports in 2001 when the current director took office. Since the fall semester of 2000, international student enrollment has progressively increased from 129 students (roughly 2.7% of total headcount) to the current level of 238 international students or roughly four percent of the current student headcount – a number that equals the national figure reported by Bhandari and Chow (2007). This university places importance in recruiting international students as evidenced by institutional structures and programs. The international plaza containing 54 full sized flag poles representing current students and recent graduates as well as the allocated funds and programs dedicated to
international student support such as the International Affairs Office (IAO) are two examples of institutional and external support for international students.

International students receive immigration document processing, arrival and orientation, ongoing immigration regulation administrative support, and social programming from the IAO. This office was officially created with the restructuring of the Intercultural International Center (IIC) in 2002. Formerly, the IIC was responsible as a unit for international student immigration and social support. Once the move from a single director with an administrative staff position in the IIC was made to an office directed by dual coordinators of international affairs and minority affairs, international students had a dedicated position for their needs.

Initially IAO was staffed by a single coordinator with three student assistants and a shared graduate assistant; the office has grown to be led by a director, a shared administrative support staff position, a graduate assistant, and seven student assistants including two student bus drivers. While there has been general growth of administrative support, there has not been a concurrent growth in understanding of international student academic engagement because the directives laid out by administrative structure have focused on compliance and international student social support.

The IAO, however, desires to understand the nature of international students’ academic experience. Therefore, the IAO has assessed its own services as well as university-wide services and programs using in-house surveys and institutional data derived from Noel Levitz and the NSSE. Retention is evaluated because retention rates are one type of measurement used to assess first year success. The IAO found international students did not persist to the second year for the same reasons as majority
students (IAO internal survey of transfer out students). Additionally, retention rates have proven inconclusive given the small number of international students. Further, explanations seemingly valid for American student trends were left wanting for international students. For example, some years the retention rates mirror those of majority students and other years they vary widely. The IAO surveyed all transfers in 2006 and found international students mainly transferred out of economic necessity citing the need to move closer to family or other forms of financial and social support. Quantitative retention rates alone fail to explain international undergraduate students’ experience so the need to understand how international students academically engage persists. This study explored this issue in order to understand how international students interact with this academic environment.

Introduction to the Study

The research question that guided the study sought to reveal how international students at this university engage in educational practices. This study explored international students’ perceptions of their academic engagement. Supporting questions were: what programs and services are accessed and in what time periods, what perceptions of programs and services that international students have and how this perception affects their academic engagement. In chapter four, the data generated by these questions and the resulting themes are presented as findings. In chapter five, the themes were filtered through the conceptual framework defined by the research heritage of student engagement and student learning theory and exemplified in the concept of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey instrument (National Survey of
Student Engagement, 2007). The discussion in the concluding chapter focuses on the meaning created by the findings, its implication for practitioners, and recommendations.

Statement of the Problem

There is a lack of information concerning international student academic engagement at this University. Resources are allocated for international student recruitment and programming, but little is known about how international students engage in educational practices and therefore derive educational benefit from their experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand international student academic engagement at this university by qualitatively researching how international students perceive their academic engagement activities. Research regarding diverse student populations on American campuses highlights the need for administrators and educators to be conscious of specific ways in which these populations differ from the majority population (Carini, Kuh, & Zhao, 2005; Kuh & Umbach, 2005; Kezar, 2007). The NSSE framework guided the analysis of engagement patterns because NSSE data have been used by other researchers to determine precisely how specific students within specific institutions engaged in effective educational practices (Laird, et al., 2007). Using qualitative data collection methods and analysis, this research provides educational leaders with explanations of international student academic engagement and may provide a procedural roadmap to other researchers with similar needs at other institutions but does not provide generalized data.
Research Question

Framed by the research setting, the problem and purpose, the research question was: What are the academic engagement patterns that emerge among international students at a Midwest regional state university? Supporting the main research question, the following sub questions were anticipated but the study was not bounded by this list:

a. What outside of classroom activities do international students report in regard to academic preparation?

b. What international student-faculty interactions are described?

c. What academic and social support programs and services do international students use?

d. What perceptions of academic and social support programs and services do international students hold?

e. What are the perceptions of international students with regard to their overall academic experience?

Design of the Study

While quantitative methods are best suited for comparisons and generalizations of large subject population data, the sparse number of international student responses to the NSSE at this institution does not support that type of research. Therefore, qualitative methods were employed to study the emergent academic engagement patterns among international students at this university. Schön (1995) argues for the use of action research to study how knowledge is generated and shared within a certain institution. While explaining the current educational research topography, Schön questions whether rigor or relevance must be compromised when qualitative methods are employed.
However, Schön’s justifications for action research place the researcher in the “messy and confusing [problems] of greatest human concern” (p. 27). The unstated reality to which Schön refers implies an objectivist ontology and subjectivist epistemology that Coghlan and Brannick (2005, p. 5) outline in their discussion and explanation of action research. However, due to the nature of the student population under study, this study was based in a subjectivist ontology and epistemology to gather and report rich data designed specifically to understand their varying perspectives regarding academic engagement. Merriam (1998) asserts anonymous experimental research is at one end of a research continuum; at the other end is this qualitative case study designed as an “intensive investigation of a specific phenomenon” (p.217). Bennett (1998) would agree with this approach when he warns, “If we fail to assume that people of different cultures may sincerely perceive the world differently, then our efforts toward understanding are subverted by a desire to ‘correct’ the one who has it wrong (p. 16).

Placing the study firmly in the realm of qualitative research further supported the purpose of this research to more fully understand the students’ perceptions of their academic engagement at this institution. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) assert the type of methodology employed is not as important in research as who sets the research agenda and who benefits from the research. In this case, the researcher is an involved participant in international programs. The impetus on the researcher requires an accurate and truthful account of the student responses. Stating this bias early and often will be one mitigating factor in the attempt to reduce bias. Merriam (1998) cites an earlier work by Diener and Crandall (1978) stating, “… Biases that cannot be controlled should be discussed in the written report” (p. 216). This research relays the experiences of individual students as
accurately as possible in order to understand how this specific group of non majority students perceives their academic experience at this university.

Procedure

Beginning in late October of 2008, after IRB approval from University of Missouri, focus groups were selected by e-mailing all current international students inviting them to participate in focus groups to share their experience. The data collected through audio recording was transcribed, coded, categorized, analyzed, and the findings and implications for further study are presented in chapters four and five. The following section highlights the proposed procedure from participant selection through analysis.

*Focus Group Participants*

Using a commonly-used, neutral e-mail account to solicit information and participation from the campus community, all undergraduate international students at this university were invited to attend an informational meeting about the study. During the first meeting I presented my study as a graduate student (in my approach, demeanor and appearance) to a group of nine students.

I read the consent statement/biographic form (Appendix A) to them and asked them to fill out the biographic portion if they agreed to participate. If they did not wish to participate, they dropped off the form in the same manner as those who chose to participate but left the form blank to desist from the study. Of the initial nine students, eight filled out the form. The biographic form captured their e-mail addresses, home country, and credit hours.
This preliminary information was used to separate the participants into focus groups. The groups were sorted first by amount of credit hours, then by region, then by group size.

According to the sorting protocol, a minimum of two focus group interviews with at least three newly arrived international student participants (less than 36 credit hours complete at time of study) and two focus group interviews with at least three participants containing experienced international students (at least 36 credit hours complete) needed to be studied. The minimum number of six students in each experience level has support within the existing literature and I was short of this goal by three newly arrived students.

Krueger and Casey (2000) note optimal focus group size in a “noncommercial topic is six to eight members” (p. 73). Additionally, Krueger and Casey assert smaller groups are preferred for in-depth analysis. Further, second language learners need more time to formulate and produce responses so the smaller group size with a minimum of three participants is warranted. A maximum of five students in four focus groups at the two levels (newly arrived and experienced) was allowed but not needed. The contingency plan if there were more volunteers than possible participant spaces stated participants would be selected at random from the total pool for each level. I.e. if there were 20 respondents from China, all have 32 hours, and there were other respondents from other countries with fewer than 36 hours, I would draw a sufficient number of Chinese students to fill out the desired number of groups. This should have allowed for a diversity of respondents. However, I did not have the required minimum number and therefore had to resort to rewriting the IRB to be able to present personally in various student organizations in order to gather more participants. This method was successful and I was
able to gather 6 more students for a total of 14 participants; 6 in the experienced category and eight in the newly arrived category.

*Focus Group Setting*

The focus groups were designed to draw out information by providing a comfortable atmosphere for international students. Based on the research of Gudykunst and Hammer (1988), the focus groups strove to provide an environment that reduced uncertainty and anxiety for participants so were held in the student union in a reading room known to be a student area of the campus. The focus groups were held at times convenient to the international student participants and it was hoped the comfortable setting removed my administrative positional power from the situation. Further, from the intercultural development theory outlined by Bennett (1998), adaptation methods were employed by the researcher (I have resolved and trailing issue scores on the Intercultural Development Inventory in the adaptation scale) to understand the students’ cultural perspectives in order to communicate their experiences clearly. This places the researcher in the study as a participant cultural interpreter, and measures were employed in the data collection and analysis to reduce bias. The measures included an acknowledgement that cultural bias can never be erased therefore requiring the researcher to be more reflective and not impose his own cultural beliefs on the answers provided.

*Focus Group Process and Data Collection Method*

Once the focus groups were assembled, a written confidentiality statement and consent form (Appendix A) was given to the students to complete. Standard protocol was developed consisting of an opening speech explaining how the focus groups were to be conducted and how protection of their rights as participants was ensured. All effort was
made to ensure students understood they were anonymous volunteers who were not required to participate and their responses would not be shared. A written confidentiality statement and a biographic consent form were given to all participants before the interview questions were asked. This was also read to them.

If students chose to continue, the biographic consent form asked students to create a pseudonym, indicate their citizenship, how many credit hours they had completed at the time of the study, and how many credit hours in which they were currently enrolled. Each student was also asked to place their pseudonym on a name tag. The focus group was made comfortable for them by choosing their own pseudonym and the discussion that followed. It was an amusing activity for them and the researcher.

Before the verbal portion of the focus group interview session, students’ questions were answered as needed. The verbal focus group interview questions began when the students were ready. The interview questions were based on the supporting questions listed in the research questions section above. The questions are based on the NSSE items and focus on the students’ academic experience at this university. These were given to the first focus group of international students. The questions were deliberately broad to let the students answer as they feel necessary. An iterative process was utilized to screen the data and construct categories after each focus group interview.

Data were collected by the confidentiality statement -biographic consent form and audio recordings of the focus group meetings. Interviews were followed by an iterative process of researcher reflection on the quality of the questions asked to elicit sufficient data. Once all of the focus groups were completed, all the audio recordings were transcribed. I collected enough data when I began to achieve redundancy as Merriam
(1998) suggests. Strauss and Corbin (1998) reaffirm this approach by stating, “data collection continues ‘until theoretical saturation takes place.’ This simply means … the researcher finds that no new data are being unearthed.” (p. 292). When the transcriptions were received, the data analysis began.

**Figure 2.** Participants selection, focus group assembly, data collection, and making meaning is a four step process with each step containing several processes.

**Data Analysis**

The qualitative data were analyzed using open and axial coding, and theme development. The themes were checked against the NSSE filter to find distilled academic engagement patterns of international students. The NSSE framework filter provided a validated lens to explore international students’ perceptions of their level of academic engagement, interactions with faculty, and their usage and resulting perceptions of specific academic services and programs that define their educational experience at this university.
Validating the new knowledge was important. Heppner and Heppner (2004) reiterate good methodology is fundamental and proper selection and alignment of the “participants, instruments, procedures, and statistical analyses” (p. 108) aides in validity and reliability of analysis and findings. This study was designed to pose questions, implement data collection methods, analyze data, and develop findings that hold meaning for all stakeholders. This process gives educational leaders and policy setters the knowledge to develop and implement better policies and practice for international students at this university.

Data Validation

Using the NSSE instrument to filter the coded and themed qualitative data garnered from the focus group enhanced validity and reliability. Themed data was checked against the academic items present in the NSSE. These items have been validated nationally and are widely accepted in the field as indicators of positive educational engagement activities. The use of this validation method focuses the students’ responses on academic engagement and provides an established set of principles to measure their perceptions.
Figure 4: Data was examined using the theoretical constructs of the NSSE to filter data in order to highlight responses that have congruency with student learning theory and answer the research question.

