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# Academic and Social Adjustments International Students Deal with Attending U.S. Universities

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ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENTS  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS DEAL WITH  
ATTENDING U.S. UNIVERSITIES

by

Renee L. Davis

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
Specialization: Intercultural Communication

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October, 2009

ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENTS  
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## ABSTRACT

The concerns and issues of international students adapting to cultural and educational changes when overseas has been ongoing. This segment of students brings in billions of dollars in revenue to the schools and communities they live in throughout the United States. They also bring unique issues which are legitimate and need further review. Through a questionnaire designed to address their opinions of American culture and educational system, students were given a platform to voice their issues and offer suggestions. Their insight should give the schools that participated the opportunity to review their current programs and possibly develop new programs that will address the concerns international students all share while pursuing their education overseas.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Just imagine being young, naïve, and heading off to school overseas. You think you have done your research, and feel confident enough with the language and customs of the host country enough to fit in. You get to your destination ready to start a new learning experience, and you realize you do not know as much as you thought. International students come from all over the world to obtain a degree from a university outside of their countries. Whether they decide to attend schools in the United States, England or Australia they encounter cultural differences in the academic and social environments. There has been a lot of research done about international students from an observation point of view. This project will address the issues of what can be done jointly between the universities and students that will realistically address the social and academic adjustments of international students.

#### Background of the Problem

Cemalcilar & Falbo (2008) stated, in the 2006/07 academic year more than 147,000 international students have enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, totaling to 582,984 students (Institute of International Education, 2008). International students bring in a large amount of revenue for the universities they attend. Opendoors (2005, as cited in Wang, 2009) stated international students significantly benefit the United States financially by bringing “over \$13.3 billion dollars to the U.S. economy” in 2004 alone.

In addition to the monetary aspects, students bring their culture, customs, and languages, political and religious views which can aid in the appreciation of intercultural communication. It brings curiosity also, along with preconceived notions of foreigners from the host nations. The cultural differences seem to be based in societies which are not Anglo-European as research has

shown. Most differences are found in the cultures where the beliefs and cultural values are not rooted in the Anglo-Christian values of America, England, Australia, or other European nations. International students that come from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, have been found to have greater challenges dealing with Western cultures because their own differ greatly in many ways.

McLachlan & Justice (2008) had participants in their study that spoke about their adjustments to American culture and one male student summed up his feelings this way:

The culture over here, it's quite different from my culture over there, so I had to come up with a whole new way of thinking and abandon, well not abandon, just really decide and try double up new strategies, new ways of thinking over here, and that's how I started actually, thinking through my perspective of my own culture. I've learned new ways of thinking and it's helped me out here, even if I go back to my country, I don't know how much I can apply from what I've learned here, but it definitely made me more open, more accepting to other things, and I wasn't before.

International students may come here with perceived notions of what life is like. They may end up disappointed, excited, or overwhelmed. It is important to ensure research continues in the hope that recommendations by researchers will be used to improve the situations international students are exposed to.

#### Statement of the Problem

International students have to deal with many challenges that the students in the host nations may never have to think about. They deal with issues such as culture shock, homesickness, language barriers, different foods, customs, and monetary issues. It is imperative that the relationships between the students and the universities are harmonious and the students have good support systems for the development of their well-being. Through discovery of past research, it appears academia could do more with their programs and organizations to help these students adapt better than they have been. It is noted that international students still have these same issues after years of research, and recommendations. The universities in the United States

have a great reputation throughout the world, and for varied reasons students want to come here for their education. It is important that international students are provided with resources to ensure students continue to come here for their education. International students have indicated their experiences in the states through a variety of research. A lot of opinions have not been favorable towards American culture and the academic experience. There needs to be a winning combination to ensure students keep coming here, by working on improvements in areas they have identified as issues that concern their unique needs. Universities are impacted by the possibility of lose revenue, and students are impacted to the point their psychological, physical and emotional well being could be at risk. The main issues this project is attempting to identify are what programs that have worked to help students adjust to life here in America, what has not worked, and what new ideas can be used which will help international students adjust socially and academically while they are in the states.

#### Definition of Terms

Throughout the project there may be terminology that needs further explanations. Some of the areas that previous researchers have identified are some key areas that will be addressed in this section. The terms listed are those which will be used in describing some of those areas that will be addressed in this project.

Emotional: The psychological experiences that are felt for international students dealing with a new culture and being away from familiar surroundings. Al-Sharideh & Goe (1998) stated, 'international students attending American universities and colleges frequently encounter problems in adjusting to their new social environment. For example, they may suffer from loneliness due to the loosening of social ties with people in their native countries.' Students can become depressed. This may manifest itself as sadness, homesickness or feelings of insecurity.

**High Expectations:** The experience of adapting to a new learning environment and the expectations that international students place on themselves in order to succeed in their academic surrounding. Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung (2008) stated, ‘satisfaction in the educational setting is important to understanding how international students adapt to their new learning environments in the United States.’

**Discrimination:** Perceived negative attitudes, and behaviors towards international students by the host community. Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung (2008) indicated the stress caused by discrimination is problematic for members of these groups, and we expect that it will influence the quality of international students’ education experiences. Harrell (2000, as cited in Wadsworth et al.) indicated perceived discrimination based upon race or ethnicity, or an individual’s perception that he/she is being discriminated against by a majority group member, is central to health well being.

**Friendships:** The relationships established by international students within their own cultural groups and those that are formed with others within the host community. Research has shown international students find it easier to establish friendships with other international students and students from their own countries than with American students. McLachlan & Justice (2009) indicated in their study that seventeen participants in their study found that establishing friendships with American students was a slow and frustrating process.

**Social Services:** The resources and departments used to assist students that need special assistance in areas such as mental health, or mentoring. Research has showed that international students do not usually seek assistance, especially mental health. Asian students were less open to counseling than other international students due their feeling of shame and losing face

regarding this type of treatment offered by universities. Yoon & Jepsen (2008 as cited in McLachlan & Justice).

**Culture Shock:** Transition experiences when people are confronted by cultural change when living abroad. Pedersen (1995, as cited in Wang) stated, “culture shock is the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment”. International students come from all over the world and when they come to the states they are faced with astounding difficulties. In addition to social differences they must adjust to the academic culture which for many is different from what they are use to. Wang (2009) states, “The difficulties faced by international students adversely influence their life experience and academic achievement. If they cannot overcome the difficulties and adjust successfully, they may be unable to reach their preset goals.

**Acculturation:** Cultural modification of an individual group, or people adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture. Zhao et al. (2005, as cited in Wadsworth et al.) found that senior international college students, who are likely to be more acculturated to US culture, were much more adept in communicative experiences than first year international students. These senior international students were as comfortable in their communicative experiences as senior American students.

### Purpose of the Project

It is through international students that new and innovative ideas can be formed that would help universities make their current and possible future programs successful. By ensuring the social and academic well being of current students, schools are looking at continued migration success. More importantly, it is critical to open dialogue with the schools chosen for this project to make assessments of their programs, and work with the students in areas they have deemed need further improvements. The intent of this project is to request information from

international students at local colleges through a questionnaire, to find what works and does not work in addressing the needs of international students. By having students be active in the process may help them feel their opinions, and ideas matter, and schools are seriously looking at their concerns.

### Addressing the Problem

In preparation for this project, I will be looking at programs already in place at the chosen schools. Interviewing personnel in the department that directly deals with international students would also be part of the process to find out how those programs have impacted international students in a positive or negative way. I will be formatting a questionnaire for the students that will contain questions and free flow essay related to the issues of social and academic concerns. Before arriving at their destinations international students may learn about the potential university and the host nation through a variety of methods. I will be addressing in the questionnaire how they learn about the host country and school. There is also media through the internet, television, and movies. Finding out how that has that influenced them is equally important.

Once the student arrives in the states they may encounter issues they did not expect. Finding out what they encountered with academic and social issues is the key to this project. The questionnaire will be broken up into questions pre-transition and post-transition to the states. Looking at academic life will be in the areas of student/student, teacher/student and university personnel/student relationships. From the social aspect of the student life areas such as friendships, mentors, dealing with banking, and getting utilities will be addressed. Sample of a few questions are:

- How realistic is the media you used to obtain information about the host nation before coming to the states?
- Upon arrival in the states, what information did the university make available for international students?
- What do students feel would be beneficial to help them adjust socially and academically in the host nation?

These questions are some of many that need to be addressed, and can only be answered by the students. In order to present data that a school would deem worthwhile to use to make their programs better, the opinions of international students need to be valued. Previous research showed their ideas were dismissed, and their concerns not addressed to their satisfaction. Seeking input of the students is critical in redefining the current programs, and seeking ways to help in the development of new programs.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the reader has been introduced to the statement of the problem and the reason for doing further research. The basic idea is international students face a disadvantage when they attend schools outside their own countries. They have challenges which are unique to them, and those issues need to be addressed by the schools which they attend. Making sure these students adjust to life in the classroom, with other students, with school personnel, and with people outside the campus area can help students deal with life. The reality can be somewhat different for international students. They can face discrimination, low self-esteem, culture shock, depression, devalued opinions, racism, sexism, religious biases, homesickness and language barriers among others. Working with students and the university community can open lines of communication.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been numerous research projects, and articles written about the challenges that international students go through as they travel abroad to attend universities. Many researchers have looked at the psychological aspects that international students encounter, and the academic and social ramifications that they go through. This paper will review some of that research in the areas of social adjustments such as culture shock, discrimination, loneliness and friendships. In the areas of academic adjustments, student/teacher, host student/international student relationships, and classroom issues will be reviewed along with overall challenges facing international students attending schools in the United States, and other English speaking nations to find common threads, and solutions.

#### General Issues

Each year since September, 2001 the United States has seen the increase of international students coming to study at universities. According to Greengard (2008), “overall, more than 1.5 million students a year study at schools outside their country’s borders. According to the Institute of International Education, 173,122 new students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and non-degree programs worldwide in 2008 an increase of 7% over the previous year”. In addition to the vast amount of students coming to the states to study there is the revenue factor that brings in billions of dollars to universities and the communities they serve. Wang (2009) wrote, international students significantly benefit the United States financially by bringing “over \$13.3 billion dollars to the U. S. Economy” in 2004 alone (Opendoors, 2005). And they are particularly important to the United States at the graduate level, especially in the fields of science and engineering. With the amount of money that international students bring in, it is imperative that

everything is being done to help the students adjust to their new lifestyles. They have to deal with new social and academic issues that they did not face back in their own countries. Many students are successful and find their experiences to be educational, life changing and they assimilate. There are other students that have challenges which affect their opinions of the host nation, and affect the overall well-being of those students.

### Academic Adjustments

For international students adjusting to academics can be challenging. Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung (2008) have stated, “one of these challenges is classroom communication. This type of teacher-student and student-student communication can be especially difficult for international students.” Classrooms are being more multicultural and it is important at the most basic level. American classrooms now include diversity in the cultural experiences of students and teachers. Plax, Kearney, & Downs (1986, as cited in Wadsworth, et al.) indicated past research showed communication behaviors are salient to teachers’ satisfaction. The experiences in academics are important for the success or failure of international students.

### *Classroom Communication*

According to Wadsworth, et al. (2008), students and teachers with similar frames of reference are better able to communicate with one another with relative ease, as they are familiar with the language and norms of classroom interaction. However, when cultural discrepancies are present, such as those between international students and American peers or instructors, problematic classroom communication is likely to occur. This can lead to a dissatisfying and potentially stressful educational experience for the international student. Ryan & Viète (2009) did a study on learning with international students in the English speaking academy. Within the study they noted that students occupying new spaces of learning my experience an initial loss of

confidence. This is a common theme among those entering a new field, but is it usual for students operating in a second language and a new culture. One student's comment in an earlier study by Viete and Peeler (2007) spoke of the burden of not knowing what locals know and the consequent loss of her former confidence:

My culture, my background, everything is different from them, so I have, not risk, but I have too many things, to many MORE things, that I have to think about than other students. I think I lost so much confidence of mine. I'm thinking I have so many, I'm talented. I want to think like that, but whenever I go to tutorials, I feel I can't do anything, so I'm not respected. (Viete and Peeler 2007, 181)

### *Students Doing Research*

Researchers have found that even in the area of doing research for literature reviews or projects posed problems for some international students in terms of how they gathered the research and learning how to be critical. Robinson-Pant (2009) indicated, as several students pointed out, the issue was not necessarily that they did not critique in their own culture/language, but that they had to learn how to read and write critically in English. 'All the time my supervisors insist that I should be critical, especially when reading a book. I should think what I am reading not just read it. It is difficult when you do this in English. It is the same in Arabic. It is not a different approach, but is difficult to be critical in another language' (interview with student from Saudi Arabia).

Robinson-Pant indicated in her study some students felt that being critical went against their nature and contradicted values emphasized in their previous education. Some students in their home countries were taught never to criticize teachers. Being under a different academic system and having to adapt to new ways of learning can be a struggle for some students. Students from the Middle East and Asia acknowledged the importance of 'saving face' and maintaining harmonious relationships within their cultures. Robinson-Pant stated 'learning the

United Kingdom ways of 'being critical' involved an educational process with which some PhD students did not feel comfortable: openly challenging the teacher, whether it is their supervisor or texts by authorities on their subject.

### *Student/Teacher Relationships*

How important is the student/ teacher relationship for international students and what they see as positive attributes that help them be successful? That issue was researched by Bartram & Bailey (2009). Their study dealt with international students in the United Kingdom and the differences in understandings and expectations of effective teaching practices which might impede students' successful integration into academic life. Peters (2005, as cited in Bartram & Bailey), indicated the staff may assume that international students will be easily assimilated into higher education, and that, although they may experience initial difficulties, they soon will adjust to academic life alongside their UK peers and adapt to any perceived differences in styles of teaching and learning. That may be the opinion of some but questions remain as to the extent to which overseas students coming to the UK share similar understandings of effective teaching practices with students from the UK.

In their study, data was collected as part of a larger survey concerning the views of international students at the university within the first month of their arrival. The questionnaire ranged on matters that related to their previous and current academic experiences, expectations and preferences. The study focused on one question only 'What is your definition of a good teacher?' Four broad categories were identified: 1) personal attributes, 2) teaching skills, 3) relationships with students, and 4) knowledge.

Teaching skills was the most mentioned attribute among UK and international students. Some comments from UK and international students were:

- ‘explains the lessons well and patiently’ (Cypriot student)
- ‘gives good explanations’ (Spanish student)
- ‘someone who explains clearly what has to be done’ (UK student)
- ‘who pays attention and captivates his/her class’ attention (French student)
- ‘gives me clear guidance (Hong Kong student)

The study also showed that when it came to personal qualities such as helpful, patient, enthusiastic, and having a sense of humor were indicated by both set of students. Comments on relationships between students and teachers were also very similar:

- ‘One who is a good friend’ (Chinese student)
- ‘Someone who could be seen as more of a friend than a teacher’ (UK student)
- ‘Treats students as friends not students’ (Indian student)

When it comes to how they want the relationship to be between students and teachers it would appear there is common ground whether you are a student from India, Hong Kong, or the United Kingdom. It appears the teacher/student relationship is important for the success of all students and is one that should not be taken lightly.

