

**OCEANS CROSSING: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SOCIAL AND
ACADEMIC INTEGRATION OF KOREAN, MALAYSIAN, AND TAIWANESE
INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

OCEANS CROSSING: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC INTEGRATION OF KOREAN, MALAYSIAN, AND TAIWANESE INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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The number of international students, especially Asian international students, studying at colleges and universities in the United States has increased dramatically during the past 50 years. As the fastest growing population on campus, Asian international students are also attracting more attention than ever before in higher education. However, much research has focused on Asian students' adjustment and adaptation to American culture and campus life.

This study investigated factors contributing to social and academic integration of Korean, Malaysian and Taiwanese international undergraduate students. This study sought understanding of why some or many of the Asian international undergraduate students integrate into college successfully despite having many challenges. Might their distinctive characteristics, country of origin, cultural norms and values, and other internal as well as external factors have significant bearing on the challenges of their social and academic integration? Specifically, guided by the Behavior-Perception-Behavior Model (Milem & Berger, 1997), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000), this study investigated how students were making a successful transition into the institution and how they integrated into the university community.

This qualitative case study gained insights into students' attitudes, behaviors, their cultures and values systems, concerns, motivations, and aspirations to become integrated to a new college environment. The study found that participants' limited cultural awareness and knowledge of America and its educational system, and language proficiency for engaging in

cross-cultural interactions proved to be factors influencing their social and academic integration. However, most Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese participants in this study were both highly intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to do well in college and were very goal-oriented. Most participants were more academically integrated than socially integrated. Most participants got more involved in both social activities and academic activities after their first year. Malaysian and Taiwanese students in the study were likely to be more socially and academically integrated in the college community than Korean students. In addition, major differences in academic and social integration were found among those interviewed participating students. The participants who enrolled in higher ranking programs such as education, communication, engineering, business, and natural sciences got more involved in campus and thus, became more integrated and more affiliated with their institution while students in economic programs felt marginalized in the campus community.

The study offered suggestions for improving policies and practices, theories, and future research on Asian international undergraduate students. Both Self-determination theory and the Behavior-Perception-Behavior model proved that they were conceptually useful through the rich findings of the study. The study proved that Asian international students are not a homogenous group and their needs and concerns differ by country of origin, ethnicity, age, year in college, programs of study, and educational background. Developing cross-cultural programs to facilitate interaction between domestic and international students would help international students improve their English and become more confident in interacting with diverse people. The study showed that Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese student associations play an important role in the participants' lives during their time studying in the U.S.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

General Background

Ease of travel, political changes, economic needs, and the opportunity for cultural interactions are factors that make study abroad a fast-growing phenomenon (Byram & Feng, 2006). As the world becomes more and more interconnected, international students have been sought and welcomed as agents of diversification and internationalization of higher education in the United States. Bringing people from different backgrounds and cultures together on campus is believed to result in transformation of cross-cultural understanding and contributes to redefining and reshaping the curriculum (Leask, 2010).

During recent decades, American colleges and universities throughout the country have been influenced by the large influx of international students in the direction of resource acquisition, resource allocation, program planning, and support services (Walker, 2000). Moreover, with more than 4,000 universities and colleges, the United States has been an especially popular and potential place for international students to travel to and a very accessible place to pursue college education (Chow, 2011; McIntire, 1992). International students make up a significant and growing portion of the total U.S. college student population. According to the *Open Doors 2010* report, the number of international students studying at colleges and universities in the United States has increased dramatically during the past 50 years, from less than 50,000 students in the 1950s to 690,923 during the 2009- 2010 academic year. International students comprise about 3.5% of the total students on American campuses; and about 45% of these students pursue undergraduate degrees. The *Open Door 2010* report also showed that almost 70% of all international students' primary funding comes from sources outside of the

U.S., including personal and family funding, and funding from their home country governments. In the academic year of 2009-2010, international students contribute nearly \$20 billion to the U.S. economy through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses, including room and board, books and supplies, transportation, health insurance, and other related costs (Open Door, 2010). Thus, the contribution of international students to the U.S. economy is undeniable (Chen & Barnett, 2000). In addition, many universities and colleges hope that by increasing the numbers of undergraduate and graduate students from other countries, domestic students will have opportunities to learn more about other cultures and to develop global perspectives through their interactions with international students (Leask, 2010).

Among the top 10 sending countries, six are Asian countries, including China, India, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Vietnam. Asian students comprise over half of all international students enrolled in U.S. higher education, an increase from 58.7% in 2009 to 63% in 2010 (Open Doors, 2009 & 2010). In the 2009-2010 academic year, there were 435,667 students from Asia studying at U.S. colleges and universities, a 5% increase over the previous year (Open Doors, 2010). Sixty percent of these students came from East Asia, 30% were from South and Central Asia, and 10% were from Southeast Asia. The increase in enrollments implies that the U.S. is one of the premier providers of tertiary education and one of the premier destinations for Asian international students (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). Studying in the U.S. is viewed as a gateway to enhance one's competence and mobility in the global market, because the U.S. is one of the most technologically innovative countries, and it has a high quality higher education system with a wider range of schools and programs to suit a variety of different students (Chow, 2011).

This increase can also be explained by the extraordinary economic achievements in many Asian countries in recent years, leading to many families having the ability to afford to send their children to study in the U.S., Asian countries have had the fastest economic growth in the world (Postiglione, 1997). According to the 2008 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report, during the period of 2000 - 2005, the economic growth increased in South Asia at 4.3% each year and remained high at 7.2% in East Asia and in the Pacific. Furthermore, a more knowledge-intensive world economy is gaining ground, necessitating a more skilled labor force in both developed and developing countries (UNESCO, 2008). With college degrees earned in the States, for many Asian students there is the hope of economic benefit and more job opportunities either in their own countries or in other countries in the future (Byram & Feng, 2006). In addition, diversifying student body, internationalizing curricula, increasing the recognition of American universities and colleges, and the importance of having an international experience are factors influencing students' decisions to choose the U.S. as their study destination (Lee & Kim, 2010; Montgomery, 2010).

The increased enrollment of international students in general and Asian international students in particular has led to a noticeable impact on the communities in which they reside, as they bring diversity of cultures and perspectives to the classroom, enrich the learning of students and faculty, contribute to internationalizing the curriculum in the host institutions, and are viewed as serious, dedicated students (Lacina, 2002; Rai, 2002; Zhang & Mi, 2010). Hence, the benefits from the economic and cultural contributions that international students bring to local communities in the United States signify the value of recruiting and retaining international students.

Furthermore, international students can help develop positive relations between their home countries and the U. S.(Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). These students will not only offer the knowledge that they gain in their degree training but also a broadened perspective of the issues that they study in a more global context (Lee & Kim, 2010). Moreover, many Asian academic and political leaders studied and absorbed American academic ideas during their college years (Altbach, 2004). Thus, the flow of international students not only changes the demographics with economic advantages in the U.S. but also promotes cultural exchange among the United States and other countries, establishing opportunities for mutual respect and collaborative relationships (Open Door, 2010). The returning students play an important role of being ambassadors to bridge cultural and scientific exchange between the U.S. and their home countries. Therefore, the American government, higher education leaders and administrators, and other stakeholders understand that international students have become an important part of the U.S. higher education institutions.

The above section has provided a brief background on international students in the U.S. The following section outlines the problem statement and the research questions that will be addressed in this study.

Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

While thinking of higher education, one vivid picture among many is a large group of energetic students with hope and potential to learn. The new students are stepping into new routes that they have chosen to experience and through which they hope to succeed. College experiences are a central aspect of student development and many students develop both academically and socially during college (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). However, for international students, this college journey is full of challenges as they live and learn across

cultures (Arthur, 2004). Even though enrolling in an undergraduate or graduate program on American college campuses, international students anticipate participating in a different social and academic environment than that in their home countries, they encounter many problems upon their arrival to campus and during their stay and study in the States. International students' experiences are likely to differ from the experiences of the minorities in the host country, because the temporary nature of their stay can be a salient force for these students (Singaravelu, 2007). This force can be positive, negative, or both depending on their new understandings of who they are, of relationships, of the world around them, and of the goals they will pursue while in the U.S. (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010).

In their move to achieve educational goals, these students experience not only a loss of their status but often their close connections with family, friends, and relatives (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia 2008). They must learn to negotiate the demands of daily living and adjust to new systems of cultural norms, communication, and behavior. The challenges of a new academic system and family expectations to succeed may create the threat of failure that adds more pressure on achieving their goals (Arthur, 2004). Furthermore, the cultural differences they experience may hinder their involvement in campus and other activities making it considerably challenging for international students in the host nation (Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994, Lin & Yi, 1997; Mori, 2000). New environments, cultural differences, and high academic achievement expectations frequently generate stress, depression, frustration, and fear for international students (Dillard & Chisolm, 1983). Therefore, their coping strategies to overcome adjustment challenges, their motivations to learn and engage in the university community, and their commitments are very important to shaping their learning experiences.

Previous research shows that international undergraduate students face the challenge of adjusting and integrating to a new living and learning environment (for example, see Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2007). Beyond navigating the educational system, campus resources, lectures, exams, and interactions with faculty and staff, international students face the challenge of fitting in and of developing a sense of belonging in the new and different social networks on campus. Meeting new people, creating a support network, adjusting to life away from their comfort zones are issues for all new college students (Arthur, 2004). However, for international students, the adjustment to a new social and academic life is even more difficult given potential language barriers, inexperience with cultural references, and limited knowledge of culture of the host country and its higher education system (Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2007; Twigg, 2005; Zhang & Mi, 2010). International students may also encounter tremendous pressure to adopt attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors very different from their own in order to feel apart of the institution. Of all obstacles that have large effects on international students, regardless of their backgrounds and resources, limited English proficiency and culture differences appear to be significant and pose great difficulties both academically and socially when integrating into college life (Holmes, 2004) and thus influence students' learning experiences. Therefore, international students need both academic and social support as much as or maybe more compared to domestic students, even many of them are bright and academically prepared in their home countries (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Horn, 2002).

As the fastest growing population on campus, Asian international students are also attracting more attention than ever before in higher education. Much research has focused on Asian students' adjustment and adaptation to American culture and campus life, and their lack of belonging and social support in the campus community (Choi, 2006; Galloway & Jenkins, 2005;

Huntley, 1993; Lee & Davis, 2000; Munoz & Munoz, 2000; Zhai, 2002). For example, Huntley (1993) pointed out that in American classrooms, Asian international students feel stressful, especially different and culturally alien, when they give oral presentations, participate in class discussions and group activities, or simply ask a question. Overall, this body of research found that Asian international students' experiences on campus are different from other students. Specifically, they experienced more difficulty in adapting to campus environments and establishing positive social relationships in the campus community. These students feel isolated and marginalized and were less engaged in social and academic activities. In addition, according to Hanassab and Tidwell (2002), Asian international students face the greatest adjustment difficulty among all the regions, because English is not their first language and their home country culture is strikingly different from American culture. In addition, undergraduate Asian international students have experienced more problems and higher needs than graduate international students (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002), because they lack access to human, cultural and financial capital and limited understanding the culture of American higher education.

Although Asian international undergraduate students stay in the U.S. temporarily, they need to succeed academically as well as socio-culturally. Therefore, it is important to explore what motivates them to integrate into college life and what factors impact this integration process. There is also a need to understand the differences between and within groups of Asian international undergraduate students in terms of their motivational orientations and other influences on their academic and social integration, for example cultural norms and values, cultural connections, language proficiency and psychological factors. Therefore, the research question driving this study is:

What contributes to social and academic integration of Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international undergraduate students?

The results of the analysis highlighted the importance of increasing awareness of the cultural diversity in higher education settings to better support international students' integration, their learning experiences and to gain competitiveness in the international higher education market. The growth of Asian international undergraduate students on American campuses and the dearth of studies specifically looking at social and academic integration of these students suggest the necessity to study these issues. With increasing numbers of Asian international students on American higher education campuses, there is a need to study why some survive and integrate into the university community better than others and what salient factors facilitate or hinder their social and academic integration. However, to date no research focuses on Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international students and their integration into the American academic environment. Moreover, understanding student perceptions of their social and academic integration is important in the process of investigating how they become integrated into the university community because these perceptions influence their behaviors and actions toward their academic and social life on campus.

This study attempted to investigate factors contributing to social and academic integration of Korean, Malaysian and Taiwanese international undergraduate students. Furthermore, it is important to understand these students' unique challenges because these challenges might affect students' ability to integrate academically and socially. In addition, Asian international students who maintain collectivist cultural values integrate into a new environment differently than other groups of American minority students (Guiffrida, 2006).

It is important to note the “diversity within diversity” while approaching this study of Asian international students. The Asian international student population is not a homogenous entity; these students are very diverse in terms of identities, languages, norms, values, customs, cultures, and differing worldviews (Sheu & Fukuyama, 2007). In general, Asians have increased public awareness that enculturation is an important indicator of within-group cultural differences (Kim, Atkinson, & Umemoto, 2001). In particular, Kim, Atkinson, and Umemoto (2001) noted that an important dimension of enculturation is adherence to Asian cultural values, which include deference to authority, emotional restraint, and hierarchical family structure. Kim, Atkinson, and Yang (1999) identified several cultural values common to Asians including collectivism, conformity to norms, emotional self-control, and family recognition through achievement, filial piety, and humility. Some Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam also share values dictated by Confucian principles, such as respect, diligence and loyalty, and the group is valued over individual. Therefore, when describing Asian international students, I was mindful of the complexity of my sample and cautious about making generalizations (Shih & Brown, 2000). It is important not to generalize all Asian international students into one ethnic group, because Asians are a mosaic of cultures.

Conceptual Framework

It is important to emphasize that this study was placed within the context of international student experiences in U.S. higher education, but it focused on the social and academic integration/campus engagement of currently enrolled Asian international undergraduate students, including effort put into being involved and use of academic and student support services. The present research identified factors that contributed to, or inhibited social and academic integration of Asian international undergraduate students. This study also sought understanding

of why some or many of the Asian international undergraduate students integrate into college successfully despite having many challenges. Might their distinctive characteristics, country of origin, cultural norms and values, and other internal as well as external factors have significant bearing on the challenges of their social and academic integration? Specifically, guided by the Behavior-Perception-Behavior Model (Milem & Berger, 1997), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000), this study investigated how students were making a successful transition into the institution and how they integrated into the university community.

Constructed from Astin's involvement theory and Tinto's social and academic integration model, which describe factors leading to successful social and academic integration, the Behavior-Perception-Behavior Model (Milem & Berger, 1997) suggests that students become more involved as they develop perceptions about the institutions' and peers' support that influence the extent to which students feel they "fit" at the institution. According to Milem and Berger (1997), students come to the institution with specific entry characteristics. As students encounter new experiences and ideas, as well as interactions with faculty, staff, and their peers, they develop perceptions about these experiences and the institution. These perceptions lead to different subsequent levels of engagement. This cycle then affects students' social and academic integration. Moreover, Milem and Berger found that both student involvement behaviors and perceptions of integration play a role in student decisions to stay or drop out from college. Therefore, this framework also helps to investigate how Asian international undergraduate students perceive social and academic integration/student engagement, why certain behaviors occur, and the effects these behaviors have on student engagement and integration.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) asserts that intrinsic and extrinsic forces motivate all human behaviors and they recognize differences in the motivational orientations of people from

collectivist and individualist societies (Guiffrida, 2006). SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000) explains why individuals choose to act, the level of energy they apply to those actions, and how motivation influences their choices as well as their performance. SDT focuses on the reasons for engagement and the values associated with the decision to engage whether that is internal or external. The theory has also focused on the motivational context of integration/engagement and how individuals internalize the values of their pursuits. Students' willingness to invest their efforts and engage themselves in the learning process is a function of their motivation. Motivation drives individuals to act in certain ways and exhibit beliefs and persuades behaviors (Griffin, 2006). In educational contexts, motivation has been applied to all types of behaviors, including those related to learning and success (Griffin, 2006; Winn, Harley, Wilcox, & Pemberton, 2006). Thus, understanding student motivation as a main factor of student success in college provides a foundation for understanding why students become integrated.

Therefore, using the Behavior–Perception-Behavior Model and SDT as frameworks led to a fuller understanding of student integration and other learning patterns in education (Guiffrida, 2006). Principal concepts of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and the internalization continuum provided a more inclusive framework for understanding educational motivation of Asian international undergraduate students to integrate into university social and academic life.

Definition of Terms

Before discussing previous studies on the topics of social and academic integration and international students in higher education, it is important to understand some of the terminology used within these areas of study.

International Students are neither citizens nor permanent residents of the host countries. The terms “overseas students” or “foreign students” are also used to designate these student

populations and used interchangeably in the literature (McNamara, & Harris, 1997; Twigg, 2005). There are several definitions of international students that are quite different from each other. International students are those from other countries who stay in the U.S. for a restricted period of time to accomplish their educational goals (Lacina, 2002). According to Andrade (2006), international students are individuals who enrolled in institutions of higher education in the host countries on temporary student visas. Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) take a different tact to define international students as a culturally heterogeneous group of people who cross cultures for the experience of living and learning in a foreign environment. Montgomery (2010) uses the term international students to refer to individuals who have traveled from their home countries to study higher education in another country.

For the purpose of the current study, Korean, Malaysian and Taiwanese *international students* will be defined as students who have come from Korea, Malaysia and Taiwan to pursue undergraduate degrees at a U.S. college or university on non-immigrant visas (F-1 or J-1).

Integration has been conceptualized as a “product of the interaction between students and their college environment” (Brower, 1992, p. 441). *Academic integration* is defined as connections to the intellectual life of the college and *social integration* refers to connections outside of the classroom college (Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto (1993), integration is encouraged by both formal and informal systems within a university or college. Integration emphasizes the development of a strong connection with the college social and academic environment both inside the classroom and outside of class, including interactions with faculty, academic staff, and peers (e.g., study groups, peer tutoring, informal contact with faculty, involvement in organizations) (Nora, 1993). Student engagement is characterized as participation in educationally purposeful activities and the efforts students put into their studies both inside

and outside the classroom (Kuh, 2003). In addition, research has consistently shown that the more students are active and get involved on campus and the more they feel a part of the institution, the more likely they are to become integrated.

For the purpose of the current study, social and academic integration cover information related to needs, concepts, and behaviors pertinent to studying and learning inside and outside the classroom, including quality of students' efforts put into involvement, their active participation in class and other educational activities, their motivation to learn, their sense of relatedness, their interactions with faculty members and staff both formally and informally, their interactions with peers, their ease of meeting friends and developing personal relationship, and their use of services.

Adjustment will be defined as the period of time it takes to transition and adapt to a new lifestyle and culture. *Cross-cultural adjustment*, for this study, refers to the adjustments made by the participants in transition from one culture to another. *Culture* refers to attitudes, behavior, norms and values that are characteristics of a particular class, community, or population.

Significance of the Study

Despite the extensive research on students' academic and social integration in college, research on Asian international undergraduate students' academic and social experiences is limited. Particularly, the literature is limited to studies of Asians lumped together, no research has focused exclusively on the academic and social integration of Korean, Malaysian and Taiwanese international undergraduate students. With an increased presence on U.S. college campuses, it is important to know how they become integrated in the campus community, and what factors facilitated or hindered their academic and social integration in college. In addition,

more Asian international students in the STEM fields presented on campuses have made a good reason to conduct this study.

The Behavior–Perception-Behavior Model and Self-Determination Theory provides the theoretical framework for this study, which makes it more significant because these two theories recognize motivational factors of students that are ignored or limited in other integration theories (e.g., Tinto, Astin), and they allow for identifying the role of choice in motivational orientations. This current study helps administrators and student affairs professionals have a stronger understanding of the relationship between individual student and the environment. This level of understanding can assist administrators and faculty as they attempt to implement strategies to improve international student engagement, motivation, and achievement.

Comparing different groups of Asian international undergraduate students' academic and social integration also helps higher education and student affairs professionals examine the extent to which college experiences of student groups differ, what contributed to these differences, and what actions might be taken to enhance student experiences and ultimately, to improve student learning in college.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature addressed several key areas that help further establish a conceptual framework for better understanding the research question of this study. The literature review synthesizes the theoretical frameworks that guide this study including Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991, Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the Behavior–Perception-Behavior Model (Milem & Berger, 1997). The primary purpose of reviewing these theoretical frameworks is to help me know what to ask the study participants in order to develop good interview questions in the research design. Other important parts of this review are drawn from various empirical studies that pertain to the area of student social and academic integration, student engagement, and Asian international students and their challenges and experiences while studying in the U.S.

Theoretical Frameworks

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1991, Ryan & Deci, 2000) posits that human beings have an intrinsic drive to develop their capacities and to build meaningful relationships with others. SDT combines psychodynamic, humanistic, and cognitive development theories and focuses on the reasons for engagement/integration and the values associated with the decision to engage. As a result, SDT provides insights of variations in student learning strategies, performance, and persistence.

Students' willingness to invest their efforts and engage in the learning process is a function of their motivation. SDT postulates the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in engaging in learning activities (Guiffreda, 2006). In SDT, commitments to goals that are intrinsically motivated or integrated in the self are theorized to lead to optimal outcomes (Ryan

& Deci, 2000). According to Ryan and Deci, SDT (2000) proposes that there are varied types of extrinsic motivation, some of which represent impoverished forms of motivation and some of which represent active states. Ryan and Deci have argued that many of the activities prescribed in educational settings are not designed to be intrinsically interesting. They argue it is important to motivate students to value and self-regulate such activities and to carry them out on their own.

In addition, according to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000), the reasons for engaging are driven by three basic psychological needs: the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that are crucial in energizing human behavior. Autonomy refers to self governance and ownership of one's action. Therefore, autonomous motivation is an attribute of fully functioning individuals across different cultures and societies (Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997). Competence is facilitated by opportunities to deal effectively with optimally challenging academic tasks and the tendency to seek out and master challenges in the environment (Deci & Ryan). Relatedness refers to a sense of belonging and feeling connected to others with a mutual understanding. In an educational setting, the fulfillment of these three psychological needs will either facilitate or undermine students' academic engagement, self-regulatory style, and achievement.

The theory also delineates contextual factors that encourage intrinsic motivation. However, individuals vary not only in level of motivation (i.e., how much motivation) but also in the orientation of that motivation (i.e., what type of motivation) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Ryan and Deci (2002), orientation of motivation concerns the attitudes and goals that give rise to action; therefore, it concerns the "why" of actions (p.54).

Importantly, SDT recognizes that cultures differentially designate domains in which members of the society may exercise this fundamental need, and shape the appropriate activities through which autonomous motivation can be practiced (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Cultures also

assign meaning to people's autonomous experience either as positive and desirable or as negative and undesirable (Chirkov, 2009). The complex interaction of multiple goals, including individual, groups and affiliate goals, is prevalent in collectivistic cultures and in many cases, family and group goals are given higher priority than individual goals (Salili, Chiu, & Lai, 2001). In addition, Guiffrida (2006) argued that maintaining cultural connections plays a foundational role for ethnic minority college students and it serves as a bridge to integrate students into the larger college community. Understanding students' motivational orientation to their commitments is essential when describing minority student engagement (Guiffrida, 2006). Therefore, as a potential minority group on American campus, understanding cultural connections and students' motivational orientation is also important in studying Asian international student engagement, because these students are embedded in collectivistic cultures as many American minority students have experienced.

Behavior - Perception – Behavior Model

Milem and Berger's (1997) Behavior–Perception-Behavior Model describes factors leading to students' successful social and academic integration by exploring the relationships between Astin's (1984) theory of involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory of departure. Milem and Berger propose a model wherein student behaviors and perceptions interact to influence academic and social integration.

Based on Astin's description of involvement as behavior in meaning (1984), Milem and Berger (1997) suggest that student integration into the college environment results from interactions between their behaviors and perceptions. They argued that during the transition stage students begin to engage in a variety of behaviors representing different types of involvement. These diverse types of involvement could influence students' perceptions of institutional and

peer support for the academic and social aspects of their experiences. These perceptions can also influence how students will invest their energy through their continued involvement and affect students' institutional commitment. This "behavior–perception–behavior cycle" (p. 392) helps explain how students navigate the stage of integration and it suggests that how students interact with the social and academic system of a campus affects the integration process.

To test this model Berger and Milem (1999) conducted research on the role of student involvement and perceptions of integration. They concluded that self-confidence on involvement improves their model's explanatory power concerning how students interact with the college environment as a precursor to academic and social integration. Their research supports the idea that students who come to college knowing exactly what to expect from their institution integrate into the campus environment successfully regardless of their background.

In summary, active growth and the integration of knowledge, motivation, and socialization are necessary for student success. The aforementioned theories provide a fuller theoretical framework for identifying important factors contributing to the academic and social integration/engagement of Asian international undergraduate students because they describe a combination of factors related to beliefs/perceptions, values and norms, skills, knowledge and motivational orientation that enables a student to engage in purposeful, goal-directed, independent, and self-regulated actions and behavior. In addition, the SDT recognizes the importance of cultural factors relating to college student integration as these factors play significant roles in the integration process for students who come from collectivist cultures.

Moreover, activity and integration do not occur in a vacuum, but from interactions between the active self and the various forces (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Students integrate into a college community because they develop perceptions about the institutions and they themselves

want to be successful (Berger & Milem, 1999; Milem & Berger, 1997). Therefore, these theories help investigate students' cultural connections, their perceptions, motivations, feelings, and thoughts when they are in a new environment. These attributes could make a difference in how they become integrated into their college environment.

Student Integration

One of the main purposes of higher education is to create learning environments that foster student success and prepare well-rounded graduates to contribute to society. The widening student participation agenda has led to an increase in students from diverse backgrounds accessing higher education (Goldrick-Rab & Cook, 2011). However, their integration into the educational environment operates on several levels, including individual and institutional levels, and in various ways. In order for students to become socially and academically integrated during the initial stages of their studies, they need to develop a strong affiliation with the academic environment (Nora, 1993), both within the formal learning context and in the social setting outside the classroom (Krause, 2001). The process of becoming socially and academically integrated into the university environment has also been found to be both a cumulative and compounding process. Over the past decades, a multitude of research studies have considered questions related to student engagement and integration (e.g., Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, most research examined the impacts of student engagement on retention or persistence as outcomes rather than the student integration itself.