Summary

This study should render an understanding of international student academic engagement in educational practices at this university from a perspective that places value on personal experiences using students’ own rich description of their perception of classes, homework, faculty, and educational programs and services.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

International students at the Midwest regional state university in this study represent a variety of cultures and educational systems. They differ from the majority student population in terms of cultural and academic preparation for university. This presents a challenge to educational leaders to understand how international students perceive their engagement in academic behavior so this specific population is educated and served effectively. The purpose of this study was to understand international student academic engagement at a Midwest regional state university by qualitatively researching how international students perceive their academic engagement activities. This chapter will present the findings of the study.

Research Question

What are the academic engagement patterns that emerge among international students at a Midwest regional state university? The grand tour question was supported using questions derived from NSSE items. The questions focus on the students’ academic experience at this university. Interview questions were deliberately broad to let the students answer as they felt necessary and only guided the actual focus group subject – academic experiences. The focus group questions were not bound by this list:

a. What outside of classroom activities do international students report in regard to academic preparation?

b. What international student-faculty interactions are described?
c. What academic and social support programs and services do international students use?
d. What perceptions of academic and social support programs and services do international students hold?
e. What are the perceptions of international students with regard to their overall academic experience?

Focus Group Method

The method employed was a qualitative case study using audio recorded focus group interviews comprised of international university students and sorted into two major groups. Students with fewer than 36 cumulative institutional credit hours were classified as newly arrived students and students with more than 36 hours were classified as experienced international students, and sorted into geographically or culturally similar groups. Five focus groups consisting of a total of fourteen students were interviewed.

Focus Group Creation

All undergraduate international students at this university were contacted using a commonly-used, neutral e-mail account recognized by the campus community. International students are defined as students holding an F-1 or J-1 student visa issued by the United States Department of State posts outside the United States. This selected group of students was asked to attend an informational meeting about the study. Three focus groups were obtained in this manner, but subsequent e-mails requesting student participation did not result in any further students attending the presentations. Therefore, a new strategy to contact students groups directly to deliver the initial presentation protocol (Appendix A) was instituted to gather more participants. This necessitated an
Institutional Review Board (IRB) amendment to request time to present the project to the student organizations during their regularly scheduled meeting times to garner further participation. The IRB amendment was approved provided each student organization granted verifiable consent in written form. Three of the four student organizations I contacted responded to my requests (Appendices C, D, and E).

During each presentation, I read the consent statement/biographic form (Appendix A) to them and asked them to fill out the biographic portion if they were willing to participate. If they did not wish to participate, they were given the option to drop off the form in the same manner as those choosing to participate but were told to leave the form blank to desist from the study. They were assured verbally and in the consent form no penalty would result for non participation. For students willing to participate, their completed form captured their e-mail addresses for future contact, home country, and credit hours.

The information gathered in this manner was used to separate the participants into focus groups. The groups were sorted first by amount of credit hours to determine whether students would be classified as newly arrived (<36 cumulative hours) or experienced (>36). Next students were sorted into affinity groups by region, then by group size.

According to the sorting protocol, two focus group interviews with three newly arrived international student participants and another containing two newly arrived students (less than 36 credit hours complete at time of study) and two focus group interviews with three participants containing experienced, international students (at least
36 credit hours complete) were assembled. The minimum number of six students in each experience level is a sufficient number of participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Krueger and Casey (2000) note optimal focus group size in a “noncommercial topic is six to eight members” (p. 73). Additionally, Krueger and Casey assert smaller groups are required for more in depth analysis. Further, second language learners need more time to formulate and produce responses so the smaller group size with a minimum of three participants is warranted. While the proposed method set limits of a maximum of five students in four focus groups at the two levels (newly arrived and experienced) this was not a concern in this study. There were no more volunteers than possible participant spaces. All willing students in the study were placed in focus groups.

Focus Group Demographics

A diverse pool of respondents took part in this study. There were fourteen students from eight countries assembled for this study including China, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Nepal, Nigeria, Spain, and (country name not disclosed to protect anonymity).

Only three participants were near native or native speakers of English. Nepalese students are near native speakers of English due to their British-based educational system and the majority of classes taught in English. Nigerians are native speakers due to their Colonial roots and the remnants of the educational and social class system left behind by the British. The result is a large portion of the Nigerian population who report English as the first language spoken in the home. The remainder of the students were considered to be second language learners of English. There were eight newly arrived students (<36 hours) and six experienced students (>36). A total of five of the fourteen participants were female and nine were male. There were three female and five male respondents in
the newly arrived group while there were two female and four male respondents in the experienced student group. While gender data were recorded, there were no reportable differences between male and female responses.

The following tables present the descriptive demographic data obtained from the confidentiality statement and a biographic consent form (Appendix B). There were eight newly arrived students representing six countries. Table 1 describes the newly arrived student demographic data in summary form.

Table 1

*Newly Arrived Focus Group Demographics (n=8)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Home Country</th>
<th>Cumulative Credit Hours</th>
<th>Credit Hours Enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 2</td>
<td>Fido</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kaori</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 4</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sid</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 5</td>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pitt</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37.5% Female</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The source of this information derived from Participation Consent and Biographic Data Sheets (Appendix B).
There were six experienced students representing four countries. The average number of cumulative credit hours for the experienced student group was 48.7 and they were enrolled in an average number of 14.0 credit hours in the semester they were interviewed. The experienced student demographic information is found in Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Home Country</th>
<th>Cumulative Credit Hours</th>
<th>Credit Hours Enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lola</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 3</td>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenger</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40.0% Average 48.7 14.0

Female

Note: The source of this information derived from Participation Consent and Biographic Data Sheets (Appendix B).

Focus Group Setting

The focus group setting was designed to draw out information by providing a comfortable atmosphere for international students. Based on the research of Gudykunst and Hammer (1988), the focus groups should provide an environment that reduces uncertainty and anxiety for participants. Every attempt was made to accomplish this goal. The focus groups were scheduled to meet in the third floor reading room of the student
union, generally known as a student gathering area, but all international student participants suggested moving to a location that was more comfortable for them when asked if the location was suitable. Two groups selected a conference room, four groups chose an office, and two chose a lunch room. All of the rooms chosen were on the second floor of the union in a location known to be a safe zone for international students; the Intercultural International Center. The focus groups were held at times the international students suggested as well. Unexpectedly, the students chose meeting times during the day. Two groups chose the late morning and the remainder selected times varying from one o’clock to four o’clock. I had expected to meet them in the evenings.

The comfortable setting was further emphasized by the use of an ice breaker activity. I recognize I am an active part of the research setting due to my professional position as the director of the international affairs and ESL program. However, I made a qualifying statement that I was conducting the focus groups as a doctoral student in an attempt to remove my administrative positional power from the situation. This was done to remove obsequious comments and try to gather honest perceptions of the students’ academic experience.

Further, it is important to note my life experiences coupled with specific personal development opportunities and my role as the international affairs director creates a unique research tool. The students recognize and understand my role as a support office. If there is social, academic, or immigration trouble, I am usually the person they meet to start the solution process. Further, and as a result of advising and counseling international students on a range of issues, I am able to adapt my communication style and cultural frame of reference to meet them where they are more easily than someone who believes
there is only one way (their own cultural reference) to show respect, be polite, or communicate effectively.

Bennett (1998) developed the experience of difference model (Figure 3) and resulting intercultural development theory to describe stages individuals move through as their worldview and understanding/acceptance/adaptation of cultural difference develops. Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003) developed an inventory to measure individuals and the stages they believe they are in and the one they are actually demonstrating. My ability to adapt my cultural frame of reference to understand the students’ cultural perspectives was valuable. I was able to relate to their experiences, understand why they saw a difference or how they understood their environment and respect the fact their interpretation of events is valid and worth consideration.

This research stance and approach placed the researcher in the study as a primary instrument (Merriam, 1998, p.7). This study involved cultural interpretation and measures were employed in the data collection and analysis to reduce researcher bias. The measures included an acknowledgement that cultural bias can never be erased therefore requiring the researcher to be more reflective and not impose her or his own cultural beliefs on the answers provided. Therefore in the timeframe allowed in the focus groups, I asked them to explain how experiences in their country had shaped their respective understandings of education and how it affects their perceptions of their experiences at this university. These measures made the atmosphere ripe to collect valuable data.

*Iterative Focus Group Data Collection*

Contacting and assembling participants and then organizing the focus groups was a considerable challenge. However, once the focus groups were assembled, standard
protocol was developed consisting of an opening speech explaining how the focus groups were to be conducted and how protection of their rights would be ensured (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). A written document and verbal reinforcement of the document was conducted to ensure students understood they were anonymous volunteers who were not required to participate and their responses would be kept confidential. A written confidentiality statement and a biographic consent form (Appendix B) were given to all participants before the focus group questions were asked. This statement was read to them for clarity and to ensure participants fully understood all directions and assurances.

If students were willing to continue, the biographic consent form asked students to create a pseudonym in order to protect their identity (ice breaker activity). They were also asked to indicate their citizenship, how many cumulative credit hours they had completed, and the number of credit hours in which they were currently enrolled. Each student was asked to place their pseudonym on a name tag so they could refer to each other using those names. Before the verbal portion of the focus group interview session, students’ questions were answered as needed. The focus group interview questions began when the students indicated they were ready.

I made a conscious effort to increase the comfort level of the focus group process by allowing them to choose the location and their pseudonym. The pseudonym creation and reporting out process was an amusing ice breaker activity for all participants. Their comfort level was noticeably increased and it promoted conversation.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interviews took place over a period of two months from December 2008 to February 2009. The length of data collection was due to the inability
of using anonymous e-mail to solicit enough participants to populate the focus groups in December. Three focus groups were gathered and interviewed using the original contact plan in December and two more focus groups were created by directly contacting international student groups, asking to present to their organization during their meeting time in person in January and February.

*Iterative Question Formulation Process*

After each focus group, initial analysis of the data provided an iterative method of data screening and identification and category construction (Merriam, 1998, p.167). Using this process facilitated the reformulation of the next set of focus group probing questions. This process facilitated the open and axial coding process as well. An iterative process was utilized to screen the data and construct categories after each focus group interview to best elicit data in the next focus group (see Figure 5). Data were collected by the confidentiality statement -biographic consent form and audio recordings of the focus group meetings. Interviews were followed by an iterative process of researcher reflection on the quality of the questions asked to elicit sufficient data. Merriam (1998) suggests and Strauss and Corbin (1998) reaffirm this approach by stating, “data collection continues ‘until theoretical saturation takes place.’” This simply means … the researcher finds that no new data are being unearthed.” (p. 292). I quickly learned I had collected enough data when I began to achieve redundancy in several areas very quickly. After I had coded the data, it was apparent there were general themes emerging from the first focus group interview such as cultural differences, instruction differences, study strategies, faculty interaction, and American peer interaction. These themes were noted after the first focus groups; the same initial interview questions were asked in each
successive focus group, but the supporting and probing questions were iteratively developed to drill down and uncover or refine various academic experiences such as American classroom cultural differences, American classroom instructional differences, faculty interaction, and academic success strategies. It was in these refined states nuances that the students’ perceptions differed between newly arrived students and experienced students. An illustration of the process is found below in Figure 5.

*Figure 5:* Concept map displaying the iterative process of initial data collection, primary analysis, data screening, and category construction.
Data Analysis Process

Data were analyzed iteratively from the first focus group to the fifth, with coding and theme development happening simultaneously with each successive group. This section will describe the data analysis process from the tape transcription to the NSSE Filter.

Open and Axial Coding

I transcribed the taped interviews verbatim and analyzed the data of the five focus groups looking for specific words or phrases that conveyed a condition, attitude, or perspective the international student participants had expressed. Upon the second reading, key phrases were highlighted in order to sort the data. From this open coded data in the first focus group, phrases were further grouped and labels were assigned for the axial coded data. These were iteratively modified as the successive data from other focus groups were collected. For example, while coding the first focus group, a heading for one code emerged initially as ‘class rules and behavior.’ However, the phrase ‘cultural differences’ was added to it to become ‘class rules and behavior, cultural differences’ as similar phrases were added, the category extended. This code, and seven other codes that emerged from the first focus group, allowed me to iteratively guide follow up question formulation for successive focus groups and consequently screen and construct themes for future data found in the subsequent focus groups.