In the study by McLachlan & Justice (2008), with faculty members 95% of students described the relationships they had with their professors were positive. Being mentors to these students was major to the student’s support system. One male, undergraduate student in the study stated, “I have 4 or 5 people picked out that if I have a problem, I just either go to one if I have a specific (problem), or if I’m confused about anything I go to all and take some time.” He remarked that many of his mentors are professors at his school. That is a positive reaction from a student in his assessment of his relationship with mentors but that is not always the case with every student. It is noted that relationships can be complex in any society and there needs to be a strong trust factor between students and those offering academic and emotional support. The main point is students come here for the personal and professional enrichment they hope to receive by attending schools in the US. It is crucial to ensure that happens for them.

### *Student Satisfaction*

Satisfaction in the educational setting is important in understanding how international students adapt to their new learning environments in the United States. International students see their relationships with teachers as critical to learning. In the study by McLachlan & Justice several participants identified their professors as playing major roles in their support systems. On the other end of the spectrum, some students had difficulties dealing with teachers in the classroom. Ryan (2002, as cited in Ryan & Viète, 2009) stated, “being able to engage in dialogic interactions in learning environments is essential for international students to become full members of the learning community, and indeed, to learn”. Yet many international students report that, despite their desire to participate in these dialogues, they are not given adequate opportunity to do so. Ryan & Viète stated, “being able to speak is not enough to ensure acceptance and belonging in a learning community, it also needs to encompass being listened to”. ‘We speak but they don’t listen’, said one international student. Another reported, ‘I’m not respected. Not always...but sometimes I feel that they’re ignoring me’ (Viète and Peeler 2007,182 as cited in Ryan & Viète).

Schmitt (2005, as cited in Ryan & Viète) discussed the need for students to be creative in language usage. Our students have expressed their frustrations as their words are prevented from “flying” (Viète and Phan, 2007) by what they view as the pedestrian practices of thesis writing, or by the prohibition against stories and emotive or passionate language.

One example of this tension is the multiple sets of values associated with using other people’s words. On the one hand, students are not encouraged to use their own voices, embedded in the voices of other theorists. On the other hand, they must develop their own distinctive and appropriate voice and argument. They are rewarded for sounding professional, as

long as their appropriation of the professional language cannot be detected as using others words. For international students this can be hugely challenging. Those highly competent in the language will be able to take on this polyphony, but those with less experience will be seen as appropriating rather than participating in the community of scholars. International students not only have to deal with the classroom and language issues when it comes to writing assignments they also have to deal with host students. As part of the whole academic experience comes the interaction between host students and how they communicate with each other.

#### *International Student/Host Student Relationships*

Student to student interaction can be equally important as the relationship between students and teachers. Dealing with students from the host nation can be challenging to deal with too. In the study by McLachlan & Justice they stated, personality type influenced how quickly students were able to establish friendships. Although participants recognized the need to seek friendships with American students to acculturate, they described friendships with other international students as developing sooner and more spontaneously. They remarked they had more international student friends and friends from their home countries. When it came to American students the situation was different. In the study 85% found that establishing friendships with American students was slow, and frustrating. The students reported their desire to develop friendships with American but it was not as comfortable for them as it is with their own. For many it is easier just to deal with the familiar and not go outside the realms of what they already know. For those individuals, there is a loss of what the host culture can provide in opening their eyes to new ideas and appreciation of different cultures. Another relationship that demands attention is the one between mentors and students which affects their academic tenure.

### *Mentors/Advisors*

In the area of graduate advising, Rice, Choi, Zhang, Villegas, Ye, Anderson, Nestic & Bigler (2009) found when it comes to the relationship between a student and his/her advisor opinions run high. In their study sixty-six participants reported concerns about their relationship with their advisors, with some comments emphasizing the social support aspects of the advising relationship. One student in the study noted feeling an absence of support from the advisor:

Any sort of concern for my personal well being would have made a significant difference in my adaptation to the life in US...he never introduced me to his wife, he never asked how my personal life was going or if I needed anything. He never had a meal with me. As I constantly see him going out to lunch with other students.

Relationships are important to the social well being of international students and how they cope psychologically has been heavily researched. Wedding, McCartney, & Currey (2009) did a study about Psychologists who serve as mentors for international students. In 2005, 3,028 international graduate students were enrolled in the psychology program. Students were diverse coming from different cultural backgrounds and beliefs making psychologists rethink their mentoring practices. Mentors now would have to be aware of differing cultural assumptions about gender, and hierarchical relations with professors. For students in the clinical or counseling fields they would now be aware of how their values may affect their professional practice.

According to Wedding, McCartney & Currey, 'many psychologists will serve as mentors for international students, and mentorship for international students may occur in a variety of ways-informally as a friend or confidant, more formally in classrooms, or in the more intimate setting of clinical, counseling, or school psychology practice and internships'. Their study indicated that the professional training of psychologists should leave them well prepared to serve in a mentoring relationship. The study showed oftentimes the psychologists often feel ill

prepared to deal with exigent cultural needs of international students and the special bureaucratic requirements they encounter in the United States.

All international students have similarities and differences they have to overcome when they go off to college. Being exposed to new people and ideas may place challenges on both groups. Some domestic and international students have strong personal beliefs which are challenged when dealing with virginity, sexual orientation, alcohol and drugs. Some students have to deal with clinical depression or thoughts of suicide. Add on problems of distance, cultural values, and isolation and things can get complicated.

Challenges specific to international students is not new to psychologists. Even in the age of the Internet many international students are somewhat familiar with the new cultures they will encounter. They have vivid images and can connect schools before their arrival. They minimize cultural shock, at least in the short term. Wedding, McCartney & Currey indicated, 'although international students experience the same challenges as domestic students, they face unique problems in negotiating with a new culture. In response to the events of September 11, 2001, Congress passed the U.S. Patriot Act of 2001 with its enhanced surveillance procedures that significantly changed the conditions under which international students enter and remain in the United States'.

The International Student and Scholar (ISS) offices are found in most colleges and universities, and these organizations are there to welcome students, help them become oriented to campus life and provide assistance in adjusting to a new culture. In the study it is noted that all international students in the US are required by federal law to check in with ISS advisors immediately upon arrival to the states and a few more times during their academic stay. The issue that needs to be addressed is if the ISS and mentors are indeed working in taking care of

these students why is research still being done on the adjustments that international students face in coping with life here in the states?

International students in graduate programs in clinical, counseling, or school psychology experience stressors which are unique to these programs. Pope & Wedding (2008, as cited in Wedding et al.) stated international students often have cultural values that conflict with those of the clients they treat and it may be difficult for them to empathize with the problems their clients bring to the counseling encounter. If the international student has been raised in a culture that emphasizes, status, caste, and hierarchical relationships, some theoretical orientations based on notions of equality of therapist and client may be uncomfortable.

#### Psychological Challenges

Chiu (1995, as cited in Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008) stated, 'difficulties in adapting to the new environment have been known to interfere with the academic success and overall well-being of international students'. Cemalcilar & Falbo conducted a study at the University of Texas at Austin during the 2002-2003 academic years. The objective of their study was to see psychological differences between students before they come to the states and three months after. In the pretransition phase, they selected 1,000 students and invited them to do an on line survey. Two hundred and sixteen students responded in their home countries. After three months, those same students were contacted again. Their findings were consistent with those from previous research which suggested that international transition can be psychologically challenging, even for those with substantial host culture language skills. After the three months, these students experienced significant declines in their well being. At the same time, their results showed that students had significantly increased their identification with their new culture while retaining normal levels of identification with their home culture. Their study suggested that the first 4

months of the transition for international students can be socially and psychologically challenging. Therefore the need for effective orientation and support programs are warranted.

#### Acculturation and Discrimination

Acculturation and discrimination may also influence how satisfying international students find their academic experience in the United States. Chen (2000, as cited in Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung 2008) stated adaptation to their new environment is important to international students' academic success. International students often experience culture shock or disorientation to the norms and practices of the host culture. Chen stated that in order to pursue their academic goals, international students must overcome culture shock and adapt to the American cultural scene, which includes the American academic system. For students to ease their transition into American classrooms, students need to grasp the English language, and slang, by having contact with American students and friends. Lindermann (2005, as cited in Wadsworth et al.) found that American students oftentimes hold a negative bias towards international students' English proficiency. This can be viewed as discrimination by international students. Other research has found that international students who experience or perceive discrimination from American students are likely to have negative outcomes such as depression.

Beery, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen (1992, as cited in Wadsworth, et al.) indicated "acculturation involves the community and individual level changes that occur when two cultures come into contact with each other. It can occur at the borders and includes immigrants as well as sojourners." Acculturation is not an easy process. While adapting to a new culture, people experience different types of stressors resulting from personal, demographic, or social makeup of an acculturating individual and a host culture. There are barriers such as discrimination, homesickness, fear, guilt, and perceived racism. While some or all of these

factors can threaten international students' educational success, perceived discrimination based upon race, or ethnicity is central to health well being. (Harrell 2000, as cited in Wadsworth, et al).

### Language Barriers

In the study by Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung it was noted that many international students' problematic experiences in communication with Americans is a direct result of cultural and language barriers. International students that have been in the states for awhile and were proficient in English may be more confident in communication with Americans. Students that are new to the states have challenges that experienced students have surpassed. Berry (2003, as cited in Wadsworth et. al) indicated, as a result, the acculturation process is likely to be related to identity and identity gaps. When an individual becomes acculturated to a new culture, his/her identity begins to encompass the new culture. The reverse can happen with students that perceive discrimination from American students. It can influence their well being and their interactions with Americans and affect their own self worth.

### Self-Esteem

Al-Sharideh & Goe (1998) took their study further by examining factors that influence personal adjustment of international students in American schools. Their study focused on adjustment as a process by which psychological distress is avoided or overcome. One aspect for the well being of a student is self esteem. Al-Sharideh & Goe stated, 'thus the development of strong ties with Americans should be positively associated with the self-esteem of international students as the emotional gratification, security, and greater competency in meeting life needs facilitated by these ties should promote a positive self-attitude'. Despite possible benefits, previous research showed there are some students who choose not to assimilate into American

culture. Tierney (1992, as cited in Al-Sharideh & Goe) contends that American universities and colleges reflect, promote, and reinforce the culture of the dominant society. Therefore, upon entry to the American university, members of other racial or ethnic groups undergo a disruptive cultural experience as they must deal with a different cultural frame of reference. Looking at this strategy, Sewell and Davidson (1956 as cited in Al-Sharideh & Goe) identified the detached observer pattern of adjustment. International students following this pattern of adjustment exhibit no desire to involve themselves socially or emotionally in the life of the host country. These students perceive their duration of stay in the host country to be short and they prefer not to associate themselves with Americans. These students satisfy their need for social interaction among fellow students of their own nationality.

The outcome of their study revealed several findings. First, the participation of students in their own ethnic communities is imperative to the development of high self esteem. That in itself was not too surprising since people are usually comfortable with people that are similar to them. Second, international students who develop strong ties with other nationals at American universities are faced with the issue of balancing life with two different social contexts. They are required to interact with people of their same cultural background. Then, they are required to socialize with Americans, perform their academic work, and meet some essential personal needs such as, purchase food, and manage finances within the context of American culture. How all of this comes together is through resiliency in the adjustment of international students. That is an area that some come by naturally and others have to learn. It becomes a balancing act for students dealing with all the challenges facing them and finding within themselves to stay motivated and focused.

## Resiliency

Wang (2009) states, ' in their adjustment, international graduate students, coming from quite different cultures and circumstances, face many changes in many aspects of their lives, such as geographical location, weather conditions, food, language, behaviors and values, social interactions, and educational systems. Therefore, the critical task of adjustment is to cope with these changes. Conner (1993, as cited in Wang) indicated that the concept of resiliency was fundamental for people dealing successfully with change.

In Wang's study other research has suggested that adjustment of international students was influenced by their parents' educational background. It might appear that students that come from prominent well educated families were better adapted to American society. Hull (1978, as cited in Wang) hypothesized that students from urban areas adjusted better than rural students yet could not determine the effect of the variable on adjustment. Adjustment is a change process, and resilience characteristics are personal abilities to cope with change, resilience characteristics may provide an overall framework for personality variables. Ting-Toomey (1999, as cited in Wang) discussed individual motivations are related with being focused. Students who voluntarily moved to another culture adjusted better than those who were moved involuntarily. In other words, people were motivated to succeed when they came of their own accord socially and academically. There is room for debate on that issue. Generally speaking, university personnel would like to think that the idea of attending schools in the United States was the idea of the student. The reality is in the patriarch and collective societies' decisions are made for what is best for families and most students will do as they are told. The possible extra burden of going someplace not chosen by the student coupled with many adjustments to a new culture can be overwhelming for some. That is why it is important for international students to have support

systems to help them with various issues they will face while at school. Another area of adjustment that international students face is the culture shock.

### Culture Shock

The transition from one culture to another can offer a mixture of emotions. When individuals travel from a culture that is vastly different from where they came from there is a host of issues they are greeted with. There may be a feeling of loss or disorientation precipitated by a change in one's familiar environment that requires adjustments. Some issues that were addressed in the study by McLachlan & Justice were:

*Food differences-* Participants talked about their need to adjust to food differences in the United States, especially large food portions common to America. Many developed a preference for hamburgers and pizza. Some students reported weight gain. Some students chose to cook foods from their own countries and in doing so helped with the feeling of homesickness.

*Weather differences-* All participants spoke about the discomfort especially in the summer months in the states. Several students indicated the severity of heat in the summer months while others felt positive about the climate with the lack of pollution and dust.

*Loneliness-* Many students felt lonely and having to deal with those feelings can be emotionally draining. Some students never had to experience that since in their own countries there were surrounded with extended family members. The use of email, telephones, and webcam offered some comfort in maintaining communication back home.

*Surrogate Family-* All of the students surveyed described how they created a new social support system. Establishing a surrogate family is a critical step for students to have some stability in their lives. Five participants reported attending church as a way to make friends and practice English.

## Cultural Assimilation

Another important area that students deal with is whether or not they assimilate and how much. An immigrant is assimilated as soon as he has shown that he can survive in the country. This means the immigrant has adapted to the lifestyle and cultural conditions of the host nation. This includes the development of a basic proficiency in the language of the host nation as well as the basic level of knowledge of native customs and values. Al-Sharideh & Goe stated assimilation of American culture would facilitate the competency of an international student in meeting academic demands and personal life needs. The student would have a deeper understanding of the social expectations of professors and fellow American students, gain more from in class experiences, and are better able to communicate and demonstrate their academic ability.