Research on Student Academic and Social Integration

Academic and social factors both play a role in a student's ability to integrate into the college environment. Reviewing the literature on student academic and integration in general

helped me identify some academic and social factors that are a potential influence on the integration of Asian international undergraduate students.

According to the research synthesis of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), knowledge acquisition and cognitive growth directly depend on an individual's level of effort and engagement. The relationship between the students' own efforts and the effects of student engagement/involvement in various activities related to academics, extracurricular activities, personal-social peer interaction, faculty interaction, scientific and quantitative activities were well documented in other research (e.g., Hu, Kuh, & Li, 2008; Kuh, Hu, & Vesper, 2000). The researchers acknowledged that substantive peer interactions outside the classroom were important, especially when balanced with other activities. The findings in these research studies indicated that students who devoted a high level of effort to a variety of educationally-purposeful activities reported more progress toward key college outcomes such as high academic performance than did those who only focused on one activity or who put forth little effort in only a few activities. Highly engaged students were involved in many activities and tied those activities with their academics (Schweinle, Reisetter, & Stokes, 2009).

High levels of student engagement are associated with purposeful student-faculty interaction, active and collaborative learning, and an institutional environment perceived by students as inclusive where expectations for performance are set at high levels and communicated clearly (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Rocconi, 2010; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). The cited studies explored connections between participation in a learning community, student engagement in educationally-purposeful activities, and overall satisfaction with the college experience. The findings indicated that participating in learning communities for both first-year and senior students was associated with high levels of academic effort, engagement in

educationally-purposeful activities such as academic integration, active and collaborative learning, and interaction with faculty members. Students also reported gains in personal and social development, practical competence, and overall satisfaction with the collegiate experience. The major influence on students' perceived gains is from their effort in getting involved in any learning opportunities provided by the institution and effort in their coursework.

Maisto and Tammi (1991) studied the effect of first year seminars on academic and social integration of first-year college students. They compared first-year students who did and did not participate in a first-year student seminar course and found that taking a freshman seminar course affected the grade point average of first-year students and their decision to continue or drop out of the program. Results indicated that students who participated in seminars earned significantly higher grades and had more informal faculty contacts and social interactions than non-participants.

Building upon their earlier work, Kuh and Hu (2002) investigated student characteristics that differentiated the levels of student engagement in educationally-purposeful activities. The researchers found that parental education, academic preparation, and students' perceptions of the campus environment positively influenced student engagement. Men, first-year students, and those with undecided majors were more likely to be among the disengaged. Kuh and Hu's results also showed that students with higher parental education levels and those more academically prepared were less likely to be disengaged. Students who perceived that their institution emphasized scholarship and intellectual and critical analysis, had high quality personal relationships between groups, and emphasized vocational and practical matters were less likely to be among the disengaged. Studying student engagement as a function of the individual within the context of the classroom and university environment, Schweinle, Reissetter, and Stokes

(2009) found that both students' personality and a sense of self influence their levels of engagement. Students who are most emotionally and socially prepared for college in addition to having adaptive personality traits are more likely to engage in college life. The students who were more highly engaged also tended to have a better sense of their own identity, interests and purpose. Their social and academic lives were linked to their interests and vision for their future. In addition, students who can not discern meaning from their college activities reported academic difficulty or social isolation (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005).

Sullivan (1997) examined student perceptions during three processes including separation from family for college, transition of adapting to college, and incorporation within the context of retention and attrition models when a student becomes integrated in the campus community. Sullivan's findings showed that the connections between students and their family and high school friends helped them overcome difficulties during the separation stage. During the transition stage, students adjusted to college by finding their niche and fitting into the new environment both socially and academically. At the incorporation stage, students perceived both competing and supporting relationships. They reported trying to perform well academically and establishing social networks that helped them with their affiliation with the institution. Thomas (2000) used a social network paradigm to measure the structural aspects of student relations to assess how social networks of students impact their commitment to college. He found that social networks helped students perform well academically and persist in their academic programs, and that the number and quality of student relationships are positively related to students' persistence in their programs and commitment to their institutions. Krause (2007) also noted the importance of students' social interactions during their early adjustment to college. He conducted a qualitative study exploring the nature of undergraduate students' social involvement with peers during the first six months of

their college experience. The findings from focus group interviews with 46 participants showed that small group and face-to-face discussions were important to students during the transition to higher education institution.

Social and Academic Integration of Domestic Minority Students

In addition to the aforementioned research on social academic integration of college students in general, there is a number of studies focusing on minority students and international students. Given the unique factors that lead to engagement and attrition of students from various minority groups, research in this area is valuable and necessary. Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, and Pascarella (1996) examined impacts of academic and social experiences on student outcomes to find ethnic and gender differences. The study findings indicated that experiences in college that include academic and social integration experiences, academic achievement, and environmental factors (e.g., financial situation and work hours on and/or off campus) affect students' persistence in college. The study also found that, where social integration is related to persistence for both male and female students, social integration was a more significant factor that impacts minority students in their persistence.

In a study of Latino students, Hurtado and Carter (1997) examined students' integration by measuring their sense of belonging. The study found that Latino students who participated in different academic-related activities outside of class during their first two years in college, for example, discussing course contents, tutoring other students, and who interacted frequently with faculty in their third year had a strong sense of belonging. In addition, participating in a religious organization in the first and second years and in a social-community organization in the third year strongly affected a student's sense of belonging. These results demonstrate that involvement in off-campus activities that link students to their cultural or religious background could help them feel

comfortable in the university community. Kraemer's (1997) research on academic and social integration of Hispanic students in two-year colleges showed a similar result. The study's results showed that faculty-student interaction and study behavior predicted Hispanic students' academic integration and influenced their academic achievement and persistence. Regarding social integration of Hispanic students on campus, Kraemer found that Hispanic students interact in their own cultural environment by socializing with Hispanic personnel, faculty, and students.

Strange (1999) examined the relationships between academic and social integration and college success for students from different ethnic backgrounds using five measures of academic and social integration including students' confidence in their ability to complete their degree programs and in their social skills, students' perceptions of themselves as a leader, their relationships with teachers, and their locus of control. The study findings showed that students from different ethnic backgrounds and family histories differed in their academic and social integration on campus. Specifically, compared to Hispanic and White, Asians students were less socially confident and less assimilated in the campus community. In addition, Strange found that academic confidence and relationships with teachers predicted Asian students' persistence, while academic confidence and internal locus of control predicted Hispanic students' persistence.

Chhuon and Hudley (2008) examined the experiences of successful Cambodian American students, a unique ethnic group, to understand their patterns of academic and social college integration. For Cambodian American students' successful adjustment, the study found that integration into the campus environment and keeping contact with the prior community were essential. Museus and Maramba's (2010) research on the impact of culture on American Filipinos also found that the direct relationship between students' connections to their cultural heritage significantly shaped their sense of belonging to the campus cultures.

Moreover, students of color experience greater feelings of alienation than do White students (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). In their study, for African American students, perceptions of discrimination negatively affected their social experience and their sense of belonging to college. However, their decision to persist was not affected by these perceptions but by parental support. Parental encouragement was also important to White students. It had a significant effect on students' social experiences, goal commitment, institutional commitment, and also influenced their persistence.

In summary, research on academic and social integration of domestic students showed that minority students' academic and social integration on campus was somehow different from that of White students. Some groups of students are more engaged than others, including women, full-time students, those living on campus, students with experiences of diversity, and students who participate in learning communities. However, for both White students and students of color interaction with others as an invaluable aspect of the integration process has been widely highlighted. The quality of these interactions has a strong influence on students' ability to navigate successfully through the demands of academic study and can have implications for both social and academic integration. Moreover, we can recognize some other similar factors contributing to the social and academic integration of both White students and students of color, and affecting their persistence in college including family background (i.e., parental education and support), students' own efforts, student characteristics (e.g., gender, academic preparation, behaviors and perceptions), institutional supports, student commitment, social network (e.g., acquaintances, friendships), and participation in on and off-campus activities. Even though those factors cross both populations, the levels of influence of these factors on academic and social integration as well as student persistence are different among populations. There are some factors that make the social

and academic integration of students of color differ from White students including ethnicity, sense of belonging, and connections with their families and cultural heritage.

Research on International Students

The increasing number of international students does not imply that they do not have problems adjusting to the new social and academic environment. Living in a foreign country requires a period of cultural and social adaptation, and the capacity of students for successful integration with their surroundings is tied to their chances of academic success (Pilote & Benabdeljalil, 2007). The question of success for international students must therefore be considered in the context of their integration into the college and university (Pilote & Benabdeljalil, 2007). International students have to work even harder in order to overcome many challenges posed by the differences in requirements and expectations in U.S. higher education institutions. Social and academic adaptations have become salient to academic success during their college experience. However, most research focuses on international student adjustment; only a few studies on student social and academic integration/engagement address international college students. The review in this section documents ways that international students engage (or do not engage) with the campus and identifies international students' learning experiences, successes, and challenges in academic settings.

Social and Academic Integration of International Students

In a study by Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) focused on engagement in effective educational practices, academic activities of international and American students were compared on selected variables shown to be related to student learning, personal development, and satisfaction with college. The researchers also assessed the degree to which students perceive campuses as supportive of academic and social needs. The Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) study found that

international first-year students were less satisfied with their college experience and spent far less time enjoying themselves and socializing than American counterparts. Senior international participants had significantly higher scores in academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and computer technology use. The study findings also showed that most international students seek out friendships with peers from the same nationality but that international students who seek out friendships with American students achieve higher grades than their counterparts who stay within their ethnic background. The researchers also mentioned motivation and academic preparation as determinants that may affect the college experiences of international and American students, and results showed differences among international students by race or ethnicity. Compared to White and other international students, Asian international students were less engaged in active and collaborative learning and diversity related activities (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005).

Andrade (2006) studied senior Asian international students, investigating the concept of integration as it relates to their persistence and the need to change their behaviors in order to become integrated into the college environment. Most students in the study were employed part-time while attending college; they therefore, spent limited time socializing in their first year because of time management and academic and language challenges. The nature of work and study required them to change in order to balance the social and academic demands. Students noted that the new environment required them to change their behaviors and they felt that these changes were necessary to integrate into the dominant academic and social systems of the university. Changing their classroom behavior from a passive to an active orientation and modifying their thinking of various cultural practices (e.g., questioning authority) are some examples. Most students in the study reported they interacted more in the classroom, developed strategies to cope with their limited English skills, became acquainted with peers from other

countries, and adopted a cooperative approach to their studies. They viewed the changes related to their home cultures positively in terms of intellectual, personal, and spiritual growth. They maintained connectedness to their own culture while adapting to the dominant norms of the university. In Andrade's (2006) study, for international students, maintaining the cultural integrity is important and integration does not imply assimilation. This contradicted earlier work by All-Sharideh and Goe (1998), who wrote that assimilation of American culture is a significant factor facilitating the competency of an international student in meeting academic and social demands as well as his/her personal life needs. Assimilation, according to All-Sharideh and Goe, includes the development of language proficiency and knowledge of customs and norms of the host culture.

Adjustment Issues of International Students

Social and academic challenges.

The first year of college is crucial to all international students, but in different ways, depending on their cultural and educational background and their country of origin (Andrade, 2005). For international students, the first few weeks after arrival on campus are hectic and challenging, because they must sort out a lot of things, learning about basic rules for living while settling down into a new environment. Research reporting the problems experienced by international students indicates that not all students have positive experiences in their study abroad journey, particularly when they first arrive on campus and adjust to new environments. Many international students are mentally and culturally under-prepared for the new environment of their study abroad and arrive unaware of the immense adjustment hurdles they must overcome to be successful in the American educational system (Constantinides, 1992; Li, Baker, & Marshall, 2002). The difference between the old environment and the new is so large for many

international students that they are unable to handle it effectively and efficiently (Ayano, 2006). Many arrive on campus with limited knowledge about culture and linguistics of the host country and they lack information about the institution they are entering prior to their arrival (Lewthwaite, 1997).

Lee's (2008) study on student information sources and reasons for study abroad confirmed Lewthwaite's (1997) finding. For many East Asian students, institutional ranking is an important factor in making decisions of where to study, and in some cases, the only factor that students relied on; therefore, they have very limited information about the campus setting, institutional and student culture, and institutional resources (Lee, 2008). Lacking information about the chosen college resulted in feelings of loneliness, isolation, and disappointment once on campus. Holmes' (2004) research on Chinese students in New Zealand also found that students came to campus with little knowledge about the country, society, culture, and education before their studies and after a while, they learned that reality conflicted with their assumptions; for example, students worked hard but in the end, their efforts did not always bring them good grades due to different learning approaches and differences in communication styles between teacher and students.

Past research indicates that international students who come from different cultural and social groups display different adjustment problems and coping strategies (Pedersen, 1991; Yoo, Goh, & Yoon, 2005). For example, international students encounter adjustment challenges that can affect their psychological well-being while living in a foreign country (Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993; Poyrarli & Grahame, 2005; Reynolds & Costaintine, 2007; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Hayes and Lin (1994) provided an overview of the adjustment of international students and their social networking during their sojourn on American campuses

and found that international students encountered social loss, communication issues, and struggles with coping strategies. Their study suggests that a supportive campus environment is an emergent need for international students to help overcome challenges in a new environment (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Furthermore, Yeh and Inose, (2003) observed that international students often lean toward friendships with fellow international students. The number of strong ties established with other internationals was found to have the strongest relationship with the personal adjustment of international students (All-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). According to All-Sharideh and Goe (1998), the relationship between assimilation of American culture and personal adjustment was found to be dependent on the number of strong ties established with other internationals whereas the establishment of strong ties with Americans was found to be independently related to personal adjustment.

Prior research also notes that international students experience significant difficulties when they first arrive and adjust to a new environment, including educational system differences, academic requirements, cultural differences, language challenges, food incompatibilities, time management, and social integration (Fatima, 2001; Galloway & Jenkins, 2005; Haydon, 2003; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Zhai, 2002). Kaur's (2006) research on academic adjustment experiences of Indian graduate students in a research university revealed that the students had difficulties in adjusting to their new academic environment due to the differences between the two academic systems including learning styles, academic code of integrity, in-class participation, student-instructor relationship, and approach to education. The results of this study are consistent with prior research on academic adjustment problems of international students including independent learning and an active, questioning style of education, different teaching methods, fast-paced class lectures and discussions, and a competitive academic environment

(Abel, 2002; Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Patton, 2002, Ramsey et. al., 1999; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Zhai 2002). Many international students must shift from the lecture method to an active and interactive learning environment, adapt to solving problems instead of memorizing facts, and learn to locate information themselves instead of depending on their professors.

As documented in the aforementioned studies, adjustment to the American academic system, cultural differences and language ability were the three most significant issues for international students. In addition, Nicholson (2001) and Poyrazli and Grahame (2005) showed that international students had difficulties managing the cost of tuition and living expenses because of out-of-state tuition, the lack of access to loans or scholarships, and the restrictions on international students working off campus. It is important to note that international students on American campuses come from all over the world, from different cultures, influenced by different social and cultural norms and beliefs, and they are familiarized with their own educational systems. So, in spite of some common adjustment problems, they also experience some challenges associated with their countries of origin. Asian international students have struggled with adjustment because of the considerable differences between the Eastern world and the Western world due to fundamentally diverse cultural values (Chen, 1999; Seo & Kor-Ljungberg, 2005; Swagler & Ellis, 2003). Studies of Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese students by Feng (1991), Swagler and Ellis (2003), and Ayano (2006) indicated that these international students found it difficult to socialize with their American counterparts due to differences in cultural values, for example, Asian international students in these studies often emphasize collectiveness, self-control and equal relationships when come to friendships. They perceive and interpret their American peers' thoughts and actions through the lens of Confucianism.

Language proficiency.

English language ability and its impact on the international student adjustment process appear to be the strongest concerns for Asian international students (Constantin, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003). Holmes (2004) interviewed Chinese students in a New Zealand university and found that among the undergraduate participants, many expressed concern about their English language competence and the associated difficulties of being understood by their New Zealand peers. Particularly, many international students perceived they had insufficient English proficiency that contributed to their lack of confidence in interacting with people from other cultures. This perception also severely hampered the development of students' intercultural communication skills in class as well as outside the classroom especially in the contexts of asking and answering questions, giving opinions and expressing ideas (Holmes, 2004).

Difficulties with English not being a first language create more obstacles to participation in academic life, general university life, and accessing services (Li et. al., 2002; Novera, 2004; Petersen, 1991), and is a primary factor impacting the learning and cultural adaptation of Asian students. In class, many Asian students' listening and comprehension skills do not equip them for extended native-speaker delivery in lecture contexts; thus they feel confused during lectures as well as class discussion (Andrade, 2005; Holmes, 2004, Nicholson, 2001). In addition, completing reading and writing assignments in time is always a challenge (Holmes, 2004). Asian international students in Nicholson's (2001) study expressed that they needed more time to study, thus they had less time for social involvement. Therefore, academic and social difficulties are likely to be related.

In addition, language insufficiency may make international students feel isolated from their American counterparts because they are afraid of being embarrassed and misunderstood (Feng, 2001). They in turn withdraw from social activities and interact within the community of their native language. However, interactions with Americans, according to Kim (2001) and Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, and Al-Timimi (2004), help international students ease the loneliness and difficulties that international students encounter, and understand American culture better and thus bring balance to their life.

Utilization of campus support services.

The difficulties in the transition to college that most students face are significant for international students. Colleges and universities recognize the need to ease the transition for international students as their integration into the social and academic fabric of the institution is a key to their retention and success (Murphy, Hawkes, & Law, 2002; Tinto, 1993). Literature on international students' experiences reveals a number of studies relating to different campus support services, however, most of these studies are related to counseling services; only a few discuss other student services.

Social contacts can be increased through facilitation by student service groups. Many colleges and universities have developed peer mentoring programs that match a new international student with a current international student or an American student (Abe, Talbot & Geelhoed, 1998). Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed (1988) examined the possible positive effects of peer programs on the adjustment of international students. These programs help international students assimilate into social norms and mores, among other transition supports. Their findings indicate that students who participated in peer programs scored higher than non-participants on social adjustment and suggest that peer programs enhanced international students' interpersonal

skills, which are crucial for their success. In addition, in Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed's (1988) study and a study by Zhai (2002), the International Student Office was cited as the most important and useful resource that contributed to students' comfort at their university.

Research on transition issues and first year retention of international students by Andrade (2005) also supports the aforementioned findings of the Abe et al. (1998) study. Students emphasized the importance of involvement with peers both from their own countries and from elsewhere in helping negotiate the first year of college. Many of these students were very goal-oriented and only involved academically. They needed to expend more effort to get involved in academic and social activities during their studies due to linguistic, cultural, and educational system differences. Involvement with faculty was evident in the study in the sense that most students benefited from faculty support and encouragement. However, formal institutional programming played a minor role in students' adjustments. Students had mixed experiences with adjustment assistance through formal support services and programs on campus. With the exception of the ESL program, formal academic support services and programs were not commonly mentioned as having a significant role in first-year adjustment. But, students also noted the need for additional English support. In the same study, students who were seniors indicated that they had been successful navigating the systems of the university, however, the author did not have any further indications of how students did this, what services they found most helpful in navigating the system, and in what way.

Social support, particularly from the academic perspective, is important to the well-being of international students because it helps to reduce obstructions that students have faced (Dee & Henkin, 1999; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) suggest that

programs that enhance cross-culture faculty mentoring and academic advising, and promote social support among peers might be particularly useful.

International students from non-Western countries experience identifiable concerns that are appropriate for counseling more frequently than international students from Western countries (Cheng et al., 1993; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). Pedersen (1991) stated that the greater the cultural difference, the more complicated the international student's adjustment is likely be. According to Lin and Yi (1997), Asian international students are often stereotyped as quiet, reserved, and non-assertive. Asian cultures place an emphasis on harmony and respect for authorities. Therefore, many of these students are reluctant to share their feelings or emotions, express their opinions or opposition to anyone, especially to authority figures. Asian international students tend to share their personal issues with fellow nationals or with their family (Baloglu, 2000; Dillar & Chisolm, 1983; Pedersen, 1991; Yoon & Jepsen, 2004; Zhai, 2002), because they are most immediately and readily available (Pedersen, 1991) and appropriate for Asian cultural norms that personal problems should stay within a family or close friends (Yoon & Jepsen, 2004).

The underutilization of counseling services was also revealed in the study by Harju, Long, and Allred (1998), who found only 14% of survey respondents reported using psychological counseling services for stress, family problems, adjustment issues, and relationship concerns. Moreover, there is a difference in utilizing counseling services within the Asian international student population. Frey and Roycircar (2006) showed that there was a significantly higher utilization of helpful resources to deal with troubles among South Asian students compared with the East Asian group. They concluded that as a result of British colonization, South Asians are more proficient in English than East Asians and therefore, more willing to reach out to different resources that require more verbal interactions.

In short, even though Chen and Barrett (2002) suggest language barriers seem to be declining in importance as more students from Asian countries studying in English countries suggest, limited language skills still is one of the most concerning issues for Asian international students in their adaptation to new social and academic environment. Experiences of loneliness, isolation, anxiety, and lack of connectedness and belonging are reported by many Asian international students and many often live in isolation on the margins of the society in which they desire to belong (Byram & Feng, 2006; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Moreover, difficulties coping with academic requirements, financial constraints, and psychological issues were unique sources influencing their adjustment and integration. Hence, students' perception and their ability to change their behaviors in order to integrate into the dominant norms, values, and behaviors of the institution are important to help them successfully adapt to the new environments. Moreover, social and academic supports are important for international students. Many services are made available to students, however, their use depends on students' ability to navigate and utilize these services to their fullest.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the theoretical frameworks that guide developing interview questions in this study, empirical studies on college student academic integration, and research on international students. Self-determination theory (SDT) strongly acknowledges the cultural and familial connections and explains how cultural norms and motivation impact college student integration and persistence. SDT shows the importance of understanding the role of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in student achievement. Moreover, cultural factors not only influence students' motivation but also their attitudes and behaviors. Interestingly, the

perception-behavior model also discusses interactions between perceptions and behaviors in influencing student integration.

The research relating to domestic minority students raises interesting questions that may be useful regarding social and academic integration of Asian international undergraduate students. For example, what roles do the cultures and countries of origin play in Asian international students' integration? What cultural factors facilitate or hinder their integration?

The review of empirical studies discussed in the chapter provides a general framework of factors that could play an important role in Asian international student integration and engagement. Those factors include interaction with other students, faculty, and staff; participation in campus activities, cultural background, students' own effort, students' perceptions of institutions, sense of belonging, connections with their families and their community members, English language proficiency, and levels of challenges that they face and how they utilize different support resources to ease their difficulties during their study in the U.S.

Next, chapter 3 will present the research design, data collection, data analysis and the limitation of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research design for this study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the research design and sampling. Second, the data collection and data analysis procedures are presented. The validity of the data is also discussed, emphasizing a triangulation approach involving analytic memos, member checking, and peer examination. Finally, the role of the researcher in this study is presented, and limitations of the study are described.

Research Design

Most research on student social and academic integration has examined mainstream, traditional American students for whom the transition to college is quite different than for students who are from other cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. Institutional norms and values more closely reflect those of mainstream students, and thus, present a significant challenge to international students. Moreover, while researchers have focused their studies on the adjustment experiences of international students, little is known about what matters to the social and academic integration of international students.

This study explored factors that contribute to social and academic integration of Asian international undergraduate students based on participants' perspectives and guided by the Behavior-Perception-Behavior Model (Milem & Berger, 1997) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 1991, 2000). The question guiding the study was as follows:

What contributes to social and academic integration of Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international undergraduate students?

The research question supported discovery of new information related to Asian international undergraduate students, including whether their cultural background, country of

origin, perceptions and behaviors toward the institution, and their motivational orientations play a role in their social and academic integration. The findings helped us understand how Asian international undergraduate students at the selected institution integrate (or do not integrate) into the college life socially and academically. I wanted to gain insights into students' attitudes, behaviors, their cultures and values systems, concerns, motivations, and aspirations to become integrated to a new college environment. Moreover, based on the notion that a qualitative approach should be used to obtain a deep understanding of the research problem and offers the opportunities for in-depth probing to obtain co-researchers' perceptions and views (Creswell, 2003), I chose this methodology for this study.

Qualitative research does not incorporate large samples or attempt to produce generalizations (Creswell, 2003; Glesne, 2006). However, qualitative methods permit the researcher to approach the fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis, and allows the researcher to study the selected issues in depth and detail (Patton, 1990). Thus, this approach provided the opportunity to have an in-depth understanding of what facilitated or hindered the participants' social and academic integration when they study in the States. In addition, a qualitative approach is able to discern subtle differences between groups; therefore I am not interested in over-generalizing across groups of students within this broad label of Asian internationals.

Methodology for this study was dictated by a constructivist/interpretivist theoretical perspective to understand and interpret participants' ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts (Glesne, 2010). The constructivist paradigm recognizes the complex nature of multiple realities and that there is no single, unique reality but only individual perspectives. A case study approach was employed to complete this qualitative study. Case studies allow the investigator to

explore a phenomenon, population, or a general condition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and is appropriate because it “arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena [and] contributes uniquely to our knowledge of individual, organizational, and social phenomena” (Yin, 1994, p.2). In addition, the case study offers a means of investigating complex social units to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon being studied within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). The phenomenon of how Asian international undergraduate students integrated into college life is a specific, complex, functioning event (Stake, 1995). A case study design allowed me to capture the nuances of lived experiences of the participants, to understand the participants’ contexts, and discover how they take actions in those contexts. In this study, the case being examined was the academic and social integration experiences of Asian international undergraduate students in a Research University in the Midwest, which has a large number of Asian international students.

