IMPROVING THE SOCIAL, LINGUISTIC, AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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by
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Abstract

Students from China experience greater levels of difficulty in the transition to American higher education compared to domestic students and other international students. They struggle with language issues, as well as social and academic acculturation challenges. A pathway program, developed in 2009 by a consortium of American colleges and universities, aimed to provide a transitional path to higher education in the U.S. for Chinese students. Students begin their program in China for fall and spring terms, and those who successfully complete those terms arrive in the United States for a Summer Bridge program aimed at acclimating students to life at an American university. This qualitative program evaluation examined faculty, staff and student experience in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Summer Bridge program in the transition process of Chinese students to American higher education. The study fills a gap in the literature on the benefits of extended orientation programs for Chinese international students. Historical documentation; course syllabi; student satisfaction survey data; and interviews with faculty, staff, and students who were involved in the program, were used to inform the results. The Summer Bridge program was successful in making students more confident when they enrolled in the fall. Students were more comfortable with the social setting as well as the academic setting. One limitation of the program was the lack of cultural diversity. Students were less inclined to practice their English speaking skills among fellow Chinese students. This study confirms that an extended orientation program for Chinese students improved their transition to American higher education.

Key Words: Chinese international students, higher education, university bridge programs, international student orientation, transition theory, social learning theory, program evaluation
Dedication

The time put into writing this dissertation required me to be a bit selfish; not something I am very familiar with. Along this path, co-workers, family, friends and others have had to understand when I was not available, and wait for me to finish. To my parents, thank you so much for the love and support you have given me through the years. You have always believed I could do anything I wanted, and that belief pushed me through all the moments when all I wanted was to give up. To my brother Scott, my sister-in-law Toni and my lovely niece Sofia, thank you for all the kindness, support and little gifts along the way to remind me you were thinking of me and the work I was doing. To my aunt Janice and uncle John, your pride and love are what help me to know I can do anything in this life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“Nothing less than the future of America is at stake. Talented people from throughout the world have come to the United States to study because of the quality of our universities. These gifted individuals provide a healthy challenge for America’s best students, and many of them stay and become part of the intellectual fabric of our nation by working in industry, health care, research and even higher education. Those who return home take with them a better understanding and appreciation for our country. Under either scenario, international students are a positive force for America. They make our country stronger, and they make the world more hospitable to American ideals.”

- President Martin C. Jischke, Purdue University

Educational Problem of Practice

In the past 50 years, the number of international students enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States has increased significantly (Anderson, Carmichael, Harper & Huang, 2009). While there was a slight dip in enrollments following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the numbers have climbed back up and during the 2012-13 academic year, the number enrolled was approximately 819,000 students (Cigularova, 2005; IIE, 2013; Schoch & Baumgartner, 2004.) This enrollment count represents a 40 percent increase in international student enrollment from a decade ago. The largest increase in international students was among the Chinese. Overall Chinese student enrollment increased 21 percent in 2012-13 over the
previous year, but at the undergraduate level the increase was 26 percent over the prior year (IIE, 2013). Increasing international enrollment requires more student services specifically tailored to international students in order to ensure that students are both academically and socially successful upon enrollment in American colleges and universities (Anderson et al., 2009; Mahew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2010).

**Significance of the Problem**

International students have become very important to American colleges and universities, as they often pay full tuition. Their estimated contribution to the U.S. economy is over $24 billion (IIE, 2013). In addition to the revenue contribution they make, these students enhance diversity at the institutions they attend, and their enrollment enhances the reputation of American colleges and universities (Paswan & Ganesh, 2009).

International students come to the United States with well-thought-out plans and high expectations of their college experience, but upon arrival they face many challenges that make their transition daunting. Some of these students face psychological issues such as homesickness, loneliness, depression, stress, anxiety, alienation, isolation, and the loss of identity, status and self-value (Anderson et al., 2009). There is a transition process that takes place after arrival, and this transition period varies from student to student. The transition can be made more difficult based on their English-language proficiency, prior experience with cultural adjustments and the support system of family and friends (Anderson et al., 2009).

In order to improve international student adjustment, research suggests that orientation programming should be developed to improve English-language proficiency, expose students to American culture and provide academic support to students so they will understand the
differences between their home academic culture and the academic culture in American higher education (Anderson et al., 2009; Lee, Park & Kim, 2009; Owens & Loomes, 2010).

International students experience greater difficulty in transitioning to American higher educational institutions as compared to domestic high school students entering college for the first time (Anderson et al., 2009). In particular, Asian students, and more specifically Chinese students, experience the greatest challenge in enrolling in American higher education due to the differences in socio-political culture, academic culture and language (Tochkov, Levine & Sanaka, 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2009). Many institutions have developed extended orientation programs in the weeks leading up to the beginning of fall enrollment, but often these programs are not long enough to give students time to adjust and understand the differences in social and academic culture (Anderson et al., 2009).

Chinese students face several challenges when enrolling in American colleges and universities. According to Dao, Lee and Chang, (2007), these students struggle with language issues, social support and acculturation challenges. Additionally students can face academic cultural differences that can make classes difficult. Such cultural difference can include issues such as timidity when it comes to class participation. Chinese students are often not used to engaging their teachers in debate on a subject or even asking questions in classes (Dao et al., 2007). Lack of class participation in American higher education can result in a lower class grade for students and can be a difficult lesson for Chinese students to learn (Anderson et al., 2009; Dao et al., 2007). Additionally, students may struggle with understanding the lectures of their professors as a result of studying in a language very different from the native language.
Difficulties with academic English can also lead to academic problems for Chinese students (Huang, 2004; Huang & Brown, 2009).

**A Pathway Program**

A program has been designed and offered by a consortium of American universities to provide a pathway for students from China to earn their undergraduate degree (chinapathways.us). This is a multi-component program designed to prepare students for entry into a bachelor’s degree program at one of seven consortium institutions (cps.neu.edu). Throughout the program students earn academic credit and comprehensive English preparation in a supportive learning environment. Students who complete the program will have earned up to 33 semester hours, allowing them to matriculate into their university as sophomores (cps.neu.edu).

This pathway program is modeled on the Northern Consortium United Kingdom (NCUK) program established by a consortium of 23 British institutions in 1987. NCUK’s mission is:

“To be the major supplier of international students from diverse source countries to NCUK owner universities by delivering quality, value-added academic pathway programmes that meet student and university client need and are benchmarked against best practice across UK universities” (ncuk.ac.uk).

This pathway program, while not associated with NCUK, was developed to serve as a competitive American alternative to NCUK. Modeled on the NCUK program, this program has some distinct differences in the design of the program. In the United Kingdom, a college degree program takes three years to complete. NCUK is designed as an admissions model aimed at
preparing high school level students to be admitted and eventually enroll in one of the NCUK partner schools. In the U.S., a college degree program takes four years to complete; therefore, for the program to remain competitive in the marketplace, the first year is based on a progression model where high school graduates prepare for enrollment in a consortium institution while also completing the first year of the college degree program (Personal Communication, 2012).

Students begin their studies at one of nine institutions in China in the fall term with a shorter and lighter schedule compared to entering college freshmen in a traditional American college. Kaplan International serves as the site host in China and they are responsible for faculty recruitment, marketing and recruitment of students in the program and providing on-ground academic and advising support. Kaplan International is a provider of English language courses and study abroad programs (kaplaninternational.com). Kaplan has partnered with the consortium members to provide on-ground support for the fall and spring terms which take place in China. While faculty members are recruited by Kaplan, they are approved through related academic units at the host institution. All faculty members in China are hired by the program’s host institution. Faculty members are native English speakers who have taught in an American higher education environment before. These faculty members are hired specifically to help introduce students to an American-style classroom environment. In addition to approving faculty, the host institution is responsible for the admissions process to participating schools, program operations, registration and academic support through an online blackboard system. Students take six credits over the course of nine weeks (chinapathways.us). Students enroll in an American Studies course and a Calculus course for credit. Additionally students take non-credit courses on Career and Program Counseling, English for Academic Purposes, and Information Technology (chinapathways.us). The fall term is intentionally made lighter in order for students to become
acclimated to the program and their instructors, to begin to understand the choices they will make regarding a college major, and to better understand what life will be like as a college student in an American-style university setting (chinapathways.us).

In the spring term, students are divided into two tracks of studies: Business Track or Engineering Track. Students who plan to major in business, arts, science or social science take courses in the Business Track, while students interested in engineering take classes in the Engineering Track (chinapathways.us). The spring term is a 15-week term and students earn 14 credits during this time. All students take a second semester of American Studies, General Chemistry and English for Academic Purposes. Business Track students also take Business Statistics and Microeconomics, and Engineering Track students take Engineering Design and Calculus for Science/Engineering (chinapathways.us). This term is critically important to the students as their mid-term grades are used in their application for admission to one of the participating institutions. In late February students take their mid-term exams, and in early March they select their preferences for institutions and for their academic program. The spring term ends in mid-April; and following the successful completion of the spring term, students are given their admissions decisions (chinapathways.us). At the end of April, the institutions review the final spring grades in order to be sure students are still eligible for enrollment. Once verified, students complete I-20 paperwork and intent to enroll forms; and at the end of May students travel to Boston, Massachusetts to begin their Summer Bridge term.

The Summer Bridge program offers a full summer of courses and orientation programing to assist students in the adjustment process. During Summer Bridge, all students are enrolled in Exploring America, Academic Writing and Macroeconomics. These three classes are
introductory levels and serve as core curriculum classes for students upon enrollment in their institution. Engineering majors take Physics for Engineers with Lab. All other majors take Music of the USA and Chemistry Lab (chinapathways.us). The Exploring America seminar is a non-credit course that introduces students to various aspects of American culture (chinapathways.us). The Exploring America seminar uses field trips, concerts and guest speakers to acclimate students to their new cultural environment in order to better understand the activities college students participate in while enrolled as an undergraduate (Personal Communication, 2012). Courses taught during Summer Bridge enroll only students from this pathway program. It is not until students enroll in their undergraduate institution that they enroll in classes with other undergraduates.

The pathway program is designed to improve language proficiency, introduce students to the American academic model and to expose students to American culture. The program’s purpose is to improve the transition process for Chinese students and to begin to promote integration into a new cultural setting (chinapathways.us). While much of this adjustment begins in China during the fall and spring terms, students become increasingly more engaged in the adjustment process when they arrive in Boston for the Summer Bridge portion of the program (cps.neu.edu). Through classes, field trips and other cultural events, Chinese students improve their language skills, become acclimated to the American academic experience and become immersed in the American social culture for twelve weeks in the summer (Personal Communication, 2012).
Purpose of the Research

A pathway has been developed by a consortium of American higher education institutions to address the language, socio-cultural and academic cultural differences Chinese students who enroll in American higher education will face. In addition to fall and spring term preparation in China, students participate in a Summer Bridge program in America on the host college’s campus aimed at easing the transition process of these students prior to their enrollment in an American higher education institution.

This research study aimed to understand the social, linguistic and academic experience of those students who completed Summer Bridge and to understand how it contributed to their adjustment upon enrollment in an American higher education institution. This research was intended to not only understand the current Summer Bridge program design and implementation, but also to consider how a full summer orientation program might contribute to the improved adjustment process of Chinese international students. The study took place at a private comprehensive University located in the Northeastern coastal U.S. The University has approximately 1,000 enrolled undergraduates from China. The institution has three pipeline programs that serve as transition programs for international students but this program is unique in that it includes a cultural experience through Summer Bridge that provides students a full summer of adjustment prior to enrollment in the fall semester at the University.

Intellectual and Practical Goals

Chinese students face challenges associated with English-language proficiency, social culture adjustment and academic culture adjustment when enrolling in American higher educational institutions. The intellectual goals of a study of Summer Bridge were to understand
whether or not an extended orientation program addressing these adjustment issues improved the transition process of Chinese students. The current literature speaks about the challenges these students face in the transition process and offers suggestions, including longer orientation programs. The literature about bridge programs describes under-prepared students who need remedial academic support prior to enrollment in an undergraduate institution. However, a full-length bridge program for Chinese students has not been identified in the academic literature related to orientation of international students in higher education. This study was designed to fill a gap in the literature regarding longer international student orientation programming and its effects on the adjustment process of Chinese students.

The practical goal of this research was to contribute to the growing research literature on Chinese student transition to American higher education and evaluate a program that may impact the success of these students in American colleges and universities. There is a gap in the literature regarding examples of extended orientation programming for international students. Summer Bridge is unique in how it aims to improve Chinese student transition by extending the amount of time students spend improving their English-language proficiency and developing an understanding of American culture as well as the culture of American higher education. Through a study of how the program was developed, how it currently operates and through interviews with faculty, staff and students, the researcher was able to evaluate the extent to which Summer Bridge contributed to the adjustment of international students.

**Positionality Statement**

As part of my work in the Enrollment Management Office at the university examined in this study, I have analyzed the academic performance of these pathway students during their
studies in China as well as their time in Summer Bridge. Further, I have continued to track their progress in their various higher education institutions upon enrollment. All of this research and analysis has been to provide summary data to various members of senior leadership at all member institutions, to track and improve the success of the students enrolling in the program. I have tracked retention rates and grade point averages of the students; however, this research allowed me to understand how the program impacts the transition process of Chinese students from a qualitative perspective through the use of student satisfaction surveys and interviews with faculty, staff and students.

Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore and understand the meaning of a problem through the eyes of a person or group of individuals (Creswell, 2009). Through the use of interviews with faculty, staff and students, I was able to go beyond the quantitative data and hear the stories these individuals were willing to share. Through their voices I was better able to understand how the Summer Bridge program impacts the transition process of Chinese students. Qualitative data from interviews and other program documents allowed me to understand the role that Summer Bridge plays in improving the English language proficiency of the students, as well as how it impacts the social and academic transition of the participants. By interviewing multiple faculty members and students from the program, I was able to collect data on the variety of experiences of the study participants. Linking faculty and student interviews with staff interviews aimed at understanding the goals of the Summer Bridge program, I was able to develop a better understanding of how Summer Bridge is meeting the goals of its programmatic design and what impact it may be having on the transition process of Chinese students to American higher education.
One potential threat to the credibility of this research was my own work with the program. This is a program I had done research on as part of my job in Enrollment Management Research. Understanding retention and academic success of the population had been primarily based on quantitative data points around GPA and the number of students enrolled from term to term. Having prior knowledge of the program could have impacted my opinion on the success or failure of the program. I relied heavily on the interviews and the use of the students’ and faculty’s voices to tell the story of Summer Bridge and to analyze if the program had an impact on improving the transition process for Chinese students.

**Research Central Question**

The question guiding this research reflects the intersection of three aspects of Summer Bridge aimed at improving the transition process of Chinese students to American higher education. Improving English language proficiency, introducing students to the American cultural setting and aiding students in the processes of learning a new academic teaching and learning style are all important factors in the success of these students following enrollment in an American institution. While the literature highlights the idea of extending orientation programs for international students, this research will fill a gap in the current literature by asking the following question:

How has the Summer Bridge program affected the ability of Chinese international students to advance their English-language proficiency and transition to a new social and academic culture?