After this process, each of the open coded transcripts were reassembled and arranged with the similar coded data found in the other transcripts to create categories of
The data were then analyzed and themes emerged from the categorized data (See Figure 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Color Code:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= class rules and behavior, cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= academic challenges in class (language, culture, difficulty of academics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= class success strategy (study behavior, homework, academic support, technology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= faculty interaction, behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= personal challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= misunderstanding/gap in “basic” knowledge American students would have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= American student interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= summary/conclusion findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FG1 – Experienced: Europe (2) and Nepal
FG2 – Newly Arrived: Japan (2)
FG3 – Experienced: Korea (3)
FG4 – Newly Arrived: Nepal (2) and Nigeria
FG5 – Newly Arrived: China, South Korea, and Indonesia

**FG1 - Experienced**

Lola: I think a big impression was like the different ways of studying and giving the class. In general, the whole system is different from my country. I think that’s been the most impressive thing.

Researcher: can you explain some of those differences?

Lola: like for example back home, like there is one final exam in June and if you don’t go to class it doesn’t matter. They don’t care, because it’s like a big class a lot of people. And here it’s like a totally different system and they care about you. They know your name and they know your tests. And it’s more personal and for me I was a lot different, but I like it here.

*Figure 6*: Screen shot of coded raw data organized by theme.

**Theme Development**

Axial coding procedures grouped the open coded data according to semantically similar phrases and sentiments (Figure 6); codes were assigned to the categories. The
assembled data were cumbersome so a data management system (see Figure 7 for sample and Appendix G for full view) was implemented to reduce the data into a manageable format in order to discern various themes more easily.

Focus groups were organized in the data management system spreadsheet into newly arrived and experienced students in order to better match the NSSE theoretical framework and to understand one dynamic – the acculturation/adaptation process of international students. The axial coded categories were placed in the horizontal axis of a spreadsheet and descriptive participant information (pseudonym, home country, focus group number) in the vertical axis (See Figure 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Misunderstanding/gap in “basic” knowledge American students would have</th>
<th>Personal challenges</th>
<th>American student interaction</th>
<th>American class cultural differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name/Data Code</td>
<td>KG</td>
<td>PC</td>
<td>SI</td>
<td>CD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fg2N-F</td>
<td>office locations</td>
<td>language</td>
<td>I don't speak to them, they don't speak to me</td>
<td>class not strict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDC?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>self dismissal - bathroom, smoke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>does not know how to answer ask questions if professor does not answer questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fg2N-K</td>
<td></td>
<td>on going language</td>
<td>looked at like strange</td>
<td>safety issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7:* Screen shot of the data management system showing focus group 2, newly arrived students and the study categories.

Organizing the axial coded data in this manner led to the development of the following themes. The following themes present newly arrived and experienced student findings together and interesting differences are highlighted. The student quotes are transcribed with grammatical and syntax errors for the remainder of the paper.
American Class Cultural Differences

When the newly arrived students and experienced students were asked to describe their classroom experiences at this university, the newly arrived students quickly noted the overt cultural differences of an American university classroom. The students uniformly reported the casual nature of the classroom at this university. Some of the issues reported included the freedom of American students to dismiss themselves for bathroom or phone breaks, the open nature of texting, the casual dress (sweat pants and flip flops), and the apparent freedom of the class atmosphere. The presence of food and drink in the classroom was particularly shocking for many newly arrived students. John, a newly arrived student from Nigeria, observed,

(an American student) came in to class and had a bottle of Gatorade and a burger and he’s eating and drinking and taking notes and he doesn’t get any queries for that? And I feel that’s really great although it’s kind of weird for me. But I feel that’s really great because you feel free and comfortable. You can’t open sweets, like, in my country. You can get in deep trouble for that.

Other classroom behavior noted included the seating position of American students. This drew attention from several newly arrived students who noted the relaxed nature of being able to slump in their chair or to put your head in their hands. Sid, a newly arrived student from Nepal noted, “you can sit in any position we like. Like this (crosses legs and leans back) with your legs like no matter how. Whatever way you feel more comfortable.” Seating and posture was particularly disturbing for these students and was mentioned by
several students. Christina and Christmas agreed with Sid and related a common shared experience on the subject in this manner:

Christina: yes when they want to leave the class they can just walk away without saying anything. Like when they go to the restroom you just go you don’t need to get permission. But in my country you should. That’s polite.

Christmas: … and they just put their leg on the desk.

Christina: Yeah! That is impossible in my country.

Christmas: I know it’s possible but very rude behavior in my country.

Researcher: So legs on the desk …

Christina: Eating food…

Christmas: Crossing your arms

Christina: Text messaging

Researcher: So what do you think of students who are doing these things?

Christina: Jealous

Researcher: You’re jealous?

Christina: I know here I can do but I was thinking I really can’t do this

Christmas: If you do that in my country you’re gonna get kicked out

Researcher: So you think that the professor that is looking at that thinks it’s OK?

Christmas: I think they think that behavior is also very rude but they can’t change it.

While Christmas believes the faculty are powerless to change American class behavior, other international students in this study recognized cultural differences in the way faculty conducted themselves in class and in how they conducted their classes.
Ana, an experienced student, noted, “Teachers give you their office hours, email, phone numbers and they’re available like 24-7 to help you. I really like it because you get more comfortable with them. It feels like they’re going to help you always.” The students stated it was easy to meet faculty after class or in their offices and they provided a barrier free communication pattern with their students. Sid noted, “here like the teacher has the freedom to talk with us and we can meet him in his office or meet him at his desk after class. And if I have a problem than I can just go and ask him and talk to him or I can e-mail him and that is more important.” Especially for the newly arrived international student, observations concerning cultural differences were thoroughly a part of their experience. The cultural differences extended to instructional differences as well.

*American Class Instructional Difference*

Ana an experienced student from Spain effectively states the nature of this theme when she noted the following:

My big impression was, like, the relationship between like student and teacher. Like the way, like back home I learned the relationship between students and teachers is not like really friendly. Like back home the teachers and professors are not willing to help students, like here. Teachers give you their office hours, email, phone numbers and they’re available like 24-7 to help you. I really like it because you get more comfortable with them. It feels like they’re going to help you always. Back home teachers doesn’t even know you 1 … but here especially in your majors classes your teachers are getting to know you and it’s more comfortable being here in studying here.
This sentiment was echoed by students from Nepal, China, South Korea and Nigeria. For example, a group of newly arrived students noted:

Sid: I think the grading system here in the United States it favors attendance whereas in Nepal we just have a main exam at the end of the year if you do good and that exam then you get a good mark if you don’t then. Then you fail.

John: Yes for me in Nigeria we have one test and one exam and that’s it.

Ray: Yes it is much more fair here. In Nepal, if there’s a student that is very clever about cheating then he just has to pass that one test and then he receives his certification. And it does not matter about attendance or homework or anything like that. But over here the system rewards a student who could study is continuously.

Further, a majority of the students recognized and highlighted the use of varied instructional techniques and compared them to their previous understanding of education. Many of the students expressed the continuous nature of the classes with an emphasis on homework and quizzes compared to a system of two tests and a final or a single cumulative examination at the end of their session. They also mentioned the importance of attendance, the interactive nature of a majority of classes, and the preeminent use of technology. Some students felt there was a reliance on technology, but the majority of students felt the technology gave them the freedom to complete tasks easily and communicate with faculty. Finally, the idea of the approachability of faculty mirrors much of the same sentiment found in the American class cultural differences theme, but the students were able to discern the difference between an instructional technique and a cultural difference.
Class Success Strategy

This theme developed out of strategies they employed to succeed in their classes. It was an important subject freely shared by the students. Issues such as study behavior, homework, academic support, technology comprise the bulk of this conversation. The findings for this theme are best displayed in visual format and shown in Figure 8.

![Figure 8. A Venn diagram of international students’ class success strategies as described by newly arrived students (< 36 hours cumulative) and experienced students (> 36 hours).]
While common success strategies were reported by students from each level, the common strategies were not reported equally by each level. I.e. newly arrived student strategies that were common to experienced students strategies relied heavily on classroom artifacts and technology to navigate their classroom experience and academic requirements, whereas experienced student used this technique but it was not central to their experience.

Figure 9 separates common international student success strategies found in Figure 8 into newly arrived and experienced student strategies. This further highlights and clarifies the behavior that differentiated newly arrived student behavior from experienced students.
### Common International Student Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newly Arrived Strategy</th>
<th>Experienced Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use syllabus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Utilize class technology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Utilize class technology</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• E-companion</td>
<td>• Threaded discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Homework verification and submission</td>
<td>• Group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• E-mail faculty questions</td>
<td>• Visit faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Notes from PowerPoint</td>
<td>• Multitasking study style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Internet</td>
<td>• Cram sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Threaded discussions</td>
<td>• Adaptive study style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do homework regularly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Rely on peers for help
  - Borrow notes
  - HW clarification
  - Group work

- Regular library study
- Use writing center
- Visit faculty
- Multitasking study style
- Cram sessions
- Adaptive study style
- Do homework regularly

*Figure 9.* Common success strategies reported by international students are separated to highlight centrality of experience each group assigned to particular strategies.
For example, the syllabus is a highly valued document for international students
to find out when major assignments are due in to professors and test scheduling. Fido, a
new student from Japan noted, “the syllabus helps me … more details there, but
sometimes the syllabus was changed so that makes me confused.” Students relied on
other classroom artifacts and tools such as the information found in the electronic
supplements to avoid confusion.

The use of technology in its various forms is a valuable aid as reported by the
participants. Ray, a newly arrived student from Nepal, reports, “Classes over here teaches
us to use technology. I use the Internet to make detailed notes about the things that I need
to study. So I use the Internet to make detailed notes on everything. But I have everything
on my (paper) notebook as well so I think the way we study will help us to be successful
in our classes.” The experienced students also reported they used these strategies, but
they were not as explicit in their description as the newly arrived students. Lola, an
experienced student from Spain mentioned her lack of Internet savvy in the classroom,
“The real support was like my advisor but I was in like earth sciences so there was a lot
of people and I didn’t know how to use the Internet so I went to my friends and said I
didn’t know how to use the Internet so it was my friends that taught me how to do it.”
The experienced students, however, focused their comments on relationships to succeed.

Specifically the experienced students focused on interpersonal experiences in the
classroom and how they can be managed effectively to succeed in class. Ana stated, “I
think now I’m just knowing how the teachers are because you get different personalities
with different teachers and you get different teachers who are always asking for
something else.” Lola agreed when she stated, “I think it’s different because in the
beginning you don’t know what’s going on so you ask your friends but now I know what’s going on so not going to ask them. So now I go to the teacher and now I’m taking every class and taking is my major so if I have doubts or something I go to my teacher and asking for assistance because my friends aren’t going to know and my confidence is higher now.” Faculty interaction was more central to their experience for experienced students.

*Faculty Interaction*

This theme needed to be broken into two different types of interactions; the actions the students reported they had taken to interact with faculty and those actions the faculty had taken to interact with students. This distinction in the theme also yielded findings that were closely associated with cultural and background differences rather than experience level when I examined the student initiated interaction with faculty.

Students who had more exposure to English in their secondary preparation reported higher levels of interaction with faculty when they first arrived in order to navigate their experience, but with time spent at the university they reported their confidence in English helped them to follow class directions more effectively and they decreased their interaction with faculty over time. However the group of experienced Korean students reported no change in their interaction with faculty over time and reported they had never spoken to some of their professors. This finding is congruent with the reports from newly arrived Southeast and East Asian students who report little or no interaction with faculty because they are “scared” and “afraid.” Mostly, they are not afraid of their ability in English, rather they are afraid that faculty will not understand them.
From the students’ perspective, the faculty have presented a friendly face to students in each level and they recognize faculty are there to help them; they highlighted faculty who provide office hours freely and are approachable after class. The students report the ease they may contact the professor using either e-mail or through various communication methods found in the university’s online classroom interface tool e-companion. Newly arrived students were generally positive and reported satisfaction with their encounters with professors. The one notable exception related to professors that do not follow the syllabus and the consternation that caused Fido. Experienced students made comments about the percentage of engaging classes they have encountered and generally presented an overall picture that some classes and professors are “good” and some are not. They also stated they had an overall decrease in faculty interaction even though they were more confident to do it.

*Academic Challenges in Class*

This theme encompasses the difficulty of class assignments and content. Interestingly, international students perceived certain classes reliant on English language components such as reading detailed text for content and writing papers based on their learning derived from texts and lecture notes as “difficult.” They interpret English being integral to the term “academic challenge.” In one example, newly arrived students clearly avoid certain general education classes until later in their academic career:

Researcher: Have you taken American history or American political science yet?

Christina and Pitt: No, not yet.

Christmas: I’ve avoided that class.

Researcher: You’ve avoided taking that one?
Christmas: Yes.

Christina: I’m not gonna take that one yet.

Researcher: So when do you think you’ll take the class?

Christmas: When my English is more fluent to understand that.