In summary, this design was selected because the purpose of this study was to explore interactions related to the experiences of Asian international undergraduate students during their study in the U.S. and to understand factors that contributed to their social and academic integration. This study was exploratory because some factors were similar to what the literature has documented about student integration, but little is known about what exactly constitutes social and academic integration of Asian international undergraduate students during their study in the States. Therefore, this study drew upon previous research, self-determination theory, and on the behavior–perception–behavior model to identify factors contributing to social and academic integration of Asian international undergraduate students.

Sampling

This study was designed to inductively identify factors that contribute to the social and academic integration of Asian international undergraduate students. In this study, the unit of analysis was student-level and contextual variables.

According to the *Open Door* (2010) report, international students from Southeast Asia are more concentrated at the undergraduate level, while students from East Asia are almost evenly split between undergraduates and graduate students. The context for this study was a large public research university located in the Midwest reflecting this enrollment trend. In the fall 2011, this institution was host to approximately 6,000 international students, comprising over 12% of the total enrollment. This university has a high population of Asian international students, which comprise more than 80% of its total international students. Korea and China are two top sending countries and more than 50% of Korean and Chinese international students are enrolled in undergraduate programs. Malaysia is not on the list of top sending countries; however, most of the Malaysian students are enrolled in undergraduate programs. In order to generate sufficient students at their junior year, after studying carefully the statistics of international enrollment published by the International Students Office (ISO), the target samples were students who come from Korea, Taiwan, and Malaysia. These countries have a substantial number of undergraduate students. According to statistics of the ISO at the studied university, as of the 2011 academic year, 446 of 729 Korean students, 86 of 187 Taiwanese students and 73 of 122 Malaysian students are enrolled in undergraduate programs. I decided not to select international students from China because they are a very big group consisting of more than 2000 international Chinese undergraduate students among the total of 6000 international students

currently enrolling at the university. It would be better to have a separate study focusing only on this group.

Purposeful sampling was used to select a sample from which I discovered, understood, and gained insight (Merriam, 2009) about student social and academic integration into the university environment. In qualitative research purposeful sampling yields the most information about the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2002) and enables rich description and enhances transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, purposeful sampling allowed me to ensure that the selected informants are representative of the group under study. The target samples were students who come from Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia under F-1 and J-1 visas (non-immigrant visa) enrolled as full-time students in undergraduate programs, and in the 3rd year of their program in the same institution. Third year students were purposefully selected based on the assumption that the duration of their college experience and period of stay in the U.S. are connected with their capacity for critical self-reflection on various aspects of their integration process and those students have achieved to move forward to their graduation. According to Tinto (1993), interaction between the student and the university environment cultivates integration into the social and academic context of the institution. I wanted to learn from these students' reflections on their first year experiences, their changes and growth after getting to know more about the institution, and environmental influences affecting their integration (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

In summary, in selecting Asian international undergraduate students to participate in the study, the criteria I focused on were full-time students in their third year, because I wanted to learn from their reflections on their first one or two years the challenges they encountered (and if those challenges are the same now or different), how they overcame these challenges if they did,

and how they got involved in campus social and academic systems. Students who transferred from other U.S. higher education institutions were not selected for the study because I wanted to learn about their perceptions about the institution and if there were any differences in their first perceptions and their current experience. Students who enrolled in non-degree programs were excluded from the study, because these students stayed for a short time and they may not have experienced any academic pressure.

I selected informants with the assistance of Student Association E-board members. From the website of the International Students Office (ISO), I had the names and emails of presidents and vice presidents of Korean, Taiwanese, and Malaysian Student Associations and their e-board members. In addition, I also participated in the International Cultures Festival in November 2011, where all the international student groups/associations showcase cultural artifacts from their countries. During the Festival, I met with some e-board members and students from Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan. I talked with them about my study, about the participant selection criteria and asked for their help identifying potential participants for the study. From that time until the data collection was completed, I kept in touch with them frequently to keep them informed about the needs of the study, criteria for selecting participants and asked for their help when needed. Making rapport with them and other students from these associations was important for the researcher's credibility.

The Letter of Invitation (Appendix B) that included the purpose of the study was emailed to the key informants so that they understood the study in order to help me recruit potential participants. Asian international undergraduate students who were in their third year were encouraged to participate in the study. While the number of required participants in qualitative studies similar to what I proposed is not clearly articulated in the literature, based on my

previous experience with interview-based research, a realistic assessment of time and logistical requirements, and estimation of the amount of experiential materials needed for rich description, I decided to collect data from 15 individuals. With the assistance of the e-board members, I got in contact with 18 potential participants. After the initial phone conversation with each, I selected 15 participants who met the research criteria. However, one of them could not make the second interview; therefore, the total number of study participants was 14. I really appreciated the support from the Student Association E-board members; without them the present study would have not carried out as planned.

According to Van Manen (1990), the qualitative interview serves very specific purposes: (1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with interviewees about the meaning of an experience. In this study, the goal of the interviews was to understand the integration experience of Asian international undergraduate students and the meanings they make of that experience. The aim of the interviews was not to gather demographic information, but to find out about the participants' "focused life history" (Seidman, 2006, p.11). The focused portion of the interview comprised information about students' home countries, how their cultures influenced their values and beliefs, and their experiences in another culture. Given this focus, data detailing students' behaviors and perceptions, their motivations to integrate into the college community socially and academically as well as their cultural backgrounds and the challenges that they encounter during their study were essential.

Moreover, I also wanted to learn how they perceive the institution where they are studying, if they see "fit" between them and the institution, and if they see the institution as

supportive. These questions helped me develop insights of perceptions, beliefs, and experiences from multiple points of view and to have the participants reconstruct their experiences within the topic under study (Glesne, 2010; Seidman, 2006).

In order to allow participants to answer questions from their own frames of reference, rather than choosing from a limited number of predetermined options, I decided to conduct open-ended interviews. The open-ended questions allowed for the flexibility to probe for meaning-making and to follow up unanticipated but relevant issues raised by the participants (Patton, 2002). I conducted two interviews with each individual, gathering in-depth information about their experiences on an American campus as an international student. This process allowed me to engage in prolonged interactions with participants and build meaningful relationships with them. The second interview helped me test my reflections of the participants' stories as well as test emerging themes. Following Seidman's advice (2006), the first interview focused on students' life history and details of their experiences, when they first arrived and during their first year, their very first perceptions of themselves, and of the institutions. The second interview focused on their current experiences, their changes during the past one or two years, their reflections of these changes, and the meaning of these changes.

From the literature review, one could see some factors related to the international student experience emerged from previous research, however, I was not very certain if those factors could be true to Asian international undergraduate students' social and academic integration. Thus, in-depth interviews were the best tool to help me investigate those factors. Compared to published studies on student integration, most of which employed quantitative methods to validate the Tinto's (1975) model of student social and academic integration, the present study helped me get an in-depth look into the realm of their experiences during their study in the U.S.

Research Instrumentation

The study was approved by the IRB in December, 2011 (Appendix A), and data collection began in spring 2012. The research instrument was semi-structured interviews, which included structured questions designed to collect consistent and relevant information from all participants, and unstructured probes which allowed individuals to share their stories in unique and personal ways. I used an interview protocol (Appendix C) that was developed based on the guiding research question, and the theoretical frameworks of the study. The protocol consisted of broad questions related to the principal research question and the theoretical frameworks, and alternative probes that could be used to facilitate the collection of vital, substantive descriptions of participants' experiences. To ensure the quality of data, the data collection instrument - interview protocols - were tested with two third-year international undergraduate students from China and Vietnam in December 2011. During these pilot interviews, I took notes on words and terms that made the questions difficult for students to respond. The interview protocols were then revised accordingly in order to ask the questions that would be understood to get better results.

Interview questions were created in a way to put the participants' experiences in context, for example, asking them to reconstruct their experiences in their home country (family, school) and their experiences when they first arrived in the U.S., their first semester, their first year, their life in residence halls comparing with off-campus living experiences in terms of social integration; and their motivations toward involvement in social and academic life. There were two questions to ask the participants to draw the pictures of what it was like for them as a new student at this institution and themselves at this current time of the interview. Their drawings served as probes for more information during the interviews. All the interviews were face-to-face which enabled me to elicit distinctive and private data from the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection

I collected data through two formal interviews with each participant. A total of 28 formal interviews were completed during the spring 2012 with 14 Korean, Malaysian and Taiwanese international undergraduate students from various areas of specialization. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes and produced about 25 hours of recording. Most of the interviews occurred at a private, comfortable and convenient room in a public place (graduate lounge and community center). All interviews were conducted in English.

I began the first interviews by informing participants about the purpose of the study and the interview methods. Participants also had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and sign consent forms (Appendix D). I spent time explaining the confidentiality of our conversations and my role as an interviewer/researcher. That is, my role was not to judge their experience or them but to hear their life stories and how they made sense of their academic journey in America. To begin, I asked participants to describe themselves; what they and their parents valued about education, and to draw pictures of themselves when they first arrived on campus. I also inquired about their motivations for attending a school in the U.S. and their expectations. Next, I asked them to describe their first few weeks when they arrived and challenges they encountered and how they responded to those challenges. The first interviews ended with a question about emerging new challenges at the current stage of their undergraduate study.

The second interview was arranged approximately one or two weeks (three weeks at most) after the first interview took place. I began by reviewing their first year experiences discussed previously to refresh their memories. Then I transitioned into the discussion of current experience, asking them to draw the picture of themselves at the current time. I followed up with

questions about their college experience so far, what experience stood out, how their current experience was different and/or the same compared to their first year experience, and how these experiences influenced their attitude, behavior and perceptions toward the university. I also asked them to describe the campus environment and their current involvement in social and academic activities. At the end, I asked participants to share insights they learned from their experiences during their past three years in college, what I should change and/or add in the interviews, and if I could to contact them in the future regarding the findings. As themes and issues arose from earlier interviews, I asked subsequent participants about those issues to gather confirming or disconfirming information. Also, if a topic or an issue was brought up in more than one interview, I probed further for more information. For example, early in the interviews the issue of big class size emerged as a salient adjustment experience for one participant. When a second participant brought up having big classes, I probed further to gather relevant information that would help me compare their experiences.

All interviews were digitally recorded with permission from participants and transcribed verbatim. After that I emailed interview transcripts to participants and asked them to check if the information was correct and it meant what they said and if they wanted to make any clarification. I followed up with participants for their reactions and/or observations. Most participants did not provide any additional comments.

Note taking and reflective listening techniques employed during the interview helped me formulate emergent questions and gauge the accuracy of understanding of the participants' responses as the interview progresses (Patton, 2002). In addition to digital recording, I took field notes. My notes included two types of information: notes of major topics or themes that participants discussed, and my observations of participants, for example, their voice and facial

expressions, questions that arose from particular topics/questions, and my thoughts on how interviews related to each other. These notes were incorporated into descriptions and thematic analyses of participants' experiences in the later stage of analysis.

Establishing Relationships with Participants

Building a strong, trusting relationship with participants is important to effective interviewing. In order to build rapport and establish my credibility, my first attempt was that at the International Cultures Fest, I came to their booths, participated in their cultural activities, and then I introduced myself and communicated my research interests and the purposes of interviews to the e-board members in informal ways. Second, I initiated informal contacts with the e-board members via email and sent them the Letter of Invitation so they could help me recruit potential participants. When I had names and contact information of potential participants, I initiated conversations with them via emails or phone. The initial interactions helped break the ice and establish some degree of familiarity with the participants.

Before I started the interviews, I assured participants of their confidentiality. In addition, I explained to them that I would change and/or remove any identifying information when necessary. I also informed them about their rights to decline to answer any questions and withdraw from interview at any time, and that they could review the transcription and change and/or remove any personal information. I also explained that the audio recording of the interviews would be erased at the completion of the study. These assurances were given verbally as well as in the informed consent form signed by participants at the beginning of the interviews.

I also built rapport with participants by showing my genuine interest in their stories and their perceptions. They also seemed to be pleased to hear that I was particularly interested in Asian international undergraduate students as many of them felt much of their experience was

either unknown or ignored by the university administration. I was also able to establish credibility with participants because of my own experience as an Asian international student on different American campuses.

Participants' comfort in sharing their personal experience and feelings may also have been influenced by my college experience and personal style. Because of my own experience as an Asian international student, I was able to connect with participants instantly. I demonstrated my comfort in hearing about inconveniences they encountered when they first arrived in the U.S. and on campus. I presented myself as open, understanding, and curious, and showed my respect and appreciation in how I asked questions, listened, and reacted to their responses.

Data Analysis

According to Miles and Huberman (1984), in qualitative research data consist of words, which are used during analysis. However, researcher could feel difficult to compare qualitative data objectively, because words can be ambiguous. Qualitative research is a successively selective process where the researcher progressively narrows the focus at each stage to achieve data reduction (Krathwohl, 1998). Preparing data for analysis, conducting different types of analyses, representing data, and interpreting the deeper meaning of the data are all necessary steps in the qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2003; Krathwohl, 1998).

Once the transcription of each interview was completed, I proof-read to check for any information that revealed participants' identity. In the analysis process, I used interview transcripts and my field notes as the primary texts. Analysis of data was an ongoing process and it began along with the transcription of interviews. This helped me avoid drowning in the data set and change the ways to ask questions or ask the participants something that came up in the first interview (Merriam, 2009). It also enabled me to focus and shape the study as it proceeded,

through constant reflections on the data and attention to what the data were saying (Glesne, 2006). I started analyzing the interview transcriptions and field notes by reading over these materials at least twice, underlining key words and phrases, and took notes on any ideas which might be important themes in the participants' college life. I usually read the combined transcripts of two interviews for each participant to get a sense of the whole of their stories (Patton, 2002). It was important to get an overall sense of each participant's experience and perceptions at early stage because the next stages of coding and categorizing involved segmenting texts into chunks of information. After reading and rereading all transcripts, I was able to have better understanding of each participant's experience. This knowledge enabled me to better understand the context and connections among the themes that I developed at the coding stage. I also kept memos of individual experience, recurring topics or issues, and salient patterns. These memos were instrumental in developing codes and constructing individual profiles.

Coding

The next step in analysis was data reduction. The biggest challenge lay in reducing the data because everything looked important when I first began the analysis; however, large amounts of data eventually had to be reduced to a manageable form. Bracketing and hand-coding the data helped me to keep close to the data. I identified phrases or passages that embodied a singular idea that seemed interesting or significant (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). During my initial reading and analysis of the transcripts, I segmented texts into chunks of information, and then put them into Excel spreadsheet. There were 5 columns in the sheet including identification code, actual talk (chunk of information), descriptive label, analytical coding, and category. Semantically related phrases, or themes, emerged as I found recurring information in multiple transcripts. Based on initial readings of the transcripts, the research questions, and the literature

on student integration and international students, I identified a list of themes of interest. As I coded more transcripts, I continued to add new codes to reflect important topics and issues that emerged in the later transcripts.

With the assistance of Excel, codes were sorted and linked the connections among the codes. After coding all transcripts, I went through an iterative process of refining and restructuring code categories. The nature of codes changed from descriptive to inferential and interpretive during the process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). When all coding was finalized, I went back to each transcript to confirm consistency across all transcripts. It is important to note that, despite the seemingly mechanical process of reading and coding, analyzing the transcripts was a highly subjective and reflective process. Determining what was important or interesting was a matter of judgment and reflected the main purposes of my study.

Thematic Analysis

The process of finding patterns and developing themes began during data collection when I developed some preliminary ideas of the factors that contributed to the participants' social and academic integration in an American college. Listening to the interviews, reading the transcripts as a whole, and the prolonged processes of coding and categorizing brought more clarity to these preliminary ideas. Identifying themes and patterns involved a reflective and iterative process of comparing and contrasting: texts, codes, and coding categories. Writing was also a part of the analytical process. Revisiting the transcripts, revising coding scheme, adding and/or changing categories are important parts in the writing process. In addition, I always remained open to other themes that might emerge during the analytical process. After completing the findings chapter (thematic analysis), I returned to the literature to re-orient myself to the theoretical frameworks in order to stay focused on participants' experiences when discussed and interpreted the findings.

During the analysis, the experiences of the participants remained central, because my goal was not to generalize. Themes were constructed through the constant comparative method, in which I constantly compared units of data (information obtained from the participants in the form of remarks, comments, and expressions) and put them into groupings that have something in common (Merriam, 1998); however, I also highlighted the differences among the groups. In addition, according to Denzin (1994), interpretation is an art and cannot be based on formulas and mechanical calculations; thus, a good interpretive process moves tactfully from field to text for the readers, and is complex and reflexive.

Validity and Trustworthiness

As the study was designed, the participant experience was not directly accessible; data analysis was inevitably based on inference upon the participants' stories. Therefore, the following actions were taken to ensure trustworthiness of research results.

First of all, data triangulation was made possible through member checks and other viewpoints. I had rather extensive contact with the participating students throughout spring semester when data collection was ongoing. I obtained their consent to stay in touch with them when I was analyzing the data and writing up the findings of the study. After the interviews were transcribed I sent them to the participants to check if I missed any information or misunderstood what they were saying. I also checked with them for any inference I made from their comments. One of my colleagues and my advisor also engaged in coding, in peer debriefing, and commented on findings as they emerged.

The Role of the Researcher: Experiences, Preconceptions, and Assumptions

The researcher is the key instrument of data collection in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). I was always aware of my background, cultural identity, and connection with the

participants. As the researcher of this study, I went through a deep process of reflection on why I chose to pursue this particular topic. Before and during conducting this study, I was always aware of the multiple ways in which my experiences relate to the participants, and always made sure to avoid imposing my experiences on them. Many factors, which include being an administrator working with international students in my home university, being an international student in the U.S. for several years and one who has experienced social and academic integration processes, all have prompted me to conduct this study.

Creswell (2007) noted that it is important for the researcher to begin collecting and analyzing data with a thorough description of his or her personal experience of the phenomenon. This bracketing is to suspend or to put aside the researcher's prior beliefs, prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions about a phenomenon of interest so that the researcher can examine the "consciousness itself" in the same way that "an object of consciousness" can be examined (Merriam, 2009, pp. 25-26). I did not approach this study assuming that every student had a negative or positive experience with their integration process. I set many of my assumptions aside in order to allow the findings of this study to emerge without placing my beliefs in the way in which participants integrate into college community socially and academically.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations in regard to the research process that need to be addressed. The first limitation is that this was a qualitative study that involved only 14 participants from Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan at one public research university. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other international undergraduate students or to other universities. An additional limitation related to the scope of the study is that not all Asian countries and/or cultures were represented in the study and the samples were not randomly

selected; therefore, the data may not necessarily reflect the views of all Asian international students enrolled in this university. In addition, if a larger number of cultures were represented in these findings, there may have been further insights not included in this sample size.

The second limitation identified during the data collection was that most participants were student leaders (student e-board members) or highly engaged and visible students on campus, except one Korean male student. As a result, highly engaged students may represent a sample bias and their beliefs may not reflect those of students less engaged. However, Creswell (2003) argued that instead of being able to generalize the findings, qualitative research aims to provide in-depth information about the phenomenon.

The third limitation has to do with the fact that I, as the researcher, am an Asian international graduate student at the institution where the study was conducted. Although this gave me several advantages such as it enabled me as the researcher to compare experiences, connect with, and reflect on matters along with participants; prolonged access to participants; and insider knowledge of institutional culture, it is still a limitation. During the data collection and analysis I felt very privileged to be an insider because I could collect first hand data which may not be available to the outsiders. This also helped when interpreting the data. However, the insider's role may add subjectivity to this study. Although the researcher made an effort to become aware of her understanding and assumptions of the research question in data collection and data analysis process, the presumptions and understanding might be biased to the degree that they impacted validity of the research findings.

This chapter outlined the methodology, research questions, data gathering and analysis, site and participant selection, validity and trustworthiness, my stance as the researcher, and limitations of the study. The next chapter will present interpretations of the findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In recent years Asian international undergraduate students have been enrolling in unprecedented numbers in U.S. colleges and universities (Open Door, 2011). It is becoming increasingly important for campuses to understand these students and how to bridge the cultural gap between them and domestic and other groups of international students. How does the culture and shared experience affect the cultural and social integration of Asian international students on an American campus? This chapter presents brief descriptions of participants' background, and findings of factors that contribute to the participants' social and academic integration through their stories. In this chapter, we learn what motivated the participants to go the U.S. for college education and pick their school; what challenges they faced; how they integrated or did not integrate into the college environment; what resources helped them ease their transition and better adapt to their social and academic life in an American college; and how they grew and succeeded in a new environment.

Participants of the Study

Joseph

Joseph is a male Taiwanese student. He is a junior in Finance in the School of Business who has been living in the States since high school. He went to a boarding high school in the northeast, which he feels helped him understand more about American culture, the American educational system, and dorm life. However, he did not really enjoy his life in the boarding school and in the dorm during his freshman year of college because of the routines. College life was more interesting for him because of its freedom, self-discipline, and self-responsibility. He has a very good family; both his parents are very supportive and always encouraged him to get

an education in the States and to learn more about the world. He is very proud of being Taiwanese because Taiwan is very open to other cultures and other perspectives. Taiwanese enjoy learning from others. This cultural factor has become his character and influenced how he has enjoyed the student life at the university.

Zakaria

Zakaria is a female Malaysian student in the College of Engineering. She came to the U.S. with a loan from her government. If her GPA is 3.5 or higher this loan will become a grant; if she graduates with a GPA from 3.0 to 3.5, she will need to pay back 10% of the money. This loan program was a very good way to motivate her to study hard in order to be fully funded. Zakaria is the only Malaysian student in the interviewed group who came to the U.S. under this program; other Malaysians were 100% funded by the government to pursue their degrees. She was the only girl in her engineering program and there were no Malaysian students in any of her classes. This was an important factor motivating her to do her best in the program because she wanted to overcome gender issues in engineering; and contributing to her exciting social life because she had made friends with both male domestic students and other international students. She is from a big family with 7 people (5 siblings), and she is the only girl in the family following her father's occupation. She is very proud of her family, especially her parents. Her parents both graduated from universities overseas (Australia and the U.K). Her dad is an engineer and has helped her a lot in her field of study.

Lyana

Lyana is a female Malaysian student in the College of Natural Sciences. She is a junior in Biotechnology and came to the States after completing her foundation year in Malaysia. She is sponsored by the Malaysian government to pursue her bachelor's degree in biochemistry/

biotechnology/ microbiology. She comes from a big family of 5 siblings. Both her parents were college graduates; her mother earned a degree from a college in the States. She is not only proud of her family, but also very proud of being eldest of 5, which makes her more independent and has become the big sister to her friends at the university. She helped them find apartments and contacted seniors in the university to get their help for other matters.

Bruce

Bruce is a male Taiwanese student majoring in advertising and public relations. Currently, he is a public relations staff member in the university's Taiwanese Student Association. His parents were high school graduates, so they wanted him to get a college education and to become better in society since he has an advanced degree. Going to study in the States to learn something new was his purpose and so that he could have international experiences. Bruce went to the States for high school. Since he came here, he realized that the opinions, perspectives, and even moral points of views of students are so different from what he experienced in his country, thus he noted, studying in the States gave him a lot more experiences than that in his home country.

Fred

Fred is a male Taiwanese student in Advertising and is currently Vice President of the university Taiwanese Student Association. He has worked for the association for the past 3 years. He is proud of being proactive in creating student activities. He comes from a good socio-economic background with parents' full support for his studies in the States. Fred went to high school in the U.S. He recalled that when he first started high school in the U.S, he was very upset because it wasn't what he expected it should be. Before coming to the States, like other Asian high school students, he thought of a free country like America in which he could do what he

wanted. But attending a boarding high school, he needed to follow a lot of rules and regulations, so his social network was very limited. However, after he got to a college, things changed. He met more people, participated in more events, and learned more about the surrounding environment and the world that he hadn't heard about it when he was in high school or in Taiwan. He was happy to become a better person with wider views of the world.

Arus

Arus is a male Malaysian student majoring in Biotechnology. He came to the university as a sponsored student by the Malaysian government. He has a big family with 7 siblings and is 5th in the family. Both his parents were college graduates and his mother also earned her master's degree. His parents always emphasized the importance of education in their lives; therefore, all of his brothers and sisters went to colleges either in Malaysia or overseas for their undergraduate education. He is very proud of the fact that all of them were awarded scholarships for their college education. He has worked very hard in order to graduate in the following year. He loves to play soccer and table tennis. He also loves to travel. He was an e-board member of the Malaysian Student Association for one academic year. He enjoyed participating in event planning and coordinating activities for Malaysian students.

Huyn

Huyn is a male student from Korea, studying Economics. After graduating from high school in Korea, he was admitted to a Korean University - one of the best universities in Korea; however, the opportunity to study abroad was quite tempting. He always wanted to challenge himself in a bigger world; therefore, his father suggested Huyn went to the States for his college education. After spending his freshman year in the States, he went back to Korea to serve in the army for two years. Resuming studies in the States after military service was quite challenging

for him, however, he adapted to the college environment faster compared to the time when he first arrived. Huyn's father played an important role in his choice of major and career. However, Huyn did not like the program curriculum very much and once wanted to transfer. Getting involved in the Korean Student Organization as a staff member, Huyn is responsible for helping KSO collaborate with departments, offices on campus and with the local community. And this involvement was one of the factors that helped him change his mind about transferring.

Ajong

Ajong is a female student from Korea. This year marked her third year at the university and she pursues elementary education with a concentration in science and a minor in TESOL. She went to the States when she was in high school, so she felt comfortable with her English. Ajong is very proud of being Korean. Her family plays an important role in how she became who she is today. Her mother is a teacher and played an important part in Ajong's decision to become a teacher as her career choice. Thanks to her mother's support, Ajong was exposed to different learning methods during grade school. Her parents have invested in her and her sisters' education since they were little. They all went to the States for college education.

Mal

Mal is from Malaysia and is a junior in biochemistry and biotechnology. She came to the U.S. after she completed her foundation year in Malaysia. Her father did not go to high school, and her mom barely managed to finish high school. Despite their limited education, her parents have supported and invested what they have in good education for their children. Her parents did not want their children to have the same paths as they did. They hoped that good education will bring good life to their children as well as their family as a whole. Mal was an outstanding student in high school; therefore, her parents encouraged her to apply for a scholarship to study

abroad from the Malaysian government. She was selected and came to the States to pursue her dream in biochemistry.