**Organization and Content**

This dissertation consists of six sections that combine to create a blueprint for the study and the results associated with the study. Chapter 1 has addressed the proposed problem of
practice. Chapter 2 addresses the underlying Theoretical Frameworks of Transition Theory and Social Learning Theory and how the combination of these two theories helps to inform the problem of practice. In Chapter 3, a Literature Review considers four streams related to this research. A comprehensive review of the literature is presented regarding the challenges facing Chinese students who enroll in American colleges and universities. Specifically the literature looks at the English language proficiency issues, the academic culture differences and the socio-cultural issues Chinese students face when enrolling in an American institution. The last section of the literature review analyzes the unique character of bridge programs aimed at under-prepared students who need remedial preparation prior to enrollment in higher education and how these programs are used to improve the success of at-risk student populations.

In Chapter 4 the Methodology presents the details of the program evaluation study. The section provides detail on the site, the participants and specifics about the informational survey and one-on-one interviews that took place. Additional information on data gathering, thematic analysis and measures taken to strengthen the validity and credibility of the study are provided. Specifics are outlined regarding measures taken to adhere to ethical research practices and protection of study participants from any potential harm. The section concludes with a summary of the study. The section also highlights the significance of the contributions these results will have for higher education administrators to consider when developing programming aimed at improving the transition success of Chinese students to American colleges and universities.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the results of the study. Detailed participant profiles tell the lived experience of six students who successfully completed the Summer Bridge program and enrolled at the university used in this study. Main points are used to summarize the
experience of three faculty members who taught in Summer Bridge and two staff members
involved in the design and implementation of the pathway program. Following the profiles,
themes and sub-categories have been detailed based on interviews and documents provided by
program administrators.

Chapter 6 provides analysis of the findings. The analysis considers how research results
are related to the theories used in this study and how the results help to answer the research
question. Implications and future research are identified at the conclusion of the chapter.
Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

In qualitative research, theory is often used as a lens that shapes what is looked at in a proposed study and what questions are asked in order to guide the research (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) defines theory as an interrelated set of constructs formed into propositions or hypotheses that specify the relationship between variables (p. 51). Theory can provide the rationale for a study, and it can also explain or predict the phenomena that a researcher intends to study (Creswell, 2009, p. 51). Theory as a lens can also guide a researcher to understand what issues are important to study and what types of individuals should be studied (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) highlights the use of a theoretical lens as an orientating lens for the study of questions related to gender, class and race, but other marginalized groups at risk can also be studied using a theoretical lens, including international students in higher education.

This study used the complementary theoretical frameworks of transition theory and social learning theory to understand how international students react to the change in experience from schools in their home country to academic and social life in a foreign country. Transition theory addresses individuals who are going through a change and social learning theory explains how individuals learn in a social setting through contact with their peers. Through the lens of these two theories it was possible to understand how the Summer Bridge program impacted students’ adjustment to American higher education socially and academically. Before understanding how these two theories jointly impacted this study, it is important to understand the theories individually and how they were developed.
Transition Theory

Schlossberg (1984) developed transition theory as a means of explaining a management philosophy that encourages managers to understand their employees are in a constant state of transition. Schlossberg wanted to work with adults facing transition, to not only help them cope with the immediate challenges they were facing, but also to identify an individual’s sources of strength and adaptation that would aid them in the various transitions they will face over the course of their lives (Schlossberg, 1984). Transition theory was designed to go beyond predicting what aspects of adult behavior will serve to aid transition. Schlossberg aimed to develop a theory that provided new ideas related to what is already understood about adults in transition and to create a theory that would not be limited based on a certain type of individual, but rather that would meet the needs of a diverse set of clients and aid counselors in developing treatment plans tailored to the individual (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012). In the context of higher education, student affairs administrators have applied Schlossberg’s transition theory when thinking about the transition process faced by college students (Anderson et al., 2009). New students entering college for the first time are dealing with the transition to a new academic environment, and student affairs professionals are tasked with easing this transition process in order to ensure students are retained from one semester to another and from one year to the next (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

According to transition theory, transition is not determined by age but by a social clock and the ability to learn new things; and adjustment is not limited by a person’s age (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). The theory holds that there are two types of transitions: events and non-events. Events are those transitions that are either anticipated or unanticipated. Anticipated transitions can include a new job, marriage, or enrolling in college (Anderson et al., 2012).
Unanticipated events often involve a crisis such as being fired or having to leave work or school due to an illness (Anderson, et al., 2012). Nonevents are those transitions that were expected but did not occur such as a marriage that did not happen or a child that was never born (Anderson, et al., 2012).

In the context of international students in higher education, events include moving into a residence hall, finding food in the dining hall that meets the dietary or religious needs of their culture, or finding the location of classes (Anderson et al., 2009). These events are anticipated, but students who have never had these experiences before need support in order to transition through these events. Non-events are unanticipated and can be positive in the form of new possibilities and negative in the form of problems (Anderson et al., 2009). Negative non-events can include challenges in writing a paper in a second language or not understanding the rules of academic integrity, and when collaboration with other students may not be appropriate (Anderson et al., 2009). Another negative non-event can be an honors student from Asia who received poor grades in a philosophy course because the student relied on memorization skills when analytical thinking was required in order to be academically successful (Anderson et al., 2009, p. 26). In the case of these non-events, students might not realize how different academic standards are in American institutions compared to their home country; and while they may think they are doing well, a bad grade may lead to shock and concern. This transition process can create a sense of confusion in a person from another culture who is experiencing a new environment for the first time.

Figure 1 below diagrams a model of adults in transition (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). At the top of the chart is the transition itself. This can be an event or non-event; it can be a work
change, a personal life change, or a social status change. It can be a move forward or backward, but ultimately this is a change in the life of a person (Schlossberg, 1981). In the middle section of the diagram are the unique aspects of the change, of the environment and of the person. The first bracket shows how a person may perceive the change they are facing. Do they have a positive or negative feeling about the change, is it planned or unplanned, and is it a permanent or temporary change. The middle bracket addresses the environment of the person going through the change. Does the person have the support of family and/or friends and to what extent is there support in their work environment. In the last bracket the characteristics of the individual are taken into consideration. The demographics of an individual will play a role in how a person copes with a transition (Schlossberg, 1981). At the bottom of the chart is the process of adaptation to the change in a person’s life. Adaptation to change is fed from above in this chart. The perception of the change, the support system of the individual facing a change and the demographics of the individual will all have an impact on the time needed to transition and how successful the transition process is for an individual.
Figure 1. A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition

The transition model developed by Schlossberg provides a systematic framework for counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other helpers as they listen to the stories of adults in transition, and provide support to those individuals to ensure a successful transition process (Anderson, et al., 2012). Figure 2 below shows the three parts of Schlossberg’s transition model (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38).
The three parts of the transition model are:

1) Approaching Transitions – Transition identification and transition process:
   Understanding the nature of the transition and the perspective of the person in transition
   is the first step in this model. In this part of the model it is important to understand a
   person’s view of the transition they are facing and what impact it might have on their life.
   A transition is not simply about the change but rather is the person’s perception of the
   change (Anderson, et al., 2012).

2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources – The 4 S System: The four Ss refer to the person’s
   Situation, Self, Support and Strategies. Situation refers to what is happening in the
   transition and what other stressors may exist in the person’s life that could impact the
   transition process. Self refers to whom the transition is happening and how each person
   is unique in how they will handle a transition. Support identifies what help is available to
   the person in transition. Strategies are the coping mechanisms a person has to navigate
   through a transition (Anderson, et al., 2012). The 4 Ss help counselors to identify how
each person reacts differently to a transition and how they cope with the changes they are experiencing.

3) Taking Charge: While a transition may be unavoidable there are steps that can be identified so that the person in transition can manage the process by strengthening his or her resources. In this part of the model, a person in transition needs to make use of the 4 Ss, identify support available to them, and develop coping mechanisms for embracing the change they are experiencing (Anderson, et al., 2012).

According to Schlossberg (1988) it is the manager’s job to help the employee to successfully transition to a new change in their life. When working with international students in higher education, transition theory informs student affairs administrators on the need to recognize both the events and non-events that international students will face and to develop programming that will guide them through the transition process (Anderson et al., 2009).

Transitions are not a short-term event for individuals. While the beginning of a transition may be linked with an identifiable event or change in a person’s life, the transition process can continue for an extended period of time (Anderson et al., 2009, Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). People can be entering transition, they can be in transition or they can be coming out of transition. It is important to study people in transition at various points during their transition in order to fully understand how the transition proceeds (Anderson et al., 2009). At first a transition may be overwhelming and may fully consume the individual in transition, but as time goes on the person may find themselves straddling two roles. Finally when a transition has continued to move along, a person will fully embrace the changes made during the transition and take on their new role (Anderson et al., 2009).
Social Learning Theory

Learning is a social process whereby most learning occurs through observation and the modeling of desired behaviors and outcomes (Bandura, 1977). One method of learning involves direct experience where a certain action can result in both positive and negative effects (Bandura, 1977). When a positive result follows an action a person will consider that action successful and when a negative result follows or when no change occurs a person will consider a different action in order to produce a positive result (Bandura, 1977). Another type of learning involves motivation. Past actions and experiences will be linked with positive or negative results. These past experiences will serve not only as learning experiences but will provide motivation to repeat those actions that were successful while avoiding actions that resulted in a negative response (Bandura, 1977). Third, Bandura speaks of learning through modeling. Learning would be more difficult if people only learned through their own actions. Observation and modeling the behavior of others is how most human behaviors are learned (Bandura, 1977).

In social learning theory, people are exposed to symbolic representations of a modeled activity, which serves as a guide for appropriate behavior (Bandura, 1977, p. 24). Bandura also highlights a number of factors when considering the impact of observational learning. People that an individual regularly associates with will have a greater influence on learned behaviors due to the amount of time spent interacting with one another (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, people learn behaviors differently based on the personality of the individual they are observing (Bandura, 1977). The actions of an individual with an engaging personality are more likely to be observed and replicated than someone more reserved and disengaged. Finally, the perceived value of the observed behavior is also important. A behavior that appears to have value and produce a greater return is more likely to be modeled (Bandura, 1977).
Academic achievement is not simply a matter of observing what needs to be done and having the wherewithal to accomplish it; instead, it is a complex reflection of a student’s own concept of his or her own strengths and weaknesses (Bandura, 1977). As part of social learning theory, self-efficacy theory explores an individual’s ability to marshal a distinct set of cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral skills to initiate and successfully perform specified tasks at designated levels, expend greater effort, and persevere in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1997). In this light, perceived self-efficacy is a person’s belief in his or her ability to succeed. Self-efficacy also reflects an individual’s ability to control difficult situations. In this case when a person is faced with challenges, they take adaptive measures to modify the situation to improve the outcome (Schwarzer, Babler, Kwiatek, Schroder, & Zhang, 1996). Self-efficacy is not related to unrealistic optimism or risk taking behavior, but rather it leads to bold actions and behavior within an individual’s capabilities (Schwarzer et al., 1996). A strong sense of self-efficacy relates to better health, higher achievement, and greater levels of social integration (Schwarzer et al., 1996, p. 2).

Schlossberg’s transition theory also highlights the importance of self-efficacy in managing adult transitions by suggesting that psychological resources such as ego development, optimism, self-efficacy, commitment, values, spirituality and resilience are all factors in aiding a person through a transition they are experiencing (Anderson, et al., 2012). Bandura suggested that belief in one’s self is the most important factor in negotiating a transition (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy depends on a person’s belief that he or she can cause an intended event to occur and can carry out the course of behavior needed to successfully deal with a situation (Rodin, 1990, p.2). Self-efficacy is a Western theory and some have questioned whether it could be applied to different cultures. In their research on the universality of self-efficacy, Schwarzer et
al. (1996) applied the General Self-Efficacy Scale to students from German, Spanish and Chinese cultures. They found that the concept of self-efficacy was in fact a universal theory and that the Chinese version of the Self-Efficacy Scale had the most internal consistency. What their research did suggest is that students from the Chinese culture may have a low level of individual self-efficacy as a result of a culture that emphasizes collective self-efficacy (Schwarzer et al., 1996).

**Combining the Theories**

Together both transition theory and social learning theory provide a dual lens through which to view the unique needs of Chinese students in transitioning to higher education. These theories work well together because they both address ways in which students learn and cope with new environments. Bandura highlights the importance of learning through example and modeling behavior based on both positive and negative observations of others. Schlossberg’s 4 Ss include support and situation, which both highlight the value of people who can provide support and a situation that can serve as a learning environment for a person facing a transition. In addition to collective learning and support, both Bandura and Schlossberg highlight the value of self-efficacy. Developing self-confidence is an important personal characteristic in both theories and self-efficacy can lead to a more successful transition according to Schlossberg (Anderson et al., 2012). These two theories work well together when considering how Chinese students meet the challenge of entering a new academic and social environment, how they learn to be successful in this new environment, and how they successfully navigate the transition process to a new environment.
Chapter Three: Literature Review

Students from China experience greater levels of difficulty in the transition to American higher education compared to domestic students (Anderson et al., 2009; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007). Chinese students come from a country that is very different from the United States in terms of culture, language, social structure, and political ideology (Yan & Berliner, 2009). Research has shown that the more the countries are different from one another, the more difficult the adjustment process can be for students (Li & Gasser, 2005; Yang & Clum, 1994; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Students who come from non-European backgrounds, Third-World countries and/or Eastern countries experience higher levels of stress during the adjustment process (Li & Gasser, 2005; Perkins, 1977). Chinese students specifically face several challenges when enrolling in American colleges and universities. According to Dao et al. (2007), these students struggle with language issues, social support and acculturation challenges.

In a review of literature regarding Chinese student adjustment to American higher education, no specific research was found on a full summer program focused specifically on the transition process of Chinese students to American higher education. In light of this gap in research, the following literature review considers four topics related to Chinese international student transition and the case for full summer programming.

The first three areas will look at the unique challenge Chinese students face with the language differences between Chinese and English, the challenge of transitioning to a new socio-cultural setting, and the challenge of transitioning to the new academic setting in American colleges and universities. The fourth section of this literature review is an analysis of current bridge programs that exist for various populations of high school students. Currently bridge
programs are designed for underprepared students who need remedial help in order to improve their success upon enrollment in a college or university (Brock, 2010; Dickson, Koefer, Michael & Ryan, 2010; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). These programs are primarily designed for ethnic minority students and first-generation students who often are not prepared for college. Such programs aim to improve the academic success and persistence of at-risk populations in higher education.

**English Language Proficiency**

English language proficiency is one of the most critical factors in the academic and social success of Chinese students (Yan & Berliner, 2009). Prior research has identified three problems with regards to Chinese students and the challenges they face with a second language: linguistic confidence, English proficiency and motivation (Sawir, 2005). Chinese students are motivated to achieve and they have a strong concern with language proficiency (Yan & Berliner, 2009). While these students may have met the language requirements for enrollment, they expressed concern that their speaking skills were not strong enough, causing them to be less participatory in classes (Yan & Berliner, 2009). In a study by Li, Fox and Almarza (2007), students expressed their stress over their English language proficiency. Students suggested they were fearful of communicating with native speakers due to the speed with which English-speaking students speak (Li et al., 2007). In conversations with native speakers the mostly Asian participants in the study expressed concern with understanding the deeper meaning of certain words, placing social conversations in the appropriate context and being able to only respond with basic vocabulary (Li et al., 2007). Students in China learn the English language in a classroom setting among other Chinese students. In this particular study the interviewees had studied English in their home country for an average of 7.5 years (Li et al., 2007). They developed an extensive
vocabulary, worked on grammar, pronunciation, basic sentence structure and verb tenses; and they developed conversational skills during their studies (Li et al., 2007). It was not until they came to the United States and began their studies on campus that they faced real challenges related to comprehension and context in social and academic English (Li et al., 2007).