Many aspects of life in America require international students to interact with those outside their own culture both in and out of the academic arena. The students will interact with professors, other students, and university personnel. Further, they must also interact with Americans during social activities such as shopping, banking, and recreation. Having social contact with Americans gives international students the opportunities to observe and evaluate thereby leading to deeper understanding and appreciation of the host culture. In reverse, it is the hope that Americans in their observations and interactions will also walk away with more positive attitudes towards the international students.

Despite the obvious benefits previous research indicated that international students may choose not to assimilate. In other words, they may choose not to conform to the integrationist model (Tierney, 1992 as cited in Al-Sharideh & Goe) where international students become socially integrated into the American institution. American colleges and universities reflect,

promote, and reinforce the culture of the dominant society (i.e., the culture of white Americans). Therefore, members of other racial or ethnic groups undergo a disruptive cultural experience as they deal with a different cultural frame of reference. The decision not to acculturate may result in alternative behavioral norms among international students.

Reflecting this strategy, Sewell and Davidson (1956, cited in Al-Sharideh & Goe) identified the detached observer pattern of adjustment. International students following this pattern of adjustment exhibit no desire to involve themselves socially or emotionally in the life of the host nation. These students perceive their duration of stay in the host nation to be short and they prefer not to associate themselves with Americans. To satisfy their social needs, these students tend to seek companionship among other students of their own nationality. Sewell and Davidson (1956, cited in Al-Sharideh & Goe) reported that international students in this category do not tend to encounter severe adjustment problems, either in the host country, or upon their return to their home countries, because they do not lose their identity with the home country and have limited participation in American life.

Even though students who chose not to assimilate establish social relationships with others of the same nationality, it is noted that the type of social relationship may best facilitate the adjustment process. International students from a common background can form the potential of an ethnic community within the university. Al-Sharideh & Goe indicated that a student's network of strong ties with the ethnic community would be utilized as means of social support and as a means of help in dealing with problems that may arise with the American social environment. There is one area that can help in the understanding of cultures. Allowing students to go outside of their own culture and learn about other cultures is Intercultural education.

## Intercultural Education

Intercultural and international educations are widely perceived as desirable. It is acknowledged that in an interconnected and globalized world, the importance of international education lies in personal enrichment, and in the attainment of intercultural competencies. Cushner (1998, Khoi, 1994, as cited in Breuning, 2007) indicated” intercultural competencies are defined by the ability to see both unique aspects of cultures as well as commonalities between them”.

### Study Abroad vs. Study in America

Breuning stated that frequent discussions on internationalizing higher education treat international students in the US and American students studying abroad separately. The literature on international students devotes much attention to adjustment issues. On the other hand, the literature on study abroad devotes much attention to the initiation, maintenance, and justification of such programs. That concept should not be that way. Once a student ventures outside their country they are considered part of a different culture. Therefore, the distinctions made between students coming here versus Americans going overseas are not logical.

Despite the importance of intercultural competencies for a diverse society such as America, discussion of the attainment of such competencies remains largely focused on study abroad. The personal experience of traveling to, or living in another country is of great value. The reality is too often the opportunity to experience other cultures is limited to those can afford it. Therefore, study abroad must be complemented with other strategies.

Breuning stated the benefits of incorporating international students into efforts to enhance the intercultural competencies of their American peers accrue to both parties. The latter gains insight into other cultures, a deeper understanding of their own culture, and may become

interested in study or travel overseas. The former gains opportunities for social interaction with their American peers.

Greengard states, the growth of international studies has opened up an entire world of opportunities. Chinese or Argentinean students may travel to Germany to receive advance instruction in mathematics; American or Russian students may venture to New Zealand to receive an education in volcanology. As increasing numbers of schools introduce joint programs and many institutions turn to U.S. accreditation organizations to gain international acceptance and stature the playing field is leveling out.

The situation is changing for the better. Greengard in his article indicated that media plays a huge role. The Internet has the ability to link people and course content. Social networking such as Facebook and Skype make it possible for international students to stay in touch with family and friends. Schools can link programs to one another and create a seamless learning experience.

#### Promoting Intercultural Education

Trice (2004, as cited in Breuning), stated factors that influence whether international students are more or less likely to interact with American students are not only the strength of their English language skills, or the size of the group of co-nationals on campus, but also the perceived cultural distance. Overall, Trice (2004) concluded that few international students spent any quality time with Americans. Chapedelaine & Alexitch (2004, as cited in Breuning) advocate the creation of programs that encourage such interaction. Programs of that nature require the cooperation of students and it is not known how willing international students are to serve as intercultural educators.

In the study done by Breuning, undergraduate international students were surveyed at a small, primarily undergraduate liberal arts university in the Midwest. It was designed to investigate the similarities and differences between undergraduate and graduate international students. The survey sought to establish whether, and in what ways undergraduate students were willing to contribute to the intercultural education of their American peers. Most international students (80%) saw themselves as unofficial ambassadors for their country. Students from Africa perceived themselves in that way more than students from Asia or Europe. The survey found that 78.7% of the students were involved with at least one student organization. The data did not tell whether international students socialize more with American students as a result of joining these organizations. Being part of the organizations that included American students may facilitate more extensive socializing with them, but it was not the only available way to make friends with Americans. Despite these opportunities, 46.7% of the respondents indicated that they would like to count more American students among their friends.

The issue of helping to educate American students and enhance their international and intercultural knowledge was met with enthusiasm. Most students (81.7%) preferred sharing their heritage through student led events. These were events organized by international students with a role for faculty or administrative advisors. One example cited was the African Student Organization called Sights and Sounds of Africa that included skits, dances, and traditional fashions and concluded with a meal of African foods. Other options included public speaking to either a campus wide audience, a classroom, or in a high school. The undergraduate international students were willing to share their cultures and do so with events they organized. The student led events would be complemented with educational efforts to foster reflection and comparison and to attain the full benefit of intercultural learning. Of course, this would require

the commitment of the university's faculty and administration to attain. The outcome can be rewarding on both ends with the enhancement of diversity and intercultural learning.

Deakins (2009) did research in the area of helping students value cultural diversity through research based teaching. His study centered on international students attending schools in New Zealand (NZ). Some of the same issues appeared in his study as previous studies done about schools in the United States. International students expressed a desire for, and an expectation of, greater contact with their domestic peers, yet a recent New Zealand study confirmed a tendency to spend most time with others from their home country. Ward & Nasgoret (2004, as cited in Deakins) indicated that 24% of international students indicated that they never spent social time with NZ friends and 47% said that they never study with NZ students. The New Zealand government is aware of the issue and recognizes that interventionist strategies need to be introduced to promote more and better intercultural understanding (MoE, 2007, cited in Deakins). On the other hand, Deakins' study noted that well intentioned attempts to value cultural diversity can often attract negative reactions from participants.

The NZ Education Act requires that every university student shall be encouraged to become intellectually independent, irrespective of their nationality. Knowing that with the increase of international students studying in New Zealand between 2000, and 2005 it would be expected that courses designed for a domestic audience would be remodeled to address process and content objectives that would take into account the cultural diversity of all the participants. However, evidence suggests that educators may be continuing to miss valuable opportunities to internationalize curricula (Ward, 2001; Ward & Masgoret, 2004, cited in Deakins).

## Valuing Cultural Diversity

The potential for international students to change both the content and process of education has shown the need for cultural diversity training to enhance intercultural communication. Training has frequently been based on differences such as whether the training is aimed at knowledge, attitudes or behaviors, or based on differences of content such as racism, or multicultural understanding.

Biggs (2003, as cited in Deakins) was of the firm view that rather than attempt to assimilate 'different' students into the host culture have teachers accommodate perceived student differences. An inclusive teaching model is needed that focuses on the similarities between students. The contextual approach (Volet & Renshaw, 1996 as cited in Deakins) recognizes that, while international students undoubtedly will have special needs with regard to provision for language and social support, it is not necessary to discriminate further because both sets need to adapt from a context of a teacher directed culture to a self directed university culture. Out of the required courses that students around the world have to take why can't there be one on multicultural diversity? Salvadori (1997, cited in Deakins) states that achievement of multicultural education will only be valid when something changes in the culture of both the classroom body of students and the teacher so that a common culture is created that is different from the original cultures of both.

Through the continued migration of students attending schools abroad it is in the interest of the host nations and students to learn more about the cultures, customs and values international students bring to their temporary homes. Having courses in cultural diversity as a requirement could help to diffuse some biases and preconceived notions cultures have about each other.

## Discussion

International students come to the United States or other locations in search of higher education to meet career goals and a different life experience, which they hope will fulfill their aspirations and dreams. Anyone who wants to experience life outside their norm will be faced with challenges some foreseen, others not. Promoting intercultural and multicultural relationships can be achieved through various programs such as Study Abroad. The point of traveling overseas is to embrace a new culture, broaden one's life journey, and appreciate each other differences.

In order for students to feel comfortable and welcomed in their new environment it is imperative students are given information and support to make their transition smoother. When students prepare to come overseas for school they have resources to look at to gather certain information about the school and surrounding area they will be living in. Yes, former students that are friends or family can provide a wealth of information. One must realize the experiences of those who have gone before will not be the same. This gives new students some insight but not the complete picture that they have to experience themselves.

International students comprise a special population that provides unique challenges for the host universities and the communities they serve. International students encompass as much or more diversity among different nationalities and ethnic/religious identities as between them and domestic students. International students must deal with the typical stressors of academic life as well as culture shock and living in a society where they are intensely scrutinized. These environmental constraints may inhibit the development of trusting relationships with their teachers, advisors and counselors. Success or failure in their academic programs carries special risks. Academic dismissal means not only dismissal from a prized degree program but also

violation of the conditions of one's legal presence in the United States. The student may face returning to the home country as a failure that has shamed their family.

Having a strong support system is critical in the development of self-esteem and psychological well being of these students. Support can come from a variety of sources such as students from the same cultural background, host students, student organizations, mentors, counselors and university personnel. The point is support needs to be there and not just short term. The development of a balanced network of strong ties with both foreigners and Americans is likely to provide a social context that will serve to promote a well rounded experience for international students and facilitate their personal life in American universities.

## CHAPTER THREE

The purpose of the method used in this project serves to bring reflective answers from international students. It is through the process of a questionnaire and essays that the issues addressed in this project can provide first hand experiences and solutions from the students and their opinions. This section is separated by four areas: planning the questions, working with university personnel, possible questions, and gathering final results.

### Planning the Questions

The purpose of doing a questionnaire versus face to face interviews was decided in the interest of time, and availability of students. At the time the questionnaire is given students will be attending classes and studying. The time constraints and logistics in gathering students to do interviews would not be feasible. In planning the questionnaire the first thought is to design the questions that would be unbiased and give students a chance to voice their own concerns. The questionnaire is designed to give students the liberty to be open and honest by not asking for personal information. It is designed to give them the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences. Their help in offering suggestions would be beneficial for future international students, and the university community. That is what the questionnaire is seeking to do.

The need to be respectful of their time is critical to ensure some measure of success and making sure the questions are not overly complex will also help with that issue. The questionnaire is a measurement that will be used to format some recommendations to university personnel that can help them develop new programs and/or enhance those programs already in place. The measure of what students are really thinking comes in the free flow essay section.

They can be free to convey what they feel about life in the states, and their academic and social experiences.

### University Personnel

Contacting university personnel to obtain permission to administer the questionnaire is equally important to the success of this project. There are two schools within the Chicago land area that are being considered for this project. One is Oakton Community College that offers programs in English as a second language and Literacy for foreign students. Currently, I am a volunteer tutor for The VITA program in Literacy at this community college. I have already been in touch with the Program Director about my project. The other school is Northwestern University. I have been in contact with the Director in the International Office at Northwestern. He has advised to submit a proposal, and the questionnaire to their IRB board for approval. Oakton Community College has not advised what is needed for them to approve the questionnaire at this time. With every plan, there needs to be options in the event the project is declined by a school. The other possible university is my Alma Mater, University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana. Over the summer, I have been in contact with the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. Finding out what each school requires for submission before their approval needs to be done immediately, due to time constraints.

Another issue that has to be looked at is how the dissemination of the questionnaires should be handled, and what timeframe should be given to the students to return the questionnaires. First option is to provide the questionnaire through emails with the cooperation of the contact personnel at each school. The students could answer the questions and submit them back either to an email set up to receive them or through a designated email that the schools set up. In addition, the questionnaire will be set up with an explanation describing the project

and why the students' opinions are valued so they are aware of why they are being asked to participate in the project. With this issue, it is important to have the input and expertise of the schools.

### Questions for the Project

These are questions that have been put together that could be part of the questionnaire. The questions are preliminary and can be changed based on input from others. The result of putting everything together is my responsibility; therefore it is important the questions are clear and valid to the project being developed.

# International Questionnaire



Place a check mark next to your answers

**1. How did you learn about Western culture while in your country?**

Television\_\_\_ Internet\_\_\_ Friends who lived overseas\_\_\_ your schools\_\_\_

**2. What was your opinion of Western culture before coming to America?**

Positive\_\_\_ Negative\_\_\_ Did not have enough information to make an opinion\_\_\_

**3. Did you feel you were prepared to deal with Western culture and would be able to adapt?**

Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Not sure what to expect\_\_\_

**4. What were your reasons for coming to America?**

Get an education and return home\_\_\_ Get an education and stay\_\_\_

**5. Did you feel your level of the English language was sufficient to deal with everyday life?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Planned on taking more English classes when got to America \_\_\_\_\_

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**6. Did the school in America provide a welcome orientation session when you started?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Did the orientation session deal with topics in social habits or was it strictly academic?**

Both \_\_\_\_\_ Academic only \_\_\_\_\_ never got orientation \_\_\_\_\_

**8. How did you learn about adjusting to social and academic life in America?**

Other students \_\_\_\_\_ Family members/friends that live here \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers \_\_\_\_\_

**9. What areas of living in America did you have difficulty with?**

Social \_\_\_\_\_ Academic \_\_\_\_\_ Both \_\_\_\_\_ had no problems adjusting \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Were you provided written information that included social and academic issues you needed to know in order to make your transition easy?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ provided academic info only \_\_\_\_\_

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**11. Does your school provide a mentoring program? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_**

**12. Do you feel comfortable talking to your teacher if you have questions about school work?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**13. What would make your transition easier in America?**

School sponsored mentoring program \_\_\_\_\_ Orientation on social and academic issues \_\_\_\_\_

**14. Are your academic study habits and grades better when you embrace American culture?**

No difference \_\_\_\_\_ Better \_\_\_\_\_ Worse \_\_\_\_\_ Do not assimilate \_\_\_\_\_

**15. Do you find it easier to deal with your own ethnic group or are you able to deal with everyone in social and academic settings?**

Stay with my own culture \_\_\_\_\_ Deal with other cultures \_\_\_\_\_ Deal with both \_\_\_\_\_

**16. Do you have periods of psychological distress? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_**

Depression \_\_\_\_\_ Homesickness \_\_\_\_\_ Poor Grades \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of self-esteem \_\_\_\_\_ Fear \_\_\_\_\_  
 Racism \_\_\_\_\_ Sexism \_\_\_\_\_ Guilt \_\_\_\_\_

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**17. What do you feel would be beneficial to help someone adjust socially and academically in the states?**

**18. What programs work, or need improvements in your opinion?**

**19. What suggestions do you have that you feel would be helpful for incoming international students that the school should adapt?**

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Married \_\_\_\_\_ Single \_\_\_\_\_ Country of  
 origin \_\_\_\_\_ Associate \_\_\_\_\_ Undergraduate \_\_\_\_\_  
 Graduate \_\_\_\_\_ PH.D \_\_\_\_\_

### Gathering Results

The goal is to gather as much information and suggestions as possible from a good number of international students. Depending on the number of international students for each school will determine what is a good sample size. Once the information is gathered and processed, I need to make the information and the suggestions of the international students available in a recommendation letter to the participant schools. At this point the decision whether the results need to be broken down by country of origin, gender, graduate vs. undergraduate has not been decided. Personally, I am not convinced that type of breakdown matters in getting to the root issues of how university personnel can support international

students. In the end international students have some of the same concerns. Breaking down my results in those types of categories I wonder what purpose that serves. I realize most other research has been done that way, but I am looking at the international student body collectively. How their opinions can help define what is important to them in addition to helping the university is more important. The issue of where they come from and their ethnicity should not come into the equation. At this point the options are open. I will be looking to the schools to provide some input whether they feel category breakdown will be of importance to their programs. Some of this methodology is subject to changes the project moves further along in the process. Working through the results hopefully will offer some concrete ideas that will benefit the international students and their schools.