Shera

Shera is a female student from Malaysia. She comes from a family of 5 siblings and is the only one in her family sponsored by the Malaysian government to study overseas. Her parents were not able to go to college because of their financial situation. Even though they were high school graduates, they knew that education could bring someone further than where they are. Therefore, her parents asked their children to study hard and put their efforts to support their children to go to college. Accepting a scholarship, she was asked to study biotechnology, however, she wanted to study law. Because the government scholarship program sponsored students to pursue certain fields of study overseas, she had no choice but to study biotechnology. Shera did not have any difficulties getting admissions to 4 different colleges in the States because of her very strong science background compared to the arts. However, after a year she could not go any further with biotechnology. She managed to change from biotechnology to animal science thanks to the strong support from her professors, who believed in her ability and spent time convincing her sponsors by writing letters to support her case.

Christine

Christine is a junior studying special education with an endorsement in arts and music. She is Taiwanese but spent all her childhood in China, because her father works there. She went to an American international middle and high school in China and went back to Taiwan for summer break every year. She is very proud of having an international background and enjoyed her time in American international schools because of their diverse student body. Her parents

had a plan to send Christine to the States for her college education, so that was why they sent her to international schools in China.

Jasmine

Jasmine is a female Taiwanese student. She has been in the States since she started high school. She comes from a good family with her parents' full support for hers and her sister's studies in the States. Jasmine went to a girl's high school in a small, quiet town in Virginia. Life in this school was very strict, as she described, with a lot of rules and regulations, for example, how to socialize with others, went to chapel every morning and went to church every Sunday morning. Jasmine's parents hoped that a degree from an American college would open more opportunities for their children in the job market either in their home country Taiwan or in other English speaking countries. Jasmine is now a junior majoring in Communication. She had some problems deciding her major, changing it 3 times from accounting to human management, then to communication.

Jae

Jae is a male Korean student studying economics. He has been in the States for 3 years, and he will go back to Korea to get a job. After graduating high school in Korea, Jae went to England to attend English courses for 2 years. Then he went back to Korea to join the mandatory military service. Jae is the only child in his family; therefore, his parents have invested their efforts and money in his education. They wanted him to get the best from what they could offer. Even after spending 2 years in the U.K, adapting to student life in the U.S was very challenging for Jae. He could not overcome age differences and hierarchy in Korean culture in order to adjust to this new place. He did not socialize much with either other Koreans or domestic students. He

once wanted to transfer because he preferred cosmopolitan cities to college towns like the one in which this university is located.

Nur

Nur is a female Malaysian student. She came to the States after she completed her college preparation year in Malaysia and is studying biochemistry. When she was in Malaysia, she attended a Chinese boarding high school. She is fluent in Chinese and enjoys having Chinese friends in college. She wanted to become a teacher, but she was awarded a scholarship to pursue biochemistry in the States. Therefore, during her foundation year she struggled a lot about what she wanted to do. Nur's parents focused on education and always urged their children to study hard to have a good foundation for their life. Thus, Nur tried her best to do well in high school and took several SAT and TOEFL in order to study in the States. She was happy with her choice of biochemistry, even though it was not her original choice.

Findings

Motivational Factors

Studying in America is not an easy path for most international students. In addition to mastering subject matter and developing effective learning strategies, they must work hard to establish interpersonal relationships, and strive to develop social identities and a sense of belongingness with a new environment. Through their stories I have learned about what motivated the participants to pursue their undergraduate degrees in the U.S and to get involved in social and academic activities, and how they perceived the campus.

Value of education.

All parents of participants placed great value on college education, and they had very high hopes for their children. Taiwanese and Korean participants knew their parents made great

investments in them to send them to America for both high school and college. All parents hoped that their children would have a good job and graduating from an American college would be value added to their resumes. Fred talked about his parents' view of education:

My mom, like other Asian mothers, wants her kids to be the top. But, my dad is more flexible. He encouraged me to try my best, if I can't be on the top, it is OK, I don't need to worry about it. But I must be a nice person. (Fred)

Some Malaysian participants received a lot of encouragement for learning from their parents, even though their parents were only high school graduates, because parents believed that education could bring someone further than where they were and could change their lives and help others. All Malaysian participants were always encouraged to go to college and both participants and their parents hoped that getting a bachelor's degree in the U.S would bring a better future to the participants as well as to their families. Mal talked about her parents' valuing education:

To them [my parents], if I study hard and graduate from college, I can find a good job and I can change our lives. They don't want me to suffer like them or to be like them. They wanted me to achieve a bigger dream to have a very good job, and they wanted me to have a better education than them. (Mal).

Most participants mentioned that education is very important. They believe that the higher degree you have the better and more valuable you are in the job market as well as in your social status. However, when asked what they value about education, all participants said they valued not only the degree they would earn but the way that education teaches them more than what is in textbooks and how to deal with what happens in life. Fred noted that:

I think education literally provides some information and teaches you how to live upright in the society. But, more important, education teaches you about the right point of value toward things and people. This, I think, is more important than actual materials you learn in class. You have to learn how to get involved with the group, how to deal with people and how to treat people well. I think that is the most important purpose of the education. (Fred)

Mal shared her value of education as:

Education is actually about learning; it is not only things mentioned in the syllabus, what the course gives you or what you have to study. It is about how you live your life. How you live your life here in the U.S. is different from how you live in Malaysia. For me, that is education. I learn how to interact with people here is education for me. (Mal)

Many participants were satisfied with the education they received in America because professors taught them a lot about life, not only about books, and that is beyond what they asked for. Jae said about his value of education:

Education is very much important, for many people to get a job, for others, to make life more meaningful. The more I get to know, the more I see things differently. Even if I pay like a thousand dollars per credit, it is a huge amount of money, but worth. (Jae)

Getting an education plays an important role not only in the participants' lives, but also in their family's welfare. All participants and their parents recognized the value of education in how they live their lives, how they interact with people, and how they view and see things. Their parents shared with them the importance of college education, the value of education and its importance to their future. Their value of education is surely a vital factor in supporting their college journey in America. However, what motivated the students to go to the U.S. for a college

education, and how were they motivated to engage and integrate into a new environment? The following sections present findings related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation through the participants' stories.

Intrinsic motivation.

Studying in America was a clearer choice for some participants than others. Some said they wanted to go to America since they were in middle school, but others, particularly Malaysian students, did their best academically at all levels and ended up getting scholarships from their government to pursue study in America. Among the 6 Malaysian participants, 3 wanted to pursue their degrees in other countries than America. However, toward the end of their time in college they were happy with the choice of going to the U.S. for their college education because they experienced so many different and wonderful things that they could not imagine when they were in their home country. This journey was truly a self-discovery for all of the participants.

In general, when asked why they wanted to study in America, most participants noted that they wanted to be in a larger community than their home countries, as Huyn said: *"I wanted to put myself in a bigger world and to challenge myself academically and socially, and get more experiences from social life."* Some commented they wanted to learn new perspectives and new ways of thinking. Zakaria said: *"I would not say that education in Malaysia is not good enough. It is good, but when the environment is different, the way you study and the way you see things is different."* Some Malaysian students wanted to be like their sisters or brothers who went overseas for college educations or wanted to set a good example for their siblings by studying hard, having good grades and completing programs.

One Malaysian and two Taiwanese students had a strong desire to bring new knowledge back to their countries, to serve their countries and to make a difference. Fred proudly indicated his purpose for studying in America: *“I think it is the purpose that everyone brings back something new from here to home to make a difference.”* Most Malaysian participants wanted to come to America to interact with other people than Malaysians and wanted to learn new things from other people. They did not want to stick with only groups of Malaysian students or to interact with only Malaysians. They were all sponsored students, so they wanted to be successful and be proud of themselves. Mal elaborated her thought as follows:

We international students pay more than American students. So, I think I should study hard like other international students, who pay for their study here by themselves, do. In other words, I need to study hard so I can be proud of myself and proud of my scholarship. (Mal)

Christine had her own desire and dedication to choose her major in special education: *So the only thing that keeps me going to special education is that I want to help people with a disability, especially after watching so many movies talking about life of these people and how they are struggling in the society.* (Christine)

The students in the study shared intrinsic motivations in their desire to challenge themselves in a new environment, to bring more knowledge to their home countries to make a change, and to help other people live better. All students found their college experiences in a new environment intrinsically satisfying. They chose to come to the U.S for a college education and chose their majors because they had a belief in their educational goals, the power of new knowledge gained in the U.S., and the value of education. The external forces driving

participants to pursue their degrees in the U.S. and to get involved in a new environment are presented in the following session.

Extrinsic motivation.

Through the participants' stories I learned that parents' encouragement for learning motivated participants to pursue college education in America and to get involved socially and academically. These extrinsic motivators came in forms of parental encouragement and support, meeting social expectations, and government scholarships. These external motivational forces pushed students to work harder in a new environment. For example, Joseph articulated his parents' support for his study in America: *"My parents are very supportive; they have supported me all the way long because they see opportunities for me to meet people from different countries, and to open my eyes and my perspective to the world."*

Many participants said parents' hope and sacrifice kept them going and helped them overcome challenges during their study. Moreover, students said they always wanted to make their parents happy and proud. Christine asserted that:

No one in both families (mother and father' families) has gone to college or university; I am the first in my families to go to college and go to the States. So, I guess, I should make them proud and happy – that is the only thing keeps me moving forward. (Christine)

Maintaining good academic standing in order to keep their government scholarship was good motivation for the Malaysian participants to be more proactive and strategic in their learning. Mal said:

I have tried to use all the resources around here. I have been going to the writing center at the library and help rooms in the department and met the TAs to ask them about the courses if I did not understand. I did not do all those last year. This year I reached out

more. This can help me improve my grades and maintain my government scholarship.

(Mal)

Nur talked about her social expectations:

As I mentioned in the earlier conversation that if I want to be someone in the society, I should be good at academics and have good social skills and leadership skills; those will help me influence people. I have to push myself and to change myself in order to become a good person to my siblings, my friends and other people. (Nur)

From the students' stories parental support, maintaining their academic status and government scholarship were all extrinsic motivators that made them strive for success and earn their degrees. What motivated the participants to do well in a new environment is important; however, what they perceived about the school, their programs, and the campus environment also played essential roles in their decision to select this particular university, their majors and to get involved in this new environment.

Perceptions of campus.

There were several perceptions of the university that mattered to participants in choosing this institution for their undergraduate studies including college rankings, diversity of the student body, and the campus itself. College ranking was one of the most important reasons that Korean and Taiwanese participants decided to go to this school. Most of Korean and Taiwanese students said this university was a good school and it is a very big campus in its athletic conference. However, some students knew more about this school than its ranking. Fred asserted his perception of this campus:

First, I found the football team was amazing. Later on when I see the student population, the first thing came to my mind was the connection was very wide-spread, not only with

people from Taiwan but from all over the world. Those two things came to my mind when I first thought of [the university]. (Fred)

Not only did the number of international students on campus impress him because he could learn many new things about different countries, but Fred also appreciated the freedom of knowledge that the school provided. He noted:

In here you can grab whatever you want to put into your brain, to choose who you want to socialize with. I think this is a place where I can make a lot of choices and get a lot of opportunities to experience so many new things and meet new people, and set a good foundation for your future career. (Fred)

For most Malaysian participants, institutional ranking was not a big factor in their final decision to accept their admissions, but the diverse student body played a more important role. Most applied to the same program and same colleges, but they all decided to choose this university because there are fewer numbers of Malaysian students compared to other schools to which they had applied. They all claimed that they wanted to interact with diverse people, not with Malaysians. Another factor Malaysian students mentioned was the beauty of campus. Just from the institution's homepage, most said it was really beautiful and they wanted to come here. Zakaria talked about the university community:

I feel like [the university] community is very nice; they are nice and friendly people. They are not ignorant people. Since [the university] is very diverse, I see many American students talking with international students. So I am happy that [the university] students are not ignorant about other cultures, probably some freshmen as they just come from high school. I like how they are diverse. (Zakaria)

When they arrived on campus, most of the Malaysian students had a very good impression of the campus. Nur asserted her surprise when she came to the university:

I expected that I spoke English every day and Americans are not really friendly because in my country we heard a lot about racism in the U.S. However, when I came here at [this state], all the people I met are very friendly. When we are behind them entering the building they open the door for us. When we are at stores they greet us – so I think they are really friendly. The people surprised me a lot in terms of their politeness, helpfulness, and friendliness. (Nur)

Not only was Nur impressed by how polite, helpful, and friendly American people on campus were, but it was very interesting that all Malaysian participants shared that impression during the individual interviews.

However, a large international student population, especially those who speak Chinese was a concern of some Taiwanese participants. They commented on the number of Chinese students on campus, including Joseph whose thoughts were as follow:

[The university] has a lot of international students. But, for me, as a Chinese speaker, there are many students from China or Taiwan, it is not very good. One of the reasons we come to study in the U.S. is to practice and improve our English, and to receive a non-Chinese education, you know, if we see many Chinese students and Chinese professors, it seems that we do not come to America. (Joseph)

Despite some Taiwanese students concerned about having a large population of Chinese students on campus, most participants expressed their appreciation for the diversity that the university brings. Moreover, what they could learn when they were here on campus, and how they liked the school and the programs were good reasons for them to move forward and to

complete their degrees. Except two Korean students in Economic programs, all participants expressed that they have become more involved in both social and academic activities because the courses they took were interesting, they liked the class activities and they liked the academic programs.

From the interviews, the researcher found that the values participants and their families place on education and educational goals play essential roles in the purposeful behavior of all participants. In addition, motivation which was linked to self-efficacy (e.g., belief in his or her ability to do well and succeed in their study in the States) and a dedication to complete the degree, the students' perceptions of school, program, and college environment play an essential part in their social and academic integration process. However, this chosen path is not an easy and smooth journey for most of the participants. What challenges did they face in this journey?

Challenges

The years of college in the United States were an exciting time for most of the participants, but there were some obstacles and challenges that they faced in a new country and in a new academic environment. The students in this study grappled with a wide range of challenges, from cultural differences to academic expectations to language. Although learning English seemed like the largest problem, the participants also confronted less obvious challenges.

Language barriers confront the students.

Sometimes I have a kind of feeling that studying in Malaysia would be better, because English is actually (I don't know). I love to be involved in extra-curriculum activities, but thinking about my English, it is difficult for me to cope with those activities. If I have good English, I don't think I have any problems making friends with domestic students or joining curriculum and extra-curriculum activities. (Arus – College of Natural Sciences)

When I got here and started to attend classes, it was quite hard to manage class from class, literally my ears were swollen because I could not understand what professors said. It was also very hard for me to have conversations with other students. The language barrier was really high for me. (Huyn – College of Business)

Cultural differences presented very real personal and professional challenges in academics for the students in this study. Language issues were immediately apparent. Arus and Huyn, quoted above, were not the only students who confronted the language challenge in this arena. Even though 7 out of the 14 participants had been in the U.S. since high school, English was still challenging them in their social and academic life. For example, one student mentioned that she was not able to comprehend all the information at the international student orientation because of her limited English proficiency at that time.

All participants identified their problems in coping with English – both academic English and conversational English in their fields of study. Because of the language limitations, the participants experienced difficulties in academic activities during their course of study in the U.S. mainly that it was not easy for them to fully understand what the professors and classmates said or what the professors wanted in class, not to mention participating in class activities. One Taiwanese student explained his challenge in class participation:

For me as an Asian student, it is very hard to have a conversation with professors, because sometimes I don't even know what they are going to talk next, for example, if they will ask you more questions. I think that is probably the hardest thing for participating in class. (Bruce)

The participants manifested a lack of confidence with English. They expressed that even though they spoke and wrote in English before they came to the States, they never communicated

100% in English with other people. Therefore, they always felt nervous when they communicated in English. They always felt that their English was not fluent enough so people might not understand what they were saying. Particularly during their first year, how to communicate well with people at this university was quite challenging.

Besides the concern about their incomplete understanding of lecturers' spoken English, students also felt unhappy with their oral performances in the presence of American classmates. Bruce, a Taiwanese student in the College of Communications, stated that he tried his best to participate in class activities, for example, group work and group projects. However, according to Bruce,

It is quite hard because American students they speak so fast, sometimes I can't follow them but sometimes they can't follow you. I don't know maybe the way we think is different from them or the way you speak English makes it hard for them to understand. Therefore, a group project is very challenging. (Bruce)

What Bruce said surprised me a lot and I did not expect that, because I was really impressed with his English and the way he communicated in English, for example, the word choices in his expressions and his intonation.

Academic writing also proved its challenge to the participants, particularly for those who were majoring in education, communication and business, because many courses required them to write essays. All participants in these fields said they struggled with their writing. Even though they were good at English grammar, it was hard to make the writing flow. Another issue in writing they encountered was writing style, with which they were not familiar, for example, citations in the writing assignments. Ajong commented about her academic writing challenges as follows:

In almost all classes, you have to write some sorts of essay, but the composition was different from what I learned in Korea. For example, I learned that you should not use the word “I” in the essay, but it is OK here. In composition it usually includes an introduction, body and conclusion, the goal is still the same but the style here is different or maybe the requirements are different. (Ajong)

The language problem could also indirectly increase the workload burden for international students. For example, if an American student can finish a book in an hour, an international student who does not speak English at home may have to consume three hours to finish the same book. Jasmine, a Taiwanese student, indicated her challenge in completing all reading assignments for the courses:

It is too much vocabulary for me. I spent a lot of time looking up in the dictionary. For American students the readings may take them 30 minutes, but for me it takes 3 hours. I have 4 classes, and all of them have reading assignments. It takes Americans about 3 hours, but it takes me more than 10 hours to do all the readings. It is very challenging. (Jasmine)

In short, studying in the States is very challenging for the students in this study and one of the reasons was that English is not their first language. All participants faced language challenges as they were trying to understand classes taught in a second language while still learning how to write academic English and to read their class materials. However, how to master their English proficiency was not the only challenge that the participants faced. What were other challenges?

Navigating the system.

While generic statements about ‘Asian learners’ should be treated with caution, in this study the researcher found evidence showing that the participants were accustomed to a more passive-receptive style of learning than is the norm in American classrooms. Malaysian participants described their learning experience in schools in their home country as “spoon-fed”; and mostly one-way communication between professors and students. All participants felt it was very challenging to adjust to “two-way communications in class” between them, professors, and their classmates; however, they all valued their learning outcomes as they were required to search for more information in order to complete all their class assignments. One Taiwanese student stated that:

Group projects were hard for me because we had different perspectives and different educational systems. Like in my country, we have to follow what teachers said. So, we don't think. While in here, we have to think how to do all the assignments, how to collaborate with others for group projects. I feel very tired every night. I think we use a lot of energy for the classes during the day. We have to think about different assignments, about group projects, and about ideas of how to work together.” (Bruce)

Choosing a major that “fit” their ability was another issue for the participants. All of them came to the school with decided majors. However, after experiencing classes in their respective fields, all participants said that courses in their major were hard; and some of them knew that the path they began was not the one they wanted to go. One student did not have the courage to change her major until the spring semester of her second year, because she also needed to convince her sponsor. Another student changed majors three different times during her 3 years

and ended up taking several courses that were not necessary. Both students did not know how to navigate different programs and identify resources that could help them to find their path.

Navigating the campus was also difficult for participants. Finding class buildings, moving from building to building, and what bus to take were challenges the participants faced during their first year. One Taiwanese student remembered holding the campus map all the time in order to find class buildings and look for student offices. When students first arrived, they lived in the residence hall, but they did not know where the dining hall was. One Malaysian student described her experience as follows:

It is very convenient in my country – if you are hungry we can easily find a restaurant nearby. The next morning (on campus after we just arrived) we were a bit of loss; we did not know what we should do and what we should eat. We did not even know where the dining hall was. Five of us just got out of the hall and took a walk around. We just walked from hall to hall but could not find anything. So we just went back to our hall and ate what we brought over from Malaysia: instant noodle with hot water in the shower. (Nur)

Another challenge for these students when they lived in the residence hall was food. Some participants, when they first arrived, said they either spent money eating out or had pizzas or hamburgers. They had a hard time adjusting to American food. For Malaysian students, they also faced religious challenge in terms of food. They could not eat meat here, so they needed to pay extra attention to see what they could eat. When they lived off-campus, they had to order their own kind of meat.

In addition, all students in this study were encouraged to attend the international orientation when they first arrived on campus. The orientation aimed to equip new international students with immigration, cultural and academic information that helped them better adjust to a

new environment. Most students in the study said that international student orientation was a good opportunity to meet people, but expressed their confusion that too much information came at the beginning that they did not know from where they should start. Moreover, there was a lot of information about different clubs and events on campus that students did not have any idea what they should attend and what they should not.

Besides navigating the university system, adjusting to early classes in the cold weather in the Midwest was very challenging to all participants. Long and cold winters and early classes were things all the participants needed to adapt to. They needed to be punctual in order to be in class on time. Mal described her first semester:

I was nervous because everything was new. I did not know what I should do. It was fall but it was too cold for me and I had early morning classes. I had to wear winter clothes during the fall. This was the first time I had to deal with the weather and to find the way to my class. And, so far I had to walk a lot to class, because I did not know what bus to take. (Mal)

Navigating the system was challenging for most of the participants in the study because they all experienced an educational system different from that in their home countries, especially for those who ventured into this new academic system only when they started college education. For many students, this was the first time they experienced a very big campus, and cold weather. Finding their way around and figuring things out for many participants was scary and overwhelming when they first arrived on campus. How did they manage their social and academic life?

Time management and balance between social and academic life.

I think there are pros and cons between focusing on study and having fun with my life. If I get involved more and have more fun enjoying my life then my study will have problems.

So, balancing between the two is very important. (Nur – College of Natural Sciences)

How to handle the academic workload and balance social and academic life requires a great deal of effort in time management for students. Most participants in the study experienced challenges managing their time. A Malaysian participant shared that she cried a lot during her first year because she did not know how to divide her chores after school and academic work; for her, there was too much workload that she felt she could not bear it. She thought of dropping a course that she could not cope with, however, in the end she tried her best to complete all the courses in which she enrolled. A male Taiwanese student experienced academic probation because he did not know how to manage his time well so he earned poor grades in his first year. A female Korean student and another Malaysian student spent so much time socializing that they did not manage their courses well and earned lower grades in their second year. Both of them said it was a really big lesson for them, and they knew how hard it was to do well in school if one did not know how to balance between social and academic life. Since then, they have been very careful not to get lost again, and they have learned to put everything in their schedule in order to manage their time wisely.

Having a bigger social network worried many participants. For example, Shera, a female Malaysian student in Animal Sciences, sighed a lot during the interviews whenever she talked about her social experience. She said that the biggest challenge for her was the worry about having no time to socialize, because she had a large social network. She described her day as follows:

There is always somebody calling me and asking me to do something. I have no free time. My time after I finish school is for people. I am doing this for you (the researcher), I am doing other things for others. My time is meeting someone. I think that is one of the challenges. (Shera)

Shera also shared that she has a large social network because she was happy to help others and glad that other people found her as a support resource when they were facing challenges; she also joined different clubs and volunteer organizations. Even though it was hard for her to do well academically, Shera always spared time to meet people and to do volunteer work.

Since arriving on campus, all participants had to learn how to manage their time and to balance their social and academic life. Several students struggled to manage their time well and some trouble arose while trying to satisfy both their academic requirements and expectations and their socialization. What else did they face during their studies in the U.S.?

Psychological issues, identity and appearance.

Here, living very far from my parents, I was really homesick. I couldn't wait until summer to visit them. I only go back once a year. I just missed my high school friends and my parents a lot. (Christine – College of Education).

All participants agreed with the fact that they came to the United States to pursue their higher education, with hopes of building a brighter future and to get a degree from a U.S institution that would be greatly valued and considered prestigious in their home countries. They came to the U.S. with mixed feelings: excited but anxious and insecure. They all experienced homesickness, loneliness, and at some point isolation in a new environment. It was hard for them during their first year because they all missed their families and friends. Zakaria, a female Malaysian student in the College of Engineering, said:

I did not have much time to think before I left my country. I did not know anyone, even any Malaysian students here because we were from different schools. I was nervous, of course. I knew that I would get homesick but I did not know I was that homesick.

(Zakaria)

She also faced gender challenges that she had never experienced when she went to school in her home country. It was hard for Zakaria at first because of being the only woman in the program.

She said:

I came here as a student in the college of engineering, and you know most of the students here are guys, most American guys or other guys but not Malaysian guys. So, I always say to myself that I can do it. It was hard at first, but then it is OK. (Zakaria)

Moreover, most participants said that when they first arrived at school, they were nervous and got scared because they did not know many people and were afraid of exposing themselves to the unfamiliar environment. One Malaysian student described her experience when she first arrived at the university:

Maybe, it was scary, because I am a foreigner; I came from a very different country, where there are no Americans surrounding me. I think the feelings of insecurity; I did not know if the people would talk to me and, in the class if I could put my hands up and answer the questions. All these questions came up to my mind when I first came here. That this why I had the feelings of insecurity and scariness, I did not know how people would perceive me. (Lyana)

When Bruce first arrived, he was very scared, because this was a whole new world for him, and he realized that colleges and high schools are very different. He got worried about a lot of things: what he should do, what he should eat, how he could deal with the workload and other

aspects of his college journey. Jasmine, a female Taiwanese student, said she felt lost and helpless at first. She was picked up from the airport by the students from the Taiwanese Student Association (TSA) and they took her to the residence hall. But, she still felt lost, because after TSA students left, she did not know any one and she was alone in her dorm room. Jasmine went to a high school in the U.S. where her high school teachers helped her with everything and they told her that in college, she needed to do everything by herself. She regretted not paying much attention to what they said. Only after a few days at school, Jasmine realized that she needed to search for things: classes, events, and homework. She was angry at herself for not learning all that in high school.