Another challenge for Chinese students enrolled in American universities is the difficulty of English academic listening (Huang, 2004). Issues include the speed of the professor’s speech, lack of clear pronunciation, the use of long and complex sentences, the use of colloquial or slang expressions, a lack of clear definition of terms and concepts, and the use of discourse markers that emphasize class direction (Huang, 2004, p. 212). Students have also expressed concern that listening to classroom conversations and finding the appropriate words and phrases to add to the conversation had caused them to give up and not participate in class discussions (Li et al., 2007). This challenge of following conversations and struggling to find the correct words and phrases can lead to feelings of embarrassment, frustration, stress and the feeling of being labeled as “dumb” by professors and classmates (Li et al., 2007). Tutoring sessions with a native English speaker can help students to become more comfortable with the language (Kwon, 2009). ESL teachers and tutors can help students to develop English language skills in a relaxed environment, which will lead to an increased comfort level with regards to class participation (Kwon, 2009). One problem many international students face with regards to developing their language proficiency is that they are more comfortable being around other students who are from their same culture and who speak the same language. According to Yan & Berliner (2009), Chinese students tend to socialize with other Chinese students and do not interact as much with American students, which can lead to more difficulty in developing English language proficiency. Students express having feelings of fear of being foreign when in classes and social
settings in American colleges, and as a result they seek out students from their own culture and speak in their native language in order to escape those feelings (Li et al., 2007).

Integrative motivation is another factor in the role English language proficiency plays in the transition process of Chinese students (Yu & Shen, 2006). Cross-cultural integration is most successful when students have the language skills to converse with students from another culture. The more a student is developing cross-cultural relationships, the more motivated they are to improve their second-language skills in order to continue to strengthen those connections (Yu & Shen, 2006). Integrative motivation is based on a positive approach to engaging in cross-cultural dialogue and a desire to improve second-language proficiency in order to develop a sense of belonging and to become more engaged in the new cultural setting (Yu & Shen, 2006). In their research, Yu & Shen (2006) show that linguistic confidence is a critical predictor of both socio-cultural and academic adaptation, but that integrative motivation was also a factor in the socio-cultural adaptation of Chinese students. Chinese students who are confident in their English language proficiency and are motivated to engage in cross-cultural relationships are better prepared to adapt to both a new socio-cultural setting and a new academic setting (Yu & Shen, 2006). In addition to strong English language skills, Chinese students face challenges related to the differences in social culture between China and the United States (Anderson et al., 2009).

**Social Differences between China and the U.S.**

One of the major challenges international students face upon arrival in a new country is trying to socially connect with other students in a new environment that is far from family and friends. Some of the social issues students face include culture shock, cultural fatigue, ethnic discrimination and challenges in adjusting to new cultural norms, customs and eating habits
(Anderson et al., 2009). Additionally, Asian students tend to maintain a strong ethnic orientation and take on less of the host culture compared to other ethnic groups (Fadil, 2010). These students tend to seek out other students from a similar cultural background and develop a social circle that serves as a sub-culture within the environment of the host culture.

The importance of the transition process is highlighted by several researchers in their studies of socialization problems that international students can face if their transition process is not successful. Khawaja and Dempsey’s (2007) research considers which social issues cause the most problems for international students in the adjustment process. McLachlan’s (2009) research is directed toward more traditional social and emotional issues such as homesickness, isolation and loneliness. Experiencing these emotions can lead to more serious psychological problems if not identified and managed early. Yang and Clum (1994) studied a group of Asian international students to understand the potential for depression and other social and emotional issues that lead to more serious problems.

International students experience a variety of problems when they are not able to successfully transition to the American social and academic culture. Feelings of fear, homesickness and stress are just a few of these problems and they can lead to students failing and withdrawing from college (Kwon, 2009). In addition to academic challenges such as English language fluency and differences in academic structure, students can experience social and emotional issues as well. Loneliness, isolation and depression are all socialization issues that can impact a student’s ability to successfully transition and can lead to their returning to their home before completing their program of study (Anderson et al., 2009). Exacerbating this problem is the fact that these socialization problems can lead to a loss of identity and a loss of
status that result in them not asking for help in order to solve these issues (Kwon, 2009). An institution may provide the services necessary to assist students, but may not be proactively reaching out to international students to ensure they are not experiencing social or emotional adjustment problems associated with the transition process. Issues related to social integration, emotional well-being and academic adjustment are all areas where international students need support in their first year in a new country and a new academic setting (Anderson et al., 2009).

There is a great deal of stress on international students who enter the country and plan to stay for an extended period of time (Fan & Wanous, 2008). A learning phase where they develop an understanding of the culture and customs of their new home, comfort with the language, and adaptation to a new lifestyle are helpful (Fan & Wanous, 2008). To combat the stress that results from these experiences, cross-cultural training has been developed to prepare international students for the cultural differences they will face when studying in the United States. Cross-cultural training programs use a wide variety of resources including lectures, videos, experiential exercises, culture assimilators, and behavior modification to aid individuals in adjusting to a different culture (Lievens, Harris, Van Keer, & Bisqueret, 2003). Unlike traditional training, which focuses on acquisition of information, cross-cultural training is aimed at changes in attitude in order to assimilate to a new cultural environment (Lievens et al., 2003).

One limitation of cross-cultural training programs according to Fan and Wanous (2008) is the lack of organizational preparation provided to international students. While many cross-cultural training programs focus on the dissimilarities in social culture, they do not spend much time addressing the organizational differences individuals will face in a new culture (Fan and Wanous, 2008). In the setting of higher education, organizational differences include multiple academic terms, fast pace in classes, and variations in class structure or assignments to be
completed (Fan and Wanous, 2008). Without the organizational socialization preparation there will still be a significant amount of stress on international students in the classroom that will impact their transition.

Social integration programs have been designed at universities because this integration does not necessarily happen automatically (Owens & Loomes, 2010). Social integration is critical to the mental and emotional health of students; and in the absence of this integration, students’ academic outcomes can be affected as well (Owens & Loomes, 2010). Providing opportunities for students to interact with students from the host country can result in better social integration among all groups of students. Students tend to gravitate to others from their own cultural group, and while this eases some aspects of the social transition process, it does not promote cross-cultural integration that will aid in development of English communication skills necessary both for social and academic success (Owens & Loomes, 2010). Examples of social integration activities include sporting events, cultural parties and events, community service activities, activities related to the student’s major, and personal wellness activities including stress management and meditation (Owens & Loomes, 2010). Additionally campus clubs and organizations give students an opportunity to work with diverse groups of students on issues that are important to them. Social interactions between international students and host country students have been linked to fewer academic problems, fewer social difficulties and improvement in communication skills (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). Additionally, international students who experience improved social adjustment experience increased emotional benefits including greater student satisfaction with the institution, lower stress levels, and greater levels of psychological adjustment (Zhou et al., 2008).
Some of the most difficult tests faced by international students come in the form of social and emotional problems such as homesickness, loneliness, depression, anxiety, stress, alienation, isolation, and loss of identity (Anderson et al., 2009). Homesickness is a major source of stress for international students as compared to American students studying in their home country. While students who move away from home for college may experience some form of homesickness, a study which compared Indian international students to American students showed that homesickness is more prevalent in the Indian group as compared to the American group (Tochkov et al., 2010). In that study researchers sent surveys to both Indian and American students asking about socialization habits as well as classroom performance, GPA and attendance. Additionally, students participated in three questionnaires that measured homesickness, anxiety and depression. Indian students experienced higher levels of homesickness, as predicted by the researchers. American students experienced higher levels of reported depression, which can be attributed to an American culture willing to admit to psychological issues. Socialization with American students had little effect on feelings of homesickness, but relationships with compatriots did diminish the feelings of homesickness experienced by Indian students (Tochkov et al., 2010). Time away from family and friends also had an impact on feelings of homesickness; the longer a student was away from home, the greater the levels of homesickness. For students who were interested in working in the host country following graduation, the levels of homesickness were significantly less; and for students who did not like the location of the college, homesickness increased. Environment, social issues, and the desire for local employment can all play a role in the levels of homesickness experienced by an international student (Tochkov et al., 2010).
Feelings of homesickness can lead to other larger psychological issues such as anxiety and depression. As a result, a great deal of research exists on what causes homesickness, how it manifests itself in other psychological symptoms, and how its effects can be minimized with international students (Tochkov et al., 2010). Severity of homesickness is a result of the distance a student travels away from their home and is also related to the age of the student. A first-year international student who comes from a far distance with no family members in the area is more likely to experience high levels of homesickness as compared to students who come from closer distances and can travel home more frequently to see family (Fisher, Murray & Frazer, 1985; Kwon, 2009; Tochkov, et al., 2010). Students who have been affected by homesickness have also experienced increased problems in regards to academic success; in extreme cases they have experienced psychological issues such as depression (Tochkov et al., 2010). Lack of prior travel experience has also been shown to affect the level of homesickness a student experiences. A student who has traveled extensively or has studied away from home before is likely to experience lower levels of homesickness as compared to a student who is away from home and family for the first time (Tochkov et al., 2010). Homesickness can lead to feelings of depression and isolation among international students and often international students are reluctant to speak with counselors or academic advisors about their problems (Kwon, 2009).

One particular population of at-risk Chinese students is known as the “little emperors” (Cameron, Erkal, Gangadharan, & Meng, 2013). This term refers to the children of urban parents in China who are products of China’s One-Child Policy (OCP). These children have parents who dote on them exclusively, and this has led to concern about the social skills of this generation of individuals (Cameron et al., 2013). These “little emperors” are described as more self-centered, less cooperative, less competitive, less conscientious and more risk-averse
individuals as compared to prior generations of Chinese citizens who came from multiple-child families and were not subject to OCP (Cameron et al., 2013). Businesses in China have even included the phrase “no single children” in job advertisements because of the social problems associated with this group (Cameron et al., 2013). This population of individuals is also feeling a great deal of pressure. Parents and grandparents have projected all their hopes and dreams onto one child; and this has resulted in increases in suicides and suicidal thoughts, according to Scelzo & Lerman (2009). Pressure to do well in school, along with feelings of isolation and loneliness, are also causes of suicidal consideration in Chinese high school students (Scelzo & Lerman, 2009). Such emotional and social issues may need to be addressed by higher education professionals, as these students increasingly come to American colleges and universities with limited socialization skills and high expectations for academic success.

International students who experience socialization or emotional problems related to the transition process often are unwilling to seek out help from the university to deal with these issues and improve the situation. They try to deal with these issues on their own and are sometimes unsuccessful. Unwillingness to reach out to university counseling services may be due to the cultural norms of the student (McLachlan, 2009). Students from non-Western cultures may not be familiar with counseling services, as they may not be prevalent in their home culture. These students, when faced with challenges, often seek out the advice of family and friends. Being far from home they may be unable to get the family support they need in order to transition to a new environment (McLachlan, 2009). International students occasionally use negative coping strategies to deal with stress leading to psychological issues (Berry, 1980; Sheu, Lin & Hwang, 2002). Asian students, specifically, may use coping mechanisms such as repression, avoidance, withdrawal, resignation and acceptance as means of resolving issues
Colleges and universities may need to develop and promote the use of support services for international students that teach more positive coping strategies in order to help alleviate stress and proactively offer programming for students to ensure participation (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2007).

Academic Differences between China & the U.S.

The issue of academic integrity is another area where Chinese students struggle in American colleges and universities (Russikoff, Fucaloro & Salkauskiene, 2003). Chinese students need to learn new academic standards and practices when enrolling in an American institution. For example, many Chinese students struggle with trying to understand the need to reference materials used in their papers (Russikoff et al., 2003). In China, students learn through a process of recitation. They are encouraged by their teachers to learn through memorization and replication of material from experts and elders (Russikoff et al., 2003). They have been taught that using verbatim quotations is considered a form of respect and flattery rather than an act of plagiarism subject to academic discipline. According to Russikoff, Fucaloro and Salkauskiene (2003), the use of verbatim material in Asian culture serves as a way of highlighting the wisdom of great scholars without creating redundancy through attribution.

Academic integrity is also a new concept to many international students; and when writing papers, they often copy verbatim from materials and do not properly cite the work (Bowman, 2011). There are a variety of reasons why students plagiarize, and it is critical for faculty to understand these reasons in order to recognize and teach students how to properly reference material. One reason why international students have difficulty understanding issues
of plagiarism is because they do not have an understanding of textual ownership in their culture (Amsberry, 2010). In Asian cultures there is a collectivist view of materials and information is shared by the entirety of society (Mundava & Chaudhuri, 2007). Additionally, copying an author’s material is viewed as a form of respect (Hayes & Introna, 2005).

In China and other communist cultures, the idea of collective ownership leads to more instances of plagiarism (Amsberry, 2010). In these cultures, no single person owns the right to an idea, but rather that person contributes to the collective understanding on a topic, and their writing is owned by the group rather than by the individual. In a study by Russikoff et al., (2003), 87% of American students and 43% of Chinese students understood that copying text verbatim was a form of plagiarism. However, among this same group of students, 48% of Americans and 55% of Chinese students did not know that minimal changing of the words in text was considered to be plagiarism as well (Russikoff et al., 2003). It is clear that as the concept of plagiarism becomes more nuanced there is more misunderstanding of the concept by all students.

Further issues related to plagiarism include a lack of experience with writing assignments. If international students come from an educational system that relies heavily on testing as a means of assessment, higher education may be their first experience with academic writing and the rules of plagiarism (Amsberry, 2010). Additionally, copying text verbatim is a means of learning for some students and they can be confused when they use the same method in American institutions and receive failing marks and reprimand from their teachers (Amsberry, 2010). Developing a comprehensive definition of plagiarism is one way to ensure students understand the rules around what is and is not acceptable in academic writing. Orientation programming can be used to address the issue of plagiarism and educate students on what the
rules are, in order to ensure that students understand the policies before beginning classes (Amsberry, 2010). Librarians can serve as a resource to students to ensure they understand the rules and assist students in properly citing references in their writing, but having clearly defined rules and educating students on the differences between what they have learned in the past and what is expected of them in this new academic environment is most important to ensuring students understand and comply with the expectations of the institution (Amsberry, 2010).