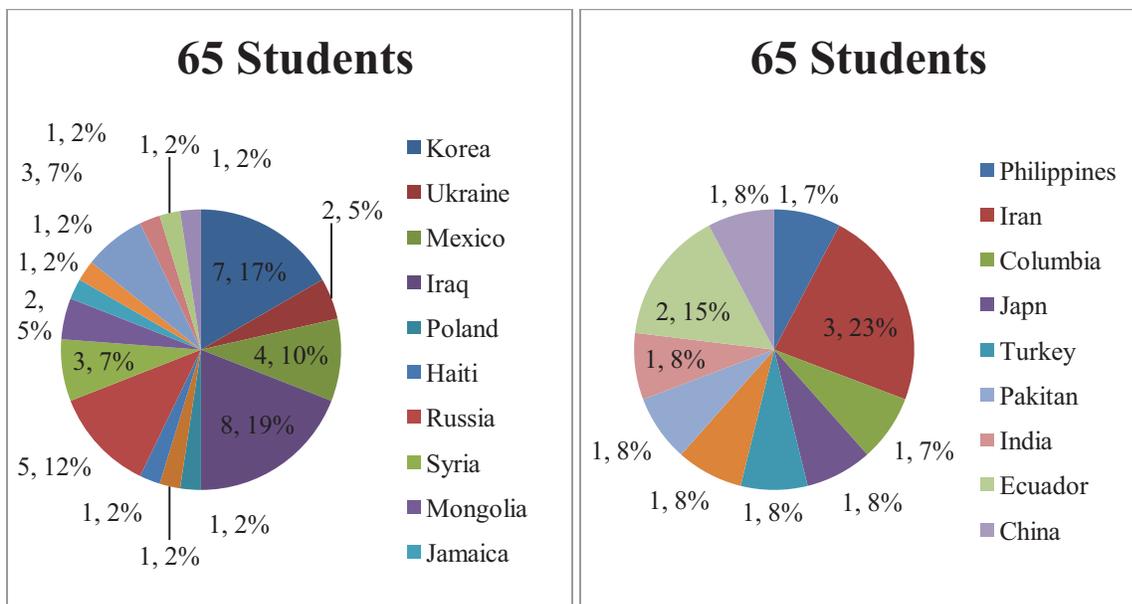
## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

Data was collected from a local community junior college in the Midwest. The international students were part of The VITA Program which involves learning ESL (English as a Second Language) and Literacy which involves English grammar, reading, and writing. Since I am a volunteer in the VITA Program, the questionnaire was submitted to the Director of the program. Upon discussion with the Director, it was decided that the questionnaire would be disseminated to the students in classrooms where it was deemed appropriate to allow students time to answer in class. The total number of respondents was sixty-five. Ten students did not specify if they were male or female. Of those that did, forty-five were female and ten were males. Forty-seven out of sixty-five students identified their country of origin. The number of students and countries that were represented were:

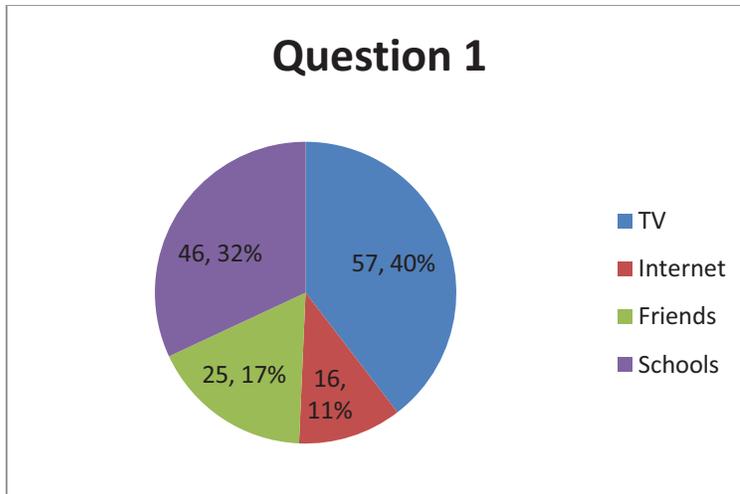
- 7 students from Korea,
- 2 students from Ukraine,
- 4 students from Mexico,
- 8 students from Iraq,
- 1 student from Poland,
- 1 student from Guatemala,
- 1 student from Haiti,
- 5 students from Russia,
- 3 students from Syria,
- 2 students from Mongolia,
- 1 student from Jamaica,
- 1 student from Philippines,
- 3 students from Iran,
- 1 student from Columbia,
- 1 student from Japan,
- 1 student from Turkey,
- 1 student from Pakistan,

- 1 student from India,
- 2 students from Ecuador,
- 1 student from China.



The purpose of the questionnaire was to find how some international students learned about Western culture, how life was upon arrival in America, how the social and academic aspects of life affected them, and what suggestions they have to improve or add international programs at their schools.

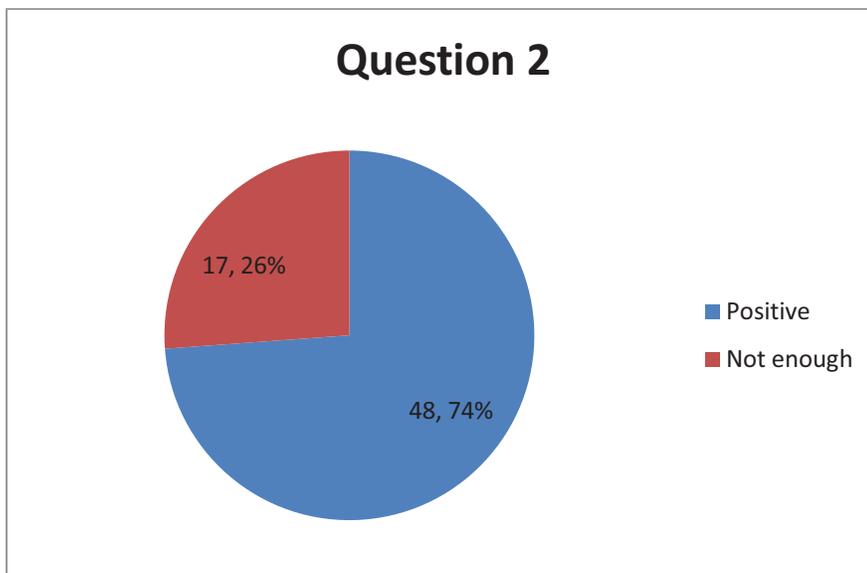
Question 1 asked, How did you learn about Western culture while in your country? Fifty-seven students indicated television, sixteen stated internet, twenty-five said friends and forty-six indicated schools in their countries. The numbers indicate some students picked more than one answer for this question. The data is represented in the following chart.



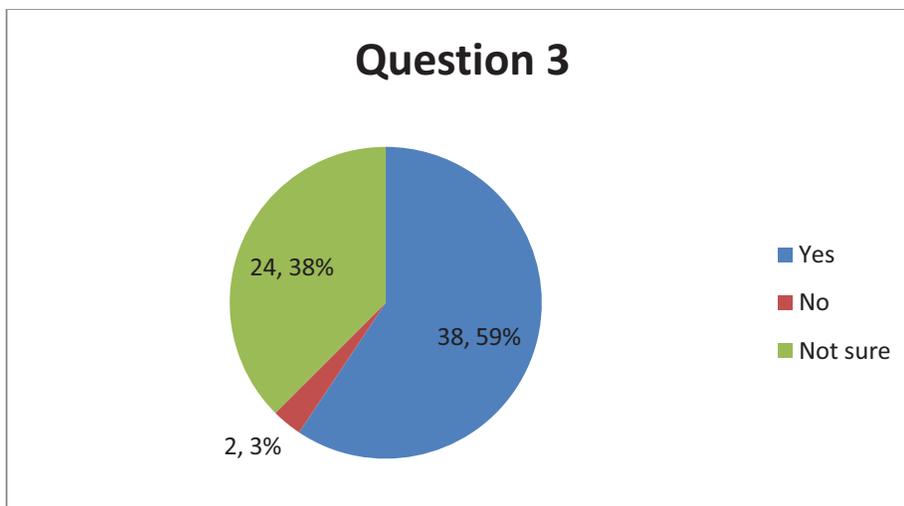
Question 2 asked, What was your opinion of Western culture before coming to America?

The choices were: positive, negative, or did not have enough information to form an opinion.

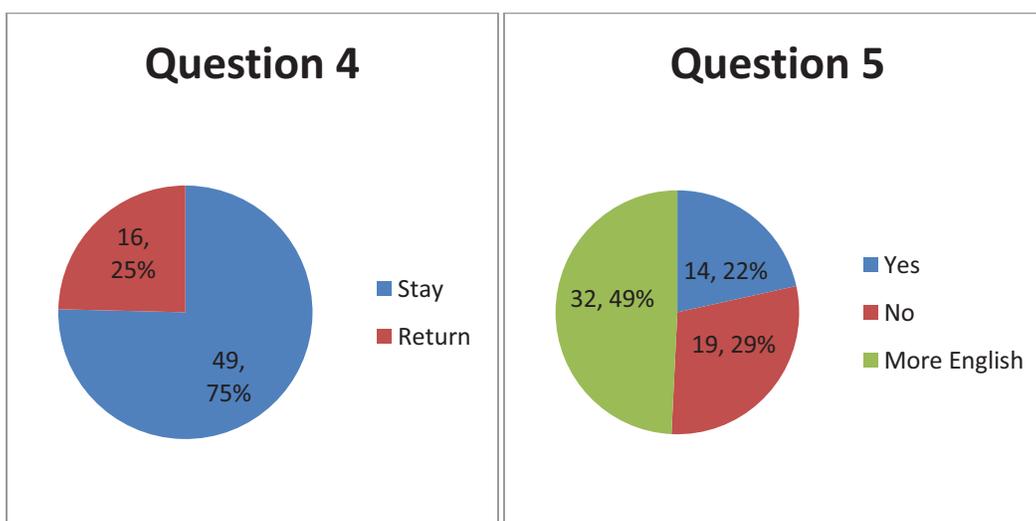
Forty-eight students answered positive and seventeen answered not enough information. The data for this question is represented in the chart below.



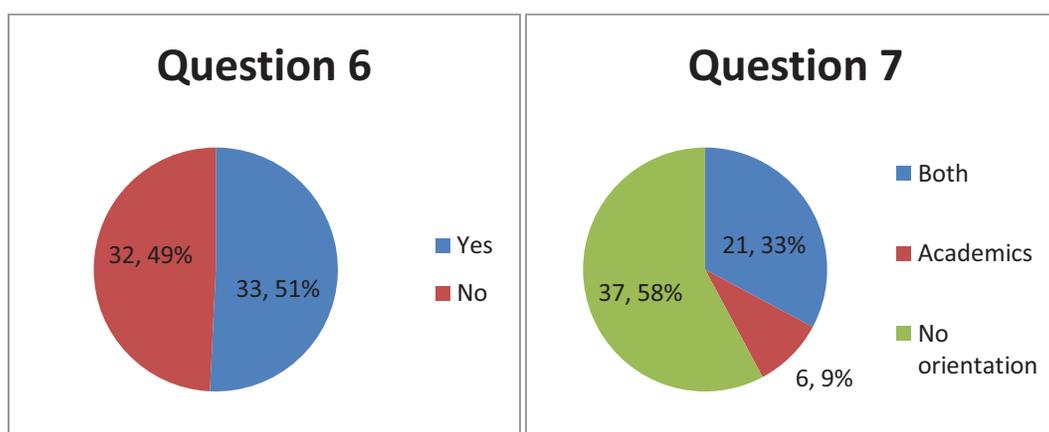
Question 3 asked, Did you feel you were prepared to deal with Western culture and would be able to adapt? Thirty-eight students answered yes, 2 answered no, and twenty four answered not sure what to expect.



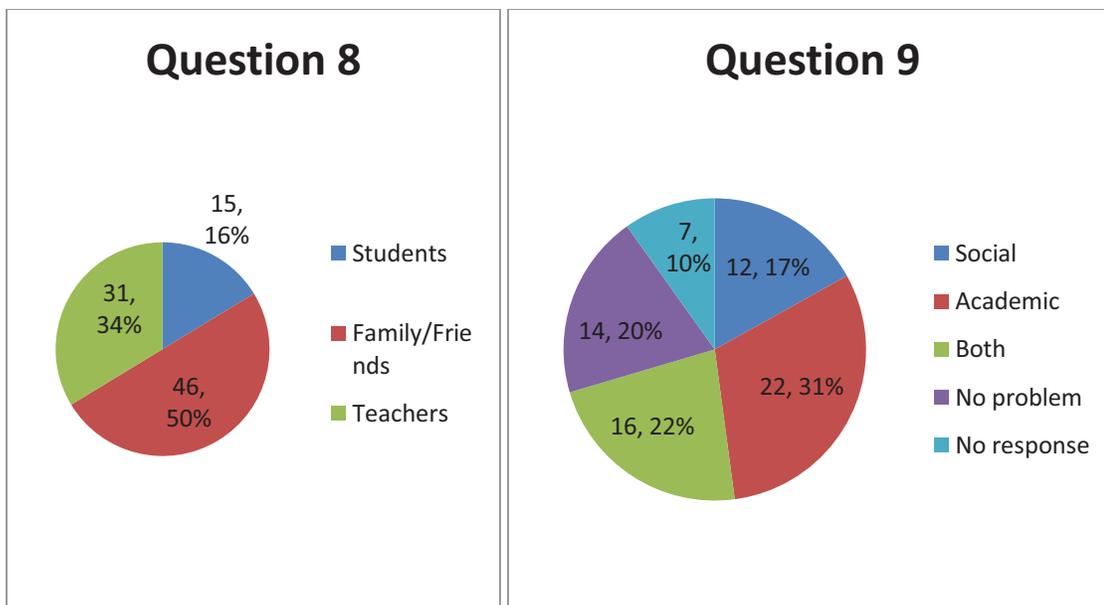
Question 4 looked to the reasons for coming to America. What were your reasons for coming to America? They could answer to get an education and return home, or get an education and stay. Sixteen students stated get an education and return home and forty-nine students were going to stay in America. For Question 5 there were more diverse answers. The question asked, Did you feel your level of the English language was sufficient to deal with everyday life? Fourteen students indicated yes, nineteen students indicated no and thirty-two students indicated they planned on taking more English classes while here.