Jae, a male Korean student in the College of Business, said he felt very lonely, nervous and scared, because there was no one he could depend on or get some help from. Moreover, he also had an identity conflict, because in Korea he defined himself in the mainstream: being a male, living in Seoul; but at the university, he was JUST an international student. He searched the Korean Student Association website and learned about different resources, but he did not contact any one before he came to the university. Another challenge for him was that he was older than most Korean students at school; he spent 2 years in the U.K and another 2 years in the military service before he came to the U.S. Jae did not feel comfortable asking for help from the younger students; however, he could not go to graduate students either because he felt it was not appropriate to approach them. From the conversation with him, I learned that the age order and hierarchy in Korean culture influenced his social life even though he was in another country. He could not approach graduate students who were older than he was nor could he approach students younger than he was because of the age order and hierarchy in Korean culture.

Jae is not the only participant who had identity issues. Some participants said they did not know how to define their identities at that time. For example, Christine described her identity conflict as a result of the fact that she was Taiwanese, but lived in China and went to an international school there for 10 years. She described herself having an international background and the challenge for her when she came here was:

We have international background, we hang out with different groups of people, and we get along with people better. But then the self-identity comes in. I can't seem to fit with TSA people or the American-born Chinese; I am so stuck in between. I am like both, but not toward one side. It was hard for me during first year because I did not know them well and they did not know me well. I really could not open up to them because I was wondering if they accepted me, especially when we are different in so many ways. It was hard. (Christine)

Besides homesickness, nervousness, and dealing with identity issues in a new environment, stress was also challenging all participants although it was an issue that all Malaysian participants mentioned repeatedly. Because they were sponsored students, they were always concerned about their study; they needed to keep a good GPA otherwise their scholarship would be cut. So, one of the greatest challenges for them was that they needed to be good at what they were doing and, therefore, sometimes they felt stressed.

Who to trust, making friends with domestic students, and social network.

One observation from the interviews was that female participants seemed to have more concerns about friendship in college than the male students talked about. All female students mentioned that they had a hard time figuring out “who to trust” during their time in college. They said they take friends very seriously and they know that friends are very important because they

have no family here. However, they emphasized “who to trust” were their friends and close friends. Ajong, a Korean student in the College of Education, talked about this experience:

Since I did not know anyone, so when I met someone I really was not sure if I could rely on or believe in her or him. And it took me very long time to figure that out. I try to judge people not just by looking (their appearances). But I always think of how much I should give her/him information about myself. (Ajong)

Some students mentioned that they were advised by other students and hall mentors while living in the hall to combat their student culture shock blues by getting involved, jumping out of their comfort zone, and making themselves known on campus. To do so, however, was not easy. Making friends with domestic students proved to be difficult for the students in this study. Before coming to the U.S., most participants expected to have a lot of American friends; however, it turned out to be very difficult or impossible. Christine said that the reasons for not making friends with domestic students were the language barrier and different ways of thinking. Two other participants said it was difficult because they had only big classes and when they were in class, they only focused on taking notes not trying to make friends. Ajong had some American friends in her major courses, but they just only talked about courses. She said it was difficult to hang out with them after class, because they still had their friends from their first year; and it was hard to get inside their friendships. She said: *“Even if I accept their culture in the extent to what they behave; it is still hard to be close friends.”*

Many international students hesitated to throw themselves fully into the American university experience. It was very tempting to stick with their national friends or other international students new to the university, and remain inside a kind of bubble of security. Malaysian participants spoke of being stuck in this circle: how to break their circle of national

friends in order to expand their social network. One characteristic of the Malaysian participants was that most of them had their own groups in the same academic program because they came to school in a batch of 10 or more students. Therefore, not only in their first year but now as older students, they were still tempted to stick together. They took the same classes, went to lab together, and studied for homework and exams together. Lyana explained the reason for this separation:

Every semester I said to myself that I needed to break the barrier and I needed to do speak with somebody else. But the issues were that with critical questions so we felt like it was better to discuss with each other because we speak the same language. It is a kind of easier for us. So, sometimes I asked myself whether I should sit with them or not. If I don't, I might not be able to interact in depth about the materials with other students because of the language barrier. If I am with them I can get the right answer. That kind of thing still happens to me even though I try to get away from it. (Lyana)

Because of his particular concerns with his identity, Jae's social network was very limited. He said that in Korea he had many friends, but at the university he had about 10; therefore, he felt his loneliness seemed to last for his college life. Jasmine had an interesting elaboration about making friends and socializing with others:

In my country (Taiwan), we are all the same age in a classroom. But in here I meet different people: different ages, different background, different countries and different levels. The range of making friends is wider. But, we need to put a lot of effort to make friends, because we are all from different countries so we need to think about other cultures. So, we need to think carefully when we talk or we do something to make sure it

does not hurt others. So, sometimes we need to listen to them and think more to avoid something we should not do. (Jasmine)

In general, the students in the study found it difficult to trust others in a new environment and to make friends with domestic students. Due to many differences in cultures, establishing friendships with Americans beyond classroom relationships and required group work was not an easy task for many of them. Therefore, the participants experienced alienation and being stuck in their circle of national friends during their studies in the States.

Self-discipline and financial issues.

Homesickness, helplessness, and loneliness are not the only problems participants faced when they lived far from their parents. Coming to the U.S., they faced the reality of how to discipline themselves to focus on their studies and to be successful. They lived on their own in a country that has a lot more freedom compared to when they were in their home countries. For most participants, going to classes without skipping and completing all assignments were very challenging, because no one forced them to study, no one told them to do this or not to do that. They all had to make decisions by themselves, which they hardly did in their home countries. Joseph, a Taiwanese student in the College of Business, stated that:

There was one thing that you need to make sure that you go to classes, even though no one cares about whether you go to class or not. So, you need to tell yourself to spend some time in the library, and focus on your study, not to do whatever you want. You need to get used to the feelings that no one thinks for you. (Joseph)

Most participants agreed that in college they were just on their own, so they needed to have plans of what they were going to do during their school year and what commitments they should make. They had to learn to put their life into a schedule that was different than when they

were in their home countries. There were a lot of things to learn here but at the same time it was very challenging because they lived and studied with their friends without their parents' care. They tried their best to adjust to the college lifestyle, to push themselves to focus on studying, and to discipline themselves in order to have good academic performance and enjoy their life, especially when they lived off campus where academic support resources, for example the library, writing center, and other resources, were not nearby.

Managing their money and funding their studies was another challenge some participants faced. They agreed that how to manage money wisely was a big issue, because it was not easy to ask their parents for money. Shera and Jae shared a shame story about when they just thought they had freedom and they had some money with them so they could do whatever they wanted. Nobody would stop them spending money, and they ended up using a portion of their tuition to back up their credit for what they bought. Zakaria had a negative balance in her account twice since she got to campus. Her friends helped her overcome that, but she needed to work part-time to earn money. Christine had another financial worry, because her family had planned for four years of college for her. However, in order to get a certificate in Special Education, which is her major, she needed to do a 5th year with practicum. She and her family had a hard time thinking of a solution to support her 5th year.

In summary, pursuing a college education in the States was not an easy path for all students in the study. There were many challenges and obstacles the students faced and needed to overcome in order to integrate into a new cultural and academic environment, and to succeed. Cultural differences, limited language proficiency, different educational system, establishing friendships, weather and food challenges, meetings social and academic expectations, and financing their studies were evidence in the participants' stories. However, many colleges

provide different resources to support international students. The findings in the following section will uncover what resources the participants relied on in order to overcome those challenges

Support Resources

As the findings showed earlier, participants in the study encountered unique challenges coming from different educational backgrounds. They shared what they found challenging and helpful in adapting to the American education system and to college life. Participants commented on the high number of assignments, papers, and projects. Keeping up with assignments and completing the amount of reading in a second language was tough for them and they felt overwhelmed. From the interviews, I learned that the academic aspect of studying abroad is what participants are most concerned about. Living on their own far from their home and taking care of everything by themselves sometimes makes them feel stressed. Adapting culturally and fitting in socially can be an incredibly worrisome and stressful task. What support resources have helped them overcome those challenges and integrate into a new environment successfully? In this section, academic support and social support resources are presented.

Academic support.

Through the interviews, the following resources participants valued and utilized in order to achieve academic success during their college were identified. Most of the resources the participants mentioned are structured by the university in responding to students' needs.

Supportive learning environment: Role of professors, teaching assistants and academic advisors.

[The university] is a big school and there are so many different resources. The school really has what students need, and if you want to do something, the school will help to do

it in a way of supporting you. I think [the university] is a good school because they provide students with many opportunities to grow and provide a lot of connections, and give students different resources to help them. (Joseph – College of Business)

[The university] is nothing but help. It helps me in many ways. From hating it I become to love it. I have to say that the people who helped me and the support they gave me, even my government was a bit skeptical/ critical about my case: they thought I could not handle my study and they should call me back. But look at me now. I am quite near the graduation. Because of my five professors who wrote letters to my government telling them that I was a good student, that I was hard-working and I could do better with my academic performance. This is the best support for me. How can you not love the people who help you so much and they always stay next to you? I feel very pleased. (Shera – College of Animal Sciences)

The case of Shera above was very special. She was sponsored by her government to pursue a bachelor's degree in biotechnology. Even though that path was not the one she wanted, she still took the courses seriously and came to see professors with questions about course materials and assignments. Therefore, professors knew her well, understood her challenges of no desire to go to the end with the biotechnology program, and they supported her talking with the sponsor about her changing majors to animal science.

Although, the case of Shera was exceptional, many participants said that their professors were very supportive in a way that they welcomed students with questions, and many participants often used office hours to ask professors about course materials. At times, all participants agreed that for their basic courses it was hard for them to approach professors, because of the nature of the courses: big class and lecture. However, when they emailed

professors with questions about course related issues, they always received replies in a timely manner. Zakaria said:

Professors impact a lot on my learning experiences. Like in high school you say you like this class because the teacher is wonderful. It is the same here. They make my study and my learning experience a lot better. They help me have better understanding of the course materials and if I ask them to write me letters of recommendation, they are happy to do it. One of the professors always encourages me to go to graduate school. They still impact my life. (Zakaria)

Taiwanese and Malaysian participants liked their professors and their teaching styles. Those participants commented that professors were very knowledgeable, supportive, and helpful. Fred noted that:

If you have any questions about course content/information the professors will ask what part you cannot get then explain clearly. Meaning that they will teach you to think in a different way step by step, not blame you on why you don't get it. (Fred)

Teaching assistants (TA) also play an important role in the participants' academic integration. All participants said that they felt very comfortable approaching TAs. For Fred, teaching assistants were "the best helpers on campus". Nur took a German class, which was hard for her. However, the teaching assistant in this class was very supportive; he encouraged Nur to speak up in class and advised her to find German students at Coffee Hours to practice speaking. Participants in science labs found teaching assistants helpful because TAs instructed them carefully about experiments and helped them perform experiments and do lab assignments correctly. Lyana stated that: *"The teaching assistants are all very helpful – all the science courses I took here were very tough and demanding, but they helped me to understand the*

materials quicker. Whenever I have problems I came to see them after class.” Some Malaysian participants particularly praised their international TAs. They felt like there was always smooth communication with the international TAs and these TAs seemed to have a better understanding of what difficulties that the participants experienced while taking the courses and of what they wanted to express.

Academic advisors are another resource that many participants found helpful. Advisors helped the participants to make the most of the academic facilities available to them. Some participants said they always discussed academic issues with their advisor. For instance, Bruce, who was on probation after his first semester, said that the constant talks with his academic advisor helped him overcome this difficult time. He learned more about time management and how to handle assignments in a timely manner from these conversations with his advisor. Another participant, Zakaria said she liked her academic advisor, because her advisor was very helpful. She gave Zakaria a lot of advice in order to help her do well in her program. Another participant, Lyana was very pleased that her advisor knew her very well and she came to see him very often. Only one participant mentioned that he had a hard time making appointments with his advisor.

Academic recourses.

Students mentioned several different campus resources that were instrumental in helping with their academic success including help rooms, review sessions, library, and writing center. One important resource that most participants strongly commented on was help rooms and review sessions. Students used these services to have better understanding of their course materials, especially for some participants who were not very comfortable approaching professors with their questions. Nur said that she usually went to the help room, studied with her

friends, and asked the teaching assistants questions about things she did not understand in classes. She elaborated:

I think [the university] is very supportive to its students. There are always review sessions before the exams and they are very useful – it really for anyone who are behind the class and also help you to have a better understanding of the course materials. It also helps you solve any concerns regarding the courses. (Nur)

Fred gave an example of difficulty when he took a course on computer programming. He thought he could fail, however, after participating in the help room and review session for the course he was able to complete all assignments and had a good grade. This achievement made him feel proud of himself and improved his self-esteem. All participants were satisfied with help room and review sessions.

Besides the main resources that participants used wisely, some other resources including tutoring, writing center, and the university library were also mentioned. Tutoring services were mentioned by one Korean and two Taiwanese participants in different programs although not always in a positive way. Two of those who mentioned tutoring found this service useful and used the service when needed; the other tried to avoid the tutoring service because he felt weird using it. Other participants did not comment about the tutoring perhaps because they always came to the help room and TAs for course difficulties.

Some participants mentioned the usefulness of the writing center. They used this service for proofreading and suggestions for improving their essays before handing them in. One Korean participant did not feel comfortable showing her writing to anyone other than her professors; therefore, she did not want to use the writing center. She usually tried to complete her writing assignments before the deadlines and asked her professors to read them for advice and

suggestions before she officially submitted assignments. Another resource that participants found helpful was the university library, which was an important resource that students used very often. Most participants mentioned that they usually went to the library to study after class. Lyana said: *“The library is huge and opens 24/7. In here I can study wherever I want and feel comfortable. This community supports learning.”*

Friends and self-help.

For all the students in this study, friends played important roles of both academic and social support during their college journey, especially during their first year when students knew too little about campus resources. Some participants usually turned to their friends for help and formed study groups together. Malaysian students usually came to the university in groups to pursue the same program; they took classes together so they discussed class materials together. Some other participants said that their friends usually helped them in academics by sharing tips and information about taking classes and examinations. Christine noted that “first, I go to my friends if I see them understanding the materials. If not, I’ll go to the TA. I know there are some resources on campus like the writing center. I go to office hours and advising office”.

From the interviews, while many students went to see their professors, TAs, and friends for their academic difficulties, all three Korean participants mostly relied on self-help for any academic matters. Once in a while they went to professors for questions, but they said they did not turn to their friends here for help. Huyn explained the reason:

I rely on myself. I do not turn any one for problem solving. There are some common beliefs among old Koreans that friends in college are not real friends. As soon as you get into a university, there is a competition between you with all your classmates, because you all pursue the same major and study the same things, and might aim to the same job

after graduation. Not only myself, but many Koreans think friends are only until high school. But in college, friends are not real. (Huyn)

Some other participants mentioned that they relied on self-help during their first year when they did not know much about different support resources available on campus. As time passed by, the students knew more about the surroundings and they sought out help when needed.

Social support.

The aforementioned findings are about academic support resources. What resources did the participants use to help them overcome social challenges in college? The following section is the findings from participants' stories about social support resources, including family, friends, and other resources on campus.

Family and friends.

For all participants, family was always their emotional and financial support whether they received funding from their governments or not. Their families worried about how the students adjusted to, lived, and studied in a new environment and they are the best support to help the participants overcome their social challenges. Even though some of the participants' parents were just high school graduates and they sometimes did not understand much about life in America, parents were always there to listen to their children's problems and to give them inspiring words. Ajong said:

My dad called me every single night to make sure that I was OK. When I told them that I wanted to get more involved in the Korean Student Association by being it e-board member, they did not like that. They just wanted me to focus on my study and to succeed academically. They did not want something outside of the academics to involve with me.

But after understanding what it meant to me, they started to support me. My family is important to me in terms of being where they were for me like I was in my first year.

(Ajong)

From the interviews, the researcher realized that all participants had a strong bond with their family members regardless of the family size or the country of origin. The students all shared with their families their thoughts before making decisions and talked about what they experienced in the new environment. Most participants said that their families trusted them and gave them more opportunities to show they were grown-up. They all kept in touch with their families very often for regular conversations or for sharing with them if they felt heavy in their hearts. For some participants, when they first arrived at the university they were very confused; they did not know what to do with anything about life like friends or financial issues, so their parents guided them through.

All the participants valued their friends and took friendships seriously. Because they lived far from home and the time differences proved to be difficult for them to ask immediate advice from their parents, many students came to their friends for advice. Besides family, friends were an important resource that the participants could turn to when they were far from home. For some social issues for example, friendship issues, roommate issues, and how to work with others as a group, participants chose to come to their friends for advice, because they wanted to hear from different perspectives, some of their friends had experienced the same issues, and students did not want to worry their parents. Some of their friends were in the same university; some were in other states, and even in their home country. But for the participants, friends played an important role in their college journey; for example, Christine and Shera shared the same thought

that one of their biggest successes in college was to have many good friends who were with them whenever they needed friends' support.

Fred expressed his appreciation to the friendships that he has maintained so far this way:

Friends are my best resource. I seldom looked for resources from the school system.

Because I think some difficulties I faced I can figure it out myself or the advice from friends. Friends play a more important role in my journey. I am really glad that I have many good friends, even they are not beside me now but they always support me. (Fred)

Friends were important to all participants as these individuals supported the students, listened to their difficulties and challenges in a new environment, and sometimes could offer the participants some advice. Without this support resource, participants found it more difficult to adjust and integrate into the college community.

Other resources.

In addition to those resources mentioned above, some participants mentioned the English programs run by the International Students Office, where they could meet other international students and learn about American culture. Airport pick-ups and trips to other cities provided by the Office were praised by many participants, because students felt welcomed and connected with the university, and the trips to other cities provided them with opportunities to meet and interact with many other international students. Jasmine shared her experience with a Chicago trip sponsored by the Office: *"I like that (trip) because we meet so many different students at once. We are all international students, so it kind of easier to understand each other than talking with Americans."*

Malaysian participants greatly appreciated the fact that the school respects religion and provides a prayer room on campus. Shera stated that: *"There are many facilities (on campus),*

and as you know that I am Muslim, and they have provided a prayer room on campus. This is very helpful. Every one, every religion can go there to pray.”

From the aforementioned findings, there is no doubt that both academic and social support resources play important roles in helping the participants ease their difficulties, have a smoother and better adjustment, make them feel a sense of belonging, and integrate into a new environment.

Access to the insider knowledge and social support - Role of the country student associations and the religious association.

When I got out of the airport, the former Taiwanese Student Association (TSA) President came to pick me up. I did not get to the dorm first but stayed in the president’s house. I realized that “Wow, it was a part of the school”. (Fred – College of Communications)

I think I did not spend much time adapting to life at [the university]. After a month, I felt it was OK. Because there are many Malaysian students here, I usually ask Malaysian fellows about things at [the university]. Before I got here, I kind of had everything set up.

(Arus – College of Natural Sciences)

The country student associations bring together students from their countries. These associations not only strive to promote their people, their cultures, and their values to a broader university community, but they also play an important role in helping their students get a better understanding of the university in order to better adjust and integrate into the new environment. Some examples of the importance of these associations from the participants include:

There is a lot of information on Malaysian Student Association (MSA) website. MSA plays an important role in getting people connected and in providing information about school and social activities. (Zakaria - College of Engineering)

We (TSA) try to provide new students welcoming party and try to help them get used to this environment. We are also trying to help them associate with other Taiwanese students who are already here. Later on, we also try to promote our own nationality and Asian culture as we were doing Global Festival and Alumni Bazaar. (Fred - College of Communications)

KSO (Korean Student Association) focuses on enhancing the closeness among students. Our website contains a lot of useful information for all Korean students in [city of the university]. We have dedicated our effort and time for incoming Korean students in creating the most recent and informative page about all necessary information related to how to prepare for college life here at [the university]. (Huyn – College of Business)

From the quotes above, it is clear that the country student associations play an important role in students' lives when they enter the new university environment. It is interesting that all participants were regular members of their country student associations, and many of them were current e-board members. All participants mentioned that they know people always need help when they are new to the place, and these students are ready to give a hand like when they first came to campus and other senior students helped them out.

As a researcher, I was curious to what extent the student country associations helped prospective and current students. I checked their websites and found that association websites are very comprehensive and informative. The Korean Student Association website is the most comprehensive and dynamic one. However, in general all 3 country association websites provide students with lots of information to help incoming and current students better prepare for their college journeys, including what to expect in a new environment, information for freshmen, social activities, campus and community resources, and even job postings. All participants

mentioned that they navigated their association websites to learn more about the U.S. educational system, campus resources, and cultural challenges. When asked about the role of the associations, some participants who were current e-board members told me that they strived to provide support for newly arrived international students from their home countries and others who are interested in their cultures. Most students mentioned their student associations' e-board members' commitment to creating and maintaining strong communities, which provided continuous emotional support to their members. Moreover, participants strongly believed that it was their responsibility to mentor incoming peers because what they experienced during their college journey, how they overcame difficulties and achieved their goals were important to share with new students. One student from Taiwan stated that:

I was very lucky that I met TSA people. I did not experience so many things happened at once for a long time, it is really true that TSA made my first arrival much easier. They provided me with different common sense stuff: housing, shopping, how to prepare for your major. (Bruce)

Every summer many TSA e-board members go back to Taiwan for the break, therefore TSA also provides an information session in Taiwan to incoming students to let them know what they can expect and what they need to prepare for going to school in the U.S. In this session, TSA representatives share with incoming students what TSA provides, for example, information about on and off - campus housing and dormitories, how to set up cell phones and open bank accounts, and joining TSA and its activities. When students arrive, TSA gives them some life support, such as some food and carpools to shopping in order to make them get ready for school. Most of the students in the study received some forms of support from their country student

associations when they first arrived, including campus tours, making student IDs, opening their bank accounts, and course enrollment.

From interviewing students from Malaysia I learned that most of them contacted senior Malaysian students at MSU to ask their advice on choosing schools to apply to for admission, and when they entered college, many senior Malaysian students were mentors and role models in both social and academic aspects. One female student told me that she came to see her advisor for advice on how to improve her academic performance and to get more involved in academic life in school because she wanted to be like the seniors. Moreover, members of the Malaysian Student Association are both undergraduate and graduate students. For undergraduates, the graduate students played an important role as a social support during their study. One female student stated that:

Luckily, there are three Malaysian families living here. They are like my new family over here. They are PhD students; they came here with their kids. There are some certain things I can't share with my mom because she is far away. I don't want to make her worry. So I just go to the graduate students. (Lyana)

Most students emphasized that their social life in the first year was attached to their country student associations. All of those interviewed in this study valued information and support that their country student associations provided before their arrival, once in this country, and during their course of study in the States. During the academic year, the associations host different social events, such as BBQ gatherings, cultural bazaars, and performances, which provide the student with a sense of home and belonging to a new environment. Moreover, through these activities students got to know other students who are not just from their country but also from other countries. Thanks to their student association activities, many gained more

social experience, had opportunities to travel to different places, to meet more people and to have fun. In addition, students were able to adjust, manage academic assignments, and alleviate fears, insecure and overwhelming feelings upon their arrival when they received support from their country student associations.

In addition to the country student association, through the students' stories, I noticed that all Malaysian participants joined both the Malaysian Student Association and Muslim Student Association, which is a diverse and religious entity to unite all Muslim students present in the States, including this university. All Malaysian participants valued what the Muslim Student Association had done to bring back their faith and to help them understand Americans and the American culture. One female Malaysian student indicated that:

I like the Muslim Student Association because it brings me back to my faith. I am now far from my country, so does my religion – the MSA reminds me a lot of it through different activities. (Zakaria)

Malaysian students mentioned that they liked the road trips they have taken during the past two years to join different events hosted by the Muslim Student Association on different campuses. They also spoke of appreciating the speaker series hosted by the MSA on this campus, particularly the opportunities to interact with diverse people who share the same faith. One student mentioned:

One thing I love to do is go to the Muslim Student Association (MSA). Because in the Malaysian Student Association there are only Malays, but in MSA there are people from other countries. I have a lot of opportunities to interact with people of different colors / countries such America, Middle East ... (Lyana)

In short, international students need knowledge of the host culture not only to live better but to succeed academically and socially. Participants who had access to a cultural insider, an individual with knowledge about the American educational system, American culture and language had better and smoother transitions to their new environment. The student country associations and the religious student association have been a form of cultural, institutional knowledge insider for many prospective and incoming international students. These cultural insiders helped international students settle down and become established in their new environment.

Academic and Social Integration

The participants in this current study have moved halfway across the world, and the new environment in which they find themselves. They are away from home, their established family and social networks, therefore, there is likely that every aspect of their new college lives can be stressful as well as exciting. As one student describes it:

I think the most important thing to live here is to know how to make friends, to socialize and to live with people who are different from you, otherwise you will become isolated. College gives you the best chance to do it: playing, partying and socializing; get to know more and more people, just only up to you how you handle this chance to learn, to know people – they will turn into your property. It is important to break your circle of friends to participate in different events to learn more, how to make friends with not only students but also with others. (Fred – College of Communication)

Shera shared her perception of social integration:

My first perception was I needed to mix around. I needed to be like them in my social life. At first, I tried very hard, so I joined different clubs, the student societies and made a lot

of American friends. After a while, I understand that I still can be with American but maintain my cultural background. Moreover, I think the main thing I need to maintain is my religion. Being a Muslim, we have more restrictions, for example, we cannot drink. I think I prefer to stick on that. Maintaining does not mean eliminating, but I am just celebrating in another way. (Shera)

General experiences.

In general, most participants indicate they have had a wonderful college experience so far. They are satisfied with their college choice, and what they have learned during their time in the university. Only two participants who happened to be Korean, wanted to transfer to another school after their first year. One said he did not like the fact that the institution was located in a small town, and he wanted to have his college experience in a big city. Another was not satisfied with several courses in his degree program. However, toward the end of their junior year, both students said they would persist and finish their degrees at this university.