Students can also face academic cultural differences that can make classes difficult, and they can struggle with understanding the lectures of their professors, which can lead to academic problems (Huang, 2004; Huang & Brown, 2009). Chinese students in an American university setting for the first time can experience a form of “educational shock” with regards to class participation and teacher expectations (Yan & Berliner, 2009, p. 942). Chinese students have been educated in a system that values blind discipline, while the American education system emphasizes self-directedness and individual autonomy (Yan & Berliner, 2009). Chinese students seek guidance from their teachers, who are supposed to be leaders and experts. The teacher-student relationship in China is a paternalistic one where the teacher tells the student what to believe (Yan & Berliner, 2009). When Chinese students begin classes in the American university setting they often fault teachers for not providing them with all the information they need to know. It takes time for them to understand that they are expected to find references in the library and study on their own in order to be prepared for class discussions and examinations (Anderson et al., 2009).

The next section of this literature review will look at bridge programs as they currently exist for under-prepared and at-risk populations of student in the United States.
Bridge Programs in American Higher Education

Bridge programs were developed in the early 1990s as a method of easing the transition process of students from high school to college in an effort to improve the retention rate of first-year enrolling college students (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996). Many programs were directed at minority students and first generation college students who were identified as the groups with the highest attrition rates historically (Hurtado et al., 1996). In creating bridge programs, researchers emphasized the adjustment issues faced by students entering college (Hurtado et al., 1996). The definition of adjustment included academic adjustment (Chartrand, 1992), absence of psychological distress (Chartrand, 1992), and absence of transitional trauma (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990). Through an understanding of the adjustment challenges students faced, academic administrators began to develop early warning systems to aid students before they failed and to understand what strategies successful students needed to adopt in order to successfully transition between high school and college (Hurtado et al., 2009; Krotseng, 1992).

Bridge programs have been designed to help students not only with remedial course work but also with the skills necessary to handle the transition process and avoid psychological stressors. Bridge programs share many common characteristics that have been shown to help students to transition from high school to college. The following are examples of program characteristics:

- Student-teacher contact (Dickson, Koefer, Michael & Ryan, 2010)
- Faculty mentoring (Brock, 2010)
- English and math skill development (Brock, 2010)
• Remedial English skills (Brock, 2010; Jenkins, D., Zeidenberg, M., & Kienzl, G., 2009)

• Dormitory living, extra-curricular activities, business classes and an introduction to the business side of college through contact with Admissions and Financial Aid counselors (Ghazzawi & Jagannathan, 2011)

While literature on bridge programs offers evidence of success with American ethnic minority students and first generation students, the researcher was unable to locate any studies that analyzed a bridge program for Chinese international students entering American higher education as first-time students.

Summary

This review of literature acknowledges the unique needs of Chinese students in transitioning to American higher education and the difficulty faced by these students. There are higher education institutions that have developed extended orientation programs. There is limited research that exists on how these programs have been developed and how successful they have been at improving the transition process of Chinese students. This proposed study seeks to fill this void in the literature regarding Chinese international students and their successful transition to American higher education.
Chapter Four: Methodology

The goal of this study was to explore the experience of Chinese international students in their transition to American higher education through their participation in the Summer Bridge program. This research examined language fluency as well as the social and academic adjustment process in order to understand how Chinese students became acclimated to a new academic environment. A qualitative approach was selected in order to examine the various issues facing Chinese students as they enrolled in a new academic environment and to understand how the Summer Bridge Program design impacted the transition process of the participants.

A qualitative approach to research relies on text and image data as part of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is personal and is based on definitions that evolve during the study (Creswell, 2007). It is also inductive, emerging, and shaped by the experience of the researcher during data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007).

A program evaluation methodology was employed because this study focused on the Summer Bridge portion of a pathway program, and how the Summer Bridge program design and implementation impacted the experiences of Chinese international students. Carol Weiss, a prominent program evaluation theorist, suggested that program evaluation should be used less to solve problems and more to develop an understanding on matters of social science (Weiss, 1982). Chinese students experience difficulty transitioning to American higher education, and Summer Bridge was designed to serve as a transition program for qualified Chinese students who desired to enroll in an American university. A qualitative approach to understanding the design of Summer Bridge, the implementation of the program by faculty and staff, and the lived
experience of students who successfully completed the program and enrolled in a university revealed the impact of the program on the students and explained how a full summer semester contributes to the transition process of Chinese students to American higher education. Program evaluation was used in this study in order to gain first-hand knowledge of how the program design was aimed at the transition process and how the actual experience impacted students once they enrolled at an American university.

**Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative research is interpretive research and as such the researcher is involved in data collection, analysis and interpretation of the results (Creswell, 2009). Because the researcher in this study has worked with quantitative data related to this program in the past, it was important to allow the research participants and other data sources to drive the results of the study. The purpose of interviewing is not to get answers to specific questions or to test hypotheses, but rather to understand the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used open-ended questions in order to allow the participants to share their experiences, tell their stories, and express their thoughts and concerns about the Summer Bridge program. The researcher used coding methods to develop themes within the overall experience, and the words of the research participants are used in the findings chapter in order to develop thick, rich descriptions of their experience.

**Research Design**

Qualitative research is a way of understanding the social issues faced by an individual or group (Creswell, 2009). This qualitative study was designed to examine how the Summer
Bridge program addressed the linguistic, social and academic transition needs of Chinese students. The lived experience of the student participants was explored to determine the impact of a full-summer program on the transition process of Chinese students. Historical documents, student satisfaction survey results, and interviews with faculty, staff and students were used in order to develop a detailed understanding of the impact of a full summer orientation program on the transition process of Chinese students.

**Research Tradition**

Program evaluation research has been used by scholars and organizations in a variety of ways. The literature suggests that Chinese international students need a longer-term orientation program in order to better adjust to the linguistic, social and academic differences in American higher education (Anderson et al., 2009). Summer Bridge is a unique program designed to provide a summer-long experience for Chinese students to prepare them for enrollment in an American university in the fall. The aim of this program evaluation was to understand how the program’s design impacts the adjustment process of Chinese international students.

**Research Central Question**

How has the Summer Bridge program affected the ability of Chinese international students to advance their English-language proficiency and transition to a new social and academic culture?

**Sources of Data**

This program evaluation relied on a variety of sources (Caudle, 1994) in order to understand and to analyze how the program aids Chinese students in improving their English proficiency, acclimating to the American higher education environment and navigating the American social environment.
One data source was a student satisfaction survey developed by the director of the program. The survey was produced, distributed and managed by Campus Labs, a survey company that works with higher education institutions. The survey link was emailed to students prior to the last week of Summer Bridge in order to improve the response rate. Open ended responses in the survey were used to gain student opinions regarding the Summer Bridge program. In addition, responses were reviewed, and they helped to guide discussion during interviews.

Interviews were another source used in qualitative data collection. Interviews are often semi-structured in order to provide direction to the interviewee, while also allowing the interviewer to follow the lead of a particular interviewee (Caudle, 1994). Interviews involved three different categories of participants in the study: faculty members who taught as part of the Summer Bridge program at the University, staff members who developed and implemented Summer Bridge, and students who were enrolled in Summer Bridge 2013 and who subsequently enrolled at the University in the Fall of 2013.

Historical documents, course syllabi, marketing materials and other program specific documents were sources of data provided by the director of the program. The documents provided for this research helped to build a foundation on how the program was designed, what the goals of the program were, and how students’ progression through the program improved their English language proficiency and acclimated them to both the American social culture and to the culture of American higher education.

Survey data were requested from the director of the program, and were used to understand student satisfaction immediately following the completion of Summer Bridge.
Survey data for students enrolling in the research site were used primarily as informational data that helped to identify themes and issues related to student experience during Summer Bridge. Several open-ended questions in the survey helped to identify both positive and negative responses students had to the Summer Bridge program, and those responses helped identify topics of discussion during student interviews.

**Participants**

Interviews with faculty, staff and students took place in March, 2014 mid-way through the spring semester.

All faculty members who taught in Summer 2013 were invited to participate in an interview regarding their classroom experience with the students. In order to get a good cross section of faculty participation the researcher interviewed an Academic Writing professor, a Music of the USA professor, and a Macroeconomics professor. The purpose of these interviews was to understand how students engaged in each type of class during the Summer Bridge program.

Interviews were also conducted with the dean and director of the program to understand the development of the Bridge Program, the goals of the program, and what services were provided to students to aid in their transition process.

Finally, all students completing the 2013 Summer Bridge program and enrolling at the University were invited to participate in an interview regarding their Summer Bridge experience and how Summer Bridge impacted their experience upon enrollment at the University. The number of enrolling students in the University was nineteen, and six students agreed to be
interviewed for this study. Student interviews took place in March, 2014 after students had experienced more than a full semester of traditional undergraduate experience.

**Site**

The location of the study was a private comprehensive University located in the Northeastern coastal U.S. This University is one of seven consortium members participating in the pathway program, and staff members from the University serve as the program managers.

**Data Storage**

The researcher ensured the anonymity of all research participants throughout the length of the study. Paper materials for the research, including consent forms, interview transcripts, syllabi, and marketing materials, were stored in a locked file cabinet. All computer files were backed up on a secure password-protected external hard drive, which was also stored in the locked file cabinet. All data files stored on the computer were password protected. All of this was done to protect the names and data of participants. All interview candidates were assigned a random name alias in order to protect the anonymity of each participant. Interview participants confirmed their aliases when reviewing their individual transcripts. Upon completion of the study, the researcher will destroy data in accordance with the University’s Institutional Research Board guidelines to further ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and data.

**Data Analysis**

A review of all documents was done in order to identify the major findings and themes of this research. Particular attention was paid to the areas of English proficiency, academic-cultural adjustment and socio-cultural adjustment. The documents served as the foundation of the program evaluation and helped to understand how the program was designed, what the goals of
the program were and how the program aimed to meet the transition of students from the perspective of English language proficiency, socio-cultural adjustment and academic-cultural adjustment.

Following the organization of all data, including transcriptions, a thorough reading of all data was done (Creswell, 2009). This first reading of materials provided a general sense of the overall meaning of the research and helped begin to develop general themes based on the three goals of the Summer Bridge program. Following the initial reading of all materials, a second reading occurred so that coding of data could begin (Creswell, 2009). Coding the data involves segmenting texts from all materials into categories and assigning a label to those categories (Creswell, 2009). Themes and categories should emerge from the data naturally (Creswell, 2009); however, the three goals of the program were also used to inform the coding process. After an initial coding process was done, a second coding process took place in order to review the current codes and create additional codes or move data segments from one code to another. According to Saldana (2013), researchers need to refine coding, in that qualitative research requires attention to the language used, and also requires continued reflection by the researcher in order to understand the emerging patterns in the participant experience.

MAXQDA coding software was used in order to aid in the coding process and to help in analyzing data through the themes and categories that were developed. Coding software did not code or analyze the data for the researcher, but rather allowed the researcher to efficiently store, organize, manage, and reconfigure data (Saldana, 2013). Code development and analysis remained the work of the researcher.
Once data were coded and themes emerged, interpretation of the meaning of the themes and subcategories that had been identified was done in order to summarize the results. Data were used to interpret the results and to identify how the program aimed to improve English language proficiency, aid students in adjusting to a new social culture, and teach students a new learning method in a new academic setting. Identifying successes and shortcomings of the program provided a list of lessons learned in order to suggest how other institutions might develop a full-length summer orientation program aimed at improving the transition of Chinese students to American higher education.

Validity

Validity refers to the appropriateness, correctness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of inferences researchers make on the data they collect (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p. 148). In qualitative research, validity is not about creating an argument that serves as the “gold-standard;” but, rather, testing validity involves the identification of validity threats, or ways in which the research might be wrong (Maxwell, 2005). When discussing the use of construct-related evidence, validity is not created by one piece of evidence, but rather through the collection of various types of evidence (Fraenkel, et al., 2012). In this research many different data elements were collected and analyzed in order to understand how the Summer Bridge program aimed to improve English language proficiency and worked to transition Chinese students to a new academic and social culture in the United States. Triangulation is the combining of methods and data sources to examine what is being studied (Caudle, 1994). Triangulation involves multiple data sources in order to strengthen the analysis and verify the results (Caudle, 1994). Various data sources are compared with one another and triangulation occurs when data from one source supports data collected from other sources (Caudle, 1994).
The use of historical documents and course syllabi helped to provide data points on how the program is designed to aid the transition process of Chinese students. Interviews with faculty, staff and students involved in the Summer Bridge program provided the opportunity to use thick, rich descriptions (Creswell, 2009, p. 191) to bring the story of the Summer Bridge experience into this research and to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Finally, all interviews were validated by respondents in order to solicit feedback regarding the data collected from the individuals being studied (Maxwell, 2005).

**Credibility**

Credibility in quantitative research is achieved by ruling out validity threats such as researcher bias (Maxwell, 2005). It is impossible to fully remove the researcher’s theories, beliefs, and perpetual “lens” with regards to the research subject (Maxwell, 2005, p. 108). Qualitative research is not concerned with fully eliminating the researcher’s perspective, but rather with addressing the researcher’s perspective and how it will be controlled in the research through various validity measures. The researcher in this study provides ongoing quantitative data analysis related to Grade Point Average (GPA) in the Summer Bridge program as part of her role in the Enrollment Management division. In the current study, the researcher interviewed faculty, staff and students and did not use any quantitative data in drawing conclusions about the Summer Bridge program. In this research, credibility was enhanced by the number and variety of data elements used for analysis. Through the use of historical documents, surveys, and interviews, thorough evaluation was done on the impact of the Summer Bridge program on student success in an American higher education institution. Credibility was also achieved through the use of interviews with students, giving them a voice and using thick, rich descriptions from the interviews in telling the story of their experience both with Summer Bridge
and with their transition experience (Geertz, 1973). Through the use of thick descriptions, respondent verification and data triangulation, the results of the data were less likely to reflect the bias of the researcher but rather told the story of the participants in Summer Bridge.

**Data Collection & Research Process**

Faculty and staff interviews were conducted in March, 2014, midway through the spring semester. Faculty members were emailed a request to participate in the study. Based upon their responses, faculty members were selected based on the course they taught in order to get a variety of faculty members. One faculty member was an Academic Writing teacher in order to understand how students in the class progress not only with matters of proficiency but also develop writing skills and understanding issues related to academic integrity. A second faculty member taught the Music of the USA course, a required course for a majority of the Summer Bridge students. Finally a third faculty member was a Macroeconomics professor, which was another required course for all Summer Bridge students.

Student interviews took place at the research site in March, 2014. All enrolling students who completed Summer Bridge were sent an email asking them to participate in an interview regarding their experience at Summer Bridge and their subsequent enrollment at the research site. Nineteen students enrolled in the University following completion of Summer Bridge and six students volunteered to be interviewed. Prior to the start of each interview, signed informed consent forms were obtained from each staff, faculty member, and student in accordance with human subject safeguards as approved by the Institutional Review Board. Semi-structured interviews took approximately 45 minutes, and each interviewee was asked approximately six questions along with some follow-up questions, depending on their answers. All interviews were
recorded with a digital recorder application on the iPhone and Rev Transcription service was 
used. All recorded interviews with the transcriptions provided were reviewed by the researcher 
to ensure they were accurate. Once interviews were transcribed, a copy of the interview was sent 
to the interviewee to be reviewed for accuracy. Any corrections were made to the interviews in 
order to ensure the accuracy of the data.