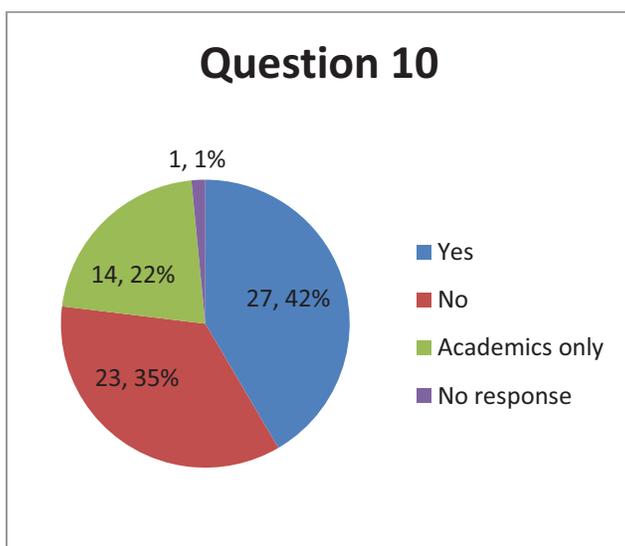
The next 5 questions dealt with the academic and social issues while attending school in America. Question 6 asked, Did the school in America provide a welcome orientation session when you started? Thirty-three students answered yes and thirty-two answered no. Regarding the orientation session, question 7 asked, Did the orientation session deal with topics in social habits or was it strictly academic? Twenty-one students checked yes to both (social and academic), 6 students answered academics only, and thirty seven students indicated they never received any type of orientation.



Question 8 asked, How did you learn about adjusting to social and academic life in America? Fifteen students indicated other students, forty six students indicated family/members/friends that live here, and thirty-one students indicated teachers. The high discrepancy in the numbers is due to some students checking more than one answer. Question 9 asked, What areas of living in America did you have difficulty with? Twelve students stated social, twenty-two stated academic, sixteen students indicated both and fourteen indicated no problem. Seven students did not respond to this question. The charts below show data for questions 7 and 8.

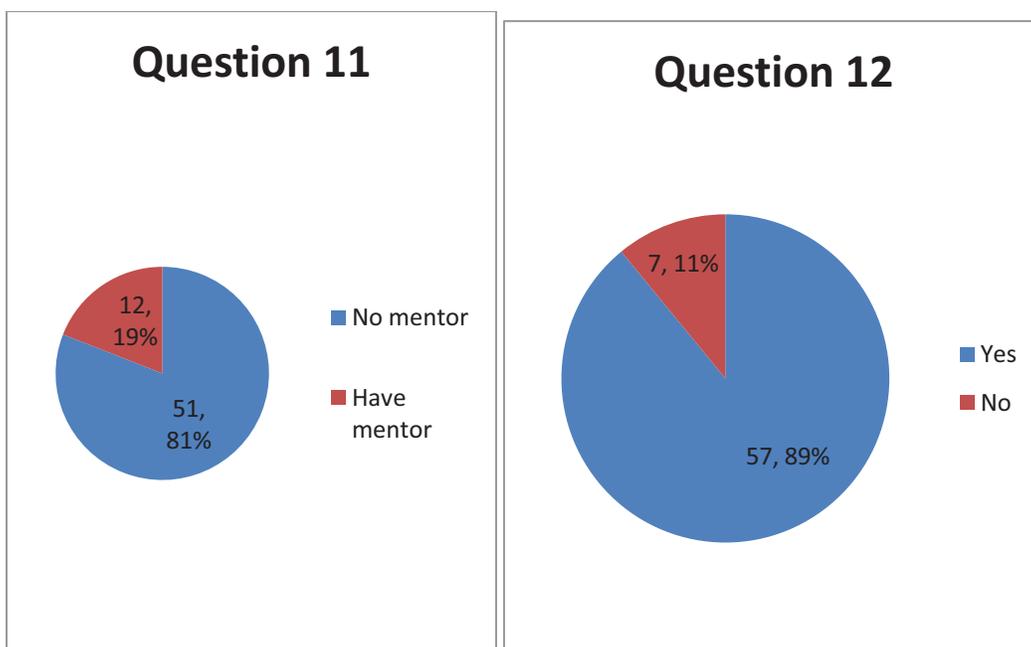


Question 10 asked, Were you provided written information that included social and academic issues you needed to know in order to make your transition easy? Twenty-seven students indicated yes, twenty- three indicated no, and fourteen indicated they were given academic information only. One person did not answer.

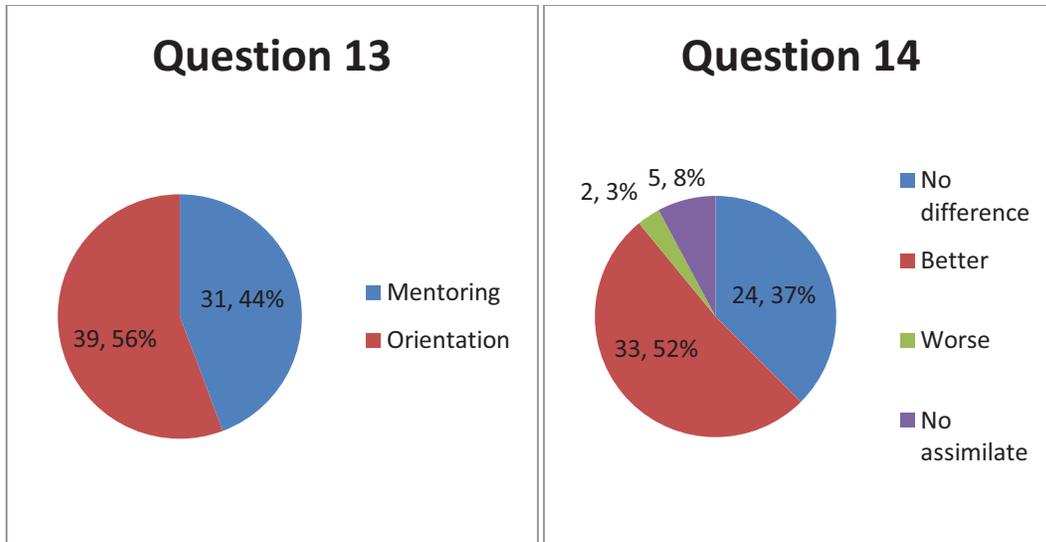


Questions eleven through sixteen covered mentoring programs, communication with teachers and their experiences with any psychological issues. Question eleven asked, Does your

school provide a mentoring program? The answers indicated that fifty- one students did not have a mentoring program at their school while twelve stated they do. Question twelve asked, Do you feel comfortable talking to your teacher if you have questions about school work? Fifty- seven stated yes while seven stated no.

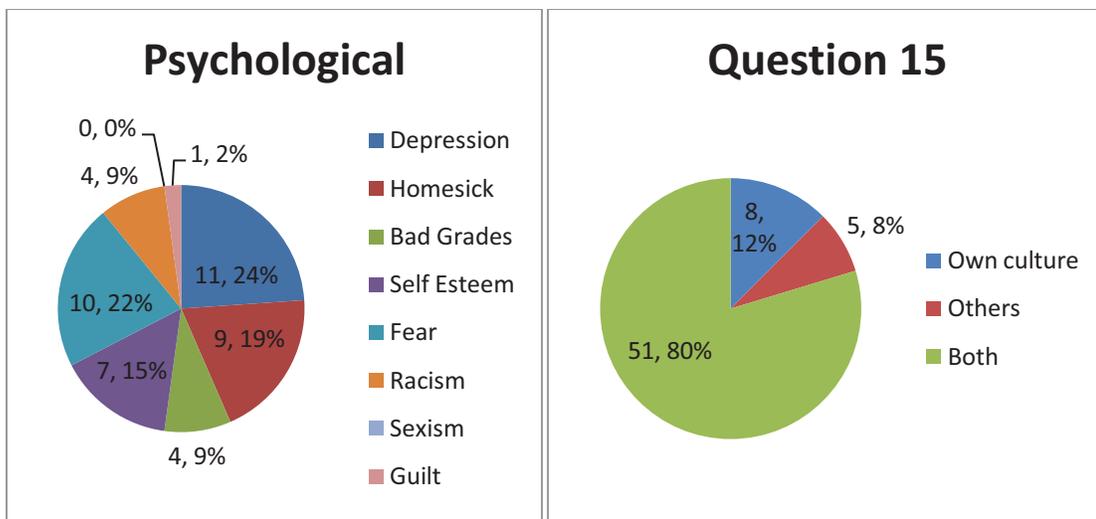


Question thirteen asked, What would make your transition easier in America? The choices were school mentoring program or orientation on social and academic issues. Thirty-one indicated mentoring program while thirty-nine indicated orientation session. Question fourteen asked, Are your academic study habits and grades better when you embrace American culture? Twenty-four students indicated no difference in their grades, thirty-three indicated their grades were better, two indicated their grades were worse and five students indicated they do not assimilate.



Question fifteen asked, Do you find it easier to deal with your own ethnic group or are you able to deal with everyone in social and academic settings? 9 students stayed within their own culture, 5 students dealt with other cultures only, fifty-one students deal with their culture and others. Question sixteen asked, Do you have periods of psychological distress? Twenty-one students indicated they did have periods of distress and forty-one indicated they did not. Out of those students who answered the areas are broken down below:

- Depression- Eleven students
- Homesickness- Nine students
- Grades- Four students
- Self-Esteem- Seven students
- Fear- Ten students
- Racism- Four students
- Sexism- Zero students
- Guilt- One student



The Psychological Chart shows the breakdown of what areas international students felt were common issues affecting them while in America. Out of the sixty-five students surveyed depression was the top reason for distress followed by fear and homesickness topping off the top three reasons for psychological distress.

Students were also given the task of offering opinions and suggestions on the current programs their school offers to help international students adjust. Their voices and concerns needed to be heard and the opportunity to state what they like or do not like about their academic situation was offered.

The question what do you feel would be beneficial to help someone adjust socially and academically in the states was answered in the following manner:

Make smaller groups. Male from Poland
Help in programs/certificates to get better job opportunities. Female from Guatemala
Learn English. Female from Haiti
I feel good and love to help the others. Female from Iraq
Teachers that speak the same language. Male from Mexico
Do jobs where they can speak English. Female from Mexico

There are numbers of teachers that expect a lot from international students just like American students. I wish they have knowledge about student's personalities etc. Female from Mongolia
I guess showing them how the American way of thinking is or making it easier for them to adjust. Female from Iraq raised in Turkey
If no one was discriminated against based off of one's accent or physical attributes. Male from Mexico
To have peers who speak the same language so they can explain things thoroughly. Female from Philippines
I will be very happy to help somebody else. I feel it is very useful. Female from Ecuador
Information from teachers about American culture. Female from China
Try to communicate with everyone. Feel free to talk. Female from India
Give good teachers and more free classes. Female from Pakistan
I think it would be good to have mentoring program. Female from Turkey
More classes for free or low price. Female from Japan
Participating in free English class and learning from teachers and classmates. Female from Iran
To improve the English, study and have degree. Female from Iran
Some orientation programs with promotion, easier to find. Female from Mexico
It's interesting to be helpful to another. Female from Korea
I would suggest that English classes are most important to adjust in American culture. Male from Korea

What programs work or need improvements? Responses were:

The English classes work for the foreigner to have involvement in social and academics in American life. Male from Korea
Reading and writing work needs improvement. Female from Korea
I think we need mentoring program or second language program. Female from Iran
Immigrants programs. Female from Mexico

English classes and most of these classes are helpful. Female from Iran
More help with the language. Female from Syria
A good program that worked very well for me was the writing free class, but it could be better. Female from Colombia
Make study for ESL class better and give better information. Male from Mexico
Citizenship and culture classes. Female from India
Social events with Americans. Female from Korea
ESL and reading classes. Female from China
Conversation classes in order to connect. Female from Iran
Academic speaking and business for getting a job and communicating with others who speak English very well. Female from Japan
More classes with less students. Female from Turkey
Free writing classes. Female from Pakistan
No, I do not think so. Female from India
More information from every teacher about social American culture. Female from India
In my opinion reading and writing is working well, but I need to improve a lot of this more especially vocabulary and pronunciation. Female from Ecuador
I need practice on my pronunciation maybe one on one. Male from Ecuador
In my opinion, ESL program is very helpful to us and it needs to continue. Female from China
Just learn English very well. Female from Iraq
ESL programs work. Female from Philippines
I would say creating more anti defamation organizations and advocating equality. Male from Mexico
The ESL program helps but not so much in getting the person to fit in with American kids. Female from Iraq raised in Turkey
International students engagement. Female from Mongolia
Teachers do a lot but students make culture difficult which makes us step back. Female from Mexico

Well need more programs for free or low cost. Am not aware if there are programs. Male from Mexico
I don't know about any programs but I hope there are programs for the people that came from another culture that we can share our culture with others. Female from Iraq
I have English programs. I do not have more programs. Female from Mongolia
Second language classes. It helped me to learn English very well. Male from Syria
English classes. female from Mexico
More free conversation classes to give opportunity to practice language especially for the beginning of education. Male from Poland

The last question asked on the questionnaire: What suggestions do you have that you feel would be helpful for incoming international students that the school should adapt? This question gave the opportunity for students to think of what they have been through and what really would help make a difference in helping those who have not come to America yet for their education.