Even though all participants faced a lot of challenges, they all also said that they adapted well and got used to college life. Some participants who went to boarding high schools in America felt that this experience made their dorm life a lot easier. They shared that their first year in the dorm was interesting and they got to know many different people. As time passed, they all felt more comfortable living and studying here because they knew more about campus, people, and particularly where to get help when needed. Bruce shared about his college experience:

When I came here I realized that the system is really good and I am glad that I made the right decision to come here. I like the environment and the atmosphere here: I get to play and I get to study. This is very good school. (Bruce)

All participants commented about and appreciated the freedom they had on campus and opportunities to travel to different parts of the state as well as to other states. As an example of freedoms students talked about, Mal said what she liked about the freedom of speech here on campus:

I think when I was in Malaysia I learned a bit about life in America through movie.

Spending one year in college in Malaysia then came here I see some differences: there is the freedom of speech, you just raise your hand to express your thoughts and ask professors questions – you make professors think. What I meant here is the communication skills you have which help you stand up for yourself in a big lecture hall and express your opinions/concerns related to the course materials. (Mal)

Some participants mentioned how they experienced a new world and discovered many interesting things through traveling to different places in the U.S. during school breaks. About traveling experiences Lyana said: *“I like the traveling part most. While traveling you see many different things and meet different people, not just from the U.S, but also from other parts of the world.”* Ajong noted that traveling taught her how to see things from different perspectives and from different angles because of what she experienced during her travel, and the people she met.

Academic and social experiences.

Most participants viewed their academic experience positively and enjoyed their study. Even though their academic experience during their first year was not as good as their current experiences, participants thought that the courses in their first year were easy and not very interesting, which may have contributed to why they did not view the first year experience as positive. Jae voiced his concern about the level of difficulty: *“I took some courses at 200 level but the materials they covered were too easy for me. I thought that was for high school students.*

But I still had to pay high tuition.” Jasmine and Christine shared the same thought that they did not feel academically challenged during their first year because the courses were quite easy.

Christine said:

I thought classes would be a lot harder, but to my experience, it was a surprise that they were pretty OK. Some classes were quite easy like easy for points. When I got here classes were not as hard as my school in China. So, I did not find it challenging.

(Christine)

Conversely, Lyana felt pressured because of number of courses in her schedule during the first semester when she just arrived in the States. Her assertion about her experience was:

I was assigned to the courses by my academic advisor. Because we (Malaysian students) missed our orientation, I got an email from my academic advisor to tell me to meet her. I came and we talked about courses to take. I had no idea of what to do so she gave me guidelines and I just followed. But what I thought is she gave us high expectations and I could not cope with all subjects. Because we just arrived, we needed more time to adjust to new environment and stabilize ourselves. She gave me much pressure on academic stuff. (Lyana)

Students reported that their current academic experience was much better than their experience of the first year. Even though all participants commented that the courses were getting harder, they were getting busier with the coursework and spent a lot of time in the library and in classes, they all loved their concentration courses. Most of the participants said the major courses were very interesting, so were their professors. Ajong, who did not find her interest in different courses and her major until the second year, said:

My concentration courses – I have so much fun learning them that I have never thought of. I love all the courses, especially the Children Literature course – it was really fun, because the professor – she is very active and energetic. She makes us focus on her lectures and she is very helping in terms of making students understand the course materials. (Ajong)

Some participants mentioned about how the practicum and field work of some courses in their majors contributed to their academic experience. For example, Nur liked the field work in her biology class most because it gave her opportunity to engage with nature and to understand more about the class materials. And Christine described her passion for one class and the practicum part of her program curriculum:

I really liked one class, where I watched a movie then wrote a paper. I got to watch a movie to understand how film is put together. And, I had to know how to write a resume. Back in high school we just went to audition, dressed up and did not have to write a resume. I find it a really interesting experience. I also like classes where I can go to actual schools and teach. In all classes I have taken, we get all the knowledge about how to teach, and then we actually do it in the school. Therefore, we can see a picture of what kind of teacher we could be in the future. That is more practical I think. (Christine)

Before coming to the university, all of the students expected to have big classes and lecture halls, but not that the classes would have more than 200 students in them. Conversely, some Malaysian participants were surprised that they had some small classes with teaching assistants. Nur expressed her surprise:

I did not expect we have small classes with TAs teaching us. I thought we would just have big lectures with professors, and after the lecture it depends on us how to study. But in

here we have TAs, they help us review the materials and answer our questions related to the lectures. (Nur)

Students had different opinions about big classes. Two male Taiwanese and one female Malaysian participants liked big classes because they believed big classes were more professional and structured; these students liked the ways professors presented course materials to students. Lyana, a female Malaysian participant, liked big and non-science classes because she had opportunities to break the circle of her Malaysian friends. In those classes she was not with the same Malaysians and she could interact more with domestic students and other groups of students through group discussions and group work. In addition, some participants mentioned about the usefulness of Angel and other technologies in the classroom (e.g., I-clicker) to help with their study. Most of the students said this was the first time they experienced those technologies, but they adapted to them very quickly and they liked them.

Similar to the aforementioned academic experiences, most participants had quite positive social experiences on campus. By going to study in the States, all participants were implicitly agreeing to temporarily leave their homes and their countries for a radically different social environment: inhabited by new and different groups of peers and experienced little direct supervision from their parents. For many participants, for the first time in their lives, they shared living space with people who were not close relatives, and their behaviors were not monitored on a daily basis by their parents. Most participants experienced cultural differences in sharing a room with either domestic students or other international students, however, all of them said they did not have any major problems. For some participants dorm life in their first year was quite routine and not very enjoyable. For others, they found dorm life interesting. Bruce commented about his life in the dorm:

My life in the dorm was pretty OK. I liked RAs, they are nice. Sometimes they just come in and chit- chat with us. They really want to get to know people on the floor. Sometimes they have interesting activities like dinners with the RAs. That's how I got involved in the dorm life. (Bruce)

Jae shared his first year dorm life experiences:

I stayed in [name of hall] for my first year in a single room, so no roommate. I shared a bathroom with another Korean so it was OK. We also brought a play station to enjoy in our free time. He is 3 years older than me so it was easy for me to get along with him. He was also freshman, so there are several common things between us. (Jae)

Besides those positive social experiences, some participants had negative experiences in terms of discrimination on- and off – campus. The participants described discrimination as something that involved stereotypes and different treatment based on characteristics such as race or being “Asian” or “look like Chinese”. Some Taiwanese participants mentioned they felt that domestic students stereotyped Asian international students, especially those who speak Chinese or who, to domestic students, look similar to Chinese students. This stereotyping included believing that other Asian international students come from rich families, do not speak English well, and are only good at math. Christine commented about this stereotype:

Then I met different people, especially white American, I would not say they are racist but they have stereotype, for example, they see me Asian and assume that I won't socialize with them or I don't speak English so don't talk to me. Even in class, I tried to start conversation first but just about assignments and other course – related stuff.

(Christine)

Other Taiwanese and Korean participants also commented about this Asian stereotype. Fred, a Taiwanese participant, said where a stereotype is, there is discrimination. One Korean participant shared his experience of unfair treatment when he traveled across the U.S. during the summer because of being Asian and foreign.

Most of the Malaysian students did not experience the “being Chinese” stereotype, but female participants did not feel comfortable when they saw other people looking at them unfavorably because they wore the “Hijab” (a veil). Malaysian students sometimes expressed concerns they had about interacting with other groups of international students and not just domestic students. For example, Shera had an experience with other groups of international students on campus. She said:

There is the fact I realized when I came here the segregation of races is more evident than in my country. It is very hard for me to be friends with Chinese and Arabs. It is very hard for me to break the race. Other races are international too, even though there are Chinese and Indian in my country. Even we have the same religion (Muslim), but when I say hi to Arabs, they do not say anything to me. (Shera)

Although generally students had positive views of their overall social and academic experience, participants in this study found their first year in college harder than their current year, their dorm life a bit routine initially, and they experienced some sort of discrimination in forms of stereotype, unfair treatment, and segregation.

Academic and social involvement.

Having lived in another cultural and academic environment, all the participants developed new relationships and social interactions. In this section, the findings about the

participants' interactions with peers, TAs, faculty, and others both in and out of the classrooms are presented.

Interaction with peers and faculty members.

When you are in a new environment, you might not know anyone, and it is very likely you will interact and socialize with peers who are very different from you in terms of culture, language, and perceptions in many aspects of life. The participants in this study all were in big classes, of which many did not have group discussions or group projects, so the students hardly interacted with peers in the classroom. Therefore, most of the participants during their first year just interacted with their national fellows, roommates, and their hall mentors. However, some students expected interacting more with other students in their classes and they made attempts to interact with American peers related to academic activities. Mal talked about how she tried to interact more with domestic students:

During my first year here I interacted with Malaysian students a lot. We came as a group so we took the same classes. I did not hang out with American students but I studied with them. Whenever I go to the help room, I see them. I always greet them and ask if they want to study with me. We share what we understand or don't understand about the course. (Mal)

Huyn talked about experiences with his American roommate:

My roommate helped me a lot. We were good to each other. He is American and he is very helpful. So being a roommate with him I had more chances to get involved into different things in the hall. (Huyn)

Four participants took an English composition class or other foreign languages class (Japanese and German) and had more opportunities to interact with their peers in a classroom

setting because of the nature of the courses. They all liked those classes because they got to know more people from diverse groups.

After the first year, when students moved into their major courses, they all had more opportunities to interact with peers in classes because the classes were much smaller, and they were with many of the same peers from class to class, and they knew more about other students on campus. Zakaria shared her experience:

I have many American friends. I do have a lot of other international friends and Malaysian friends. However, my American friends are mostly related to academics. We are still friends outside of class. There are so many ways to make friends. Most of my classes are in engineering, but I do have some classes in other fields, and I do have friends in those classes and we still hang out together until now. (Zakaria)

Compared to their first years, most of the participants were happy that they had more diverse friends. All participants indicated that they have become more comfortable to initiate conversations with domestic students. Overcoming language barriers and worries about how others perceived them, they all said they wanted to get as much as they can during their time here; interactions with peers helped these students learn more about college life and helped them succeed academically. Arus described his peer relationships this way:

I like my friends here. This is very important to me. I have more American friends compared to my first year. However, they are just my classmates, not my close friends. I don't feel awkwardness to talk with Americans anymore. In many cases, I initiated the conversations, I wasn't waiting until they come and talk to me. (Arus)

For many participants, professors brought them exceptional experiences. During their first years, all participants interacted more with TAs than with professors because of big classes.

However, some participants have had good relationships with their professors ever since their first year. Shera was one of the best examples of this and she always was excited to talk about her professors and her program:

Even though all my classes are big but I am quite close with my professors. I usually come to their office hours and ask them about the course. You know what even professors who taught me before, I still come to meet them and say hi, and give them a small gift of gratitude. (Shera)

After their first year, many of the participants tried to interact more with professors in class and came to their office hours for any questions about the course. Arus spoke about his experience this way:

But now it is different. If I feel like I want to ask something, I'll just go to see professors. In class, if I have a question, I'll just ask. Before when I was in a big class, I was kind of hiding myself from professors. Now, I don't do it; I'll just ask if I have a question. It is a big difference. (Arus)

A few participants were still not very comfortable to see professors after class. For these students, if they did not fully understand the course, they emailed their questions to professors or came to see the TAs. All participants agreed that in small classes they interacted more with their professors.

Academic involvement.

Most of the participants in this study experienced language barriers and different academic expectations especially during their first year, but they all tried their best to get involved in class and social activities. They all knew clearly about the importance of class participation and how to prepare themselves in group discussions and group projects because it

was stated on course syllabi and many students heard about that from seniors either before coming to campus or when they arrived. However, it was not as easy as just doing it. After their first year, students felt more comfortable with their English and had a better understanding of how to interact with Americans; so many of them got more involved in smaller groups, were very comfortable and did not experience many difficulties in group discussions or group assignments. The students also found interesting meetings outside of class for group projects. They appreciated those opportunities to interact more with their classmates, to talk with them and to share their voices. Jasmine shared her appreciation: *“Thanks to different group projects, I become to know my classmates more, and then we send emails or connect in Facebook so we can interact with each other.”*

Some participants mentioned that in their junior year they really enjoyed group work because they knew more about how to work and collaborate with others, how to compromise and make their work successful, and their teamwork skills were really developed. Bruce spoke about this experience:

I like group projects because I have a chance to interact with people and develop teamwork skills to get the job done rather than working on your own. How to schedule the time and how to process the assignment was really fascinating to me. Homework does not mean writing only essays. You need to be involved in the class discussions even online and in interaction with other students to get your assignment done. (Bruce)

Only one participant mentioned that he still did not get involved much in group work as an advanced undergraduate, because he experienced no-true-collaboration in the process. Therefore, he only did tasks that his groups assigned to him and tried to do his best on those parts.

Not only getting involved in class activities, some students also participated in different subject groups, study groups, and research projects, or tutoring outside the classroom. Korean students in the study got involved in different academic subject groups, for example Korean student groups for accounting, for supply chain. In those country groups of students, they had regular meetings to share information, and they also helped each other in the subject matter.

Two participants in education programs tried to gain some teaching experiences by tutoring students off campus and during summer breaks in their home countries. Christine tried to get more experience in special education and spoke about her efforts:

Besides classes, I tutored elementary students during weekends, but it was a bit difficult because international students are not allowed to work/earn money off campus. In order to get into the program, it is required to have some teaching experiences. So, during summers I went back to Taiwan and taught at different schools. I was assigned to special education classes. That helps me understand my major a lot better. (Christine)

Three other participants took part in different research projects in their departments and were all happy about these experiences. Zakaria was involved in a project sponsored by MIT and was so proud of her participation. She also got involved in several mini-projects in her college. In her words, she kept her eyes and ears open to learn more about different academic events in her department and to get involved academically. She enjoyed engineering, her major, and she was an active member of the Association of Women in Engineering, a member of Phi Delta Honor Society, and a member of the Honor Society for students in electrical engineering, computer engineering, and computer science. Fred got involved in an advertising project that required creating a booklet. Thanks to this project, his Photoshop skills were improved and he also learned how to know other people's points of view. Huyn felt that doing a research project

helped him better understand the importance of participants in research and he was willing to give the researcher a hand as a participant.

In short, after their first year, many participants in the study tried their best to get more involved in academic activities both in class and out of class even though a few students still had a hard time getting involved or chose not to get involved academically. In both cases, academic involvement seemed an important part of students' integration process in college. Those who were more academically involved seemed more integrated. How about their social involvement?

Social involvement.

The earlier findings showed that the country student associations played an important role in the participants' life when they were in the States. Most of the participants were actively involved in these associations. Many of them were current e-board members and engaged in designing activities for the associations. They organized many different events to promote their cultures and harmony among members on campus. In general, all participants got involved more with their student association activities than on-campus social activities. None of them joined sororities or fraternities, because the students felt no connections with these associations.

Some Malaysian and Taiwanese students joined some social activities offered by the International Students Office, including coffee hour every Friday and trips to other cities. Some of the participants mentioned that they got also involved in some activities in the residence halls in their first year thanks to their roommates and hall mentors. Jasmine shared her involvement in the hall:

I lived in [name of hall] in my first year. We had a mentor, her name is [name]. We always hung out with other people on the floor. We also stick together in the cafeteria. I know so many events going on in the Union and Residence Halls. I wanted to see how

people were doing at the events and what college life was, and just to meet people. I was new at that time and I liked the feelings of seeing many new things. I felt involved with friends and the college life. (Jasmine)

Only three participants mentioned that they had a part-time job in the dining hall on campus, which provided opportunities to interact with diverse people. They did this part-time job because they all wanted to explore more about college life and to meet people. Lyana spoke this way about her part-time job experience: *“I just had a part-time job in the hall for a semester. People are very friendly there. There I had a chance to interact with people who are much older than me. I learned so many things from them.”*

All participants said that one of the reasons they went to study in America was because they wanted to interact with diverse people especially with domestic students, to know more about American culture, and to broaden their perspectives. However, during their first year all of the students in this study just stayed within their national groups, and some of them sought out other international students. However, by the time they were in their junior years, their social networks were expended and most of them had friends from very diverse groups of people.

Sense of belonging.

Sometimes I do feel nervous, but I am much better now. I feel better to talk to people. I think I kind of adapt to the life here. Time lets you adapt to the new place. I feel this is home, my second home. For example, after summer break in my home country I went back to school. After a long flight, I got here, I felt like going home. (Zakaria – College of Engineering)

Participants were asked to describe if they got used to the college life and if they were a part of the university community at present time. Although they felt the campus community was

friendly, all participants experienced culture shock as incoming freshman due to different cultures, educational systems, fewer friends and unmet expectations. All participants felt small in a big, new environment and they seemed to be outsiders to observe what was going on in the community. However, after their first year, all participants got used to the environment and started to feel a sense of belonging. Jasmine shared this experience:

Everyone had her/his own schedule, so when I woke up in the morning, no one was in the dorm. I wasn't belonging to the community. Time passes by and I get used to things here, so I find everything makes sense, and I have my friends, so I feel much more comfortable and belonging. (Jasmine)

There were, however, mixed feelings about belonging. Ten of 14 participants expressed feelings of belonging primarily because they got involved in many activities, they were familiar with the campus and the lifestyle, and they felt very comfortable. Among those, two female Malaysian participants strongly expressed their sense of belonging. Both Zakaria (quote above) and Shera said that the university was their second home; Shera added that she felt the professors were like her parents and she really enjoyed being here. Some of the students spoke about their school spirit and what being a [university mascot label] meant to them. Bruce shared his feelings:

Even though I am a big sport fan, I am really proud of being [a university mascot label]. Whenever I go out, if someone does not know about [the university], I will talk about what it means to be Spartan. I get used to the lifestyle here; I feel quite laid back. (Bruce)

Three participants doubted their belonging, because they did not socialize much and did not participate in many on-campus events. Christine shared this thought:

No, all along I feel I am in it but not a part of it. Maybe, because I don't really get involved in many activities here on campus or events, I don't really know what is going on. But I still enjoy the program and enjoy my study here. (Christine)

Most participants really enjoyed their time, and they got involved in both on and off-campus social and academic activities. All said they have a good social life and good academic standing. It was when they first arrived on campus for students in the study to feel nervous and not connected with the university community. As time went by, they developed new friendships and connections both with domestic and other international students, and the support from faculty members, academic advisors, and other people provided them with a sense of belonging. However, there were a few students who still did not find their niche in this environment.

Personal Growth and Success

Personal growth.

Asian international undergraduate students on American campuses deal with living far from their comfort zone, language, educational and cultural differences, and their academic workload. The experience, for them, can lead to a unique kind of personal growth. As said, the participants in this study chose to study in the U.S. because they wanted to broaden their views, to gain international perspectives, and to see what is going outside of their home countries. For many of them, study abroad seemed like a self-discovery journey. All of the participants said that now, as a result of studying in the US, they became more open-minded and they could see things or analyze things from broader perspectives. They have changed their points of view to see into things and to deal with different matters of their life. After their time of study in the U.S., these students were now able and comfortable to expose themselves to different environments. Bruce was so happy with his changes and personal development that he shared these thoughts:

I get more perspectives and change my attitudes: more tolerant with others or reaction to certain things, because I know maybe the difference in culture or maybe family situation. I am more acceptant to others like something I don't like or I don't agree with. Another thing I learned is how to deal with nationality and different cultures, and even how to talk with Americans. (Bruce)

Zakaria shared a quite similar thought, but from a different angle:

I think I become more open culturally. I am a Muslim and I like to meet non-Malaysian Muslims during the Muslim Student Association events. Once I met an American Muslim and we talked. So I meet different people that help me see things differently. I also have a Catholic best friend, so I learn a lot of things. (Zakaria)

Becoming more mature in what they were thinking and doing was another area of growth that students were proud of. Many participants spoke about what their parents' support for their study financially and emotionally meant to them. Before, they did not think about that thoroughly, but now they knew more about the meanings behind the money and the encouragement that their parents brought to them. They depended a lot on their parents when they were in their home countries, yet, all of the participants claimed that they became more independent because they needed to take care of themselves in every aspect of their study and their life when they were here.

In addition, students became more skillful in managing their life than they were in their home countries. They were now able to manage their finances and their schedule; they were also able to choose what their schedule was like and to make decisions on what courses to take, what activities to join, depending on their goals and purposes and they became more responsible.

Joseph shared his thoughts about his growth:

College life kind of gets myself prepare for my future career. What I have gained: Obviously it is the communication skills in English and with people from different cultures and ability to manage myself, and to manage my time. I think I could count on myself now. In the past, either teachers or my parents could help me to do something.

(Joseph)

Going to the States for their undergraduate education, living far from home, interacting and meeting with people from diverse cultures and background were learning opportunities for the students in this study that become opportunities for their personal growth. The participants became more culturally open, more independent, more mature, and more self-decisive. What were their successes so far in their college journey?

Success.

All the participants in the study told the researcher that they had made great progress toward their graduation at the time of the interview (Spring 2012); all of them moved a step closer to getting a U.S. college degree. When asked about their biggest successes, all the participants talked about their academic accomplishments. Two Malaysian participants added that another success during their college journey was having more friends to share happiness and sorrows during their time studying in the U.S. One Taiwanese student said that besides the academic achievement, his biggest success was to build good relationships with different people. Some other students mentioned overcoming homesickness and improving time management skills as significant achievements.

The participants were really satisfied with what they achieved during their college journey so far and were happy that their academics were on the right track. Some participants, whose first year's GPA was not very good, said they put more efforts into academics and tried

their best to improve their GPA. Having good academic performance has helped them become more confident in the classroom and among their peers. Arus was so happy to share his achievement:

We usually have final exams, so after the exams I sometimes talk to random people about how they were doing with their exams. Knowing the facts that I have above average grade in all exams, I feel I am more confident. (Arus)

Some participants shared their achievements in certain difficult courses, because high grades in those courses made them feel more confident in their academics. Nur managed to survive in her programming class, in which she was the only Malaysian. Success in this class brought her self-esteem and confidence that she could do many things without depending too much on her friends.

Seven participants talked about how happy they were when they got onto the Dean's list, because it was not easy to achieve with a standard of a GPA above 3.5 with the enrollment of at least 12 credits. During the interviews, all participants stressed the importance of focusing on academics. Some of them said academic achievements were the ways they made their parents happy and proud of them, while others thought that good academic performance would bring them more job opportunities.

Summary

This chapter presented participants' background and their perspectives of the factors associated with social and academic integration, how they adjusted, adapted and integrated in a new cultural and academic environment, what challenges they faced, and what this learning opportunity brought to them. Participants' limited cultural awareness, knowledge of America and its educational system, and language proficiency for engaging in cross-cultural interactions

proved to be factors influencing their social and academic integration. However, most Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese participants in this study were both highly intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to do well in college and were very goal-oriented. They made their choices of studying in the U.S. based on their academic preparation, motivation, career goals, personal interests and family's encouragement. In general, they all worked hard to achieve specific goals.

Participants in the study were varied in their experiences in regard to their academic and social integration in an American university. However, most participants were more academically integrated than socially integrated. Most of them were satisfied with their academic experiences, personal growth, and success. Most students got involved in their country student organizations and participated in different events on campus to get opportunities to interact and socialize with other international students as well as domestic students. Navigating the system and negotiating cultural differences became particularly challenging, but some individuals made efforts to engage with others, while others remained in their comfort zone.

Students from Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan had different experiences in terms of their academic and social integration. However, most students shared that they got more involved in both social activities and academic activities after their first year. Malaysian and Taiwanese students in the study were likely to be more socially and academically integrated in the college community than Korean student. In addition, major differences in academic and social integration were found among those interviewed students. The participants who enrolled in higher ranking programs such as education, communication, engineering, business, and natural sciences were getting more involved in campus and thus, became more integrated and more

affiliated with their institution while students in economic programs felt marginalized in the campus community.

Finally, students in the study shared about their success in college in both academic and social arenas, however, academic success seemed to be stronger and more emphasized by all participants. At times, students in the study felt frustrated with their social experiences; however, this did not affect their willingness to move forward to complete their degrees.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore what factors contributed to social and academic integration of Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international undergraduate students at a research university. The study contributes to the limited literature on minority students' academic and social integration on an American campus by exploring Asian international undergraduate student experiences. Investigating Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international undergraduate students' academic and social integration helps higher education and student affairs professionals examine the extent to which the college experiences of these international students are similar to or differ from their American peers, the causes for these differences, and actions that might be taken to enhance international student experiences in college.

The following factors were found to affect Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international undergraduate students' social and academic integration: (a) cultural value; (b) structural influences that include language, student background, support system and class size; (c) psychological influences including: psychological challenges; motivation; sense of belonging; interactions with peers, TAs, and faculty; educational self-efficacy; and behavior (time and effort, participation/involvement and goal commitments). These factors were found to influence Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international undergraduate students' perceptions of the campus environment, their experiences on campus, and their learning and personal development during their college journey. In spite of challenges students faced, the study found that Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international students were motivated to persist in order to achieve their goals.

Cultural Values and Tensions

In this study, it was observed that the majority of interviewed participants did not explicitly mention cultural values as the influence on their social and academic integration and the cause of some of the difficulties that they encountered. Nevertheless, from the participants' stories I realized that cultural values and tensions appear to be a factor.

The students in the study and their parents valued education highly. They all came from a strong home environment, in which investment in educational opportunities and an intact family were highly emphasized. In addition, parental emphasis on respect for education and expectation of academic achievement were factors the participants have in common, even though some of the participants' parents were only high school graduates. One of the participants expressed his mother's wish: *"like other Asian mothers, my mom always wanted me to be the best (in school)."* Their parents did not only want them to do well in school but also paid a lot of attention to where they wanted their children to get an education. For all Taiwanese and Korean participants in this study, as most of them went to high school in America, their parents actually looked out for educational opportunities in America for them, because they wanted their children to have a better education and to have an opportunity to experience different cultures. The findings indicate that parental expectations do play an important part in the students' orientation toward their academics, which could affect their academic integration and success in college.

The findings reinforced the UNESCO (2008) report that in countries such as Korea, Japan, and other Asian countries, getting a good education means more than social status. The present findings were consistent with the studies on family characteristics in attempting to understand success of Asian-American children by Lee (1987), Mordkowitz and Ginsburg (1987), and Yao (1985) (cited in Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990).