A variety of ethical issues arise when conducting research, and a researcher must be 
prepared to protect the research participants, develop trust with them, promote the integrity of the 
research, guard against misconduct, and cope with any other challenges or problems that might 
arise during any part of the research process (Isreal & Hay, 2006). Creswell (2009) highlights 
the value of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process in protecting against human rights 
violations. In order to build trust with participants, the researcher began the meetings by 
explaining the purpose of the study and that their involvement in the study was optional. 
Participants were informed that their anonymity would be protected at all times and that they 
would be assigned an alias for the purpose of reporting research findings. They were also told 
that their participation in the study could benefit future students from China. Once participants 
were briefed on the specific details related to their participation in the study, the researcher 
obtained signed informed consent forms from all participants prior to the start of each interview. 
All research records were stored in a password-protected external hard drive. The hard drive and 
all other research materials were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home office.

Conclusion

The Summer Bridge program was aimed at helping Chinese international students to 
 improve their English language proficiency as well as aiding them in adjusting to both the
academic culture of American higher education and to the social culture of the United States. The program began in late May and ended in early August, and while students were on campus they learned what life was like in a residence hall, the experience of eating in dining halls, and how to find their way around the area to participate in a variety of activities like concerts, museums and sporting events. Through the use of on-campus classes and participation in field trips around town, students became familiar with campus life. Along with administrative support and the support of currently-enrolled students, participants in the Summer Bridge program had a significant amount of time to become familiar with the expectations for American college students in order to be prepared for fall enrollment in a higher education institution. This research was designed to determine if these students were more prepared for their ongoing U.S. academic experience as a result of their participation in the Summer Bridge program.
Chapter 5: Research Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the research interviews of six students, two staff members, and three faculty members involved in a 2013 Summer Bridge program, as well as the analysis of those interviews. Student satisfaction survey data were used to identify areas of student concern during the semi-structured interviews.

Note. Marketing materials included a website with program details as well as packets produced for potential students and their families. These materials were not used because they were written in Chinese in order to be user-friendly for parents considering the program.

Detailed participant profiles were written to provide the unique perspectives of students who participated in the program. Student profiles captured details about their higher education goals and aspirations, their experience in Summer Bridge, as well as their experience in the fall and spring terms once enrolled at their destination institution. A chart was used to identify the main themes and sub-categories of all student participants. Faculty and staff interviews were combined to highlight major points associated with the program design and implementation throughout the course of the Summer Bridge program. Following the student profiles and faculty and staff section, this chapter identifies recurrent themes and subcategories across the program and how each theme and subcategory has been expressed by students, faculty and staff.

Student Profiles

Student interviews were conducted to understand the lived experience of students who successfully completed Summer Bridge and who enrolled in the fall and spring semester at the University. These profiles are aimed at understanding what aspects of the Summer Bridge program had the most impact on the academic and cultural adjustment of the students.
Additionally, these profiles aim to understand how students improve their English language proficiency during Summer Bridge and how that impacts their enrollment at their destination institution.

Table 1

Overview of Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cai</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong</td>
<td>International Business</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tian</td>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lian</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hui.** Hui was enrolled in the Business School as an Accounting major. She decided to come to college in the United States because she knew she could not get admitted to a top-ranking college in China. Hui had support from her family in selecting her major and, as a family, they did research on the program as well as the University, and believed this would be a good area of study for her.

During Summer Bridge, Hui went on various trips around the city with the GSAs to museums and shopping areas. “We just got familiar with the city and feel more comfortable with the culture here.” After enrolling in the fall semester, Hui joined two clubs at the University. She was in the badminton club as well as the cultural and language learning society. The badminton club was mostly Chinese and Philippino students and they played on campus once a week in the gymnasium. The language club was made up of students from a variety of different cultures who liked to teach and learn different languages. “A friend of mine taught
Mandarin last semester and I also learned several languages.” Hui went on to say that she took French and Cantonese classes and while she did not learn very much, she had a lot of fun during the classes. There were lots of international students in this club and so it was a good opportunity to work on her English fluency as well because English was the one language they all had in common. Participation in these clubs did not always translate into developing strong friendships with students from other cultures. When asked how often she associated with students from other cultures, she noted:

Not very often, I think. Only one or two times. Badminton class is two hours during Friday nights every week and language club is twice a week. A class only lasts for an hour and after class I don’t keep in touch with other international students.

Hui did spend a lot of her free time with friends from Summer Bridge. “Every week my friend and I will go to Chinatown for dinner and the cinema for a movie. Sometimes we just go shopping around the Boston areas.” She felt comfortable going off campus and participating in local activities, but when she went off campus it was usually with a friend from China.

While Hui did not socialize often with students outside of China, she did meet with study groups and participated in group projects as part of her classes. During Summer Bridge, the Macroeconomics and Music of the USA classes each required group projects and these classes helped to prepare Hui for working in groups once she enrolled in the University. In Summer Bridge, her professors would randomly assign groups for projects and this helped her to become more comfortable working with different people when she was randomly assigned to groups by her professors after she enrolled in the fall semester. Hui had to learn to work with various groups of students, to offer her opinions and ideas, and to put all of it together to present to the
class. In the spring semester, Hui had four classes and in three of them she had group projects. In some cases her professors randomly assigned the groups but other professors let the students choose their own groups. Because there are so many Chinese students in the business classes, some of Hui’s groups were all Chinese students. “Sometimes the professor randomly selects us. But in every class there are five to ten Chinese students. They would always just stay together.” Five to ten Chinese students in a class of 40 means that 12-25% of the class was students from the same culture and groups began to form around those cultural lines. When a professor allowed students to make up their own groups, students could work with those classmates they were most comfortable with rather than reaching out to students from other cultures and meeting new friends.

Classes in Summer Bridge were slower than what Hui experienced after enrolling in the fall. “For Summer Bridge, all classes were very easy. For music class, we just listen to music and there’s only a final exam. Most of us got an A.” Hui suggested making Summer Bridge a bit more challenging might help better prepare students for what to expect in the regular term at the University. She explained, “I just found that life became much tougher than before. Sometimes I just say to my friends that I hate college.” She mentioned that during mid-term and final exam periods she had to study a lot and did not get much sleep. This lack of sleep led to the frustration she mentioned. Hui believed that Summer Bridge did not necessarily prepare her well for this new experience.

During Summer Bridge, she did learn about writing papers and citing references for material she found in other books. She noted that in her American history class in China she also had to write papers, but that “course writing here is much more difficult than the paper we wrote
in American history.” She stated that learning how to reference material in her papers was challenging and professors would just have them practice using various sources and writing out references as a way to learn and become more comfortable with the writing format. While she felt that Summer Bridge prepared her well for writing papers, she did not write many papers in her classes once enrolled at the University.

Summer Bridge did help Hui to become more confident in her English language proficiency.

Before I came to America, I never talked in class. But I can understand everything the teacher and professor said. But after I came here, the professor and class atmosphere forced me to begin to talk because there’s scores for class participation. It forced me to talk, to get involved in class. Every class I will try my best to at least say something.

Through practice and the awarding of points for class participation in Summer Bridge, Hui learned that she had to speak up in class and the practice of that in Summer Bridge helped her to become more confident in communicating to the professor that she understood the materials being taught. Another challenge for Hui during Summer Bridge was understanding a professor from Egypt who spoke English with a very thick accent. As a result of that class she became much better at understanding her professors no matter what accent they may have. “I think I have no concerns about understanding professors because I’m getting used to it. But I do have concerns about understanding what my peers and classmates say.” Hui admitted that in groups she did not talk much but that she became more confident as she continued to be assigned to various group projects in her classes.
One experience Hui shared was related to matters of academic integrity. She mentioned that several students would copy work from one another in class. They would get caught and the professor would make the students redo the work. Later in the conversation, Hui told about her own experience of an academic integrity violation with a friend who used Hui’s paper to write her own. Hui had written her paper and her friend asked to read it because she did not know what to write. Hui gave her friend her paper and then turned it in to her professor. Her professor contacted her and informed her that he had run her paper as well as her friend’s paper through Turnitin to check for similarities between the two papers. He found that the percentage of similarities between the two papers was high and as a result the students were reported to the program coordinator. After the incident both students had to have weekly meetings with the coordinator and according to Hui their punishment was announced to all their classmates. Hui did not realize her friend would copy so many sentences from her paper. “She just asked me whether I can give my paper to her to look at because she had no idea what to write about.” Nothing like this happened again to Hui, but she was upset that she was punished for letting her friend read her paper.

Cai. Cai started out in the fall semester majoring in Economics, but changed majors in the spring semester to Finance. When she selected her major in China she was not quite sure whether she wanted to major in Finance or Economics, so she chose Economics. After Summer Bridge, she knew she wanted to change her major to Finance, but she could not do that until after the fall semester was complete. Because of this delay in starting in her desired major, she was a semester behind many of her classmates. Cai was very excited to study in the United States. Her mother worked for a top international company and encouraged her to study in the U.S. at some point in her academic career. Cai’s uncle lived and worked in San Francisco, California as well,
and as a result, her family was very supportive of her decision to go to college in the United States. Cai’s family believed it was important for a student to study abroad so that they could learn about other cultures and see a different place. Cai chose to study in the U.S. because the economy was so developed and she felt it would be a good place to study Finance. Additionally, she really liked the American culture, “I really like English. I like the American view. American music, I love it!” Cai really enjoyed the activities in Summer Bridge because it helped her to become comfortable in America.

The three months itself helped me to get to know better about American culture. Because I’m in America. If I don’t have these three months, I’ll be shocked and I can’t study very well in the fall semester.

Cai also believed that Summer Bridge helped her to improve her English proficiency and to become more confident in speaking the language. Cai began studying English in primary school but did not believe her English was good until she came for Summer Bridge. In school in China, Cai learned grammar and basic English, but in Summer Bridge she felt she got better at speaking and understanding English. “All the professors for these courses are really kind to me. The professors are really patient with me and are really helpful.” One negative that Cai mentioned about Summer Bridge was that all the students in the program were Chinese. “Other thing is, the bad part, it’s not that bad but because of this program, all my classmates are Chinese students. A lot of Chinese students, they don’t want to talk with other people.” While Cai spoke with some broken English, she understood those around her, she worked hard to meet new people, and continued to practice her English language skills. She hoped that by the time Summer Bridge ended, she would be very fluent in English and just like any other American
student. While she believed she did not achieve her goal, she knew that she spoke better English after Summer Bridge as compared to when she arrived.

During Summer Bridge, Cai really enjoyed the activities off campus that the GSAs organized. They would go around Boston to find good places to eat or go to the beach. After Summer Bridge, she felt comfortable in the city and knew how to find fun things to do. Since starting the fall semester Cai joined some on-campus activities such as the badminton club and also volunteered with a group putting on the Chinese spring festival. Cai also tried to join a group that does volunteer work but struggled understanding how the group operated. She was still hopeful that she would be able to do volunteer work in the spring semester.

I missed two opportunities to volunteer and I’m really alarmed by it. Because most students from other countries, especially America, they have whole experience to do community work and serve people or things like this. I didn’t have any chance to do this.

Cai explained that she wanted to participate in these groups because she wanted to go outside her dormitory and communicate with other people. She explained that not everyone had the patience to listen to her and understand her so it was frustrating to not be able to practice her English more often. In Summer Bridge she was with mostly Chinese students and outside of classes they would speak Chinese. She would only get a chance to practice her English with teachers, GSAs and program directors. In her work with groups on campus such as Chinese spring festival and badminton, she was surrounded primarily by Chinese students and they spoke in Chinese.

For Cai, classes in the U.S. were very different from classes in China. In China high school classes had 60 students in a class but in America she had 20-40 students in a class. As a
result, in China there was not much class participation because the teacher could not allow everyone to talk without taking too much time away from teaching. In Summer Bridge her professors told students they had to participate in class. Cai learned how to participate in class during Summer Bridge and she participated even more after enrolling at the University in the fall. She did still find that when working on group projects she spoke less because she was worried she could not speak as clearly as her other group members. “I still not get too comfortable about it. Much better than fall semester. Group project not quite good. Because I can’t speak it out quite clearly.” Cai had a lot of group projects she had to participate in and most of her professors allowed the class to pick their own groups.

Actually, at first, I think I’m not quite like most of my friends. I like to go out like I said before. I want to talk with people with other cultures and practice my language and my English. At first, I really want to join the other countries for those groups. They really happy like I join in.

Cai was excited to join groups that were intercultural because she viewed it as an opportunity to meet new people and continue to improve her English language skills. What she found when working with students from other cultures was that academically they behaved differently and that was frustrating for Cai. Cai mentioned that some students from other cultures liked to spread the project work out over the time allowed, whereas she wanted to do the work right away and relax when it was done. Cai found that when she was grouped with Chinese students, it was not only easier to communicate but they got the work done with better results. While language was a factor in Cai wanting to work with Chinese students, learning style also had an impact on why she wanted to work with Chinese students on group projects.
What she found was a mix of students was helpful, and that while maybe a group of all Chinese students was not a good idea, she thought that staying within the Asian culture helped to avoid the different work ethics of other cultures.

For Cai, the pace of Summer Bridge was slower and she would have liked another class so that it would have been similar to what she experienced in the fall. She did learn a lot in her English class about writing papers and referencing materials. She realized that it was a new learning experience for her and took some time to learn, whereas American students had been doing this longer and were more comfortable with the technique of academic writing.

I’ve been thinking like the professor, they explain quite clear but because we don’t have too much opportunity to practice. Like the citing, I don’t like that much. Like the American students, I imagine maybe they start it from primary school but we just start like three months ago probably. We will make mistakes.

Cai knew that she just needed to practice more to become comfortable with academic writing. She did learn that sharing work is not acceptable as it breaks the rule of academic integrity. She seemed to appreciate the balance between group work and helping each other out when one person did not understand something, but that you could not share papers with one another.

I’m thinking that it’s good for student who’s studying in a group and study together. It will be clear like the quality part and they’ll finish it quicker. Don’t bend it. You should encourage students to study together but not share the work. Share the result. You can discuss it, the case, together but not with the same answer.
Cai also mentioned the challenges of the classroom and how understanding a teacher or the textbook were new issues for her. However, they were issues that improved for her over the course of Summer Bridge. Cai mentioned the issue of textbooks and having to read a lot of academic material where she did not always understand the meaning of the sentences. In Music of the USA class in Summer Bridge the book was more difficult to understand than the Macroeconomics textbook. “I don’t understand the meaning of those words, each of the words, I hardly understand what the sentence is about. That’s a problem. I think we need to read more, write more, practice more but we don’t have enough time.” Cai suggested that they actually had more time to practice before they came, while they were enrolled in the fall and spring semester of the program, but that most students, including herself, did not realize how important reading would be. “We waste time, waste the chance and that’s why we came here.” Cai knew she could have worked harder back then to make things easier during Summer Bridge. Cai did say that it was much better once she enrolled in the fall, and she had learned to read more quickly, but certainly not as good as she read Chinese.