The students responded in the following manner:

More cultural sensitive classes. Female from Guatemala
International teachers. Female from Haiti
Support staff needs to be more culturally sensitive. Male from Poland
Orientation program and more free English and conversation classes. Female from Mexico
Open clubs about Middle East countries. Male from Syria
Any program that can help the new incoming to help them adjust to their life. Female from Iraq
More counselors to tell you what you need to do or what classes to take that speak same language and ready to help in what you need tell you step by step. More people to help us in any questions we have. Male from Mexico
Everything is fine. It's just we need to go for it then only can we face Western people. Female from China

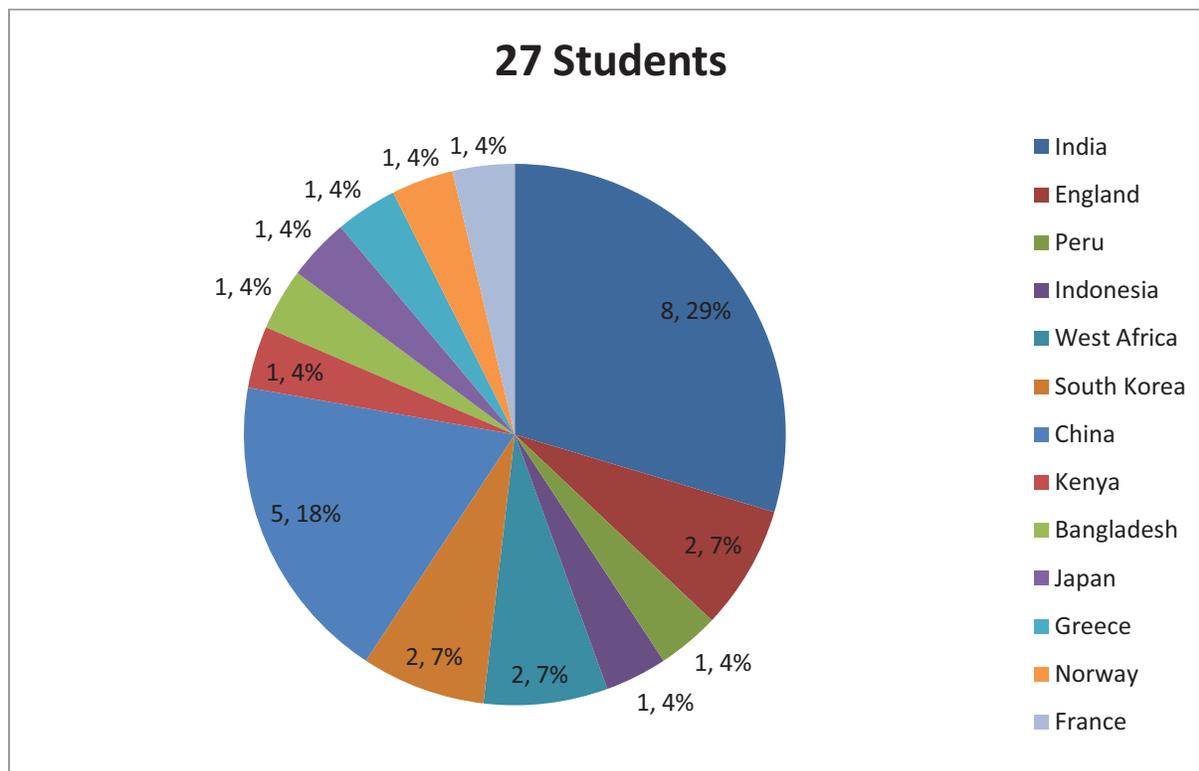
Show the students American lifestyles, their beliefs and what is accepted in true American society and what is not. Female from Iraq raised in Turkey
Really advocating the importance in making everyone feel accepted regarding ethnicity or race. Male from Mexico
To encourage them to join a club because it will help them adapt to social skills. Female from Philippines
It is necessary they arrive with a good knowledge of English. Male from Ecuador
First of all I will suggest to them study English, encourage yourself to take writing and reading classes right away, don't be afraid to speak out, watch TV in English. Talk with the people around you don't be shy. Follow this suggestion and you will become success. By other hands I think this school is providing very interesting English classes that everyone improved their English. Female from Ecuador
Find out more information about social life, it will help to adapt faster. Female from China
Those who are weak in English, first take free English classes to improve your English and then go join the college for higher studies. Free classes will help a lot. Female from India
When they come to USA first pass TESL class, learn to drive and take more English. Female from Pakistan
I think that international students feel anxious about adapting to this country and they need a person who gives them information about the U.S. Female from Japan
I would be helpful for incoming international students, like I can give them information from my own experience about my school, my work and how I came here if they contacted me. Female from India
I think they try to join American party or social group of Americans and talking with American students. Female from Korea
Give them more support. Female from China
More information about non native speakers. English classes with credits. In my case I had no idea about theses classes, I just knew about ESL classes, first time when I came to Oakton so I decided to start in other school and then I moved here this semester. Female from Colombia
I wish you had more programs to help second language students. Female from Syria

We need some extra English classes and other classes to improve our skills in job opportunities for example account classes. female from Iran
More interrelations and communication between international students that can interchange experiences. If you have something like that promote it! It's better when you know people who are in the same situation like you. Female from Mexico
They need some extra class for talking English that way we can become better in English language. Female from Iran
I suggest speak English with friend or family as much as possible. Listen to the radio and watching English TV. When you learn new vocabulary, speak loudly and repeat it. Female from Korea
For the incoming international students I would suggest that the more they learn English the easier you get in American life socially and academically as well. Male from Korea
Cultural orientation and more support programs for international students. Female from Mexico

The next set of data is from a Jesuit university in the Midwest offering undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees to students. Though the number of participants is lower than those received from students at the community junior college their invaluable insight, opinions, and suggestions given warranted their admission to this project. Twenty-seven students completed the questionnaire. The following countries were represented:

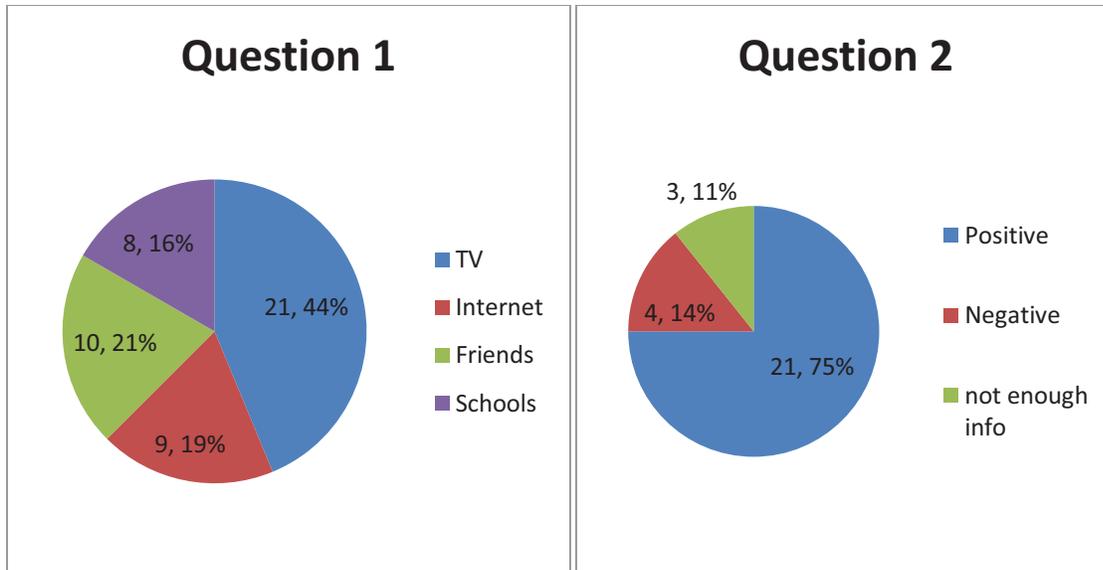
- 8 from India,
- 2 from England,
- 1 from Peru,
- 1 from Indonesia,
- 2 from West Africa,
- 2 from South Korea,
- 5 from China,
- 1 from Kenya,
- 1 from Bangladesh,
- 1 from Japan,
- 1 from Greece,
- 1 from Norway,

- 1 from France.

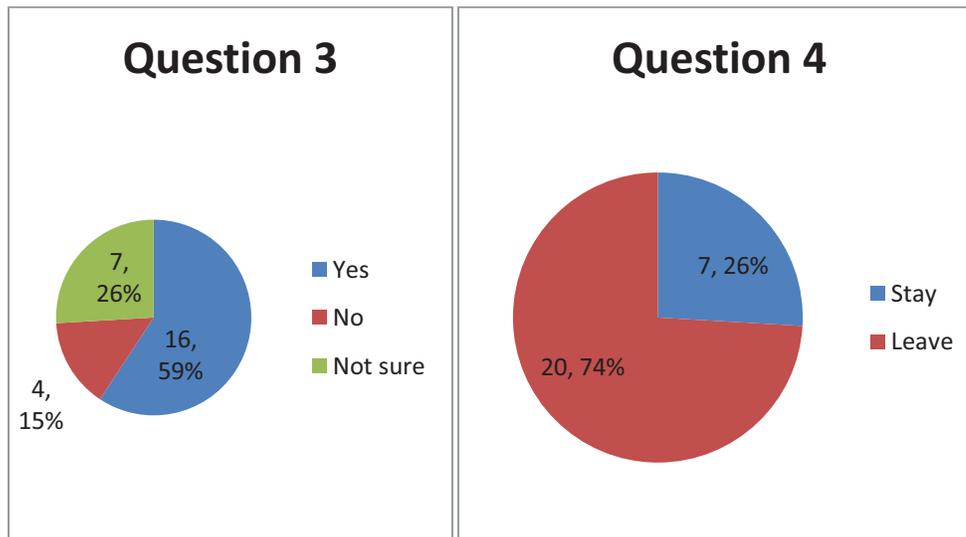


Some of the same answers that students answered at the community college were similar to the ones answered by students at the Jesuit university.

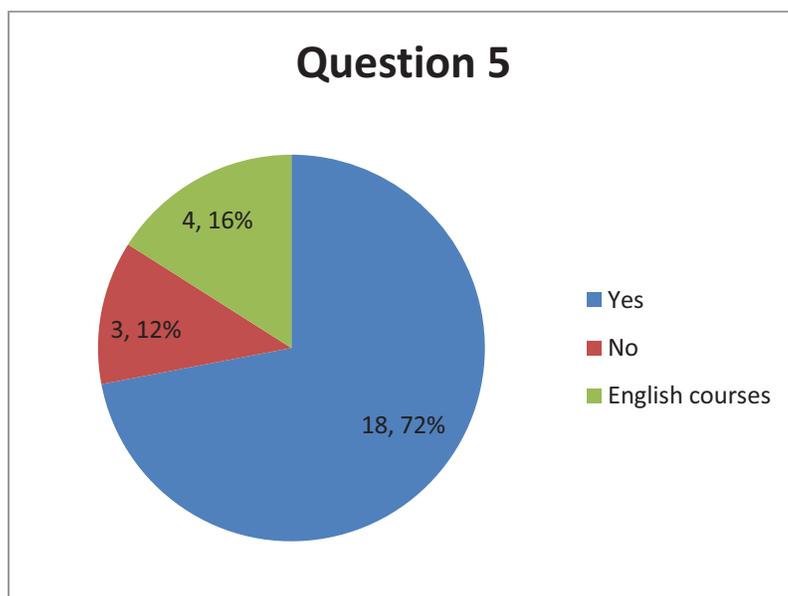
For Question 1 twenty-one students indicated they learned about American culture from television. The internet was second with 9 students, family and friends tied with ten students and 7 students indicated local schools influenced their opinions of America. Again, some students checked multiple answers to show there was more than one answer. Question 2 asked whether their opinion of America was positive, negative or did not have enough information to form an opinion. Out of the twenty-seven students twenty-one students checked positive, 4 checked negative and 2 checked not enough information. The charts below break down the data.



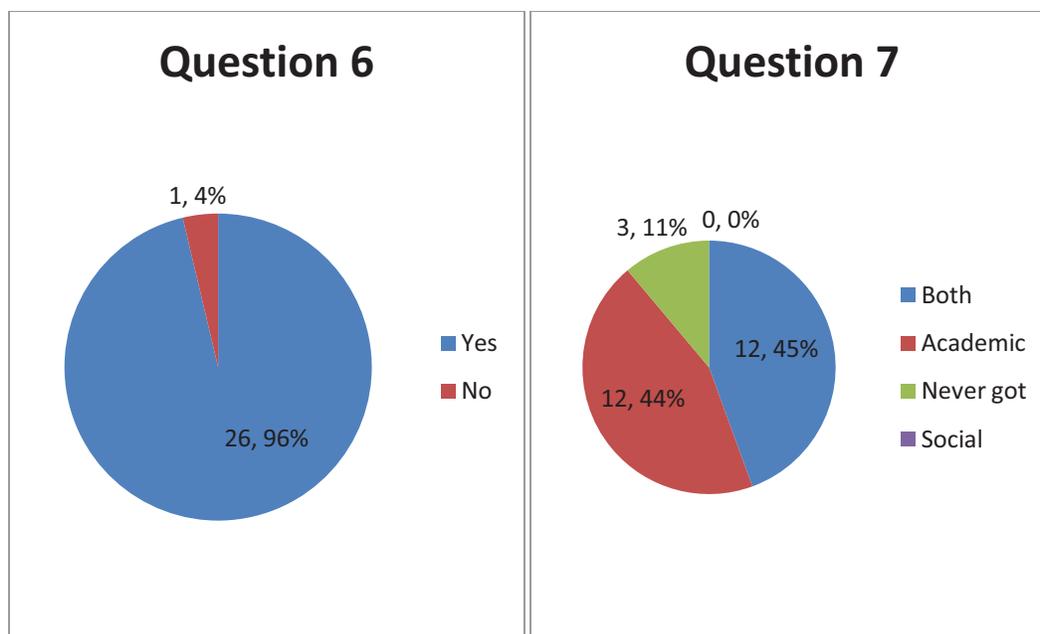
Question 3 asked if they felt prepared to deal with Western culture and able to adapt. Sixteen students checked yes, 4 checked no, and 6 were not sure what to expect. Question 4 dealt with reasons for coming to America. Twenty students indicated they were getting an education and leaving, and 7 indicated they were getting an education and staying in America.