These researchers found that Asian-American parents held high educational expectations for their children. They assumed that these cultural characteristics played an important role in their children's achievement in school. However, the researchers were unsure to what extent Asian-Americans' achievement could be attributed to their parental expectations.

Even though Malaysian parents did not look out for educational opportunities overseas for the Malaysian students in this study, the parents all had high hope for their children's education, and encouraged their children to do their best in school. Although most parents of the Malaysian participants did not ask them or push them to study well in high school in order to get scholarships for their studies overseas, Malaysian students did well in order to get government scholarships or loans to pursue their studies in the States. Malaysian students agreed that by going to America for a college education and studying well, they wanted to set a good example for their siblings or they wanted to follow their parents, brothers', and sisters' footsteps. Many Malaysian and Taiwanese participants explicitly mentioned that they really wanted to make their parents proud, and with a degree from an American college they hoped to get a better job in order to support their parents. This perspective is very common in Asian cultures. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), many Asian cultures have distinct conceptions of individuality that insist on the fundamental relatedness of individuals to each other and emphasize attending to others and fitting in. In addition, one of the cultural value dimensions identified by Kim, Atkinson, and Yang (1999) is family recognition through achievement, which refers to the importance of not bringing shame to the family by avoiding occupational or educational failures and by achieving academically.

The tension between cultures clearly emerged from the participants' responses. All students in this study come from an educational background and a culture where communication

is very much one-way from the lecturer or the person in authority and where class participation and critical reasoning are not encouraged. One participant pointed out: “*In Malaysia we are spoon-fed*”. Students studied what they were told to and they were required to be quiet and just listen in class. Even though after awhile the participants valued the freedom of speech and some were familiar with the American academic culture because they went to high school in America, class participation still presented to the participants a significant challenge when they were expected to speak on their own in classes. Two-way communication in academic settings subsequently affects students’ learning approaches. For example, some participants still did not feel comfortable asking questions in class or meeting professors after class. If they had any academic difficulties, they went to see their friends or the teaching assistants. Furthermore, all participants regarded faculty and staff highly as expected in their Asian tradition and culture. Respect for authority is shown both in how and when to ask questions and to approach faculty and staff. The study findings are supported by Southall, Rushton, Hagan, Kane, and Cormick (2006) who found that in some cultures, silence in class is highly valued and encouraged, and questioning the authority and knowledge of the lecturer is considered inappropriate. So active participation is inhibited and critical thinking, which is so valued in the Western educational system, is not encouraged; thus, some students find it difficult to contribute in class participation, and to meet professors with questions.

Structural Influences

Language

Academic reputation and improving English were the two primary reasons the participants in this study pursued higher education in the United States. All of the participants I interviewed had very good English; none of them was on provisional admission (e.g., they all

passed the TOEFL score for admission), 7 out of 14 went to high school in the States or took English courses in the U.K, and some Malaysian participants started learning English when they were in elementary school. However, all participants encountered language challenges in college. Passing the TOEFL for admission does not guarantee that you will not face any language difficulties in college, because of several reasons. First, the TOEFL is a test of general language proficiency and may not measure the proficiencies required by the discipline-specific nature of college learning (Simpson & Nist, 1997). Second, the knowledge of technical vocabulary in a discipline is needed for academic success (Cammish, 1997). In addition, the participants in this study speak languages that do not share the alphabet and many root words with English (Maylath, 1997). The study findings highlighted what is documented in the previous research that English language proficiency is a major factor in the adaptation process of international students (Rosenthal, Russell, & Thompson, 2007).

The study findings indicated that English language ability and its impacts on the social and academic integration process appeared to be the strongest concerns for Asian international undergraduate students. Language barriers presented a myriad of inter-related problems for the participants in this study. This is because in American academic settings a student must be able to use English for all language processes: listening, reading, speaking, and writing, which are all important proficiencies connected with academic success that were found to be challenging for the participants. Students in this study experienced difficulty with a variety of language related issues, such as understanding lectures (too much new vocabulary, and professors and domestic students spoke too fast), writing papers, joining group discussions, becoming familiar with the host country culture, and making domestic friends. In terms of academic writing skills, some participants noted that the issue was not that they could not write but rather that they conceived

and wrote in ways different from written English academic discourse. This finding is similar to the study by Terkla, Roscoe, and Etish-Andrews (2007) that 60% of Asian students studying outside their home countries reported difficulty in writing papers and 49% reported difficulty understanding slang. The findings of my study also confirmed the results of Andrade (2005), Casanave (1995), Holmes (2004), and Nicholson (2001) that in class, most students' listening and understanding skills do not equip them for professors' delivery in lecture contexts; they thus felt confusion during the lecture as well as class discussion.

Even though during the interviews I felt that students had good English, many participants in this study perceived their English as weak, leading to a lack of confidence participating in curricular and co-curricular activities, and in interacting with professors and domestic students, which severely hampered the development of their intercultural communication skills in class as well as outside the classroom. In this study all participants did not explicitly mention that language proficiency is the reason that they did not contact staff members during their studies, although in other studies of international students, language difficulties hinder attempts to make contact with university staff (Tantisantisoml & Clayden, 2008).

In addition, completing readings and writing assignments in English in a timely manner was always a challenge for the participants. They all reported needing more time to study, thus they had less time for social involvement; so at least in terms of time commitments and developing social networks, academic and social difficulties are likely to be related. In addition, some participants including Malaysian students, one Korean student, and two Taiwanese students who attended high school in the U.S. in this study felt isolated from their American counterparts because they perceived that their English proficiency was limited and they were

afraid of being embarrassed and misunderstood. They in turn withdrew from social activities and interacted within the community of their native language. One Malaysian participant told me that he would not care much about making friends with domestic students because he had so many Malaysian friends on campus. However, many of the participants were very self-motivated to improve their English by attending different English programs for international students and spouses offered by the International Students Office. From the study findings, there is evidence that most of the participants confronted language challenges in their social and academic integration. However, at maybe a deeper level, there is something more than language that is underpinning the social and academic integration of the participants. The study findings and contributions from the literature suggest that social and academic integration might include the values and norms of the diverse cultures of the students, because they may find some of their values mismatched with values of the host culture given the diverse cultures from which they come as discussed earlier (Robinson-Pant, 2009).

The findings from this study suggest that international students cannot academically and socially integrate into the college environment successfully without a support system in place. The support system helps ease their transition to life in a new environment and helps them succeed.

Support System

As the numbers of international students attending American institutions of higher education increases, there is growing demand to structure the support system to best meet the needs of diverse student bodies, including international students. If universities can offer relevant support services to their students, they will be able to sustain these students more effectively throughout the educational processes.

The academic advisor was the first academic staff that students in this study met when they first arrived on campus. Meeting advisors to discuss their academic plan, course enrollment, and other academic issues was important to the students. The findings of this study showed many participants find academic advisors helpful. Advisors helped the participants make the most of the academic facilities on campus available to them. Most participants always discussed academic issues with their academic advisors. These meetings helped students be on the right track and achieve their academic goals. Most Taiwanese and Malaysian participants were satisfied that they had good and close relationships with their academic advisors. Among the interviewed participants, Korean students seemed to be the least close with academic advisors, coming to see their advisors only once every semester just for course planning. One Korean participant had an issue with the English language in his first year and wanted to share with his advisor, however, he could not set up an appointment with him. Therefore, he felt that he should solve the problem by himself rather than waiting for his advisor's advice.

According to Cuseo (2003), good advising is systematic and ongoing, involving a close student-advisor relationship with frequent interactions. However, due to the unique characteristics of international students, many advisors may feel ill-equipped to advise these students effectively, and thus students may not feel satisfied with the service. For example, one Malaysian participant recalled that her academic advisor seemed to have high expectations about her academic achievement even though she just arrived on campus. After meeting with the advisor for the first time she felt overwhelmed because of the heavy workload, academic rules and expectations, and she needed time to adjust to a new environment and a new educational system.

According to King (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), advisors play a key role in helping students become socially and academically integrated into college and in students' decisions to persist, that, in turn, contribute to student growth and satisfaction. The findings reinforced the significance of the academic advising function in the lives of international students in the study. Advisors are responsible for connecting students to other essential services on campus (King, 1993) and offer students interpersonal interactions with a caring adult (Wade & Yoder, 1995). Academic advising is much more than just scheduling courses and registering students for classes. Consequently, students take their relationships with their academic advisors very seriously, as they should. Furthermore, academic advising might possibly be the only organized and structured relationships outside of class in which faculty and staff have sustained interactions with students (Hunter & White, 2004).

Besides academic advisors, most of the students in the study also benefited from faculty involvement both in class and during office hours. Faculty offered students opportunities for academic enrichment and inquiry. All participants found that professors' office hours were convenient and professors were not difficult to approach. Besides, students could email professors with questions and concerns if their time did not permit to meet during the office hours. No participants commented that they experienced negative faculty perceptions of international students and some talked about faculty members' availability and willingness to assist and support them when they were in difficult situations. Especially, the case of Shera in this study was a powerful example of faculty support when her professors wrote letters of support to the Malaysian government (her sponsor) to convince them about her ability and allowing her to change the major. These findings reinforced the results of Wang's (2004) studies

that students appreciate faculty who have awareness of their unique situations and provide valuable guidance on academic matters, personal support, and advocacy within the community.

In addition to support from academic advisors and faculty members, most participants in the study greatly appreciated graduate teaching assistants (GTA), review sessions, and help rooms when they were in need of academic support. GTAs are a recognized position and a common feature of American college and universities that have a prominent research mission (Luft, Kurdziel, Roehrig, & Turner, 2004). GTAs are expected to be experts in their discipline and knowledgeable of the appropriate pedagogical strategies for undergraduate instruction (Luft et.al., 2004). Most participants in the study had positive experiences with teaching assistants, particularly with international graduate teaching assistants. This finding is consistent with Borjas's (2000) research on international graduate teaching assistants and the academic performance of undergraduates, including international undergraduates. Borjas's research suggests that international graduate teaching assistants do not have a negative impact on the academic achievement of undergraduate students who are "like them", perhaps both in terms of language and cultural background.

As discussed earlier, all participants in this study expressed concerns about their language skills especially academic writing skills. Most of the participants suggested that their need for assistance with writing skills was already addressed in some ways through the university's writing center and they were positive about this service. However, not all the participants who struggled with writing used the writing center. Some preferred sending their writing to professors for comments or revision before the final submission. Therefore, multiple forms of writing support may be needed, for example, academic writing support in each school may help students

edit their writing assignments or provide academic writing lessons to orient students, especially international students, with academic writing requirements expected in each school.

The Student Associations

The student country associations (Korean Student Association (KSO), Malaysian Student Association (MSA), and Taiwanese Student Association (TSA)) are part of the overall support system that plays such a vital role in students' social and academic integration. During their past three years in college, many students in the study were active members in the associations' e-boards, involved in designing and planning activities for the associations, and providing support to incoming and new students from their home countries.

These associations provide a way for students to get to know each other and learn about American culture as well as other cultures, and promote their cultures on campus. The international student communities on campus provided a safe and networking place for most of those interviewed. For these participants, studying in the U.S. involved being separated from their comfort zone including families and social support system in their home countries. The student country associations helped students during their study in the States in many ways through their services and activities. Many participants relied on their peers in student associations prior to their arrival and during their study for information and advice on academic and social issues. The KSO, MSO, and TSA were also students' primary social venues, in which most participants actively got involved. Students learned about the programs, the institutions and about America from their student country associations. Research showed that international students rely extensively on other students from their home country or those who share similar culture traditions and religious beliefs for social support (e.g., Kim, 2001; Trice, 2004).

The reliance on an ethnic community for socialization is influenced by the degree to which the community has established its own system in the host country (Kim, 2001). The Korean student association, Malaysian student association, and Taiwanese student association are typically well-developed at the institution I studied; for example, the Korean student association has a history rooted on this campus from the 1950s. Participants are drawn to their student association as it provides a support system based on common experiences and understanding, and allows the students to be Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese, to practice their culture and maintain their cultural identity while they are far from home.

Although it is possible that the long-term impact of ethnic socialization on cross-cultural adaptation may delay the acquisition of host communication competence and meaningful engagement in host communication process (Kim, 2001), one Korean participant expressed that she wished she had gotten involved in KSO e-board earlier because it benefited her in many ways, including leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills. In addition, most participants commented that getting involved in their student country associations provided them with opportunities to interact with other international students and American students who are interested in their cultures.

Class Size

Class size is one of the factors influencing social and academic integration of the participants in the study. Students were very surprised when enrolled in class with more than 200 students. Even though none of the participants said they disliked the class due to its size, they all agreed that there was no way to engage with their peers or with professors in big class. Most of the participants said that they were more active in small classes, because in large classes it was really hard to express their opinions, there were fewer opportunities to interact with the

professor, and it was difficult to make friends. Some also liked big classes because they found it fun taking quizzes and talking with the teaching assistants. However, in general, participants agreed that small classes were better because they got more involved and the professors got to know them better. In addition, many participants commented on how they need to discipline themselves to go to class because professors hardly took attendance due to class size. University classes, especially some introductory courses often taken by new students, are far too large for professors to provide the type of shared guidance required and even to monitor progress and adapt to students' needs as expected (Heirdsfield, 2008). The present study findings are supported by Townsend and Wilson (2006) who found that large class size hindered both social and academic integration of students.

In contrast, all participants were getting involved more in class activities including class participation, engaging discussions with professors and peers when classes were smaller. The study results showed that in small classes, students interacted with faculty more frequently, getting to know their professors better, and feeling like the interactions related to the quality of instruction. Thus, small class size is believed to enhance academic integration.

Psychological Influences

Motivation

The study findings showed students' motivations to study in the States and to be academically successful included experiencing different cultures, broadening their perspectives, wanting social and academic challenges in a bigger environment than that of their home countries, and making their families proud. Their first year in the U.S was difficult and challenging, but even so, some participants talked about a passion and love for their studies and their life in a new environment. Others talked about parental expectations and professors'

encouragement that prompted them to pursue a higher degree. All the participants were found to be very persistent in completing their degrees because of their motivations and determination. Their motivations operate through their goal setting (e.g., high GPA, more job opportunities) and self-regulating reinforcement (e.g., reaching out for academic success), which are intervening influences. This result supports the findings of Allen's (1999) research on the relationship between persistence and motivation, which found that motivation is positively associated with persistence for minority students.

The study findings indicated that the students' value of education, their intrinsic needs of being recognized, of becoming an educated person, and of a better ability to serve their home countries with knowledge and skills they have gained in an American college provides the energy for them to act in a new environment. These intrinsic motivations are of importance in the participants' success and persistence so far. My study results are similar to the research on African American male students (e.g., Davis, 1994; Patitu, 2000) that found that African American males succeed because of their value of education, intrinsic motivation, and determination to succeed.

When the participants experienced intrinsic motivation, they showed interest in becoming a person with open and global mindset, in interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, and in getting involved in both social and academic activities. All participants felt confident and self-determined about their study in the U.S. Even though three of the students did not have good academic standing at times, they managed to overcome and get back on track. Even though there were many challenges during their studies in the States, the participants in the study were found to work with the course material diligently and able to manage their own learning activities as well as their social activities. Many of them all showed a positive attitude towards learning in a

new environment and believed in their ability to complete their degrees. Students seemed more academically integrated than socially and than in their first year: they were involved in academic activities; sought such opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, and competence in their academic areas; and had more autonomy in their program choice. When they felt a mismatch between their program and their interests, talents, or career goals, they switched to another academic program (the case of Jasmine). They strived to perform well academically, as exemplified by their high GPA, on the Dean's list, and some of them got involved in academic professional associations (the case of Zakaria).

Psychological Challenges

As discussed earlier, there are many motives and aims of international students who pursue their degrees in the U.S., such as culture learning, personal development, and good career opportunities. An observation from my research result was that most of the participants in the study placed high demands on achieving academic excellence. As a result, education-related problems are of major concern to these participants.

As international students sought to re-establish their lives in a new environment, they were compelled to make changes that were often accompanied by psychological consequences, some of which made their transition in the new setting very challenging. Students in my study came from a different educational culture and environment and had a variety of social and academic hardships, different modes of expression, and communication. Therefore, when the students first arrived in this new environment, they all experienced homesickness, loneliness, anxiety, insecurity, and marginalization. These psychological challenges made it more difficult for the students in this study to initially integrate into the new social and cultural environment in

the U.S.. Those psychological issues have been well documented in the literature (e.g., Anderson et al., 2009; Berry, 1997; Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007; Olivas & Li, 2006).

The psychological issues developed when either the participant or the participant's experience failed to meet their own expectations, especially during their first year. Malaysian participants expressed anxiety and feelings of isolation because they expected to have a lot of American friends and speak English all the time. In reality, unless they initiated the conversation, no one came to talk to them. The students wanted to break their national circle in order to integrate into a new environment; however, they thought it was really hard to do so. During their first year, the feelings of being isolated and an outsider made it difficult for them to get involved in social and academic activities. In some particular cases, for example Jae, overcoming those psychological issues was almost impossible. For the past three years in school, Jae could not overcome the issue of age difference or the feelings of losing status and identity in order to engage with the cultural and academic environment of the college. He was working hard towards graduation, but he did not feel he could immerse himself in this environment. The study findings were supported by the Anderson et al.'s (2009) research that, while international students come to study in American colleges with high expectations for the quality of life in the United States, they may feel frustrated, indignant, and inadequate after they understand the realities and face difficulties and failures. Many studies on international student adjustment documented that the extent to which international students had to contend with cultural adjustment difficulties influenced social and academic integration, academic success, retention, and levels of satisfaction with the college experience (Constantine, Anderson, et al., 2005; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007).

Sense of Belonging

The findings of this study showed that after their first year, most participants felt very comfortable about studying and living in the U.S. They felt more confident about approaching and having conversations with professors, staff, and other students. This change may be the result of the greater extent to which participants in their concentration courses are in smaller classes and work closely with each other, and they interact more with other students, faculty, and staff members in either their programs or through out the campus. However, two Korean participants did not feel a sense of belonging either to their department or the university, so at times they wanted to transfer to another school. It was interesting that one of them was an e-board member of the Korean Student Association and got involved in a number of social and academic activities on and off-campus. Both students cared more about their academic programs, whether they like their programs of study or not, than their involvement in social activities.

In general, students in this study who were involved in their student associations, professional clubs, honor societies, and volunteer activities exhibited a high sense of belonging to the university. Some participants considered the university their second home; others said that they loved the school buildings, loved meeting people in their programs; and some always wanted to stay at school to meet professors, staff, or other students after classes. The reason could be that after a while, they learned more about the school, knew where to seek help when needed, and understood the system. In addition, the support system helped students make good academic decisions and made them feel a sense of belonging. Therefore, their sense of belonging reflects the extent to which they feel personally accepted, connected, a part of, and supported by others in the university community, and their level of understanding the system where they were in (Jacoby & Garland, 2005).

Furthermore, Glogowska, Young, & Lockyer (2007) noted that “support networks and feeling a sense of belonging may also be crucial in students continuing their studies” (p.73). The study also found that students who perceived the college environment to be supportive felt more connected to the university and believed in their success, and accordingly, their academic motivation was improved (for example, Shera, Zakaria, Fred, Bruce). In addition, participants believed they were successful achieving their academic goals because of their motivation, support from family, support resources from the university (help rooms, review sessions, teaching assistants), and faculty members. The findings from this study support Osterman’s (2000) conclusion that students who experience a sense of belonging in educational environments are more motivated, more engaged in school and classroom activities, and more dedicated to school.

The findings also demonstrated that students in the study successfully moved forward to their graduation because they were able to adapt and to integrate into the dominant norms, values, and behaviors of the institution. Some of them mentioned the university spirit and about what this spirit meant to them when they were far from campus. They were proud of being a [university mascot], but they were also proud of their cultural background and of being a Korean, a Malaysian, or a Taiwanese person. They felt a sense of belonging and integrated into the university environment, but they all maintained their cultural integrity, like Shera said: *“Maintaining does not mean eliminating, but I am just celebrating in another way”*. This finding was similar to the results of Andrade’s (2006) research on international student persistence. Andrade (2006) concluded that international students viewed integration positively; they integrated into a new environment but did not assimilate because they preserved their cultural integrity.

Peer Interactions

Social integration is of a great concern to Asian international undergraduate students in this study. Students believed that their social interactions were important for their learning and development. Despite such belief, they reported very limited social interactions with faculty, staff, and students from other cultures, especially during their first year. Some participants reported that they had negative experiences with social interactions, and “who to trust” and “how to make friends and develop the relationship” were big questions in their social life when they first came to the country and to this university. Many felt alienated in the campus community and tended to socialize with other national fellows.

There are reasons that they did not often interacted with American peers. It could be that the superficial elements of American social life, as interpreted by students from fundamentally different cultures, might get in the way of participants’ adjustment. Research has shown that superficial relationships and interactions between international students and local students did not contribute to their development or enhance their global perspective (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). From their stories, students in this study wanted to cultivate deep, meaningful relationships and conversations, which was not easy to do considering the busy lives of their American peers and their level of confidence in English proficiency. As Ajong (a Korean student) and Lyana (a Malaysian student) noted, Americans are polite but not friendly. Some participants actively sought engagement with their American peers and accepted the superficiality of it all, while at the same time craving honest friendships and relationships.

Another reason for many participants reaching out to their national fellows could have been that the Asian student culture of orientation is inherently more sociable with people within the same cultural group than with American students (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). The findings

of my study were consistent with previous research on international student friendship network patterns (e.g., Al-Sharideh, & Goe 1998).

The experiences of peer relationships vary considerably among the students in the study. Some students found close friendships, but the others found it difficult to make friends. Participants mentioned they had different classmates in different classes and less formal contact hours with frequent peers; and therefore, they had fewer opportunities to meet and find study partners. Participants indicated that in their home country, one could make friends in college easily, because they were almost the same age, they had the same classmates every day as they took the same subjects, and they all knew each other in school; they, therefore, formed strong social bonds among themselves. However, the university in this study is big; most students speak a different language, and are a different race. As a consequence, whilst peer relationships are friendly at home, some students felt uncomfortable on campus because their behavior is different from that of their fellow students. Some participants reflected that they were more reliant on their national friends for help in their studies and for organizing their life in America, as they have no family close by. Some participants, by contrast, found that it is hard to meet other students due to academic workload and different class schedules, which causes more difficulty with getting involved socially.

However, as time passed most of the participants tried to reach out to make friends with Americans or with students from different cultural groups. The study found that Malaysian and Taiwanese participants showed great interest in getting to know American students and establishing long-term friendships with them. However, they reported difficulty with interacting and making friends with Americans. Any participants who had an American roommate appreciated this opportunity, because they learned a lot about American culture and academic

requirements and expectations in an American college that helped them better adjust and integrate to a new environment. The study findings were consistent with the study of Japanese, Taiwanese, and Chinese undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at an American university by Yang, Teraoka, Eichenfield, and Audas (1994). These researchers suggested the reasons why Asian international students have low commitments to establish friendships with host nationals including no opportunities to establish these relationships, cultural differences, and lacking the time to do so.

The socialization of international students with American students has been discussed to a certain extent in the research (e.g., Trice, 2002; Yang et. al., 1994). Overall, these studies found that international students' social interactions with American students were very important to eliminate their feelings of marginality and to help them with their adjustment. Yet, international students' socialization with American students was very limited (Trice, 2004). It is important to note that a sound peer relationship requires positive efforts from both parties in cross-cultural communications.

Interactions with Faculty Members

In this study, the researcher noticed that participants said they worked very hard and put most of their effort into meeting faculty expectations. The study found that close relationships with professors and faculty members' concern about student growth and development were related to student satisfaction and their sense of belonging. The participants had good impressions of and satisfaction with the faculty, which led to feelings that participants are members of the college community. Some participants expressed that they always wanted to maintain positive student-faculty interactions with their professors. Students learned that interaction with faculty was an important support for them to reach their academic goals during

their studies in college. For the participants, the faculty members represent the authority figure, the mentor, and the role model. For this reason, the faculty members' influence on students can be significant (McArthur, 2005). The study findings sustained Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) conclusion that interactions with faculty presents one of the most positive significant factors influencing undergraduate students' retention.

Many participants in the study reported that they have limited interactions with faculty members. Participants perceived a lack of both classroom and social non-classroom interactions and wished they had closer relationships with faculty. Some participants said that most student-faculty interactions were classroom interactions and most non-classroom interactions were related to academic issues, even though the students expected this to be the case. A few participants expressed that they kept in touch with their professors outside class. These participants found their college experience very rewarding as professors supported and encouraged them. This finding is supported by extensive research that demonstrates that student-faculty contact in and outside the classroom is correlated with student persistence and development (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Thompson, 2001). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that quality student-faculty interactions were positively associated with a student's educational aspirations, attitudes toward college, academic achievement, and intellectual and personal development, and helped students socialize to the norms of their institution and create a closer bond between student and institution. For Asian international students, such student-faculty interactions are also strongly associated with a positive and significant development of academic content and skills. Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) found that frequent interactions with faculty predict learning for students among all ethnic groups, and that the quality of the interaction with faculty has the strongest association with the

learning for Asian students. However, studies have also found that in general Asian students' interactions with faculty are limited (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). Students who report quality out-of-class interactions with faculty members also perceive that their institutions are more supportive and they put more effort toward their studies (Kuh & Hu, 2001).

Educational Self-efficacy and Behaviors

In this study, the findings showed that participants were excited about going to study in America, but they all understood that this journey was not easy and many challenges were awaiting them. In addition, the participants had high educational self-efficacy at the start of their studies in America as they come from strong educational backgrounds in which their parents always encouraged learning, taking challenges, and trying to do best in their capabilities. Most of the participants, especially those from Malaysia and Taiwan, had high GPAs in high school and good college academic preparation. Since a student's past performance heavily influences the shaping of self-efficacy beliefs, students will have a high level of task familiarity with college level academic requirements, which often result in academic success (Elias & MacDonald, 2007)

Self- efficacy, according to Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) definition, is "a product of multiple personal and comparative factors, including students' conceptions of their intellectual and social abilities and their successes and failures in previous academic settings, all tempered by comparisons with others" (p. 223). Self-efficacy determines how hard students work and how long they persist when confronted with challenges and obstacles. All the participants in the study reported that their first year was difficult as they needed to navigate the system and to adapt to a new environment, but they always told themselves that they could do it and believed in their ability to accomplish tasks and to reach their goals. Most of them reported succeeding academically in their first year (even though one Taiwanese participant was on probation after

his first semester, he managed to get back on track after the second semester). This success helped them become more confident in interacting with people around them.