In China, Cai said that teachers are always there for the students but in the United States you have to make an appointment with the professor or only visit them during office hours. That was a difference between the two academic systems, but she still made appointments to meet with her professors here in the U.S. when she had questions. Cai also became more comfortable answering questions in class. “I feel like asking question is normal. It’s also, like I said, step-by-step improvement.” Cai found that Summer Bridge really helped her to practice participating in class. Cai expressed her feelings that maybe professors in Summer Bridge were more patient with the Chinese students who were learning and asking a lot of questions, compared to professors who had students from a lot of different cultures in their classes. She worried that if
she asked too many questions the professor might be upset with her for not understanding the material. Cai suggested that the biggest difference is that in Summer Bridge all the students were Chinese and they learned at the same pace, but after enrolling in the University there were many different cultures in her classes and the pace was quicker. She did express concern that unlike her classmates who spoke English very well, her English was not perfect and she worried about her success in classes.

I feel like my competitors, which is my classmates, they are really good at what we’re learning right now. I have confidence about my ability. If I study everything in Chinese, I can comprehend it well. Because of English, they are like one gap or something stuck in front of me. I can’t learn it quite well and quick as others.

Hong. Hong was majoring in International Business with a concentration in Chinese. She chose to major in this field because of its competitiveness in the market. She found that this major was highly ranked and felt that was the best major for her. Hong decided to study at a university in the U.S. because education here was “the best in the world.” Her parents were very supportive of her decision to study in the U.S. When Hong was in middle school she knew she wanted to study abroad for college and when she spoke with her parents about it they felt that it was a good idea.

Hong began studying English in elementary school. English classes were much more focused on learning the vocabulary and passing a test. It was not until she enrolled in the program that she became more conversational in English. In China, Hong studied in the International Department of her high school. Although it was the same high school as other Chinese students, she felt she had a better experience compared to other students. A lot of the
teachers in the department were from Australia, the U.S., and the United Kingdom, so she had already learned a lot about American culture before she came to the United States.

Hong felt that Summer Bridge only partially prepared her to study with students from other cultures. In Summer Bridge all the students were Chinese and professors allowed them to use simpler words to make it easier on the students. She felt the exams were not difficult or strict because the classes were all Chinese students. She suggested that once she enrolled at the University and she was studying and living with students from other cultures, she had to speak better and study harder to keep up. She believed that including students from other cultures in Summer Bridge would help prevent students from speaking Chinese.

Hong felt confident in her classes after enrolling because they were a mix of students from a variety of different cultures. Her professors often assigned groups for projects that occurred throughout the semester. She was often in groups with a variety of students from different countries and genders. There were not many Chinese students in her particular major so she was often in contact with more students from different cultures. This diversity in her classes made her more confident in her study groups. Hong actively participated in group projects. She helped to do the work and created slides for the presentation, and the group divided up the presentation time in class so that everyone had a chance to speak.

Academic integrity was not an issue for Hong but she knew that students in Summer Bridge did get in trouble for sharing papers and exams. She told stories of how one boy wrote a paper on his own, gave it to his friend so that he could get some ideas on what to write, and the other boy copied a lot of his paper. The professor gave them each fifty percent off their grade and they got in trouble. Hong suggested that students were often too lazy to write the papers and
that is why they cheated off other students. Hong did not share her work with anyone, and she took the academic integrity policies very seriously. She also learned how to reference items in her paper and with the help of tutors she was able to practice this writing technique. Hong felt more comfortable writing papers after enrolling at the University, but when she worked with her groups, the American students often did a lot of the writing so that it sounded correct.

In Summer Bridge the GSAs took students to the beach and on other trips around Boston. Hong’s favorite place to go was the beach because she loved the sun. When the weather was good she visited the beach with her cousin, who was studying at another college nearby. Hong lived with a Chinese roommate during Summer Bridge and then planned to move into a single room in the fall semester. She really did not want to live alone and she also wanted to meet American students and be just like an American student herself. She decided to live in apartment-style housing on campus. She was randomly assigned to an apartment with three American students from different class years. She really enjoyed the opportunity to live with students from America and they often cooked together and watched television or listened to music.

Yeah, they’re all nice guys. Sometimes I always feel like Chinese food. Sometimes my roommate had made cookies or pies, we also share. It is a way for me to understand American culture. One of the reasons I just moved there is because I live alone in a single room and it’s just like taking classes with foreigners right? After class you might just no more communication but if you live with them and…yeah we can just say everything and every day right? That’s the reason I want to go there and live with American girls. Because my parents, they pay a lot for me to go abroad.
Hong really enjoyed American culture and wanted to be just like any other American student. She believed that it was important for her to meet students from other cultures because her parents paid a lot of money for her to be there and to experience a new culture. Hong did not eat in the dining commons much but she did enjoy American food. In her apartment she often cooked Chinese food with ingredients she brought with her in the summer. She said that American-Chinese food is not the same as real Chinese food and she especially liked spicy food. Hong did venture out with friends on weekends to get food in Chinatown and she also went there to buy groceries. Hong found a way to balance the aspects of Chinese culture that she loved with a new American culture that she really enjoyed being a part of. She was quickly becoming just like any other American college student.

Kang. Kang was majoring in mechanical engineering because he really wanted to build things. Kang liked cars and hoped his degree will allow him to work in the automotive industry. Kang chose to attend this university because of the quality of the engineering program and his parents were very supportive of him coming to college in the United States.

Kang really enjoyed the variety of activities that took place during Summer Bridge because they allowed him to feel comfortable around Boston. After the start of the fall semester he often went to Chinatown for food or he liked to go shopping with friends in different places around town. He did not participate in many activities because his class work kept him very busy, but he did participate in the mechanical engineering club. As part of this club, he attended several lectures on campus and then he wrote short papers about it for his classes. Kang was very involved with school work and it kept him busy during the semester. One thing he noted
about the differences between his life in China and his life in the U.S. is that he needed to be much more responsible for himself.

I should say that I need to study for myself. So when I was maybe 16 or 17 years old I don’t like to study, so I didn’t want to study. I study just for teachers or maybe my parents. They want me to study, so I don’t know why I need to study those things, but now I know I need to study for myself and I have the motivation to study.

Kang knew that his commitment to his studies would help him with a future career and in the near-term with doing well in his classes.

Kang was on the engineering track so he took Macroeconomics, Academic Writing and Physics. Kang felt that Summer Bridge was easier compared to his work in the fall and spring terms once he enrolled in the University. His classes became harder after enrolling compared to the entry level Physics class in the summer. “Yeah, because in Summer Bridge we learn some class begin with number one, and now we begin with number two. And go to three and four.” He knew that each semester the classes would become more difficult as he went deeper into his field of study. Kang felt that the slower pace of Summer Bridge was helpful. He had learned some physics in China so this class during Summer Bridge was easier for him. However, the writing class was challenging for him and he was able to put more of his time into learning how to write academic papers.

Yeah, so for Physics we have learned something in China. We know a little bit about this course, so it’s easier for us to learn it. And for the writing it helps us to learn some way to write a report or how to say some idea.
Kang learned how to cite references, which was something new for him when writing a report for class. It was not a format he was familiar with, but the writing class helped him to practice and to learn, “which sections to write at what time.” In addition to learning about writing, Kang also had to learn how to do group work and when group work should not be done.

So I think that going through the homework we can do that group work, Maybe we have a lot of questions, and I know how to do this question, but you don’t, so I can teach you. But maybe sometimes I don’t know some question, but you can teach me. So I think this is good for us so we learn something from each other.

Kang was quite eloquent when talking about group work and learning from other students. But he was also clear that when it came to homework assignments, sharing papers was not a good idea. This was particularly challenging when writing up physics lab reports where the solution was the same, but students needed to avoid writing the exact same answers.

I don’t know because our report should have the same solution because we have the same aim to do maybe for this experiment we want to prove something. After the last class we can through the experiment know this is true so we can prove it.

While he understood the words should be somewhat different, he still found it difficult when everyone would have the same result from the lab experiment. In one of his lab courses he worked in a team of three people and they did the lab work together but wrote their lab reports separately. However, in another lab course he worked in a team of four and the professor wanted only one lab report submitted for the entire group. In this case each member of the group contributed a section of the lab report and one student volunteered to put it all together to make sure it sounded correct. Kang felt his physics class during Summer Bridge helped him to
understand how to do lab reports and how to feel confident speaking English with his group.

“Yeah, and we can talk to each other what do you want to write and we can discuss how to write this paragraph”.

Kang felt confident in his English language proficiency. He began studying English in middle school where he learned a lot of vocabulary to take tests. He did not get many opportunities to speak English until he enrolled in the program. Kang found it hard to understand his professors when he first arrived for Summer Bridge, but as the term went on he was better able to understand what they were saying. He felt more comfortable speaking with classmates because “they’re not professors, just my friends.” He found that if he did not know how to say something, he had friends that could help him. After enrolling in the University, Kang developed friendships with students from other cultures. He became good friends with a student from Chile who helped him with his English. Kang said that his friend’s English was very good and they had a lot of classes together. As a result of this friendship, his friend was able to help Kang with his English.

Kang learned how to actively participate in class during Summer Bridge, but as an engineering student, he said that professors did not often ask questions in class so he did not get many opportunities to answer a question during class. He did feel confident to ask a question of the professor and he attributed that confidence to his time in Summer Bridge. If he did not feel confident about a concept, he would raise his hand and ask the professor a question. He did have a professor in the fall that would write a question on the board and then would have students discuss the questions in groups.
Yeah, but last semester we have a class I think the professor’s good. Yeah, so he gave us a question on the blackboard and he gave us time to do it, and then he gave us time to discuss it. Then he will teach it to us.

Kang suggested that in his Academic Writing class in Summer Bridge, the professor would always ask questions of the class and Kang would try to answer them often. This experience helped him in classes he took in the fall and spring when he had to discuss something and answer questions in class.

Kang also felt Summer Bridge helped him to improve his English skills overall. In addition to building his confidence to speak up in class, he learned to write better and he read a lot more in his textbooks in order to write papers for class. “Yeah, so when I read the textbook I must have used my dictionary, and to check the word maybe on page maybe I will need to check maybe 30 words. Yeah, so at first I read slowly.” In his summer Physics class, the professor would tell the students that they had a certain amount of material to go over in class and when he was done teaching they could leave. Sometimes class would get out early and that gave Kang time to do more reading, because that took more time for him. The slower pace of Summer Bridge and the relative ease of his Physics class gave Kang the time to focus on his Academic Writing class and improve his English language skills.

I always talk with the writing professor because I’m not good at writing. So the writing professor want class to write something and the report is about our thinking. Now the sentence is not important, the important thing is our thinking. If our thinking is right.

The conversations he had with his professor helped him to feel better about writing his papers for class, because he knew what was most important was to express what he was thinking,
and that he could continue to improve his writing skills throughout the course. Kang found writing to be a very difficult thing to learn. “So before I came to United States, while I was in China, write a report maybe at most four pages. So now I come here, at least four pages. Yeah, so it’s a little bit hard for me.” Kang said he continued to meet with professors after class if he had a question about something he did not understand during class. He attributed his willingness to meet with professors to the many times he spoke with his writing professor during Summer Bridge.

**Tian.** Tian was majoring in Civil Engineering and he decided on this major because his grandfather was a civil engineer. When he was young he would visit his grandfather at work and this sparked his interest in engineering. Tian was also good at physics when he was in high school and he knew this would be an important subject for an engineer. He decided to study at a university in the U.S. because he wanted to be freer in how he studied and learned new subjects.

Tian enjoyed a lot of the activities that took place during Summer Bridge including trips to Harvard Square and MIT. He also liked that on the first day the GSAs showed students around the University and what activities students could do on campus. The one complaint he mentioned is that there were not enough activities. When asked to clarify, he said there were not enough activities that he liked and he would have preferred more trips to the beach and fewer trips to museums. Once he enrolled at the University, Tian enjoyed going all around New England. He went to the beach and even went with friends out to the western part of the state to the Six Flags Amusement Park. Tian spent most of his social time with friends from his engineering classes and most of those friends were either American or other international students. In addition to various trips off campus, Tian was involved in the student chapter of the
American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and during the year he was participating in the Steel Bridge Competition.

I also participate in steel bridge. It’s kind of like competition between universities. We just like build a bridge and play a match and like if we got the top three in Boston we are going into competition between all the states.

This student group not only included a wide range of cultures, it also included students from different enrollment years. Tian made a lot of friends through this group and the one thing they all had in common was their passion for civil engineering. Tian was fortunate to meet so many friends through his major and his participation in ASCE, because none of the other Summer Bridge students were civil engineering students. Through these groups associated with his major, he met people he could study with who were in the same classes. Tian felt that Summer Bridge really helped him to improve his English speaking skills, which allowed him to communicate better with other students. Whether it was in class or out shopping or buying food on campus, Tian and his classmates had to use English and that resulted in them improving their communication skills. “You just need to talk with the people, like they will like speak English to you and whenever you go to buy things, the employees, like people always talk to you with English and that helps us.”

Tian was also learning how to manage his academic and social life. When asked about the biggest difference between his life in China and his life here in the United States, Tian spoke primarily about school-life balance.
It’s maybe I think the largest difference is that in the United States I’m far away from parents, and I should deal with things all by myself. I should plan how to study, how do I relax, and sometimes you just feel like you just kind of miss home.

Tian had to get accustomed to being away from his parents and being more responsible for organizing his time. He had to make sure he planned his study time as well as his free time, and that was something new for him. While he enjoyed this new freedom, he realized that it required him to be very responsible and disciplined. The slower pace of Summer Bridge helped him to get accustomed to this new situation. In addition to planning his schedule and prioritizing studying with social activity, Tian learned to take advantage of meeting with his professors. “Yeah, I feel comfortable. Whenever I have problems what he was talking about or have problems about homework I really like him to see it during office time.” Tian met his professors during office hours in order to ask questions or get additional help.

**Lian.** Lian decided to study in the U.S. because she wanted to see a new environment and have a different experience from her life in China. She also wanted to meet people from all over the world. Her parents were very supportive of her decision to study abroad and felt this would be a good experience for her. Lian enjoyed studying in the U.S. because it was so different from China.

Lian was studying Electrical Engineering; and she felt lucky because she had a friend from China who was in the same major with her, which helped when studying. They were able to support each other and they often discussed their homework assignments or other topics that came up in their classes. During Summer Bridge she liked the slower pace because, “it gives us some space to adapt to next year and it’s not very fast like now.” Lian recognized that she
needed time to get used to academics in the U.S., and the slower pace of Summer Bridge gave her a chance to learn in her classes, but also time to adjust to a new environment.

Lian enjoyed a lot of the activities that took place during Summer Bridge. Her favorite activities included the welcome party and the farewell party held during the summer. It was a good chance to socialize with her friends, the staff and faculty involved in the program. Lian spoke about how Summer Bridge really helped her to get connected to different people in the United States. “Yeah. It’s kind of where like we can know people from other regions in China and we can communicate with our GSAs and our teachers.”

Once Lian enrolled at the University, she liked to go shopping or volunteered in Boston on weekends. She worked with the Boston debate program and judged middle and high school students. The program held debates every week and she had just completed judging the championship competition. In addition, she had also worked at the Boston Book Festival and had served at the Boston Food Bank. Lian really enjoyed getting out into the community and serving because it was a new experience for her. In China students studied all the time and there was no freedom to participate in groups or social activities. In the U.S. she was able to study and participate in more social activities. While she enjoyed this freedom, she realized she must plan her time carefully so that she got all her studying done.