For international students, reading a large quantity of text found in history and political science books is academic challenge for them. Additionally, they reported verbal directions given in class that have led to missed assignments, verbal class notes, and instructions not supported with PowerPoint or written on the board that were not understood, and verbal syllabi changes that have confused these students. However, the international students regard these as academic challenges. Further, written assignments, speeches and answering in class were noted as significant academic challenges for students at both levels.

Beyond the academic challenge of actively using language, students report some classes are difficult and some are easy at this university. The classes they found easy were math and science. The classes they found difficult had language components others seemingly did not. Christmas, a newly arrived Korean female, stated, “I often answer questions in statistics class because you have exact answers (laughter by all members). So it’s not like professional media writing or something like that so difficult to answer that.” Christina from China remarked, “Algebra, because I think I’m good so I can answer that because, you know Americans math is not very good. You know in my country we learn it since we were very young so it is very easy for us to answer this question (laughter). I’m never afraid but other class even though I know my answers right, I don’t. I want to! But I’m afraid.” John newly arrived from Nigeria summarizes the situation concisely, “I
think there are some classes that are very easy and in some classes that are very difficult, period, for us. Math and science classes are easier than history or political science classes. When I am confident in classes I seem to have a better time.”

Finally, the structure and course requirements were noted by students. Students recognized the daily rigor of the classes but it was welcomed by all of the participants. Some students stated they enjoyed the constant pace of classes as it forced them to do work on a daily basis. All of them employed strategies to succeed in class to deal with this cultural difference. Notably, they stated they studied regularly in the library. This behavior was not noted in focus group one, however. Further, no students reported writing a paper longer than 5 pages in length; the longest paper any international student in this study had written was four pages in an English 110 class. Students at both levels reported writing two to three page papers as a normal requirement. The students generally felt that proper time management and a commitment to completing the coursework was sufficient to overcome the academic challenges.

Personal Challenges

This theme was closely related with academic challenges especially in terms of the initial language issues the students reported, but there were two differences worth recognizing. Besides the reported language usage issues (for second language learners) and accent issues (for near-native and native speakers), there were comments reflecting the students’ necessity to adjust their personalities to fit their classes. Ana from (country name not disclosed to protect anonymity) noted,

It’s not about like how professor makes the class, but it’s more like your personality. Like even now I’m not gonna stand up in front of the whole class and
talk something. I don’t feel really comfortable being in front of people even now. I’m enjoying more be in class and I will say something sometimes but I won’t be able to stand up and say things in front of the class. The thing now is I feel more comfortable and I’m not scared and if the professor asks me something then I can answer and say something.

Other experienced students commented on this feeling as well which indicates it is not mere language confidence that holds some international students back from participating in class.

The other finding in this theme revolves around the innate ability for American students to express their ideas in ways others can understand them. This confused Christina, a newly arrived student from China, who said, “sometimes American students speak not clearly as us but they can all understand and I don’t know why!” This finding is explored in more depth in the following section and speaks to a larger issue of international students missing bits of information in its various forms.

*Misunderstanding or Gap in “Basic” Knowledge American Students Have*

Intuitively, this theme is focused on the newly arrived students. The experienced students did not express any current concerns but spoke of their initial experiences. The newly arrived students reported numerous issues ranging from basic information like the location of the TDC or faculty offices, the skill of answering questions in class seated rather than standing at attention, and missing out or completely not understanding cultural references that explain class material. Three of the newly arrived students did not know what the TDC was or where it was. One student commented he did not know where his professor’s office was located and John relayed a story about his first embarrassing
cultural encounter. In one class, he “… stood up and, and it was embarrassing because I saw the looks on people’s faces and they were asking ‘Why are you standing up?’ Because, um I did not understand until later when other people were answering questions and they were sat down comfortably and spoke out so I kind of understood at that time.”

Another cultural knowledge gap was reported by Christmas who remembered she had difficulty in one of her advertising classes because of the numerous references to apparently famous advertisements of which she had never seen. This finding is seemingly congruent with the earlier finding in the personal challenges theme where Christina noted the students did not say things “clearly” but the other American students still understood what the speaker conveyed. Beyond language, these findings indicate there are other factors involved in the academic experience that international students find challenging.

*American Student Interaction*

“Kind - if you talk to them, they will talk to you.” “If I don’t speak to them, they don’t speak to me.” “Nice, but they won’t maintain a friendship.” “Nice, but they do not to make friends with me.” “They don’t talk to us.” These sentiments, conveyed to me when I asked the students to describe their interactions with American students, indicate the American cultural trait to respond kindly when addressed or greeted. However, actually making a lasting relationship is more involving than most newly arrived students have yet to encounter.

The second most reported American student interaction was class group work or team project situations. In these situations, students reported interaction with American students but several noticed they had been given the easiest job in the team project. John, a newly arrived student from Nigeria notes:
I can meet a guy in class and look at him and say “what’s up? I’m John” and he will say, “It’s nice to meet you.’ But like the next day if you see him again and you don’t say anything to him like ‘Did you see that touchdown?’ or ‘Did you see that game yesterday?’ then that is where the relationship will stand and it will never go beyond that. They are friendly but they won’t give you more than the normal hi or hello friendship unless you want more.

Alex, an experienced student from Nepal, believes there may be a structural answer to the dilemma:

I think the structure of the university makes it a little difficult to get to know new people. In Nepal you study with the same people in the same classes all year and for the entire major everyone takes the same classes but here you can choose your classes so you have different people and classes each time.

Researcher: In your classes how do you make friends with the other students?
Alex: I never talked with them (nervous laughter).

International students in this study reported they generally enjoyed interaction with American students despite perceptions that Americans did not want to become close friends with them. The reported they wished they could meet Americans more easily.

Data Analysis Summary

After transcribing the focus group data, I followed the open coding, axial coding, and theme development process (see Figure 10).
In order to understand how these themes impact their academic engagement, I filtered the findings through an established theoretical framework (NSSE) to understand which academic engagement experiences and behaviors international students report. The filtering process allowed me to answer the research question accurately.

The NSSE Filter

The qualitative data were initially analyzed using open and axial coding and theme development to understand international student perceptions of their academic...
engagement at this university. While the themes overlapped with the NSSE Filter categories (See Appendix I), the use of the NSSE framework filter to separate academic engagement patterns of international students from the myriad other experiences international students encounter (that are not specifically concerned with academics) clarified their engagement patterns and helped answer the research question.

The NSSE framework filter (See Figure 11) provided a validated lens to explore international students’ perceptions of their level of academic engagement, interactions with faculty, and their usage and resulting perceptions of specific academic services and programs that define their educational experience at this university.

*Figure 11.* The NSSE Filter focuses the spectrum of international student responses into a clear picture of academic engagement findings.

NSSE is designed to assess students’ perceptions of their level of involvement in educationally sound practices (Kuh, 2001). The NSSE framework seeks to measure in-class experiences, class preparation, interactions with instructors, interaction with diverse
student populations, curriculum delivery and design, course work load, peer collaboration, and community services involvement (Kuh, 2001). Using this filter allowed the range of responses to be focused on academic engagement rather than on cultural or personal aspects of their experiences. The purpose of using the NSSE filter was to clearly answer the research question and its supporting questions.

The NSSE instrument attempts to highlight various aspects of college life that, if present and the students choose to engage in those activities, add value and meaning to the learning of that student. The NSSE filter provided boundaries to the qualitative data elicited from the students and I used the intent of those items to search for responses international students gave about their academic experience. A full list of the NSSE items used for the NSSE Filter can be found in Appendix I.

NSSE Filter Findings

The NSSE filter findings generally support the national findings by Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005) discussed on page 29 of this study. A sample of the NSSE filter findings is presented here and shows data that were previously categorized into themes now ordered under NSSE headings. Comprehensive filter findings can be found in Appendix I but a screen shot provides a glimpse into the process (See Figure 12).
NEWLY ARRIVED INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSSE Filter Headings</th>
<th>Active and Collaborative Learning</th>
<th>Gains in Personal and Social Development</th>
<th>Academic Challenge</th>
<th>Computer Technology</th>
<th>Gains in General Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>never volunteer answers in class</td>
<td>regular study</td>
<td>in class HW</td>
<td>class tech - ?'s</td>
<td>reliant on tech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answers when called upon</td>
<td>multi-task study</td>
<td>difficult HW</td>
<td>class tech</td>
<td>system rewards</td>
<td>constant study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never answers in class</td>
<td>note taking</td>
<td>longest paper 2 pages</td>
<td>class tech - Internet supplement/ notes</td>
<td>independent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friend help</td>
<td>never skip</td>
<td>schedule easy</td>
<td>integrate tech and texts</td>
<td>grading system favors attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Figure 12: Screen shot of the NSSE Filter findings highlights academic engagement_

Newly arrived international students indicated consistent study time spent in the library – an average of about 2 hours per day. They reported they felt free to ask their professor questions after class or in their office and they used technology to communicate with them. All students reported they needed to learn and use technology in their courses despite some students from certain countries experiencing difficulty integrating technology in their academic repertoire. Additionally, the participants indicated the need to follow the constant pace of the classroom by completing assignments in a timely and organized manner, but the nature of these assignments and what they entailed was not ascertained from the focus groups. Further, there is mention by the newly arrived students regarding the difficulty of the homework. However, the focus group discussions did not
bear out the nature of difficult homework. Students also indicated the classes were interactive in nature and the faculty encouraged participation – even if they are not participating. Further, whether or not the newly arrived students are analyzing, organizing and synthesizing ideas in class remains to be seen, but the level of academic challenge these new students report would support the claim they are engaged in more activities and at a higher frequency than their American counterparts.

The experienced students also confirm the findings of Carini, Kuh, and Zhao by mirroring their American counterparts in terms of academic engagement. The international students noted having discussions with instructors in and out of class and on a variety of topics. They also reported discussing class work with their peers. Finally, the continued difficulty of homework experienced students reported reflects the ongoing academic challenge that continues for this population past the initial period of cultural and academic adaption in their first years of college.

Interestingly, there are several key areas of the NSSE framework international students reported they intentionally did not do. They reported opting out of active and collaborative learning opportunities such as class participation. Most students mention high levels of stress and consternation of participating in class, especially for the East Asian males in this study. Further, the students reported the structure of the class either enabled or inhibited their participation. Specifically, classes taught primarily in lecture style inhibit their class participation. These findings suggest there are other factors that contribute to, and detract from, international students’ academic engagement at this university beyond factors found in the NSSE theoretical framework.
Summary

The themes piece together a mosaic that reveals an answer to the research question: What are the academic engagement patterns that emerge among international students at a Midwest regional state university? Essentially, international students enter the university and must immediately navigate a host of cultural differences and potential second language issues that challenge them in ways unique from American students. They engage in behavior that is reflected in the NSSE theoretical framework such as speaking with friends about class, e-mailing the professor with questions, spending longer periods of self study, using available technology to assist them, working harder than they thought to succeed, and visiting with professors. The findings were condensed into themes to further explicate the major aspects of the interviewed international students’ experience at this university. Experienced students perception of their academic engagement indicates they have reduced the number of hours spent studying from their first year but are more likely to employ somewhat familiar strategies to them from their initial experience.

The thematic findings support previous literature that highlights the adaptation international students experience over their academic career. The NSSE Filter further highlighted academic engagement behavior international students reported were a part of their academic experience.

For example, students have mixed results regarding the supportive nature of this Midwest regional state university campus. For international students in this study, there is no Likert scale average we can measure and assess, rather this tenet of NSSE is measured
in the collective answers students gave to questions about the friendly nature of the faculty and the standoffish nature of their American peers. They also feel they are given the easiest jobs when they have group work assigned. International students also report little activity in active and collaborative learning issues which may not hamper their success directly. Service learning is a foreign activity according to students in this study and they report little experience with diversity issues. International students have positive experiences but struggle to incorporate themselves in the fabric of campus. They are making gains in general education as well as their personal and social development, however. A discussion of these findings and their implications for higher education administrators and faculty takes place in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS WITH IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

International students at this Midwest regional state university represent a variety of cultures and educational systems. They differ from the majority student population in terms of cultural and university academic preparation and employ various academic success strategies from their perspective. This presents a challenge to educational leaders to understand how international students perceive their engagement in academic behavior. The purpose of this study was to elicit international student responses to understand international student academic engagement at a Midwest regional state university by qualitatively researching how international students perceive their academic engagement activities. Understanding how this unique and varied population is educated and served effectively is central to higher education administrators and faculty in order to recruit, retain, and graduate international students.