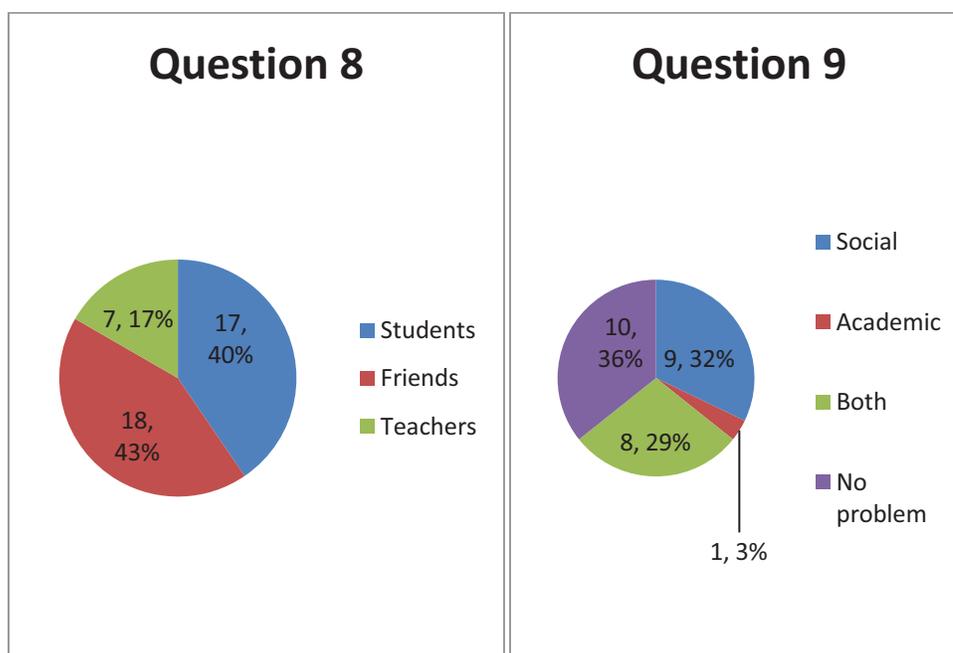
Question 5 asked the students if they felt their level of English was sufficient to deal with everyday life in America. Eighteen students said yes, 3 said no, and 4 were planning to take more English courses.



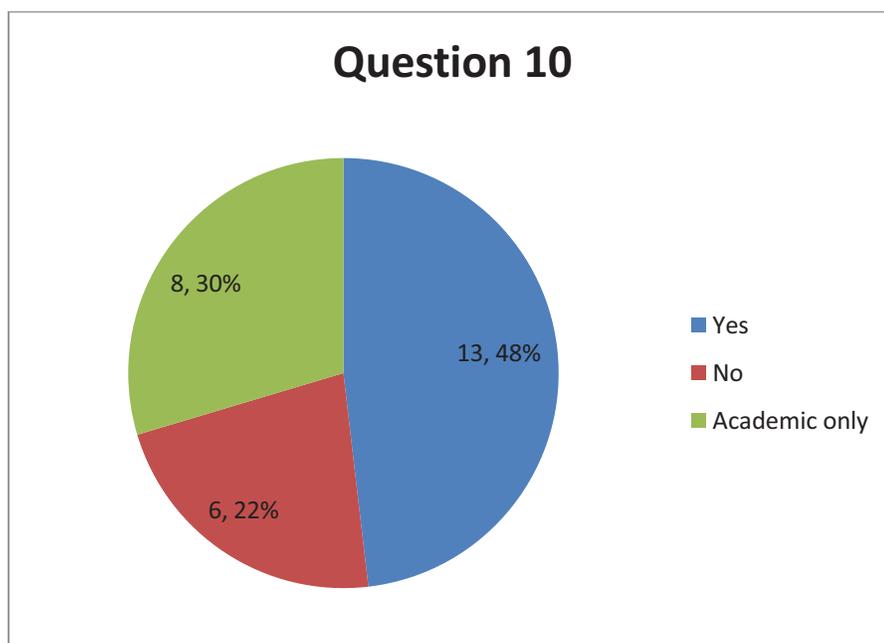
The next 5 questions dealt with school orientations and adjusting to life in America. Question 6 asked if the school offered a welcome orientation session. Twenty-six students said yes, and one said no. Question 7 asked whether the orientation session dealt with social, academics, or both. Twelve students said both, twelve said academic only, and 3 said never got orientation. The charts below indicate the data presented in these questions.



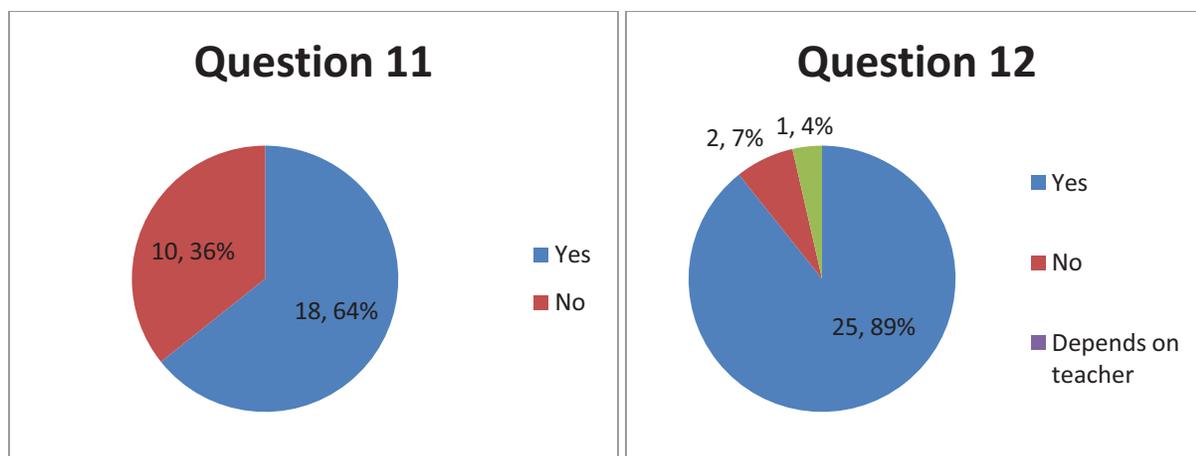
Question 8 asked how they learned about adjusting to social and academic life in America. Seventeen students said other students, eighteen students said family/friends, 7 students said teachers. Again, some students picked multiple answers. For question 9 the topic was what areas of living in America do you have difficulty with. 9 students indicated social, 1 said academics, 8 students said both, and 9 had no problems adjusting.



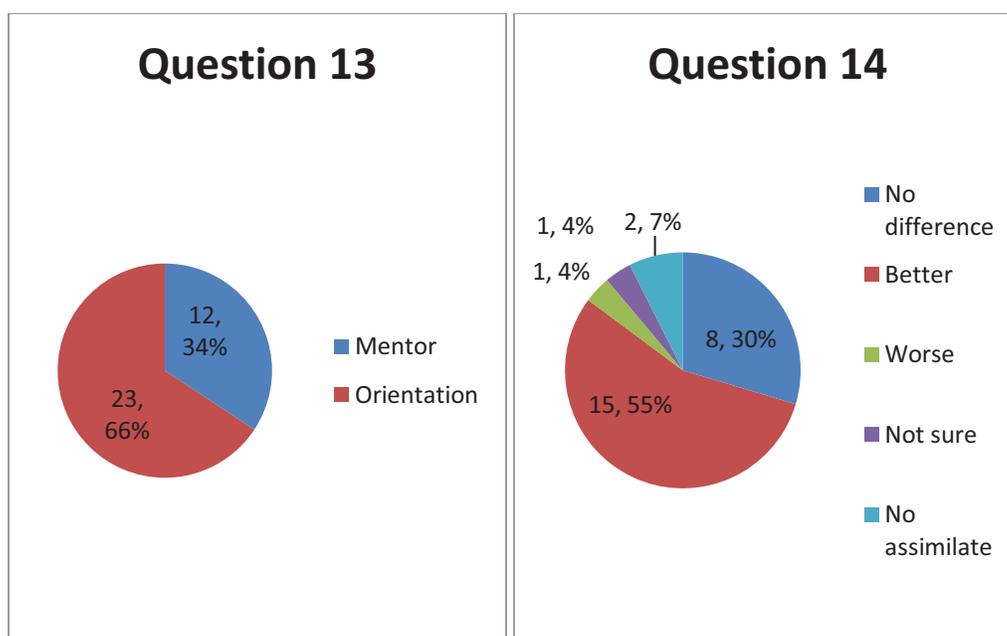
Question Ten asked them if they were provided written information on social and academic issues to make their transition easy. Thirteen students said yes, 6 said no and 8 students were provided with information on academics only.



Questions eleven through sixteen deals with mentoring programs, academics and psychological issues. Question eleven asked if their school provided mentoring programs. Eighteen students said yes, and 9 students said no. Question twelve asked whether they were comfortable talking to their teachers about school work. Twenty five students indicated yes, 1 said no, and one said depends on the professor.

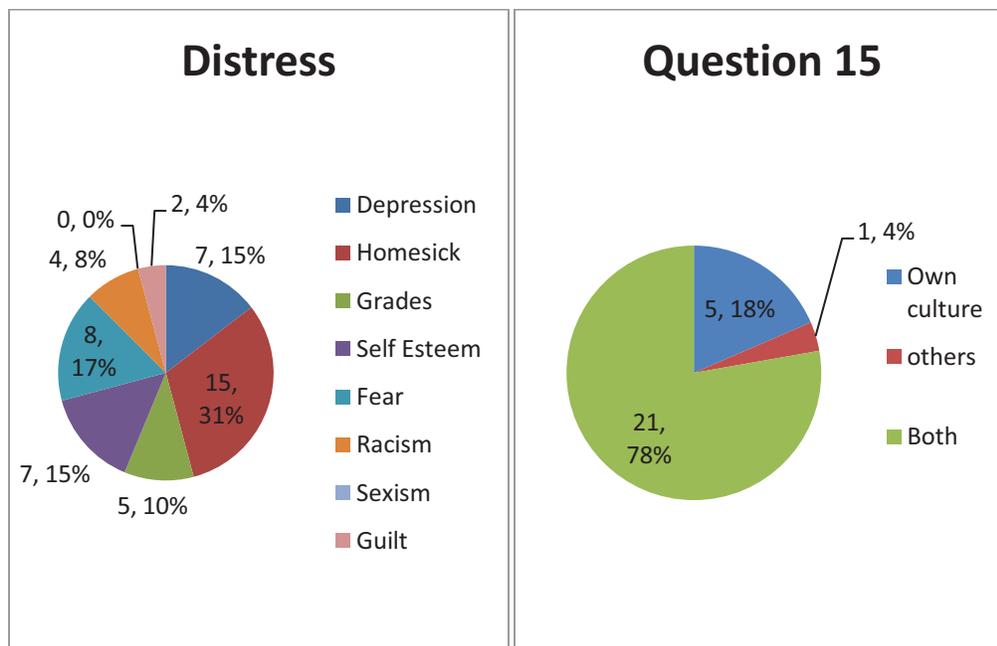


Question thirteen asked what would make their transition easier in America. Eighteen students said orientation on social and academic issues, and twelve students said mentoring programs. Some students felt both were important and checked both answers. Question fourteen wanted to know whether their study habits and grades were better when they embraced American culture. 8 students indicated no difference, fifteen students said better, 1 stated worse, 2 do not assimilate, and one was not sure.



Question fifteen touched on a similar topic asking if they find it easier to deal with their own ethnic group, others groups, or both in social and academic settings. 5 students checked own culture, 1 checked other cultures, and twenty one students said both cultures. Question sixteen deals with psychological issues. Eighteen students indicated they have periods of distress and 9 students said no distress. Out of those who have distress the breakdown is as follows:

Depression- 7 students  
 Homesickness- 15 students  
 Poor Grades- 5 students  
 Lack of self esteem- 7 students  
 Fear- 8 students  
 Racism- 4 students  
 Sexism- 0 students  
 Guilt- 2 students



The Psychological Chart shows the data of psychological distress categories that international students felt were of concern to them and the impact they have on their social and academic lives. Question 15 deals with the students' adapting to American culture and whether or not they embrace the different cultures or stay within their own ethnic groups.

The set of questions gave the students the opportunity to express their feelings and give their opinions on a variety of issues. Question seventeen asked students what they felt would be beneficial to help someone adjust socially and academically in the states. The following responses were given:

Orientations and social meetings. Male from China
Have a mentor; Based on a student's level of interaction with the western world, they can be given the option to live with a host family (if possible) to get some insight/ experience needed for adjustment. Time frame- A semester to a year maximum. Female from West Africa
I think an orientation program about social life and general academic requirements, as well as a mentorship program by the respective academic department would be extremely beneficial. Male from India
Meeting different culture is helped to understand other culture and business practices. Other advantage is to study by using more progressive education in my field. Female from South Korea
Found some associations to help, host parties and lectures. I think the most important is our international students need to accept western culture and try our best to communicate with others positively. Female from China
Have a specific student(who may commit to help the International student adjust for a whole month) may be a junior or a sophomore depending on the level of the academics of the international student. Going to shops together, entertainment spots and may be suggest ways by which Americans expect in an interaction to be. Not everybody grew up doing the video game or all the Stuffs the American students expect from the international students. Male from Kenya
Making friends and going out to see America on your own feet. Female from Indonesia

Being able to have useful and practical resources in social and academic environments. Male from China
The school provides some related program to help international students to adapt new culture. The people around international students should be nice that would be beneficial for student. Female from China
Listen to the student's opinion, give time to adjust with the study, and provide support to make a decision. Not to impose decision on the international students. Female from Bangladesh

I think the partnership with US students would be helpful, such as in the language or the culture studying groups. Female from China
Ethnic groups. Female from China
A tighter academic mentoring program would be extremely beneficial, as well as the implementation of a friendship program, in which international students have an American student as a “friend” at least for the first weeks of their stay in the US. Moreover, better organization in terms of information provided after admission to the program and to the University would greatly help the psychological preparation of the International student. Female from Greece
Just be around people. Male from West Africa
To have conversation partner to talk about it, to involve in international student community, to involve in students activity such as sport, Labra ministry, music, etc. Female from India
An orientation on social and academic atmosphere is appreciated. I had not much difficulty with social adjustment, but the class room set up and the way of studying were quite different. Some help on filling this gap would be helpful. Male from India
Lots and lots of teaching, education and if possible a little financial help. Female from India
People have to go through their own experiences. But if people in the US were more knowledgeable about and sensitive to other areas of the world, that would help. Male from Peru
Get involved in sports or clubs at your school and in your neighborhood. Do not spend too much time on the phone with people at home when you can be out making friends for life!:) Female from Norway

Better understanding of the culture which is extremely individualistic, get acquainted with slang language or commonly used phrases specific to Americans, know the demands of academia and accept it. Female from India
Physical adjustment – People come from very different atmospheric conditions, that was my first problem as to how to survive in a very cold weather from very warm climatic condition.