In China, especially with high school, the way of study is kind of different from here. Like in high school we have from every day and it’s kind of lot of that and we have to struggle with that ourselves. It’s usually much more difficult than we study here now. Here the way of study is kind of different. You have a lot of your own time to space. You can some days, you can spend time on study or you can like chat with friends, or
going out having fun, like that. You have more freedom but it mean you need to spare your time more carefully.

Lian began studying English in primary school when she was 6 years old. It took her many years to learn English because it began with basic vocabulary and grammar. In China, teachers put more emphasis on reading and writing, but students do not get a lot of opportunity to practice speaking English with other people. She expressed concern that when she first arrived in America, she struggled with pronunciation and being understood. Having the opportunity to practice speaking English in Summer Bridge was important to Lian. It made her more confident, and allowed her to improve her pronunciation and fluency before she enrolled in the fall at the University.

Lian also found the textbooks helped her when she did not understand everything her teachers said. Lian attended class, listened to the professor’s lecture, and if she did not fully understand what was being taught, she would read the textbook to better understand. “The textbook usually talks much better and in more detail than the professor. Like professor always gives a general description, but for some detailed information you can look in the textbook.” Lian understood the role of faculty lectures. She also knew she had to supplement them with reading the textbooks. This really demonstrated how well she understood her role as a student in an American university. She no longer depended on the professor providing all the information, but rather she recognized that learning the material was part of her responsibility, and reading the textbook was a valuable way to pick up more details than what the professor lectured on in class.

Lian took two laboratory classes and most of her classmates were from America or other international cultures. Liam found that American students were better at the lab work and better
understood how to operate the equipment. However she thought that students like herself were better at the calculations and math required. This meant that hey all work well together and each student brought something special to the lab group. Lian felt that Summer Bridge helped her to speak clearer, and that allowed her to be successful in classes and working in small groups with her lab partners. “At least we can get others to know what we are talking about. Especially when we asking questions in the lab or in the class. They can understand what we are talking about.”

Summary of Student Themes

The chart below summarizes the themes and subcategories of student participants in this study that were identified during the data analysis process. Next to each subcategory is a brief description detailing their concern within that particular subcategory. Finally, each student who brought up this issue is identified to highlight how in some cases the concern was limited to a small population of students, whereas other issues, such as speaking English, were of concern to all the students interviewed in this study. These themes and subcategories will be expanded upon later in this chapter.
Staff and Faculty Feedback

Faculty and staff interviews were conducted in order to understand how the Summer Bridge program was designed to address issues of English language proficiency as well and social and academic adjustment to American higher education. Two staff members were interviewed to understand specific details of the overall program design, while the three faculty
interviews were conducted to understand the design of the classroom experience for program participants. Out of these five interviews, the following main points highlight the program design, implementation, and how this program was aimed at the transition process of Chinese students.

**Creating a Real Experience Prior to Enrollment.** According to Jeffrey, one of the staff members, the intent of the program was to create a real experience for students prior to enrolling in their destination institution. When the students arrived at Summer Bridge, they participated in almost a full semester in a U.S. classroom environment and cultural setting. He suggested that this was a big cultural and social adjustment for these students, so there was a great deal of support provided to ease the transition over the course of Summer Bridge. Jeffrey further explained that if students were not coached in this new learning environment, they could be confused, making the transition quite traumatic and frightening. The Summer Bridge program provided that opportunity to be in an American college campus, participate in traditional American classes, and develop a comfort level with this academic method prior to enrolling in the fall semester, alongside students from other cultures. Peter, a Macroeconomics professor, gave an example of a student who was confused by the new class culture in America and did not realize that if a quiz was given at the end of a class, the student could leave once he had completed the quiz.

The first time we did that I had a lot of trouble because this one student just wouldn’t understand that he was allowed to leave and I was like, “You can go,” and he was like, “I didn’t do anything wrong you don’t have to make me.” I was like, “No. We’re done for the day.” It took a few minutes for me to communicate with him that he was free to go.
Samuel, a Music of the USA professor, sought out opportunities to guide his students in the new academic environment they were experiencing. He tried to engage the students and to ensure they understood what was expected of them as students in American higher education. He would try very hard to help students to realize that he wanted them to speak English and answer questions in class even if the student’s answer was that he or she did not know the answer.

If I ask you a question, it is perfectly fine for you to look at me and say, ‘I’m sorry I don’t know how to answer that’ or ‘I’m sorry could you repeat that using different words.’ I’m trying to teach them all these ways to cope in English.

Teaching students to be engaged in class discussions was an important part of each class taught during Summer Bridge, because that was what was expected of students in American colleges and universities. The point of getting students to speak in class was to make sure the students felt comfortable either answering the question, saying they needed help to understand the question, or that they did not know the answer.

Rachael, an Academic Writing professor, used scaffolding techniques and smaller assignments to build students up to the bigger writing projects. “We do peer editing. We do presentations related to the writing. It’s a basic composition class preparing them for academic writing in the first year of college.” The use of scaffolding allowed students to become familiar with the process of writing papers through smaller assignments and class discussions. Each smaller assignment would build up until the student was able to complete the larger term paper.

The basic thing is I start with them writing about their own personal experiences in class so I get to know their writing level. Then, when we go on to more academic assignments
I use scaffolding in class so they'll write about ... They'll start their paper in class. Write a small portion and then build on it.

Samuel felt that providing support during the Summer Bridge term was critical to the success of the students once they enrolled in the fall semester. This was a time of learning new experiences, and providing a great deal of support during that time was important to student success.

I think what I would just say is that you have to be really vigilant about working really hard to support the kids through that. Because that’s tough. I mean to do what they’re doing is hard. And they may not realize how hard it is until they get here.

**Teaching Personal Responsibility.** Another feature of the Summer Bridge program design was teaching students how to become more personally responsible for their work and for their time. According to both staff members, in China these students had a very structured academic environment with little time for social activities. When they arrived at Summer Bridge they had a class and tutorial schedule, but they had fewer restrictions in terms of free-time. They could stay up late, but if they did they would not be well-rested for classes the next day. They had a class schedule, but setting study hours and planning social activities was solely the responsibility of the student. Students in Summer Bridge did receive student conduct violations for missing class. If a student had an unexcused absence they would get a call from the staff and would have to explain why they missed class. Jennifer, a staff member in the program explained, “We try to teach them that if you ever miss a class the instructor is not going to come to you and say here is what you missed.” Students were taught to be responsible for their own learning and their own academic success. In Summer Bridge the half-hour tutoring session each
week was a requirement, but in the fall semester no one would make them attend tutoring. If a student was struggling in a class they needed to seek out that help in order to be successful. This semi-structured environment was another transition tool aimed at preparing students for fall enrollment. In the fall, they were even more responsible for their own planning. Jennifer concluded, “We try to create that path for the students so that their learning these resources and how things should be done.”

**Developing an Understanding of Academic Integrity.** Administrators and faculty worked in tandem to teach students the rules related to academic integrity. The administrative staff members were in charge of dealing with students who violated the conduct policy, which encompassed both academic integrity violations as well as residential life related violations. According to Jennifer, “Our conduct policy which you’ve read over is sort of a three strikes and you’re out policy.” Any combination of violations served as the three strikes. If a student had an academic violation, then a second strike could have been a residential violation such as covering the smoke detector, and finally a third violation could have been a noise violation. Following a first violation, the student’s parents would be contacted and informed of the violation. Contacting the parents following the first offense was usually enough to prevent students from committing a second offense. In some small number of cases students who went on to have a second and third offense were often trying to return home to China, and they were not interested in staying in the United States for their education. In the rare cases of a second offense, the student’s destination institution was notified and the student had to write a letter to the admissions office explaining what the offense was, how they learned from it, and how they modified their behavior to prevent it from happening in the future.
In cases of academic integrity violations, the faculty members were responsible for reporting violations to the program staff. The punishments for these types of violations were two-pronged. The faculty member retained the right to handle the grading issue within the classroom. If they reported the violation to the staff, then the appropriate measures would be taken with the student to have a meeting, and depending on what number offense it was, hand out the appropriate penalty. Academic violations were reported at the discretion of the individual faculty member and they could choose not to report a first offense if they felt the student could learn from the mistake without the inclusion of the administrative staff. Jennifer suggested that many students who had a minor academic integrity violation never were brought to the attention of the staff. “Many of our instructors if they see a first time violation that they feel it’s a real learning experience for a student.” Peter had such an example in his class where he found students attempting to cheat during a quiz.

I believe it was a quiz where it was very clear that a student was just wholesale cheating and technically I was supposed to report that but I just talked to her and said, if you do this again, I’m going to know and, you know, then I’ll get the program involved.

This first warning was enough to convince the students not to attempt further acts of cheating in his class. Samuel also experienced some cases of academic integrity violations where students would share their work on papers, and he would have to speak with the students and quiz them individually to make sure both students understood the materials. In cases of minor first offenses, he would speak directly with the students and explain appropriate academic behavior. He would let them know that any second offense would result in him contacting the program
staff. Samuel felt that what was most important was that all students were doing the work and no one was being taken advantage of with regards to homework preparation.

I just wanted to make sure there wasn’t some kind of exploitative situation going on where one student was actually doing the work for a couple or a group and taking all the credit for it. Or the others were taking credit for it. I was just trying to make sure that there wasn’t that kind of exploitation going on.

Rachel found that academic integrity violations became teaching opportunities in class. If a student tried to reference a photograph for the first time, or used the wrong order in an entry, the example would be put before the whole class so that students could see the correct way to cite these references. Using the example with the entire class helped others to learn the correct procedure.

We spend a lot of time on citation methods. It's a big learning curve, but I can say that one thing I’ve noticed is some change in the preparation of the students when they come from China.

**Providing Support from Peers.** Global Student Ambassadors (GSAs) were current students from the host university who severed as tutors, activity guides, and resident assistants (RAs) throughout the Summer Bridge term. As Jennifer explained:

GSAs have been a really significant part of our program and what I can say that I’m most proud of that has worked well in the program is that it’s not just academics over here, and the cultural piece over here, the academic and the social piece were really very integrated.
The GSAs are a huge role in that, making sure that students are connecting or different learning experiences so we take a holistic approach.

GSAs had a lot of responsibility during the Summer Bridge term. As tutors they were assigned to a group of 15 Summer Bridge students and they attended the academic writing class twice each week with these students. They served as a teaching assistant (TA) to the professor and were required to meet with each student once a week for a half-hour in the evenings. These tutoring sessions were mandatory for the GSAs and students, and allowed the students the opportunity to ask questions, review their papers with the GSAs to ensure they were properly referencing materials in their papers, and were clearly writing their ideas in the proper format.

The GSAs also served as a line of communication to the program staff. If the GSAs were seeing any issues related to academic integrity violations, they were to inform both the professor and the program staff to ensure the issue was addressed quickly and appropriately. Rachael worked well with her GSAs and found that they helped her to better understand students who were having problems. “It's a great duo system. It's like teamwork.” In addition to serving as tutors, the GSAs were also required to organize social events during the Summer Bridge term. Each GSA had to organize several programs over the course of the summer. These programs included a combination of trips around the city as well as activities highlighting facilities on campus. Events included trips to local museums, movie nights, trips to hear a local band play, wiffle ball games on campus, and one of the most popular events was a tour of the Harbor Islands off the coast of Boston. Finally GSAs also served as RAs in the dormitory and they were required to do rounds each night and write up students who violated any of the housing regulations. The GSAs in their role as RA had to be mature and served as a disciplinarian, because occasionally they
would have to write-up students for these violations such as smoking in the dormitory, covering fire alarms or noise violations.

**Themes and Categories**

Through an in-depth study of the participant profiles, the main ideas summarized by faculty and staff related to program development and implementation, as well as historical documents such as course syllabi, student conduct policies, and student survey data, four themes were identified across the wide range of data elements. Within each theme, subcategories that related to the main theme provided greater level of detail to understand the role of Summer Bridge in the transition process of Chinese international students. These themes and subcategories were common to all study participants regardless of whether they were student, staff, or faculty. Table 3 presents themes and subcategories discussed in greater detail below.
Table 3

Summary of Overall Themes and Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
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| 1. *Summer Bridge aided students in their academic transition* | ✓ Academic Preparation  
✓ Academic Life/Culture  
✓ Academic Integrity  
✓ Class Participation/Faculty Engagement  
✓ Study Groups/Group Projects |
| 2. *Summer Bridge aided students in improving their English language proficiency* | ✓ Speaking English  
✓ Reading English  
✓ Comprehending English  
✓ Writing Academically |
| 3. *Summer Bridge aided students in their social adjustment* | ✓ Summer Bridge Activities  
✓ Activity Participation after Summer Bridge  
✓ American Culture  
✓ Family Support/Homesickness  
✓ Friends from China  
✓ Friends from other cultures |
| 4. *Summer Bridge aided students in their transition through a unique Pace and Process* | ✓ Pace of the Program  
✓ GSA’s  
✓ Time Management |

**Summer Bridge aided students in their academic transition.**

**Academic Preparation.** The Summer Bridge program was designed to engage Chinese students in a real American classroom so that they could experience the differences between cultures, understand how their academic habits needed to change, and have an opportunity to practice their skills before they enrolled in a full term at an American university. Jeffrey explained it best as providing students with “success strategies in terms of learning, studying, and achieving in a U.S. classroom.” Students came from a different academic environment where the faculty members were seen as all-knowing. Jeffrey provided some insight into this
when he spoke about how the students were supposed to be respectful to the teachers, memorize the answers, and never were asked what they thought. Asking a student what they thought might result in them having a different answer than the teacher, and that would be disrespectful. Students entering American higher education needed to learn about engagement in class and that questions were not only encouraged, but might be required as part of their grade, according to Jeffrey. “If they haven’t been coached in a pertinent environment it can be quite traumatic, frightening, and they don’t know how to respond.” Courses designed for Summer Bridge were carefully selected to provide students the academic requirements they needed to enroll in their destination institution while also having an opportunity to teach about American culture. Exposing students to a music class helped them to experience a class outside of their major, earn academic credit, and learn about the new social culture they would be living in. While the course topic of music was unique for these students, the course design was also unique in that it was, “a little bit more experiential, a little less strictly academic,” according to Samuel. The end of term concert gave students a chance to plan an event and perform music they learned throughout the term. Throughout the semester they learned not only the music of this new culture, but they learned about the role that music plays in American history. “A lot of times we’re really using music as a way to learn lessons about lots of aspects of American culture.” For Samuel teaching this introductory music course to a group of non-music majors caused him to relate music to history in order to develop cultural understanding alongside music appreciation.