Overview of the Study

This research was a qualitative case study using focus groups comprised and sorted into newly arrived and experienced international students and further sorted into geographically or culturally similar groups where possible. Five focus groups consisting of a total of fourteen students were interviewed.

The qualitative data produced from the focus groups were open coded. Each of the open coded transcripts were then reassembled and arranged with the similar coded data found in the other transcripts to create categories of data. The data were then analyzed using a data management tool (Appendix G) and themes emerged from the data.
The resulting product was a body of reduced data ready to be further refined by the use of the NSSE theoretical framework filter. This tool, represented by highlighted cells in Appendix G, focused the spectrum of international student responses into “empirically derived good educational practices” (Kuh, 2001, p. 2).

Making Meaning

Theme development and NSSE theoretical framework filtering produced several key findings worth highlighting before presenting the discussion.

- Academic success strategies are used to cope with new environment. The strategies may resonate with the NSSE theoretical framework, but seem to be coping strategies when students first arrive rather than positive educational behaviors NSSE seeks to highlight.
- International students’ experience acculturation issues to the university culture and their academic needs vary depending on country of origin and home culture. These needs change over time.
- International student needs are nuanced and greater knowledge of their differences within the population will provide administrators and faculty with practical guidance to enhance international student academic engagement and assist students to develop meaningful and positive success strategies.

These key findings undergird the following discussion and provide focus for the multiple findings of this study.

Discussion of Findings

The research question sought to elucidate the academic engagement patterns that emerge among international students at a Midwest regional state university. The findings
revealed students are dealing with external cultural issues not measured by NSSE. These cultural differences are central to their experience and may impact their academic engagement in various ways. Indeed, there is a mosaic pattern of international student engagement in educationally beneficial activities presented in the findings chapter, but a closer look at certain aspects of their experience is warranted and desired.

I developed supporting questions to guide the study that, to an extent, outline international student academic behavior. The discussion will incorporate the broad findings from the Making Meaning section above with the supporting focus group questions and some pertinent student quotes to fully illuminate international student academic engagement at this university.

*Academic Success Strategies as Coping Mechanisms*

The data analysis revealed international students in this study engage in academic behavior that changes as they adapt to the university. Filtering their responses through the NSSE framework highlights their engagement levels and supports earlier findings by Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005). In a national study, they found international students academically engage at higher rates in the freshmen year than their American counterparts but then resemble American students by their senior year. However, findings from my study suggest students are using these strategies more as a coping mechanism than positive academic behavior as measured by NSSE. Further, some of their success strategies are considered educationally beneficial while some are not. The application of the NSSE filter demonstrates international students may be engaged in certain positive activities but how they are engaged and to what benefit to the students and their classmates is a complex issue explored in the following sections.
What is an international student study schedule? This question provided an apt starting point to begin discussions with students regarding their general academic experience by starting with a comfortable topic like their schedule. From this point, my questions delved into other interactions and experiences surrounding their “study life” (a term used by the Chinese and Korean students in this research to describe the time they spend on course-related work).

International students spend a great deal of time at the library. This phenomenon is relatively well known within the international student community and among library staff at this university. The responses to the focus group questions support this general campus knowledge. While no generalizations can be made from these fourteen participants, the newly arrived students reported a “regular” study pattern of a minimum period of time in the evening. The activities in which they are engaged range from a dedicated period of time spent studying a single topic without distraction to multitasking in short bursts of effort. The students reported their study pattern resembles a preview and review session of the material covered in class plus completion of new assignments due in the future. Students reported they use hand-held electronic translators, the Internet, e-companion, textbooks, personal notes, and notes borrowed from American friends to succeed in their classes.

Additionally, international students at both levels reported a significant number of group work projects in which they had been involved. These findings suggest they are engaged in active learning activities as outlined by various items found in the NSSE. Further, the experienced students in this study reported less active and collaborative learning than the newly arrived students. This information is congruent with the findings
reported by Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005) who report international students “scored higher than their American counterparts on level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, and technology use (while)… compared with Americans, senior international students were more engaged in academic work, used technology more frequently and participated more frequently in diversity-related activities” (p. 9-10).

Despite the congruence in the data, the perception of the interactions the students reported did not match with the perception one finds in the NSSE items. For example, in the item that measures working with students outside of class to prepare class assignments (item 1. h), the assumption is all interaction of this type would be beneficial and positive. International students in this study reported involvement in class group projects, however they overwhelmingly noted the fact they had been assigned the easiest jobs in the group. In the excerpt below from the focus group, Christina, a newly arrived student from China, explains a group situation she had with American student partners:

Christina: Yeah sometimes we have a group, we have group project but I don’t think they have said a job for me yet. They have already separated job already and then I’m asking “What’s my job?” And they say “Okay you can what-a-what-a-what.” So … I thought there are some people who think my English is not very good, but I still can understand class so I am here. You know what I’m saying?

Researcher: Yes. So in group work you find that the students are giving work to everyone else except you?
Christina: Just everyone has two jobs, two jobs, two jobs and the last is me. The last one they separate job. OK, if we find maybe the easy one or maybe the work just the easiest work to me. I only have one job.

This discussion is not to contend the findings of NSSE, engaging in group learning activity is beneficial on many levels and is the reason professors assign this type of work, but for international students there is an added dimension faculty should be aware when international students are in their class. For example, in group work, international students bring a dynamic to student groups and their American peers are not skilled enough to incorporate difference in a way international students find effective.

Finally, international students in this research reported they relied on technology to succeed in their classes. This concurs with findings in other research (Carini, Kuh, & Zhao, 2005). They also mentioned use of the syllabus regularly and being able to access the communication tool e-companion in order to communicate with faculty. Coupled with the initial difficulty all students referenced in terms of studying in a second language or new accent, the use of those documents and tools represents a core strategy for students to succeed.

These findings suggest international students rely on various academic success strategies not to fulfill positive learning outcomes, but to cope with an oftentimes profoundly new environment with new cultural, academic norms and class delivery methods. They are struggling to acquire culture and social capital.

*Varying Academic Needs that Change over Time*

A key finding suggests international students are not a homogenous group of students with simply different needs than the majority student. International students
from various countries and regions will interact with faculty and access various academic support services in different ways from other international students from different regions, countries, and cultures. For example, Anna refers to her reliance on friends rather than on faculty at the beginning, when she says, “In the beginning its like you have more support from your friends because like you’re scared to go and talk to your teacher and ask for help.” However, John from Nigeria reported, “professors they do listen to your problems; it’s really great. And so I had this problem with my calculator and the professor was very kind to help me out with the problem personally. It was apparent faculty interaction differed greatly for these two students. Similar findings surfaced repeatedly in various forms and in various interactions. All the findings suggest international students are not a monolithic population with similar needs and challenges.

*How do international students interact with faculty?* Faculty interaction differs among the international students in this study by country and experience. The European students, while comfortable with English when they arrived, claimed it took some time to get confident with their language ability before they would approach faculty. Conversely, Nepalese students reveled in the newfound access they had to professors and were delighted to be able to ask as many questions as they needed after class and during office hours. The experienced Nepalese student noted that he asked fewer and fewer questions over the course of his degree as he became comfortable with his environment. The East Asian students claimed they utilized technology more to communicate with professors and only when they perceived it better to visit faculty would they go to their office. From the focus group responses it was fairly clear that culture and comfort dictate the level of interaction with faculty both in and out of the classroom.
During class, all students reported a strong reluctance to volunteer answers if the faculty asked a general question any student could raise a hand to answer. In general the students in this research were and continue to be nervous and scared to speak in class. For the Korean, male, experienced students, this was especially noteworthy; they reported they had had classes where they had never spoken to their professor for any reason, not to mention an understanding that class participation could be beneficial for them. This is not ground breaking knowledge on its own, but the reasons the students give are revelatory.

Christmas: I think I feel a little afraid to speak because I’m not a native speaker. We are a little afraid about if we said something but professor didn’t understand. Like that it would be very embarrassing. It would be very embarrassing situation for us. I think I’m afraid about that situation.

Researcher: OK, so what are you embarrassed about? That the professor doesn’t know what you are saying or are you embarrassed about the other students and what they think about you?

Christmas: Both of them, but more like professor didn’t understand what I’m saying so his lecture stops because of me (sympathetic laughter from other students).

Christina: For example, if professor ask a question I want to say, and if I say “this is what-a-what-what” and the professor says “Uh huh? Sorry?” Then I suddenly stop! And I feel so…, I don’t know how to explain, embarrassing and everyone looks at me. And even though I know the answer and at that time I forgot, right?
The students are relaying a fear of not being understood, but not a fear of not knowing what to say. In situations where these two students knew the answers, as in math or science classes, they reported they readily volunteered answers. The importance of this finding suggests faculty control the environment to an extent and they have the power to foster class participation from international students. This will be discussed in the implications and recommendations section later in the chapter.

*What academic and social support programs and services do international students use?* International students in this study know the Writing Center well. It is central to their experience when they began study life at this institution. English 110 is this university's lowest introductory English offering meant for students who were admitted with lower ACT entrance scores and class ranks or who are international students (even if they had been admitted with a English proficiency score much higher than the minimum required English proficiency level for regular admission). International students take the English Department’s screening exam to prove they have English ability sufficient to waive the class. Most international students take English 110 and it introduces students to the English Department’s Writing Center. This academic support service office is directed by faculty but staffed with student assistants. The goal of the Writing Center is to provide students with knowledge of how to organize their thoughts and present them in written form; it is not a grammar support center. Because of this mission, there may be conflict in what some participants wish it to be.

The Writing Center received mixed reviews from the students. The newly arrived students expressed satisfaction with the services they had received, but experienced students held a lesser opinion. Ray, a newly arrived student noted, “I use the writing
center. The teacher told me to go to the writing center and after two weeks I was more clear.” John from Nigeria agreed, “I have a tutor in the writing center and she is really great.” However, John, an experienced student from Korea noted, “I use the Writing Center but they didn’t really help me. I wanted answers but they only ever talked about writing style.” Eric, another experienced student from Korea added, ‘the writing center does help you try to get better grades but it is not as helpful as it could be. Sometimes the teachers there give you their opinion about what you should be answering to the professor but sometimes I don’t agree with that.”

However, the Writing Center went through a director change in the last year and this may have resulted in new processes or policies. This study did not investigate the reason for the difference, but the findings clearly show the writing center is the only academic support system international students access regularly.

The participants were also somewhat split in their usage and opinions of other academic support structures. One of the experienced students from Nepal had been to a supplementary instructional (SI) session a program offered by the Talent Development Center (TDC), where successful students who have taken the course previously now provide tutoring to students in the class in a study session format, but did not enjoy learning from other students. He remarked, “I didn’t find the SI session very good because it’s just another student that took the class one semester before. She was not a real teacher and didn’t use any real teaching methods.” John from Nigeria, disagreed and enjoyed his experience,

We have SI sessions, I don’t know what that means, but they have students that have taken the class and they’re really good in that and they teach us three or four
times a week and you can just go in and ask questions about class and if you don’t understand and they will help you out.

Other newly arrived students from East Asia either were not aware of the TDC and its mission or had chosen to not go to these formalized support systems. However, the students in this study reported they used informal social support networks to be successful in classes.

Participants reported they used two social strategies to navigate their academic experience. One student noted she performed better when she was able to use her American friend’s class notes to supplement her own. She noted her friend’s notes were more detailed and picked up on the important aspects of the class. When asked why she borrowed notes to study for a test, she said, “You know like I’m not used to writing English words so I’m writing really slow and I don’t get it. If I’m writing something I don’t listen. But she is used to writing and listening to the lecture so her notes are a lot better and easier to understand than mine.” Another student commented he had a peer instructor from his Freshmen Seminar class he met on Facebook and that she would guide him when he asked.

Experienced students reported more interaction with American and other classmates as a strategy to succeed, but it was not central to their experience. They also noted they had used the Writing Center, the TDC and SI sessions but these comprised a small part of their academic behavior.

The participants’ behavior indicates they face much of their coursework independently and do not rely on external programs and services to succeed in their classes. Examining their responses after they have been through the NSSE filter indicates
they engage at levels that exceed their counterparts in certain areas but not in others. Understanding they utilize documents, class notes, e-companion, and faculty communication to succeed, it indicates they are not experiencing the social aspect of their college career to the greatest of it potential. However, this may not be entirely a bad thing.

*Understanding International Student Needs*

Perceptions of programs and overall experiences provide an insight to international students needs. The following two questions highlight the nuanced needs international students express (or do not express).