Cultural and educational differences provided some stressful situations that all participants overcame as they continued to develop the skills necessary to be successful in their study. Regardless of all the challenges they have faced, most participants maintained positive attitudes toward their studies. This effort resulted in their high grades and in achieving self-esteem. In addition, achieving high GPAs and being on the Dean's list have contributed to the formation of the participants' feelings of perceived academic self-efficacy; therefore, they felt more capable in the classroom. Thus, the participants excelled because they had confidence in their abilities. The findings reinforced the existing literature that a student's personal commitment to education and a more positive view of one's self corresponds to higher academic self-efficacy (Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999). Research by Garcia and Hu (2001) found that high academic self-efficacy is a positive significant factor that influenced first-year student' academic performance and adjustment in college.

In addition, many participants reported that they perceived this university's environment supported their learning, so they continued to strive for achievement. Therefore, encouragement from their families and faculty members, and meaningful interactions from faculty and staff in and outside of the classroom also contributed to enhance the participants' success.

Summary

Pursuing undergraduate education in the United States is a challenging, but exciting journey for most participants in the study. There is some commonality evident, which underpins their unique social and academic integration experiences. Most participants went through an initial stage of feeling insecure, nervous, and lost, but then felt more confident, more settled, and

more involved either from the second semester or second year. The support systems (both social and academic supports, family and school) play an important role in helping students ease their adjustment difficulties, in understanding about the new culture and academic system, and in getting them more involved in both social and academic life in college. Students initially experienced excitement because of the new environment and new freedom compared to the more structured previous educational experience in their home country, and then became concerned as they realized the magnitude of the hidden academic and social demands expected of them integrating in a new environment.

This new educational environment provides them with a lot of freedom of choices. With no direct supervision from their parents, it is the students who decide what they want to do, and how much effort to put into their studies and their social life. They make these decisions on a daily basis, given their passion, aspiration, abilities, perceptions of social and academic activities, and judgments of the probability of success. Therefore, their value of education, their passion and motivation for integrating to the new environment, and success in their study in an American college appear to be significant.

Asian international students in the study had some difficult and frustrating experiences when it came to social integration. The most troublesome aspects appear to be finding such social connections and balancing academics, social lives, and other life responsibilities. Students emphasized academic issues in contrast to social issues. Although peer group participation could be an academic endeavor, cultural values may inhibit such interaction.

As discussed, cultural values and differences significantly impinged upon the social and academic integration of those Asian international undergraduate students in the study. However, most students interviewed attributed language as the cause for the difficulties of their social and

academic experiences. This is perhaps because language was the most obvious cause to be identified. Not all of the students were as aware that cultural differences were also playing a part. This highlights the need to promote awareness of cultural diversity in higher education both to students and institutions.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In this chapter I discuss the implications of the findings of the investigation presented here, recommendations for future research and concluding the dissertation. The study has explored the social and academic integration experiences of Asian international undergraduate students – how they integrated into a new cultural and academic environment. Guided by Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000) and the Behavior-Perception-Behavior (Milem & Berger, 1997) as frameworks, the study answered the main research question: What factors contributed to the social and academic integration of Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international undergraduate students in an American college?

In this study, I conducted 28 in-depth interviews with 14 Asian international undergraduate students from Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan studying at a research university in the Midwest. The personal interviews lasting up to 50-minute each yielded detailed information about students' lives up to the point of their junior years and compiled comprehensive data on their perceptions, attitudes, expectations, and values. All participants grew up in an intact family; Malaysian students attended resource-rich high schools in their home country; and Korean and Taiwanese students' family income was high enough to be able to send them overseas since they were in high school. Students reported that their parents were supportive of their learning: parents were involved in participants' lives, and took an active role in developing their educational skills. However, studying in the States was very different from what they experienced in their home countries.

With their parents' emotional and financial support, the students still encountered endless challenges in a new environment. The campus environment they entered was overwhelmingly White and had an academic culture with which they were not familiar (Charles, Fischer, Mooney, & Massey, 2009); students tried their best to overcome cultural, social, and academic challenges, to break their circle of national friends, and to understand American culture better in order to get more involved and to integrate to the new environment. When they first arrived, most participants talked of having lower levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy at times; however, toward their junior year as they have succeeded academically, the students indicated having achieved high levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and a high level of country pride. At the time of interviews, many students reported feeling very comfortable and confident in this new environment. Some of them felt attached to their schools, which brought them warm feelings as in their home with parents and after spending a summer break in their countries, coming back to college, as some said, they felt like going home.

Even though 7 out of 14 went to high school in the U.S., one went to an International American school in China, and one went to England for 2 years for English courses, living in other countries before college did not make them better for social integration compared to those students who did not have those experiences. One student said she liked the school and the program, but she did not feel a sense of belonging. The institution type could be an answer for this issue. Many students mentioned that the high schools and preparation colleges they went to were small in size and number of students. Students all knew each other and knew all teachers, and thus they had a sense of family in their old environments and that made them feel differently when they entered a new big environment.

Through the individual interviews and member-checking sessions with the 14 participants, stories emerged that highlighted social and academic integration experiences of these students. This study provided the space for participants to tell their stories. Most participants remained actively and energetically engaged during this study: they all arrived on time for and eagerly engaged with me in the interviews. These participants opened their lives to me and trusted me to tell their stories, for which I am deeply grateful. What emerged from their stories is that Asian international undergraduate students cannot be grouped into a homogeneous cluster, as they all lead diverse lives. Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese students in the study shared some similarities in terms of cultural values (e.g., value of education, meaning of academic success to their families), but there were many differences in terms of social and academic integration experiences among them. For example, hierarchy and age differences in Korean culture seem to strongly influence on how Korean students interact with other students and with faculty and staff members than Malaysian and Taiwanese students. In the study, practicing religion could make students closer like all Malaysian students mentioned about the benefits of joining the Muslim Student Association. However, at some points some Malaysian students did not feel comfortable with Arab Muslims. The study findings showed that the cultural dynamics is one of the important factors that one could not ignore when study about different groups of students. This study has been painted by different colors of the participants' lives as they have been doing their best to adjust, integrate, persist, and succeed during their study in the States.

All the participants struggled with negotiating between home and host country. What many of them lacked the most was the realm of social experience: the meaningful relationships with American peers, with the university, and the local community. Most participants had deep

and meaningful relationships and comfort in ethnic communities that they found through student associations and from their own networks. Regular prolonged conversations with family and friends from home in their first year, at some points, had the effect of preventing students from seeking new connections in the host country. However, family and friends were strong support whenever students faced difficulties in their social and academic life.

In addition, a supportive environment, in which advisors and faculty members care about them and support resources are available, helped these students sense that they are included and belonging. According to the literature, a student's sense of belonging is largely built upon feelings of acceptance as an individual and as part of a community (e.g., Hurtado & Carter, 1997). This sense of connection impacts the quality of learning and social life on campus. Adversely, feelings of loneliness have a negative impact on students' sense of community on campus as well as on their college experiences (Cheng 2004, Tinto 2005). Moreover, language problems and cultural values all were barriers to the participants' social and academic integration. Most participants experienced a cultural shift from "spoon-fed" instruction in their home countries to exploratory self-disciplined and self-regulated in every aspects of their academic life in the university in the States.

From the literature review, findings, and discussion there are some similar factors contributing to the social and academic integration of Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese students and students of color in the U.S., and factors affecting their persistence in college including family background (i.e., parental support), students' own efforts, student characteristics (e.g., academic preparation, behaviors and perceptions), institutional supports, student commitment, and social networks (e.g., acquaintances, friendships). However the levels of influence of these factors on academic and social integration as well as student persistence are

different among those populations. There are some factors that make the social and academic integration of Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international students differ from domestic minority students including cultural dynamics (e.g., hierarchy, age), sense of belonging, and their academic commitment.

This study also brought some insights into international undergraduate student socialization patterns and the factors that influence their social life: understanding of U.S. culture plays an important part in international students' interactions with Americans; skills and knowledge international students need to help them integrate better to the American college environment; and the balance between socializing with co-national and cross-cultural groups. Due to vast cultural differences and limited understanding of American culture, some students found it less desirous to engage in activities with Americans. It was cited in the literature that international students have limited opportunities to meet and interact with Americans because the ways of thinking and even leisure activities were different (e.g., Ho, Li, Cooper, & Holmes, 2007). Therefore, overcoming language barriers and getting to know more about American culture and its people by participating in different social and academic activities on campus were the ways students tried to integrate into the college environment. In addition, participating in their country student associations' events brought students more opportunities to meet and interact with other internationals as well as Americans who were interested in learning about Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese cultures. Furthermore, students who were e-board members in Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese Students Associations reported this involvement improved their interpersonal, communication, and leadership skills, which they saw as an advantage in their social and academic integration experience. In addition, these e-board members supported

me with help in disseminating my study and introducing me to significant informants, for that I am very grateful.

Implications for Theory

This study contributes to the existing theories of SDT and the Behavior-Perception-Behavior regarding self-determination, motivation, perceptions and behaviors by examining the role each factor plays in social and academic integration of Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international undergraduate students. Both SDT and the Behavior-Perception-Behavior model proved that they were conceptually useful through the rich findings of the study. STD and the Behavior-Perception-Behavior model guided me to develop a useful research question and create good interview protocols. However, the study findings showed that educational self-efficacy, which was not described in either the SDT or the Behavior-Perception-Behavior model, was a salient factor that influenced the participants' social and academic integration. Thus, the findings of the study have implications for applying current theories, and developing a new, theoretical model for studying social and academic integration and persistence of Asian international students in particular, and international students in general.

When designing this study, it was difficult to find a theoretical framework that could explain the social and academic integration process of this particular student population. Although general theories are not meant to fit any one subset of students exactly, they provide helpful guidelines and tools for administrators and faculty, as well as researchers. Results of the current study indicate the importance of structural and psychological factors in influencing international student integration to an American college environment. Psychological challenges, motivation, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, interactions with peers and faculty, perceptions and behaviors were all shown to play a role in influencing social and academic integration. From this

study, international college students' self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and expectations are considered to be dynamic constructs because they can be changed as sources of information are filtered through current perceptions, personal knowledge, and the individual's interactions with and reactions to environment and tasks.

In this study, students who were highly intrinsically motivated to get the most of their college experience in the U.S. have a stronger commitment to integrate themselves socially and academically into the college environment and to complete their degree programs. Findings of this study show that, as SDT and the Behavior-Perception-Behavior frameworks suggest, perceptions, motivational orientations, educational self-efficacy, behaviors and attitudes interact with and influence each other. Additional research is needed in an attempt to further understand the complex relationship among the investigated structural and psychological factors to have a better understanding of social and academic integration and persistence of international college students.

Implications for Future Research

Further research with the same design and theoretical frameworks can be conducted in other contexts to have a better understanding of international undergraduate students' social and academic integration and persistence in general, Asian international students in particular. This study was an exploratory case study with a qualitative research design and it yielded very useful findings but specific to the study context. In other words, the findings were institutionally specific even if lessons learned from this study can inform those in similar situations at other universities. Furthermore, the current study only focused on Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese undergraduate students in a public research university. It did not study other groups of international students or international students in private universities/colleges and community

colleges. To examine whether any differences in students' social and academic integration on campus among different groups of students, and/or in different types of colleges, future research can include international students from different countries of origin and/or across various institutional types.

The findings from this study could serve as a platform for examining how different groups of Asian international undergraduate students adjust and integrate to a new environment in response to their unique needs and contexts. The insights provided in this study also open doors for understanding the interconnections among international students' academic life and their socialization. Asian international undergraduate students in this study often found it difficult to connect psychologically, socially, and culturally with faculty members and American peers. Even students who formed good relationships with faculty and their American peers said they went through difficult periods initially. However, those difficulties were only from the participants' perspectives and they did not reflect if these difficulties stemmed from domestic students' competence with cross-cultural interpersonal relationships or faculty members' expertise regarding working with international students. Therefore, an important direction for future research is to closely examine how international students navigate relationships with American peers, faculty members, and their academic advisors, because high-quality relationships with peers and faculty members have been found to provide strength to overcome psychological challenges (e.g., depression, stress) that international students experience during their study in the U.S. (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). In addition, research needs to explore these issues from both faculty and domestic student perspectives. For example, future research could examine how academic advisors, student affairs administrators, and American students

understand issues surrounding international students' social and academic integration, and compare their understandings and perceptions to international students' perceptions.

This study also provided new insight into the role of the country student associations in international students' lives on American campus. These associations play an important role in helping prospective and incoming international students get to know more about the schools they might be attending, to learn more about American culture, to help them have a smoother and better transition to a new environment, and to promote better understanding among cultures on campus. Most participants' social involvement was with their associations. However, the current study did not investigate deep enough in order to understand the linkage between the associations and the institutions, which offices they worked with to plan their events, and how they collaborate with each other. Therefore, there is a need to have further research on this area in order to understand the role of the institution in these associations' mission and vice versa and the impacts of these associations on social and academic integration of international students.

The study findings showed the students in different programs and schools within the university experienced different experiences of social and academic integration. Therefore, exploring the needs and expectations of international students in different programs and across different schools can be alternatives for future research. In addition, there is a need to conduct sustained research that keeps pace with the needs and expectations of international students. University personnel should continue to have conversations with international students to gain perspective on their experiences. A comparative study of international undergraduate students and their American peers on social experiences should be conducted every 2 years or 5 years because the international and American student body, culture, and socialization patterns are ever changing.

Implication for Policy and Practice

As the number of international students in general, Asian international students in particular, increases in American colleges and universities, shedding light onto the factors contributing to their social and academic integration would give student affairs staff and academic administrators a better picture of how these students adjust and integrate into the new environment. Four-year public research institutions may be able to use the information of this study to evaluate current practices and policies on international student integration and persistence. This research has contributed to detailing some of the mechanisms that universities can adopt, or consider adopting to enhance social and academic integration and positively influence persistence for Korean, Malaysian, Taiwanese international students at American universities. Faculty, administrators, and student affairs staff who are interested in international students' experiences, particularly Asian international undergraduate students, may benefit from the insights and thoughts shared by the participants.

The study suggests that by being aware of the differences between cultures in their home countries and American culture, Asian international students would be more involved and successful in the early years of higher education. However, Asian international students are not a homogenous group and their needs and concerns differ by country of origin, ethnicity, age, year in college, programs of study, and educational background. The study found that students from more socially hierarchically connected societies (e.g., Korea) are more difficult to integrate into a new environment socially and are less likely to utilize formal support services (e.g., the writing center, help rooms, and advising system). The findings suggest that underutilization of support services may result from students not being familiar with the services or possibly that the

services are not culturally relevant. Thus, greater understanding should be the basis of continuing the discussion on provision of appropriate support services that meet student needs.

In addition, the quality of academic advising may influence the persistence rate of international undergraduate students on campuses. Faculty members' capacity to advise and connect with international students may be enhanced when they are aware of and interested in the challenges these students face. Faculty members and academic advisors with international backgrounds and those who successfully work with international students can share their knowledge and experiences, particularly with other members, who are and/or will be working with international students in their departments as well as across campus.

Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese international undergraduate students in the study shared a desire to integrate with Americans and feel a sense of community in the American university. However, many found themselves in learning environments with limited opportunities to speak English and interact with students who are different from them. Therefore, developing cross-cultural programs to facilitate interaction between domestic and international students would help international students improve their English and become more confident in interacting with diverse people. Involving domestic students in cross-cultural programming serves the dual purposes of learning and adjustment for all students. For example, some sessions in orientation for international students should be combined with first-year student orientation for American students, so international students could have opportunities to interact and make friends with domestic students from the start. Moreover, orientation should not only last for a week or two at the beginning of the academic year, but rather be an ongoing activity. Most interviewed participants did not get much from an intensive orientation at the beginning of their first semester due to their language limitation and feeling overwhelmed. In addition, increasing

opportunities for social interactions that attract both international and domestic students, such as games nights or cultural performance nights, or trips and cultural excursions, will help international students better adjust and integrate into a new environment.

The study findings showed Korean, Malaysian, and Taiwanese student associations play an important role in the participants' lives during their time studying in the U.S. According to the International Student Office statistics, in fall 2011 the university hosts almost 6,000 international students represented 125 countries, however, there are only 35 international student clubs and associations. What happens to students who are not a member of or belonging to any of those clubs and associations or students whose groups were too small to form a student country association? Understanding international student needs and providing support will help students better integrate into the college environment during their time on campus. One suggestion is that there should be student ambassadors representing their countries (how many student ambassadors representing one's country depending on how big the student group from that country was) and the university can organize forums for these ambassadors to introduce themselves, share their experiences, and network with prospective and incoming students.

In addition, the study findings showed the importance of the country student associations on campus, therefore, university staff could work together with the country student associations to run pre-departure orientation for international students in a number of key sending countries (e.g., what the Taiwanese Student Association is doing right now during their summer break when e-board members come back to Taiwan for their break). Student country organizations, student support staff, and other service units could work together to design programs responding to the needs of international students, for example, a cross-cultural communication program encourages international students to engage with domestic students in a workshop setting, which

covers a range of topics (e.g., exploring cultural differences, transition, balancing academic and social life). More activities should be organized throughout the academic year to provide opportunities for making friends and augmenting peer group interactions. International students come from all over the globe in order to better themselves through academic experiences, so they need an environment where there is encouragement to interact with the American students on campus. Such interchange would be equally beneficial to the international student, the university, and the host country as well as the sending countries. Therefore, the university community as a whole needs to actively engage with international students as do their American peers.

Final Thoughts – A Message for Future International Undergraduate Students

Throughout the entire process of becoming accustomed to a new environment in the United States, it is important to remember that international students are never alone. American students starting their freshman year of college face many of the same issues fitting in and making new friends. For many of domestic students, it is often a totally new environment, as they venture away from their families and hometowns for the first time. Everyone needs some time to find their niche, be it through different social and academic activities both on and off-campus, and daily life in a new environment. The more the students put themselves into the American university experience, the more they will get out of it; it is definitely worth it, and there is so much that can be learned. All students need to do is get involved, be open-minded and try new things. There will be many incredible opportunities awaiting an adventure!

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

December 8, 2011

To: Marilyn J. Amey

418 Erickson Hall

Re: **IRB# X11-1122e** Category: EXEMPT 1.2

Approval Date: December 8, 2011

Title: Factors contributing to the persistence of Asian International Undergraduate Students.
The Institutional Review Board has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that **your project has been deemed as exempt** in accordance with federal regulations.

The IRB has found that your research project meets the criteria for exempt status and the criteria for the protection of human subjects in exempt research. **Under our exempt policy the Principal Investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects** in this project as outlined in the assurance letter and exempt educational material. The IRB office has received your signed assurance for exempt research. A copy of this signed agreement is appended for your information and records.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. If the project is completed, please submit an

Application for Permanent Closure.

Revisions: Exempt protocols do not require revisions. However, if changes are made to a protocol that may no longer meet the exempt criteria, a new initial application will be required.

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects and change the category of review, notify the IRB office promptly. Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the IRB.

Follow-up: If your exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the IRB office will contact you regarding the status of the project and to verify that no changes have occurred that may affect exempt status.

Please use the IRB number listed above on any forms submitted which relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the IRB office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517-355-2180 or via email at IRB@msu.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Harry McGee, MPH
SIRB Chair

APPENDIX B: INVITATION LETTER

Date:

Dear International students from Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia

My name is Hoa Pham and I am an international student from Vietnam pursuing my PhD in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education, College of Education at Michigan State University. Some of you might have met me during the Global Festivals. **If you are junior students enrolled in any undergraduate program**, I would like to invite you to participate in an exciting opportunity, in which your invaluable insights will benefit the experiences of international undergraduate students at MSU.

I am conducting research on Asian international undergraduate students' persistence examined through their life history and reflections on their experiences during their course of study at the university. Your participation will both advance our understanding of the challenging but very meaningful lives that international students lead, and will highlight the importance of Asian international undergraduate students to administrators and faculty at the university. I understand that this is a busy time of the year; however, I am contacting you in hopes of obtaining the information only international students like you can provide.

As a participant in this study you will be interviewed two times (45 minutes per interview) in a relaxed informal environment. First interview focuses on students' life history and details of your experiences when you first arrived and during your first year here at MSU, and your early perceptions of yourself and of the institution. Second interview focuses on your current experiences, your changes (if any) during the past one or two years, and your reflections of these changes and the meaning of these changes.

The interviews will be conducted during the spring of 2012. The interviews will be at least a week apart and I will work around your schedule and convenience to plan these meetings. Your participation and information provided by you will be kept strictly confidential. Wal-Mart gift cards worth \$15.00 as tokens of my appreciation to your time and sharing your experiences will be given to you at the second interview.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary; please respond to phamhoa1@msu.edu if you are interested in participating. I thank you in advance for your participation and interest to improve the quality of international students' lives. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Hoa Pham
Doctoral Candidate
Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education
College of Education.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

IRB#: 11-1122

Introduction- Who I am; What is the research about; Purpose of the interview, confidentiality, length

First interview focus: students' life history and details their experiences when they first arrived and during their first year, and their very first perceptions of themselves, and of the institutions.

Second interview focus: their current experiences, their changes (if any) during the past one or two years, and their reflections of these changes and the meaning of these changes.

Interview 1:

1. Please tell me about yourself.
 2. What do you value about education? (Probing: What do your parents value about education)
 3. Why have you decided to study in the U.S?
 4. Why did you choose to study at this institution? (Probing: What do you perceive about your institution?)
 5. How did you think about yourself in a new culture when you first arrived?
 6. Please draw a picture of what it was like for you as a new student at this institution.
 7. What about coming to an American college surprised you? Was there anything about college life that you didn't expect?
 8. Tell me about your first year experience?
 9. Please tell me how you got involved in social and academic activities during your first year.
 10. Please tell me about your life in the residence hall. How was it different with your life in your home country?
 11. Tell me one or two social and academic activities that you liked most during the first year? Why?
 12. What role did your family and your friends play in your first year?
 13. Is there anything else about your first year that you want to share with me?
- Thank you for your time

Interview 2:

14. Please draw a picture of yourself at this current time.

15. Please tell me about your college experience so far. What are some of the things that stand out for you (about your college experience)?
16. Comparing to your first year experiences, how are your current experiences similar or different?
17. How have your experiences influenced your behavior and attitude toward the university?
18. How have you changed during the past year (or 2 years)?
19. How do you perceive the need for change in order to be successful in your study in the U.S?
20. What do you like most about your college? Your student life?
21. Tell me about your relationship and interactions with other students as well as faculty members and staff. How these relationships affect your experiences on campus? What cultural factors that you have kept when you interact with people different from your own.
22. Have you got used to the university life here? Why/why not and how?
23. Describe the campus environment?
24. Tell me about your current campus involvement?
25. What role does your family play in your college journey?
26. What factors made it difficult to succeed in college thus far?
27. Who or what programs have made you feel supported while in college?
28. Is there anything else you want to share with me?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

IRB # 11-1122

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

STUDY TITLE:

Study Title:	Factors contributing to social and academic integration of Asian International undergraduate students
Researcher and Title:	Hoa Pham, Ph.D. Student.
Department and Institution:	Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Michigan State University
Address and Contact Information:	1576E Spartan Village East Lansing, MI 48823 517-303-4422 phamhoa1@msu.edu

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:

You are being asked to participate in a research study of factors contributing to persistence of Asian International undergraduate students. The study will focus on how and why students become integrated to the college environment, the nature of the perceived student integration and students' behaviors toward the institution. You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a full-time junior Asian international undergraduate student. If you are under 18 you cannot be in this study.

WHAT YOU WILL DO:

Participation in this study involves two in-person interviews. The interviews will each last approximately 45 minutes depending on the length of your responses. During the interview you will be asked about your experiences during your study here in the U.S., the challenges you faced during your first few months and first year in the U.S., your current challenges and how you address these challenges, your home country (family, school) and your experiences when you first arrived in the U.S., your first semester, your first year, and your life in residence halls compared with off-campus living experiences if any, in terms of your efforts and your motivations to participate in both social and academic activities. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

Your participation in this study may result in recommendations that can help the institution have a better understanding of the Asian international students and their needs. These will result in recommendations for designing effective programs to improve college experience of Asian international students.

POTENTIAL RISKS:

It is possible that you may feel uncomfortable with some of the questions asked in the interview. If at any time you do not wish to answer a question or wish to stop the interview, please alert the

interviewer immediately. You may also ask the interviewer to turn the audio recorder off at any point during the interview.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

Every effort will be made to maintain your confidentiality and privacy within this project. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The Secondary Investigator, Hoa Pham, will be the only person aware of your identity. For reporting purposes you will be asked to select your own pseudonym. The data will be audio recorded and stored on a password protected computer until it is transcribed. Once transcribed, the hard copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked private office. Your pseudonym will be used during the interview, but your actual name will not be used. Your signed consent form will be kept in another locked filing cabinet.

The research data will be stored in a password protected computer or locked file cabinet on the campus of Michigan State University (MSU) for a minimum of 3 years after the close of the research. Only the appointed researchers and Institutional Review Board will have access to the research data. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain concealed with the use of a pseudonym.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW:

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw without penalty or loss of benefits. If you would like to withdraw your participation, alert the investigator to your wish and your participation will be stopped immediately. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. You may also choose to continue the interview without being audio recorded at any time.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher Hoa Pham, 1576E Spartan Village, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, 48823, 517-303-4422; phamhoa1@msu.edu or the principal investigator Dr. Marilyn Amey, 418 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48823, 517-432-1056, amey@msu.edu

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT:

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study and you allow me as the researcher to record the interview.

Signature

Date

Participants Desired Pseudonym (Please Print) – One copy to the participant

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