Academic system – Academic system is very different in US than any other international countries (It includes grading system, semester system, financial credit hour system and even teaching system). Being unaware about this system left me confused and fearful during my initial semester.
Food – Did not know places from where I can get food according to my needs. Female from India
Other than just academic information, it is essential that a person feels at home in a strange foreign country. Getting such students in touch with international students associations who can help them adjust well. Female from India
Let her or him feel like at home in a different country. Female from England
To attributes an American student to an international one is a great idea. But it would be greater if we could “match” each other, share the same interests, or be the same age... Female from France

The next question asked dealt with what programs work, or need improvements? The following responses were given:

The welcoming day should be a bit more organized, with a program, a campus and city tour, (maybe a party!) just not to feel lonely and start meeting people. Female from France
More opportunities to get to know other cultures better. Female from India
International Programs can definitely help but the only thing is at times they need experience sharing sessions where old students can themselves share what problems a student can face and how and where to go or whom to approach to overcome such problems. Male from India
Dire need for departments to have close association with International Programs office so that they can reduce misunderstandings or gap related to International status, fellowships, assistantships and other related problems which international students have to face. Female from India
Welcoming, Mentoring, Helping in socializing, connecting to similar culture, Financial help. Female from India

More opportunities to interact with American students and teachers. Male from China
The work done by our office for international students did an excellent job of bringing us together often and to introduce us to the cultural events of the city. It also helped us to be in touch with other international students. Male from India
Wellness Center individual psychological support. Male from Peru
That work: coffee hour for international student, international night, and mentoring program. Female from India
Social connections. Male from West Africa
Workshops work very well, but they shouldn't only be organized in the Lake Shore campus. The International Clubs are doing a great job; however, they should have greater support from the International office in terms of resources and ideas of how to make students feel more comfortable in the academic and social environment. Female from Norway
The mentoring program in school. Female from China
I think it would be better if there are more communication programs or activities for graduate students in Water Tower Campus. Sometimes it was difficult for graduate students from other countries to keep in touch with the undergraduates in US. Because we have different schedule of classes so that it is harder to settle down a fixed time to meet or communicate. Male from China
An holistic approach to a particular school of study. Female from Bangladesh
First, orientation could be added some parts that specially offer to international students. Second, build some student organization which provides one-by-one communication that could be an American and an international student. They could meet once a week and talk to each other. It would be good for international student to adapt new environment faster and good for American to know culture in outside. Third, distribute an advisor who cares about living for international students, not only academic area. Female from China
The students groups should be reinforced to help in interaction between students. Male from Kenya
The first orientation was very important and it would be better if we had a chance to chat with each other to make first friends there. Female from Japan

Better understanding of the culture which is extremely individualistic, get acquainted with slang language or commonly used phrases specific to Americans, know the demands of academia and accept it. Female from India

I haven't attended any program, so have no idea about it. Female from China

Mentoring program for adjustment both living life and school. Female from South Korea

Orientations are good but should provide international students with a better understanding of American culture. At the same time, it's only through actually interacting with people that one can really come to understanding American culture. Male from India

Works: Thanksgiving host family dinner; Welcome orientation; International Club events. Female from West Africa

FINANCIAL AID Male from England

The last question on the questionnaire asked students what suggestions they have that would be helpful for incoming international students that the school should adapt. Students responded in the following manner:

When students are coming, they have difficulties such open bank account and adjustment America school system, etc. It is not only language problem but also life style differences. If a school has two weeks or one month program for adjustment class and society, it would be help them. Female from South Korea

If advisor or tutor can spend some time to have a chat with their students (once a quarter), ask their current level and problems, also introduce some interesting activities according to each student's character and desire. Female from China

I know it is kind of impossible but it would be great if there were, or more, programmes which would take international students out like a small field trip. Female from Japan

They should be put under the same residential halls with few American students at least for the first year to enable them adjust together. Otherwise there should also be thorough orientation to talk about the academic, cultural and social life in the US. Male from Kenya

More orientation about experiencing different cultures in the states. Male from China
As mentioned in last question. First, orientation focuses on “international” more. Second, student organization. Third, living advisor for international students. Female from China
The school should include some aspects of the cultural or social exchange with the international students. If possible to discuss of the academic structure of the home of origin. Female from Bangladesh
For me, since I’m a Chinese student, so it will be really helpful if there is a Chinese student who could answer my questions about US and who I could communicate with easily in Loyola, before I get here. Male from China
Arrange new students to meet with other students who came from same country. Female from China
Loyola University should embrace and recognize International students in a greater degree. Scholarships and stipends should be given as a reward for academic performance and/ or as a motivation for an International student to choose Loyola over another Chicago University. Recognition of the International Loyola society should be part of the whole welcoming procedure. That’s the beginning, there are a lot more that Loyola could do for its International students.... Female from Greece
Create situations for international students to meet together. Male from West Africa
To find friends who come from other country; so we can share what we feel or our difficulties, and how to deal with this situation. To find conversation partner (American); so we can improve our English and get a lot information about how to live in US. Female from India
I had more difficulty before coming to the school than after coming. The office for the international students should be more helpful in securing admission. The rest was taken care of pretty well by the department in our university. Male from India

Instruct them how to mingle themselves with the American to feel less fear and take them out from loneliness. Female from India

There should be an international advisor to whom students can contact right from their home country and clarify their doubts before coming to US because as soon as they come there they are too overwhelmed to handle one thing at a time. Clear information related to fees, credit hours and courses can be provided by the respective departments prior to coming to US. New students should be made aware about maps, bus routes, nearest train and bus stations and transportation service closer to their schools. At least for a week there should be dorm services where international students can stay without pay. After guidance at least within one week they can be helped to find a place to live. Female from India

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Get to know the American culture, way of living, the high level of individualism and capitalistic nature of the society, be involved in extracurricular, community services etc. Female from India

Things might be different than u expected, but that does not make it wrong. Take on challenges with a smile and the opportunities are endless! Female from Norway

Actually I am already so happy with my new life as an international student that I don't know what to suggest... People have been so helpful and kind with me so far! Just stay as available and nice as you are! Female from France

This concludes the data collected from international students from both schools. The data from the Jesuit university was done in conjunction with their International Studies Department via email. The students at that school were sent the questionnaire along with a cover letter asking

for their participation. They replied to my personal email address. The personnel felt that was the best way to handle this project. The responses from both schools were insightful and helpful to this project and shows that previous research done on this topic was in line with past findings. The issues uncovered in this project were similar to the findings in other research that was documented in the review of literature. The next chapter will go into further detail about the findings through discussion, and offer recommendations that the schools can use in their present programs and perhaps offer some insight into future programs that can assist their international students.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

International students have demonstrated in this project a keen awareness of what they expect and want from their educational experience in America. Previous research has proven there are deep rooted concerns that international students experience. No matter what country they come from, they all experience the unknown when embarking on their quest to travel to a foreign country to pursue their education. The media plays a large part in their assessment of what life is like in America. From the questionnaire presented to these students, it is also clear that what they thought life would be like and the reality once they got here were quite different. This discussion will examine each section of the questionnaire, and offer suggestions to the schools involved to help them assess their current programs, and look for ways that will eliminate some of the issues their students identified as concerns.

#### The Media

Students from both schools indicated that television was their main source of learning about American culture. The question asked was, How did you learn about Western culture while in your country? Though the questionnaire did not address the type of programs they watched, it is clear that whatever programming is offered in their countries students are greatly impacted by what they see. This can include a variety of programs from news, sitcoms, dramas, movies, or reality shows. For example, my own experiences dealing with international students (especially male students from the Middle East) while an undergraduate showed that their opinions of American women were strongly shaped by what the media portrayed in an unflattering way. As they became better acquainted with me and my friends, only then did the international students'

perceptions change. Whether our culture is presented in a negative or positive way, the images seen on the television have a profound effect on the opinions formed by international students. The media has a responsibility to present cultures and customs truthfully and without prejudice. The reality is that is not always the case. Within the American culture it is clear that there are still stereotypes that people take offense with, and those images are part of television, movies, and other media outlets that are seen by those who live overseas. Those who view these images form opinions in some way about ethnic groups, and culture within America. It is also clear that images that are transmitted from overseas here in America can also be biased. The media is a powerful communication outlet, and thus must be cautious in presenting all sides of a story or news to help develop clear and thoughtful opinions and not biases.

Most students in this project felt their opinions were positive about American culture before coming here, but not all answered that way. The question asked What was your opinion of Western culture before coming to America? Expanding the question further may have given more insight into those students who answered negatively or indicated they did not have enough information to form an opinion. The majority of students at both schools felt they were prepared to deal with American culture, but there were a significant number that answered they were not sure what to expect. Finding out why they checked that answer may have given some hint into how deeply they felt about what they saw and read about America. This could lead a person to wonder whether or not the media they are exposed to before coming to America gives them a balanced or distorted view of life here in the states.

### Academic and Social Issues

The questions asked in this section dealt with whether current programs offered at the schools provided information to help international students adjust to academic and social life in America. The questions asked were:

- Did the school in America provide a welcome orientation session when you started?
- Did the orientation session deal with topics in social habits or was it strictly academic?

The outcome indicated that orientations are not complete in helping students with issues that are vital for their overall well being. Most students indicated some type of orientation was given but orientation that addressed both academic and social concerns was missing. This is definitely one area that schools can address in their future planning. The majority of students answered they had difficulty adjusting to social and academic life in America. This is consistent with previous research that showed due to a lack of programs that would address these issues international students have a more difficult time dealing with life here.

Students looking to their schools for help in order to transition to American culture find that most of the information presented was geared to academics only. Fifty-one students indicated that they were provided information on academics only or were not provided information at all. That is a high number of international students that felt their complete needs were not met by the programs offered. This is one area that schools can focus on by giving students the assistance they need to completely function on and off campus. The other questions asked in the questionnaire were:

- How did you learn about adjusting to social and academic life in America?
- What areas of living in America did you difficulty with?

- Were you provided written information that included social and academic issues you needed to know in order to make your transition easy?

Based on their answers they learned about American culture through family and friends here in America. Additional answers given by the students it would appear that most students felt there are still issues dealing with social and academic life. Most students indicated the information provided to them was academic in nature. This can be a good start for schools to focus more on these issues through the programs they provide.

#### Mentoring, and Psychological Issues

Questions eleven through sixteen focused on the academic programs and experiences with psychological distress. The questions in this section were:

- Does your school provide a mentoring program?
- Do you feel comfortable talking to your teacher?
- What would make your transition easier in America?
- Are your academic study habits and grades better when you embrace American culture?
- Do you find it easier to deal with your own ethnic group or are you able to deal with everyone in social and academic settings?
- Do you have periods of psychological distress?

Between the two schools surveyed, sixty-one students stated they did not have a mentoring program. Students also stated having a mentoring program and orientation programs that address their academic and social needs would be welcomed. Embracing American culture was easier when it came to their grades rather than stay within their own culture. Most of the students indicated socializing and working within two cultures was better than staying within their own culture or not assimilating at all. It would appear students feel getting involved in American

culture and staying true to their own values helps with the transition. Even though getting involved with American culture still does not take away from the psychological distress some of the students feel. Each person comes here with their own individual experiences. How they to adapt to different situations may be attributed to their upbringing in their own countries. Some Western cultures are similar to America, but students from cultures that are completely different in customs, foods and languages may present more of a challenge. The questionnaire could have had an additional question as to why students felt distress. Those who did answer the question most were from Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Most of the international students had some form of distress with depression, homesickness, fear and lack of self-esteem being the areas with the highest number of responses. These areas are consistent with past research, and though these areas are common with past research this questionnaire did not address whether or not the students sought professional help. In past research students that did seek out help were not always satisfied with the results. There are no assumptions as to the reasons why these students answered the way they did. This is one area where there were some limitations to the questions that were asked.

Students had the chance to voice their concerns and give their suggestions to what would be beneficial to help someone adjust socially and academically in the states. In this section the following questions were asked:

- What do you feel would be beneficial to help someone adjust socially and academically in the states?
- What programs work, or need improvements in your opinion?
- What suggestions do you have that you feel would be helpful for incoming international students that the school should adapt?

The answers were varied and well thought out. The answers given by the students from the community college were more concerned with their courses, finding jobs, and taking more English courses. Since most of these international students planned on staying in America, having a better command of the English language and interacting within the culture they felt were their best chances of success. The international students from the Jesuit university were more profound in their opinions and suggestions. This may be due to their educational level and better command of the English language. Past research asked students questions as well. The questions asked in this project were specific to this research by allowing questions that would allow students to give opinions based on what they are currently going through at school, and what they would like to see their schools do differently to help them, and future students. The students' opinions were at the forefront of what would help students and schools diminish the same issues that keep coming up in dealing with academic and social issues.

#### Original Problem

The reasons for this project were to see how far past research has come to correct the issues that international feel strongly about that can limit their progress in school and socially. The goal was to find what students felt would help them succeed by offering them a chance to give their own suggestions and opinions to their schools. The hope is that those suggestions could be incorporated in existing programs or develops new programs to decrease the issues addressed by the students. Past research showed there are valid concerns, and international students deserve to be heard. It has been noted in this project and other research that international students bring in billions in revenue for schools and their communities. It would be wise that the schools involved in the recruitment of these students did what is needed to ensure continued success of their programs.

There are limitations that are found in this project that deal with the expansion of some questions on issues that may have given further insight. The questions were basic in nature due to time constraints, but they did get to some of the reasons international students experience some negative feelings. The contribution this project makes gives more insight into what students want, and what helped to shape their opinions about American culture before they got here. The biggest contribution is the portion of the questionnaire that allowed students the opportunity to state their concerns in their own words. What these students wrote will have a more profound effect within their own schools and communities. If the schools are truly concerned about the opinions of their own students and use this information to improve on their current programs and start new ones, then this process will be a success.

#### Recommendations

Part of the process in doing research is to take the findings and present them to the schools involved so they may take the steps necessary to make changes that will be beneficial to them and their students. From the suggestions and opinions of the international students participating in the questionnaire the following recommendations are given:

- In orientation sessions provide information that will help students get adjusted to life in America. Information on opening bank accounts, getting landline and mobile phone services, provide information on currency exchange, utilities, grocery shopping, etc. will help students with the basic necessities of life in addition to the general academic information.
- Start mentoring programs that will give international students the opportunity to be paired with an American student to help with social interaction, and academic issues the student may have.

- Provide better professional help services for international students that would help them feel more at ease in discussing some of the psychological distress they may be feeling and be sensitive to their particular culture needs.
- Provide an International Week or Day that would open the lines of communication for all students on campus. Provide an outlet for the international students to present their customs, arts, food, dance, and language for the whole community to obtain knowledge and better appreciation for those cultures.
  - Provide clubs for international students to be able to socialize with people from their own countries and those from other countries to come together to discuss their common concerns relating to academic and social issues.
  - Have faculty on staff that has experience dealing with international students that these students can go to for counsel, and help with school work.
  - Make sure the organizations that are involved in international affairs are part of the orientation sessions to help students adjust from the beginning.

The recommendations will be presented in a formal letter to both schools thanking them for their participation. There are many more suggestions and opinions that the students presented and those will be made available to the schools involved so they can see firsthand what their students are thinking. It is important to the students and this project that their voices are taken seriously. The international students took the time to fill out the questionnaire, and gave their honest opinions on what they see as concerns that needed to be addressed. In the end it is up to the administrations, the international departments, and those in charge of these students to help bridge the gap on what they are currently providing and what students would like to see done differently.

The issues presented in this project are not new issues. They have been around for a long time. The questions facing schools that accept international students are why the same issues come up year after year, and why some of the basic issues have not been addressed. There are some universities that have most of these issues resolved, but not all schools throughout America have all programs in place to assist international students. It is obvious from this project that the schools involved are not handling everything they can based on their students' feedback. Hopefully, this can help bring international students' concerns one step closer to getting some if not all issues addressed for the betterment of the schools and their students.

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