*What perceptions of academic programs and services do international students have?* International students in this study perceive the writing center in two distinctly different lights. While the experienced students do not have a positive perception of the center, the newly arrived students do despite one student echoing a complaint the experienced students noted earlier. Newly arrived Christmas, Pitt, and Christina had this conversation:

Christmas: I’ve used the writing center a lot in the last semester I was in English 110 and now they offer for us conversation partners program. I use that like three times a week.

Pitt: I go there one time per week and then I share our ideas how to make a good paragraph. And they are helpful to have to make good progress. And how much of the final paper is real.

Researcher: So what is your impression of the writing center? Overall, is it a helpful place?
Christmas: They are very helpful because of that I got a really good grade in English 110. They helped me a lot.

Pitt: We learn more, like, our partner is like a teacher. It is very helpful.

Christmas: And they help a lot because like we are international student so our grammar is not that perfect as an American student so they help us with that. So they remind us things about grammar or using verbs and it was very helpful to me.

Christina: I went there only one or two weeks but I found they didn’t answer a lot of my opinions just asked me a lot of questions. One point is they are good they really tried to give a lot of help but they tried to give me their understanding of what the teachers were asking in the question for the essay. So they’re giving their opinions about the answers. And sometimes they’re saying this is not good.

This last point was echoed by experienced students and was enough to spoil their experience of the Writing Center.

While interviewing these students and when I reflected on their responses, my perception of their experience indicated they had academic support options but they did not see those as integral tools of their academic strategy. While they used these services, they did not always understand the mission of those services. In a sense the university is meeting their needs without the students understanding why they are in place. I believe this is a further example of a lack of academic cultural capital they have yet to acquire.

What are the perceptions of international students with regard to their overall academic experience? International students expressed an overwhelmingly positive response to this question. It is best conveyed in their own words:
Ana: I really enjoyed everything here. If you’re interested in what you’re studying then you’re going to learn more. The professors give you such a good knowledge here. I’ve really enjoyed it and since I came here I’ve learned a lot. When I first came here as a bachelor student I didn’t think I was going to graduate but now because of studying here I am almost finished and I’m even thinking of starting a master’s degree. Before I thought I wanted to do my four year degree and then start working but no I want to study my master’s degree. If I have an opportunity to take a master’s then why not? I learned so many things. And I think the teachers here helped me change my mind.

Lola: I am really glad that I came here. In the beginning, a lot of people said it was a small town and I don’t know if I’m going to enjoy it but I always thought it was nice here. I think that there is more interaction between the professors and the teachers because if you go to a big city and a big university you’re going to feel more lost for sure. So I really enjoy here. And when I came here I was also scared to choose my major because they told me it was one of the hardest. So I was so scared and thought maybe I should change is something that was easier like economics are something like that and there would be more job opportunities, but I talked to my advisers and my teachers and they said if that’s what I like that I should do it and not be scared. So they really help me.

Alex: The academic experience (at this university) is really, really good. I’m interested in my major courses but I don’t like the general courses.

Sid: It has been a comfortable change.
John: It’s great, it’s comfortable. Although every day you might struggle with things and they might be strange for you but in time you will get used to it … And that’s really great because the teachers trying to make you feel more at home by trying to get more involved with you and build a relationship with you.

Ray: I’ve got my freedom to make decisions.

The finding indicates they have a generally positive perception of the university despite the real challenges they face when they first arrive. Understanding the positive overall experience expressed by the students and how those activities are congruent with NSSE items suggests international students in this study are engaging in academically beneficial activities. However their positive perception of their overall experience contradicts experiences they related in other contexts. It is quite strange, but the lack of perceived programmatic and academic need expressed by international students, given their overall positive feelings, indicates they are reluctant to complain about their academic environment directly, but it is apparent there are struggles they face when we ask the other questions listed above and probe for their responses.

Discussion Wrap Up

Peeling away the cultural adaptation and traditional international student academic concerns (see Figure 1) from international students’ experience was revelatory. While there is no doubt international students face cultural and academic challenges in the American classroom (the focus group discussions supported those previous researchers’ findings), moving beyond those traditional issues to address international students’ academic engagement is central to understanding how educational leaders can improve the learning environment for international students and, I posit, American
students alike. When qualitatively investigating international student responses to their perceived level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and supportive campus environment, three key findings surface.

International students employ strategies to cope with a new academic environment using skills they have previously learned to succeed and adapt those to their new environment. Many of those effective skills match what NSSE attempts to capture and are duly highlighted. Next, international students’ academic needs vary by country, region, and culture. Finally, their needs are not readily shared explicitly and it may take a concerted effort to reveal those needs.

Further, for these participants, some new skills such as analyzing, synthesizing, and applying new knowledge, serious discussions with students who are very different from them, and self-reflection, which may be more beneficial to them in many ways, were simply not reported. Perhaps these skills are not reported when talking about their academic experiences because they are not discussed in classes, or they simply are not acquired, or possibly not defined by them in cultural terms as representing these higher-order learning skills. This study did not investigate this finding further. From this knowledge, there are several implications and recommendations for educational leaders at this university that may also have import at other higher education institutions.

Implications

Two implications result from the findings and discussion of international student academic engagement.
International Students Require Sophisticated Services

Given their heterogeneous skills, academic success strategies, and interaction preferences, international students require this university to offer sophisticated programs and services. International students report they are culturally and linguistically behind their American counterparts, but they possess and employ a range of strategies to cope with their newfound environment. All international students have had to prove a minimal level of English capability and/or academic skill when they applied for admission at this moderately selective institution so to think they all need remedial English is not sophisticated enough for their needs. International students arrive at this university with a wide variance in their academic preparation and language skills. Despite the minimum criteria, the variance in their interaction and apparent comprehension is observed by any person who has had to educate or provide service for international students. After reflecting on the findings of this research, new knowledge regarding international student academic engagement emerges.

In general, the students report they are capable enough to accomplish the work in their courses, but have some difficulty with the seemingly visceral experiences of the American classroom such as volunteering answers, providing opinions, active listening, note taking, and writing thoughts concisely. Some of these strategies are definitely grounded in their command of English and improve over time; some are culturally bound and may never change. However, all international students in this study could articulate their study strategies. After filtered through the NSSE theoretical framework, some of their behaviors are educationally beneficial whether they arose out of a need to cope, such as a reliance on technology and class artifacts, and others may be previously learned
educationally sound behaviors such as multiple hours per day spent previewing and reviewing for class. Some of their behavior runs counter to the NSSE theoretical framework like non-participation in discussion.

The negative implication is none of the students in this study reported any higher order learning skills nor reflected on their learning environment beyond asking themselves what classes are difficult. It may be a reflection of their disengagement from a richer educational experience or it may be a function of their learning environment. In either case, a more thoughtful approach to servicing this population is warranted. It is easy to understand sophisticated programs, services, teaching methods, and faculty knowledge are required to service this population.

*Academic Engagement Theoretical Framework should be Central to International Students’ Learning Experience*

Stemming from the first implication, the second implication is more focused and succinct, but infinitely more difficult to achieve institutionally. Namely, higher order learning skills such as analyzing, synthesizing, and applying new knowledge, serious discussions with students who are very different from them, and self reflection should be incorporated into all students learning experiences and the learning environment. I agree with Gurin (1999) and Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005) and contend international students, if present in significant numbers on a campus, can have positive educational benefit if the learning environment is intentionally crafted to foster positive interactions. Positive interactions and environments have long been heralded in general in the literature of international student issues (Olanrian, 1996; Selvadurai, 1992; Wan, Chapman and Biggs, 1992). Fittingly, the positive environments recommended by these and other researchers
(Hurtado & Carter, 1997), should be specifically aimed at classroom management training and academic engagement. Out of these experiences, students may be able to access the deeper educational culture of collegial inquiry incorporating higher-order learning skills only a handful of students experience. In these classrooms, education transcends getting the grade and becomes a process for greater self fulfillment and a mentality of life-long learning. International student academic engagement could be the pathway to this lofty goal.

Recommendations

Two resulting recommendations may lead, if implemented at this university, to greater international student engagement and the robust learning environment envisioned above.

Curriculum Refocusing

If higher-order skills are being addressed in classes, international students are not absorbing it and reporting it as one of their core strategies to succeed. Perhaps the culturally tacit knowledge in the faculty’s assignments and tests imply the acquisition of higher order learning skills but should be made explicit to all students. Perhaps these skills are not being assigned in the classes at all or in sporadic fashion. Either way, international students would benefit if course assignments and coursework outlining the higher order learning skill being addressed were made explicit. For example, an assignment direction may instruct students to read a certain number of articles on a topic and synthesize the information, evaluate the merits of the topics, and then apply the new interpretation to another issue the class is covering. Using the key words, synthesize,
evaluate, apply interpretation in a learning matrix would make the higher order skills more explicit.

*Intentionally Fostering Positive Classroom Interaction and Acknowledgement of Difference*

Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005) lamented how the density of international students seemed to negatively impact campus climate scores. I previously stated I agreed more international students could provide a positive learning atmosphere if the learning environment is intentionally crafted to foster positive interactions. However, Carini, Kuh, and Zhao found when large numbers of international students were present, the scores from both American and international students regarding supportive campus climate decreased. Gurin (1999) claims the amount of diversity is not important without meaningful conversations and interactions between students with different backgrounds. The most effective method to promote these interactions and conversation in the classroom, when feasible and warranted, lies in the types of mediated and class-based conversations faculty can encourage where all students are given voice.

This study reinforced international students engage academically in different ways from their American counterparts. Cultural and language differences aside, international students present a challenge and opportunity for faculty to recognize difference in the classroom, and then use the situation for greater educational effect. However, this skill is not intuitive, and the fear of asking inappropriate questions could lead to avoidance of an obvious reality: someone not from our country is in this classroom! Understanding the nature of this institution (Predominantly White Institution), the avoidance of difference in classroom discussions has negative side effects. This
manifested itself in a story Christmas told when asked about how she felt about American students:

  I think they are not that open to international students. There is just one international student in my class so they feel I’m a little special from them, different from them. One time, I was just taking my notes from my professor’s lecture. They just watched what I wrote, what I writing in my notes to see if I’m writing in English or Korean. So I feel a little uncomfortable about that.

Adding to the challenge of incorporating students from different countries and cultures into the classroom discourse is a general repulsion by international students to be singled out and asked to comment for their entire country. Additionally, they may feel uncomfortable being asked if they are from another country and Americans have been made cautious by experience that just because someone does not look “American” then you probably should not ask if they or where they originate so as not to offend. It really is not the question that is offensive rather the approach people take to it. The unfortunate result, however, is faculty, staff, and students have learned looks alone are not an indicator of nationality so incorporating difference in the classroom is difficult at best and is, largely, better left alone.

Understanding this university is predominantly white, both in student and faculty body, respectable recognition of difference and incorporation of multiple viewpoints in the class is a need all students have but one few students can express, including international students.

While there are many opportunities to obtain intercultural competence through workshops and seminars to update classroom management and content delivery
proficiency as well as general intercultural competence, this is a process to which upper administration must ascribe, implement, fund, recognize, and reward. Bennett (1998) provides the Experience of Difference model as a measuring stick and tool to move faculty and students toward a more ethnorelative approach to teaching and learning. These efforts would engage students in meaningful ways and would positively impact educational gains scores, campus climate scores, and diversity scores on NSSE and other measures of satisfaction. With this structure in place, learning would be enhanced for all students and would add benefit for international students by addressing cultural capital shortage they experience. Furthermore, even students from the Midwest have a culture they should recognize and be able to relate to those around them and this approach would allow and reward this learning.

Concluding Thoughts

This study should foster an understanding of international student academic engagement at this university. The study supports and offers a perspective that places value on international students’ personal experiences using their own rich description of their perception of classes, homework, faculty, and educational programs and services. Studying international student perceptions of their experience within the framework of the NSSE findings has meaning for faculty and administrators and should highlight the needs of this population of students. Understanding international students are not a monolith in terms of skills and success strategies, but employ various methods to adapt to their educational environment and become involved in academic and social experiences in different ways will inform administrators and faculty of the needs international students have as well as highlight the potential educational benefits that may develop.
However, the answers and the practical solutions are not simple fixes. There are many issues present that pose challenges to the implications and recommendations listed above.

**Unresolved Issues for Further Study**

During the development of findings in this study, several issues presented themselves that require further investigation.

*The existence of a negative academic experience.* An underlying theme became pervasive and more apparent with more investigation. Students’ responses to certain questions, in the absence of other similar comments, seemed to be minor annoyances. However, gathered together, their comments seem to sketch a learning environment that is not entirely positive. The students all observed and articulated strategies to cope with classes, however they were (1) not interacting in meaningful ways with their American colleagues, (2) they were being given the easy assignments in group work, (3) they were missing key points in the lectures, (4) they were not participating fully in certain classes, (5) they were relying on friends for basic assistance, and (6) they were not participating in service learning activities. While the students were developing and deploying strategies to be successful in their classes, they were, at the same time, not engaging fully in the academic environment.

This issue needs further study, but I suspect these are indicators of an environment that lacks certain ethnorelative tenants that would create a positive living learning environment.

*Why host international students at all?* Currently the rationale proffered by many higher education administrators discounts the motive of international students (of course
they want to come to the best higher education system on Earth!) of coming to the United States. Instead international educators assert their insight, viewpoints, and culture produce educational benefit they bring to our respective campus. Gurin, (1999) outlines this clearly in her testimony in the University of Michigan affirmative action case. However, this rationale alone may not be sufficient to justify recruitment of international students.

The rationale to recruit and host international students has changed over time for the majority of universities. To recap the history of international student education from chapter two, people have moved around the globe in search of education for time immemorial. It has only been in this century when students coming to the United States in search of an education have become an important part of the higher education landscape in this country.

Theories guiding the rationale to host and educate international students have developed over time as well. Beyond cultural and academic challenges international students face, their academic engagement is central to understanding how educational leaders can improve the learning environment for international students and American students alike. The critical issue is improvement of the educational environment. The statement is apparently self-evident, is made easily, and is rather innocuous, but the ramifications of exploring how classes are taught elicit heated debate among higher education administrators and faculty.

I have used the “benefit to our campus” rationale when confronted with the question of why we bring international students if we cannot serve them question. I still truly believe there are benefits to a multicultural classroom that far exceed the “costs” as
reflected in the implications and recommendations section above. However, once the students arrive on campus the true nature of the issue emerges. What do we do with these people who are fundamentally different from the majority of students, faculty, and staff?

Over time, we sought to understand their cultures and the differences between us, we understood they needed special services and orientation and created international student services offices to administratively process them, we noticed their language ability and created ESL programs to train them, we recognized their mental health during this tough transition in their lives and provided counseling to normalize them, we sent our students abroad to understand other countries, we looked to our own ability to interact with other cultures effectively, and now we must investigate how to teach effectively to a multicultural classroom.

Perhaps this issue is resolved to an extent in the sections above, but I feel it is such a hot topic that is transcends the discussion surrounding creation of positive learning environments and becomes much more personal to faculty and therefore is an unresolved issue.

*Teaching strategy and methods will have to adapt to successfully educate mobile, global, and multicultural students.* Merely having difference in the classroom does not mean educators are providing students with productive discussions, assignments, and lectures. The costs of providing meaningful classes to international students are real. The need for deployment of a curriculum or an overall educational experience that is proactive, thoughtful, and respectful to international students and American students of color is immediately apparent to any educator who has been faced with a multicultural classroom.
Detractors may argue the cost of educating international students is much greater than any benefit we could derive from their presence. Some may say international students are only a revenue source and are an economic input derived from a neo-commercial enterprise developed to bolster a bottom line. Either may cite nouveau ecological arguments of local sustainability to promote better education systems for the countries from where most international students originate as a solution. However, those notions exist in a nether world. Nothing any one administrator or country of administrators can do will halt the mobility of humans in this era. One is forced to accept that difference in the classroom is a reality and the methods used to teach to monocultural classrooms have inherent flaws and must be addressed.

Carini, Kuh, and Zhao (2005) assert the creation of learning environments that value diversity if “embedded in appropriate pedagogy” can create positive learning outcomes. My learning from this research indicates changes need to be made in the classroom now. The NSSE analyzes the environmental and resulting behavioral outputs students report about their respective campuses. The data is used to provide feedback about positive environments for learning. Using the NSSE to assess the qualitative experiences of students in the classroom has provided impetus and an initial roadmap of potential next steps to move beyond monoculturally focused classrooms into classrooms of the Twenty-first Century.

Looking Backward and Forward

While this study was limited in its relative lack of transferability of findings and recommendations to other Midwestern and American institutions, it provides a process
template to carry out distinctive case studies of international students elsewhere. Moreover, it unearthed fourteen international students experiences and perceptions of their academic engagement at this Midwest regional state university. Knowledge, understanding, and possible next steps to a better educational environment grew from their participation and sharing. The analysis and validation of the data they provided revolved around a familiar instrument to this institution and the findings, implications, and recommendations are easily reported and understood in those terms. In general, this research provides greater insight into the nature of international students’ perceptions of academic engagement at this university and highlights the needs they have.

This research design allowed an understanding of the individual variables that intertwine to make up the international student experience at this institution. It revealed international student learning outcomes are inextricably linked with their American counterparts and how together each gain from the other’s knowledge. Understanding how students perceive their environment aided in the creation of new knowledge that international students and difference in classrooms can also lead to higher level academic skills acquisition and result in educational and social fulfillment for all students.
References


Johnson, D.et al. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year Undergraduate
from different racial/ethnic groups. *The Journal of College Student Development* 48(5). 525-542.


APPENDIX A

Initial Presentation

International Students’ Academic Engagement Study

This is a study of how international students academically engage in educational activities at this university. I want to know how international students study here and what your experience is. I will ask questions about your study habits, professors and classes, and academic support services.

I am asking for your participation in this study. If you agree to participate, please fill out the questions on page two of this piece of paper.

The data collected through this survey will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. The law protects your privacy fully. Personal data will be kept under a pseudonym (fake name) you create during the focus group. All recordings and surveys will be kept in a secured, limited access location. Results and statements will only be reported in this anonymous form by referencing your pseudonym. If you come from a country where you are the only student present, I will not disclose your country. Your identities will not be revealed in any publication or future presentation of the results of this survey.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You do not have to pay to participate. There is no foreseeable risk (immigration, academic, or personal) of participating in this study. You will not be paid to participate and you will gain no direct benefit by participating in this study.

If you have any questions about your rights in participating in this research study, you may contact me, Jeffrey Foot, by email (jfoot@nwmissouri.edu) or by phone at 660-562-1367. You may also contact Jeffrey Foot’s advisor and professor, Dr. Phillip Messner, by e-mail at pemday@nwmissouri.edu or by phone at 660-562-1478 if you have questions or concerns. You may also stop me at any point to ask a question and you may stop participating at any time. If you choose to leave at anytime, any data you have given me will be destroyed and deleted from the record of these meetings.

Thank you for your time. I will now leave the room so you can fill out the form and place it in the box if you are interested. If you are not interested, please place the sheet in the box with no writing on it.

By filling out the information below you will show your consent to participate in this study (i.e. you are allowing me to use your responses to this survey and the words you speak in the following focus group to use as data for my study).
Please complete the survey and watch your e-mail account for a meeting time.

1. S-number: _s_________________@nwmissouri.edu________________

2. Personal e-mail address: __________________@________________

3. Home country passport containing current US visa: __________________________

4. How many credit hours have you earned at this university? ______________

5. How many credit hours are you taking this semester? ______________
Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Verbal Script
(Procedural Note: Read this statement after handing out copies to participants)
Once students are seated and ready, greet them and thank them for coming again. Next, tell them this is a focus group interview. A focus group is a conversation where people are free to express their opinions and may react to what other students say. I will try my best to make sure everyone is comfortable and that everything said here will be kept confidential.

There are some important things we must cover before we can start and I will read the important things to them. Tell the students they may stop the process at any time to leave or to ask a question. If there are no questions, read:

International Students’ Academic Engagement Focus Group

Confidentiality Statement – International Student Focus Group

This is a study of how international students academically engage in educational activities at this university. I will ask questions about your study habits, professors and classes, and academic support services.

The data collected through this survey will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. Personal data will be kept under the pseudonym (fake name) you create below and all recordings and surveys will be kept in a secured, limited access location. Results and statements will only be reported in this anonymous form by referencing your pseudonym. If you come from a country where you are the only student present, I will not disclose your country. Your identities will not be revealed in any publication or future presentation of the results of this survey.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You do not have to pay to participate. There is no foreseeable risk (immigration, academic, or personal) of participating in this study. You will not be paid to participate and you will gain no direct benefit by participating in this study.

If you have any questions about your rights in participating in this research study, you may contact, me, Jeffrey Foot, by email (jrfvxf@mizzou.edu) or by phone at 660-562-1367. You may also contact Jeffrey Foot’s advisor and professor, Dr. Phillip Messner, by e-mail at pemday@missouri.edu or by phone at 660-562-1478 if you have questions or concerns. You may also stop me at any point to ask a question and you may stop participating at any time. If you choose to leave at anytime, any data you have given me will be destroyed and deleted from the record of these meetings.
By filling out the information below you further show your consent to participate in this study (i.e. you are allowing me to use your responses to this survey and the words you speak in the following focus group to use as data for my study).

Please fill out the survey and stay for the focus group. We will be here for no more than 75 minutes.

1. Pseudonym (please choose a name that you will be called in this study):

   __________________________________________________

   (Now write this name on the name tag you were given)

2. Passport containing current US visa issued by:

3. How many credit hours have you earned at this university?

4. How many credit hours are you taking this semester?

(Procedural Note: After students have completed and turned in the sheets, tell them you will record the meeting. If there is a problem, answer their questions and allow them to make a new decision. If everyone agrees, turn on the recorder and begin with the first question. Also ask students to state their pseudonym each time they speak. I.e. George: I think I have…)

Opening question: “Each of you please tell me your pseudonym and why you chose it.

Transition question: “Think about taking classes here, what has made an impression upon you?

Key Question: “What do you do to be successful in your classes?”

Key Question: “What is your study schedule?

Key Question: “How do you interact with faculty?

Key Question: “What academic and social support programs and services do you use?

Key Question: “What perceptions of those programs and services do you have?

Key Question: “What do you think about your overall academic experience?

(Procedural Note: Once complete, do a member check by summarizing the key points and then state …

Summary: “How well have I understood your answers? Is there anything I have missed?

Concluding: “Think about everything we have spoken about here today; what is the most important thing for you?”
Permission Letter to International Student Organization

Alice Foreman
International Student Organization
Northwest Missouri State University

Re: Research Proposal

Dear Ms. Foreman,

I am conducting a research project to complete the requirements for my Doctor of Education program at the University of Missouri – Columbia. The project is titled “Exploring international student academic engagement using the NSSE framework.” My study will interview international students in a focus group format in order to investigate international undergraduate students’ experience and perception of their academic environment at their higher education institution.

I am seeking permission to present my project to your group at a convenient time and. My presentation will take roughly 10-15 minutes. After the presentation, I will exit your meeting and ask that you gather the participant forms. I will collect the completed or uncompleted forms from you at your convenience.

If you agree to allow me to present my research, can you please sign below and indicate the time I may meet with your constituents?

Thank you for your consideration,

Jeffrey Foot

I, (print name)________________________________, understand the research topic and the request to present the study to my organization__________________________ in order to generate participants. I (circle one) give / do not give permission to Jeffrey Foot to present his research topic, Exploring international student academic engagement using the NSSE framework, to our student group on (day)________________________. (date)__________________. 20____.

Signature ____________________________________ Date ____________________, 20____.
APPENDIX D

Permission Letter to Indian Student Association

Vishnu Kosaraju
Indian Student Association
Northwest Missouri State University

Re: Research Proposal

Dear Mr. Kosaraju,

I am conducting a research project to complete the requirements for my Doctor of Education program at the University of Missouri – Columbia. The project is titled “Exploring international student academic engagement using the NSSE framework.” My study will interview international students in a focus group format in order to investigate international undergraduate students’ experience and perception of their academic environment at their higher education institution.

I am seeking permission to present my project to your group at a convenient time for your group. My presentation will take roughly 10-15 minutes. After the presentation, I will exit your meeting and ask that you gather the participant forms. I will collect the completed or uncompleted forms from you at your convenience.

If you agree to allow me to present my research, can you please sign below and indicate the time I may meet with your constituents?

Thank you for your consideration,

Jeffrey Foot

I, (print name)________________________________, understand the research topic and the request to present the study to my organization__________________________ in order to generate participants. I (circle one) give / do not give permission to Jeffrey Foot to present his research topic, Exploring international student academic engagement using the NSSE framework, to our student group on (day)___________________________.

(date)__________________, 20____.

Signature ___________________________________________________________ Date _______________, 20_____.

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APPENDIX E

Permission Letter to Korean Student Association

Young Wook Lee
Korean Student Association
Northwest Missouri State University

Re: Research Proposal

Dear Mr. Lee,

I am conducting a research project to complete the requirements for my Doctor of Education program at the University of Missouri – Columbia. The project is titled “Exploring international student academic engagement using the NSSE framework.” My study will interview international students in a focus group format in order to investigate international undergraduate students’ experience and perception of their academic environment at their higher education institution.

I am seeking permission to present my project to your group at a convenient time for your group. My presentation will take roughly 10-15 minutes. After the presentation, I will exit your meeting and ask that you gather the participant forms. I will collect the completed or uncompleted forms from you at your convenience.

If you agree to allow me to present my research, can you please sign below and indicate the time I may meet with your constituents?

Thank you for your consideration,

Jeffrey Foot

I, (print name)________________________________, understand the research topic and the request to present the study to my organization________________________________ in order to generate participants. I (circle one) give / do not give permission to Jeffrey Foot to present his research topic, Exploring international student academic engagement using the NSSE framework, to our student group on (day)__________________________, (date)________________, 20____.

Signature ____________________________________ Date ________________, 20____.
APPENDIX F

Sample of Open Coded Transcript

= class rules and behavior, cultural differences
= academic challenges in class (language, culture, difficulty of academics)
= class success strategy (Study behavior, homework, academic support, technology)
= faculty interaction, behavior
= personal challenges
= misunderstanding/gap in “basic” knowledge American students would have
= American student interaction
= summary/conclusion findings

FG1 – Experienced: Europe (2) and Nepal
FG2 – Newly Arrived: Japan (2)
FG3 – Experienced: Korea (3)
FG4 – Newly Arrived: Nepal (2) and Nigeria
FG5 – Newly Arrived: China, South Korea, and Indonesia

FG1 - Experienced
Lola: I think a big impression was like the different ways of studying and giving the class. In general, the whole system is different from my country. I think that’s been the most impressive thing.
Researcher: can you explain some of those differences?
Lola: like for example back home, like there is one final exam in June and if you don’t go to class it doesn’t matter. They don’t care, because it’s like a big class a lot of people. And here it’s like a totally different system and they care about you. They know your name and they know your tests. And it’s more personal and for me I was a lot different, but I like it here.
Ana: my big impression was, like, the relationship between like student and teacher. Like the way, like back home I learned the relationship between students and teachers is not like really friendly. Like back home the teachers and professors are not willing to help students, like here. Here in the students have all the help from teachers. Teachers give you their office hours, email, phone numbers and they’re available like 24-7 to help
you. I’d really like it because you get more comfortable with them. It feels like they’re going to help you always. Back home teachers doesn’t even know you like your name or something, but here especially in your majors classes your teachers are getting to know you and it’s more comfortable being here in studying here.

Alex: my biggest impression is that technology they use here. Back in my home country we don’t use that much email, we don’t use Internet that much so when I came here the first time I had to use the e-mail Internet from the very first day. It was really impressive as well as uncomfortable for me the first time. And in every class sometimes in my first semester it was a marketing class and I didn’t really see if the professor. I saw him for like one or two times and that was it. And after that he gave me homework in the Internet so used to download those to study that any like twice a week to give a quiz for exam.

Researcher: so, can you explain that a little bit more, you weren’t able to see a professor for a while?
## APPENDIX G

### Data Management System - International Student Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Theme:</th>
<th>Data Management - International Student Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language:</td>
<td>TDC? prepares dictionary to use English or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>doesn't talk to us when students aren't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>following class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textbooks:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? makes PowerPoint presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? uses conversational teaching method</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- TDC? provides feedback on studies and projects</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? offers office hours</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- TDC? encourages participation in class discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? provides resources for self-study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? offers opportunities for cross-cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? provides guidance on academic challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? offers support for personal challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? provides feedback on class performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? offers opportunities for peer-to-peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? provides resources for cultural development</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- TDC? offers support for financial management</td>
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<td>- TDC? offers opportunities for career guidance</td>
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<td>- TDC? provides feedback on leadership qualities</td>
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<td>- TDC? offers support for professional development</td>
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<td>- TDC? provides resources for professional</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? offers support for family and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? provides resources for community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TDC? offers support for personal</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Data Management System - International Student Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Data Code Name Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Personal Challenges</th>
<th>American student interaction</th>
<th>Class success strategy (Study habit)</th>
<th>Student interaction (Faculty behavior)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KD</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>FgG-6</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>What is the constant?</td>
<td>2 hours per day; review notes; self-paced study; attending center; library study</td>
<td>Wrote paper in class; no neat paper; self-editing study</td>
<td>Oak talking in class; no talking in class; class study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KG</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>FG-7</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>FG-9</td>
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<td>What is the constant?</td>
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<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>FG-11</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>What is the constant?</td>
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</table>

## Participant Details

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## Study Habits and Faculty Interaction

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Christmas</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H

Survey Items Used to Create the NSSE Filter

From the College Student Report: National Survey of Student Engagement

**Academic Challenge**
- Number of hours per week spent on a class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, and other activities related to the program)
- Number of assigned text books, books, or book-length packs of course readings
- Number of written papers or reports between five and nineteen pages
- Number of written papers or reports fewer than five pages
- The extent coursework emphasized analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory
- The extent coursework emphasized synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships
- The extent coursework emphasized making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
- The extent coursework emphasized applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- The extent the institution and the size of spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work

**Active and Collaborative Learning**
- The frequency of having asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- The frequency of having made the class presentation
- The frequency of having worked with other students on projects
- The frequency of having worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Frequency of having tutored or taught other students
- The frequency of having discussed ideas from your readings classes with others outside of class

**Student interactions with faculty members**
- The frequency of having discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- The frequency of having talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- The frequency of having discussed ideas from your readings were classes with faculty members outside of class
- The frequency of having worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework
- Have done or plan to work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program before you graduate from your institution
General Survey Items Used to Create the NSSE Filter

Supportive campus environment
- The extent the institution emphasizes providing the support you need to help you succeed academically
- The extent the institution emphasizes helping you cope with your non academic responsibilities
- The extent the institution emphasizes providing the support you need to thrive socially
- Quality of relationships with other students at your institution
- Quality of relationships with faculty members at your institution
- Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices at your institution

Gains in personal and social development
- The extent your college experience contributed to developing a personal code of values and ethics
- The extent your college experience contributed to understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds
- The extent your college experience contributed to understanding yourself
- The extent your college experience contributed to learning effectively on your own
- The extent your college experience contributed to working effectively with others
- The extent your college experience contributed to acquiring broad general education
- The extent your college experience contributed to thinking critically and analytically

Gains in general education
- The extent your college experience contributed to writing clearly and effectively
- The extent your college experience contributed to speaking clearly and effectively
- The extent your college experience contributed to acquiring broad general education
- The extent your college experience contributed to thinking critically and analytically

Gains in job related skills
- The extent your college experience contributed to acquiring job or work related knowledge and skills

Computer technology
- The frequency of having used an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment during the current school year
General Survey Items Used to Create the NSSE Filter

Page 3

- The frequency of having used e-mail to communicate with an instructor during the current school year
- The extent your college experience contributed to using computing and information technology

**Diversity**

- The frequency of having had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own during the current school year
- The frequency of having had serious conversations with students who differ from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values during the current school year
- The extent the institution emphasizes encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
## APPENDIX I

### NSSE Filter Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interaction with Faculty</th>
<th>Supportive Classroom Environment</th>
<th>Active and Collaborative Learning</th>
<th>Gains in Personal and Social Development</th>
<th>Academic Challenge</th>
<th>Computer Technology</th>
<th>Gains in General Education</th>
<th>Diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ask faculty after class</td>
<td>I don't speak to them, they don't speak to me</td>
<td>never volunteer answers in class</td>
<td>regular study</td>
<td>in class HW</td>
<td>class tech - ?'s</td>
<td>reliant on tech</td>
<td>international faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no time for questions in class</td>
<td>looked at like strange</td>
<td>answers when called upon</td>
<td>multi-task study</td>
<td>difficult HW</td>
<td>class tech</td>
<td>system rewards constant study</td>
<td>cultural knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask faculty</td>
<td>nice, but not to make friends</td>
<td>never answers in class</td>
<td>note taking</td>
<td>longest paper 2 pages</td>
<td>class tech - internet</td>
<td>independent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not follow syllabus</td>
<td>tutors are great</td>
<td>friend help</td>
<td>never skip</td>
<td>schedule easy</td>
<td>integrate tech and texts</td>
<td>grading system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little interaction</td>
<td>writing center (+)</td>
<td>answer algebra question</td>
<td>complete HW</td>
<td>some class difficult</td>
<td>technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hw checking with faculty</td>
<td>got directions, got taken there!</td>
<td>less discussion than hoped</td>
<td>3 hours HW</td>
<td>HW easy</td>
<td>class tech - syllabus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>faculty desire to talk with students</td>
<td>group work - easy jobs</td>
<td>library study</td>
<td>easier</td>
<td>class tech - ?'s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher reminds of the hw due</td>
<td>Americans instantly understand each other</td>
<td>answer stat questions</td>
<td>class tech - e companion</td>
<td>certain times, classes hard</td>
<td>class tech - ?'s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rewrite HW OK</td>
<td>only international - too much help</td>
<td>definitive answers</td>
<td>regular study</td>
<td>day to day class work structure</td>
<td>class tech - syllabus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask faculty</td>
<td>can really learn here</td>
<td>lots of group projects</td>
<td>HW 2 hour per day</td>
<td>many quizzes</td>
<td>instructional technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>haven't talked to faculty</td>
<td>no talking in class yet - &quot;too many students&quot;</td>
<td>review notes - self</td>
<td>expected to study here</td>
<td>multi-task study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faculty have freedom to meet</td>
<td>&quot;afraid&quot; of faculty</td>
<td>group - work get easy jobs</td>
<td>preview vocab</td>
<td>longest paper 2-3 pages</td>
<td>class tech - e companion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-mail professor if needed</td>
<td>writing center (+)</td>
<td>initial help from friends</td>
<td>library study</td>
<td>longest paper 3 pages</td>
<td>class tech - e companion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use class tech to contact faculty</td>
<td>few international so I feel special</td>
<td>continue friend help</td>
<td>never skip class</td>
<td>stats easy</td>
<td>class tech - e companion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;don't interact!&quot;</td>
<td>watch what I write to see if English or in Korean (uncomfortable)</td>
<td>initial friend help</td>
<td>library study</td>
<td>longest paper 4 pages</td>
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<tr>
<td>once per 2 weeks office visit</td>
<td>Am. S. don't talk to us</td>
<td>continue friend help</td>
<td>adaptive study 1 hr/wk</td>
<td>some difficult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>haven't met professor yet</td>
<td>kind - if you talk to them, they talk to you</td>
<td>no volunteer answers</td>
<td>HW important</td>
<td>some easy - math and science</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>hard to contact faculty</td>
<td>always answer questions</td>
<td>speak in class once a month</td>
<td>more time = independence</td>
<td>likes the constant pace with quizzes, HW, tests</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initial faculty reliance</td>
<td>writing center (+)</td>
<td>no volunteer answers</td>
<td>more time = independence</td>
<td>helps you to be prepared</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>get to know faculty</td>
<td>why are you here?</td>
<td>only if asked</td>
<td>regular study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>decreased F1</td>
<td>group work</td>
<td>little use of academic support</td>
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<td>relationship with faculty</td>
<td>Interested in language issues</td>
<td>no volunteer answers</td>
<td>writing center ( )</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>helpful</td>
<td>they think no international students here</td>
<td>no volunteer answers</td>
<td>writing center ( )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>comfortable with faculty</td>
<td>group work - get easy jobs</td>
<td>group work</td>
<td>writing center ( )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Jeffrey Foot earned a Bachelor of Arts (Sociology) from the University of New Brunswick - Fredericton, a Master’s of Science in Educational Leadership from Northwest Missouri State University and a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri – Columbia.

A native of Nova Scotia who enjoyed four years in South Korea and nine years (to date) in the United States, Jeff has had the ultimate good fortune to have experienced living and working in three very different yet wonderful countries. He has had the pleasure to travel to 15 other countries and has family living or working in four including Canada, Mexico, Korea, and the United States. Jeff works daily with people from all over the world in the Intercultural International Center and has been enriched by the lives and stories of the students he has the privilege to meet. A NAFSA Trainer Corps member with over 100 hours of NAFSA PD Workshop experience, Jeff is excited to train the next generation of international educator in the coming years.

Jeffrey Foot lives in Maryville, Missouri with his wife Jeaneth Puriel and his 8 month old son, Alexander Jeffrey Foot. He has recently discovered he enjoys watching his son observe nature’s wonders – a trait he hopes transform into skills his son will take to the golf links.