**Academic Life/Culture.** Students during Summer Bridge did develop a strong understanding of their new academic culture, and as the term progressed they became more comfortable in this new environment. Students learned that if a professor released them early,
they were not being punished. While this example given by Peter may seem obvious to an American student, it is a new experience for a Chinese international student and one they must learn along the way. Life in a new academic environment brought freedom for many students in this program. Lian liked the freedom she had, but understood that as a result of this new freedom, she needed to be more responsible for her time. Lian explained that in China they had a much more structured academic environment, and there was a standard schedule each day of when they would go to class and when they would study; and very little other time was available for activities. “Here the way of study is kind of different. You have a lot of your own time to spare.” Lian talked about balancing her study time with time to chat with friends or going out and having fun. This freedom was something Tian also highlighted as a reason he decided to study in the U.S. “It’s just I feel like in America I’m more free than in China and I can learn more things at the university compared to the university in China.” Tian knew he must be better at balancing his schedule of studying and socializing with friends. At home, when he was near his parents, he had their help and support to plan his studies. In America, he was far away from his parents and had to figure out his schedule by himself. Tian found this new responsibility more difficult and he missed some of the structure he had at home. Freedom for Tian meant being self-sufficient and not having his parents or teachers to keep him on track. Kang also highlighted personal responsibility as a big difference between his life in China and the U.S. He thought back to when he was in high school and he studied for his parents or his teachers. He did not enjoy studying but he did it because he had to. Once enrolled at the University, he understood how studying for his classes would positively impact his life and career choices and he wanted to study for himself and for his future.
Academic Integrity. Issues related to academic integrity were another set of differences students in Summer Bridge needed to learn before enrolling in their destination institution. Students who participated in Summer Bridge had to read and sign the Summer Bridge Conduct Policy. This policy is written in Chinese and is provided to both the student and their parents prior to leaving China. The staff wrote the policy in Chinese, so there was no chance a student or parent failed to understand the rules and the consequences associated with breaking the rules. In addition to the student, the parents also signed this policy so that they became engaged in the success of the student. While some of the rules in the policy related to living in the dormitory, other rules were associated with the classroom. Attendance policies were aimed at ensuring that students were on-time to class, and attended every class unless excused by their professor. The student conduct policy also highlighted issues related to cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and academic dishonesty. For Summer Bridge, the program directed students to the policy of the host institution, but all participating institutions had similar policies. This was an opportunity for Summer Bridge students to become familiar with the expectations of their host institution. Issues related to academic integrity were new to many of these students and they violated the rules for a variety of reasons. Peter experienced some cases of cheating on quizzes in his class; and for those who cheated the first time; he spoke with the students and explained that any other instances would have to be reported to the program staff. Standardization of classes and materials did lead students from one course section to provide test questions and answers to students in another section. In the regular semester, there was not this degree of standardization and students were less likely to cheat because entirely different questions may have been asked on their tests compared to someone else’s test. For Samuel, cheating involved plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration. In writing papers, students who
struggled with English sought out their answers on Chinese language websites and used Google Translate to compose their answers in English. Samuel did not report these minor first offenses to the program staff. He spoke with the students, asked them what they did, and explained how they had to change their behavior. Often these discussions would result in the necessary change. Samuel also dealt with issues of unauthorized collaboration where students shared their work with one another. In these cases, he ran the papers through Turnitin, a software program designed to determine the degree of similarity between the papers of different students. In cases of unauthorized collaboration, Samuel quizzed the students individually to determine if both students understood the topic of their paper and ensured that one student was not providing all the answers to the other student. Only one student told the story of unauthorized collaboration and how the professor handled the situation. Hui’s friend asked to read her music paper so she could figure out what the write. Her friend copied several sentences from her paper and when the professor ran both papers through Turnitin, he found that they were very similar. She had to have weekly meetings, and she was embarrassed by this mistake; as a result she had not shared her work with a classmate again. Kang addressed the difficult balance of working in groups and not sharing answers. He seemed to know that sharing a paper was not acceptable but still the concept was more challenging when the results were the same. In the Physics syllabus, the professor wrote about the rules around group work.

You are strongly encouraged to form small groups to work together on parts of the course. In the real science and engineering worlds, you will spend a significant amount of your professional career working with other people, and now is a good time to start. On the other hand, you also want to be sure that you are learning to work independently. There is a delicate balance here, which you need to discover for yourself as a part of
Kang sometimes found it difficult to write uniquely when the experiment results were the same. He understood that lab reports were to be written individually once the lab work was done, but he also knew that the written reports would still be similar because they performed lab experiments in groups. Kang learned to perform his lab experiments in groups and write up his individual lab reports on his own to ensure that he would not get into trouble with his professor.

**Class Participation/Faculty Engagement.** Class participation and faculty engagement were also new experiences for Chinese students in the American classroom for the first time. Class participation grades ranged from 10-20% of the overall class grade, and students were required to make group presentations and actively participate in classroom discussion as part of the participation grade. For many of these pathway students this was a new experience and one they had to become comfortable with during the summer. Chinese students had a strong desire to be successful and so they tried very hard to actively participate in class. They knew they could not risk failure or they would have had to return home to China. While failing a class was devastating to any student, for a Chinese student it meant a return home without a degree and career opportunities. Faculty in Summer Bridge found that class participation varied based on English language proficiency as well. Students who were struggling with proficiency were less likely to raise their hands, and when called upon by a professor they would struggle to give any response. In these instances, classmates often came to the rescue, using Chinese to help the struggling student.

Students used the classes in Summer Bridge to build their confidence speaking in class; and they believed that as their English proficiency became stronger, they were more willing to speak in class or meet with their professors during office hours. For Cai speaking in class was
still challenging for her. She worried that she would not be understood by her professors; but she also understood that speaking in class was something American students did, and she wanted to be like every other American student. The patience shown by professors in Summer Bridge helped students to become more confident. For Cai, fewer students in Summer Bridge were willing to speak in class but once enrolled she had to contend with other students who asked very good questions. Building confidence in Summer Bridge made class participation easier once students enrolled in their destination institution. Other students concurred with this idea that class participation in Summer Bridge made them more confident to speak in class or meet with the professor during office hours once they enrolled in the fall semester. Kang spoke with his professors in Summer Bridge and that made it easier for him to speak with his professors in the fall and spring terms. Still he felt more confident speaking with his classmates because, “I feel confident when I talk with my friends or any people because they’re not professors, just my friends.” Kang was still learning that asking questions of his professor was something that was encouraged and not a sign of disrespect. Tian liked to meet with his professor after class if there was something discussed in class that he did not understand. “Whenever I have problems with what he was talking about or have problems about homework, I really like to see him during office time.” For students in this program, the practice of engaging in class discussion or meeting with professors during office hours gave them the confidence to continue these skills throughout their time in an American university.

**Study Groups/Group Projects.** Finally, Summer Bridge prepared students for the practice of group work and group projects. The opportunity to meet in groups is something students may have been familiar with, but they needed to learn to work in groups as well as independently in order to avoid issues previously discussed in regards to academic integrity.
One of the challenges in Summer Bridge was that all the students were Chinese, and when they broke out into groups they spoke to one another in Chinese. While this was comfortable, they were not developing their English language skills; and when they had group projects in future classes they were less confident in their ability to speak up in their groups. Hui attributed her confidence to work on group projects to the group work she did in her Summer Bridge classes. She worked on a variety of group projects in her classes since enrolling at the University in the fall. However, because the business programs enrolled a large number of Chinese students, she often found herself in groups with other Chinese students rather than in groups of mixed nationalities. Even when the professor randomly assigned students she often ended up in a group with other Chinese students. Because most of her group work was with other Chinese students, she spoke Chinese rather than English in order to complete assignments. Cai wanted to work in groups with students from other cultures, but she struggled with people understanding her and with the fact that sometimes they had a different work routine. Rather than working with different students and learning how to work together, Cai decided to work with other Asian students who shared her same work routine. Other students in the program found that group work was almost always with students from other cultures. The three engineering students all expressed that there were not many Chinese students in their field and so their group work involved working with students from other cultures. They all learned how to work as a group on projects and write their reports or sections of reports on their own. This group of students developed more friendship outside their culture compared to the other students who were enrolled in the business programs. All students suggested that as they became more confident in English language proficiency, they were more engaged in their group work with other students. For these students, conversational English was a new experience and something they had to get
used to in order to be more confident speaking with students outside their own culture.

**Summer Bridge aided students in improving their English language proficiency.**

**Speaking English.** Each of the students interviewed began studying English in elementary school. Students talked about English classes in their schools and how most classes focused on students learning vocabulary words and grammar. They spent most of their time studying English to prepare for tests but spent very little time speaking English with other people. Each of the students mentioned that coming to Summer Bridge was the first time they spoke English on a regular basis. They felt that their ability to speak English did not improve until the came to Summer Bridge and had to spend the majority of their time speaking in English. “You just need to talk with the people, like they will like speak English to you and whenever you go to buy things, the employee, like people always talk to you with English and that helps us.” Tian was very clear that practicing English in class, in stores, and around campus was the key to improving his conversational English. For Lian, speaking English during Summer Bridge helped her with pronunciation of words. “Like at the first time we can’t get others to know what we are talking about. Like our pronunciation is not like them; they couldn’t understand sometimes.” With practice Lian improved her pronunciation, and her confidence to speak with classmates and professors improved as a result. As a result of their Summer Bridge experience they gained confidence in their English speaking ability and in speaking in class, meeting with professors, working on group projects, and developing friendships with students from other cultures. Kang felt that speaking with students was less intimidating than speaking with professors and because he did not go to class with a lot of Chinese students he made friends with students from other cultures. He became close friends with a student from Chile who spoke very good English. This friend helped Kang become more fluent in English. For Hong, living with three American
students in an apartment on campus improved her English language proficiency, and she tried very hard to spend a lot of time with students from other cultures so that she could continue to practice speaking English. She knew this was the only way she would improve her speaking ability. While students did feel that Summer Bridge improved their conversational skills, they also noted that because the program only involved Chinese students, they still missed out on opportunities to speak English, because when they were speaking with their friends they used Chinese rather than English. When Hui was asked if she spoke Chinese with her friends outside of class, her response was quite candid, “of course, I’m Chinese!” She acknowledged that because everyone in the program is Chinese it was more comfortable for them to speak Chinese outside of class when they were socializing together. All of the staff, faculty and students suggested that adding new cultures to the program would force them to use English more and result in fewer periods where Chinese would be the language of choice. In classes students were required to speak in English. The Academic Writing syllabus was the only one that made this policy clear.

You are expected to speak English in the class at all times. Speaking your native language is not only counterproductive for you, it is also disruptive to the class, and it will not be tolerated.

For other classes, English only was required but not always strictly enforced. When students broke up into groups they spoke in Chinese to one another, and other students used Chinese to help fellow students understand a question the professor asked. While professors encouraged English usage and asked for students to admit if they did not understand something, speaking Chinese was how students communicated with one another and supported each other. Throughout Summer Bridge the fluency of Chinese students improved and changed as well.
Jennifer noted that students arrived at Summer Bridge with what she termed “perfect English.” By this she meant that student spoke grammatically correct English rather than slang English. For example, by the end of Summer Bridge, students said, “What’s up?” rather than saying, “Hi, how are you?” Student fluency was more than just speaking clearly, but was also about using the same phrases that students in America would use. Summer Bridge participants were in constant contact with teachers, staff members, and GSAs who spoke slang English. As a result they picked up these new phrases.

**Reading English.** Reading English is another area that was difficult for the Chinese international students. While they learned to read English in China, the use of English textbooks proved problematic for some students in Summer Bridge and after they enrolled in the fall semester. Samuel suggested that one of the textbooks for Music of the USA was too difficult for the students, and he believed the text was even too difficult for American students in an introductory music class. The text used language from other eras and included slang that could not be found in a dictionary, and that made reading and making use of the text in class very difficult. Kang talked about struggling with some of his textbooks for class. He had a dictionary on his phone and often he had to look up several words from the textbook in order to understand what he was reading about. The slower pace of Summer Bridge allowed him to practice reading textbooks more, and he was able to spend more time on his reading during that term. Lian also required more time to read her textbooks but found them to be very important to her understanding of the professor’s lectures. If she did not understand what the professor was lecturing about she would go back and read the textbook to better understand the lecture and learn more details about the topic. “If you have met some words you do not know in the textbook, you can also look for it in the dictionary. The textbook usually talks much better and
in more detail than the professor.”

**Comprehending English.** English comprehension in class can also be challenging for Chinese students. Both Peter and Samuel experienced instances where it appeared that students did not comprehend what they were lecturing about in class. While it is possible that some students did not understand concepts being taught, it was also the case that students were struggling due to English comprehension. “There was another instance where somebody asked me the definition of a word but it was like a very simple word; I was just completely unprepared.” Peter found it difficult to define the word to the student because it was something so basic and he had no experience as an English-language teacher. In other classes, lack of comprehension came as result of attempts to engage students in class discussions. A student would be asked a question and provide no response. It was not always clear if the students did not understand the professor or they did not understand the material. Samuel would try to encourage students to tell him what they were having problems with, but often students would say nothing. He would try to teach them ways to cope in English by letting them know that it is fine to say, “I’m sorry I don’t know how to answer that,” or “I’m sorry could you repeat that using different words.” While he knew he was making the students uncomfortable, he tried to gently continue to push students because this was preparing them for comprehension in their classes at their destination institution. Being able to answer questions in class and engage in discussions continued to be the expectation of faculty, and Summer Bridge was a useful way to prepare students for that experience.

**Writing Academically.** Academic writing was a new experience for Chinese students; and in addition to writing in English, students had to learn to cite references and avoid academic integrity issues related to plagiarism. This was difficult for students who were struggling with
their English language proficiency. Samuel found that students who were struggling with English would copy text from Chinese language websites and use Google Translate to convert the text to English. Because their English proficiency was not strong, they did not realize the translation contained gibberish. After submitting the paper, Samuel had to explain to the student that copying and pasting text into a paper was plagiarism and not acceptable. Rachael used scaffolding techniques to build confidence in her students’ ability to write. She used group projects to provide students a creative way to write a story. The story was then read in class and students used that experience to become more confident putting their ideas into their writing. In addition to scaffolding, Rachael attributed better writing skills to the tutoring work of the GSAs in the evenings. GSAs met with students to discuss their papers and during these required tutoring sessions they helped students to identify cases of academic integrity violations in order to prevent them from making those mistakes on their final assignments.

Students struggled with learning how to write academically and learn the rules around academic integrity. Hui attributed her success to the GSAs and the evening tutoring sessions. She noted that the professors taught the rules but the tutoring helped her to understand how the rules applied to her assignments. Cai felt that professors were good about teaching how to reference material but they did not have enough time to practice these techniques. Cai suggested that American students learned these techniques as early as primary school and had more time to practice. She suggested that Chinese students were learning this for the first time and only had two months of Summer Bridge. Academic writing takes practice, and learning new rules around attribution is not something that was learned right away. Professors often did not report first offenses to the program staff, but rather used these offenses as teaching opportunities for the entire class. By not punishing the student the first time and giving an opportunity to correct their
mistake, professors encouraged students to learn the techniques and avoid future mistakes. All
the students interviewed suggested that they did not do much writing after enrolling in the
University and this was largely due to the fact that they are business and engineering students.

**Summer Bridge aided students in their social adjustment.**

**Summer Bridge Activities.** In addition to academic adjustment and English language proficiency improvement, Summer Bridge was designed to help students adjust to a new social environment. The GSAs were required to host various social events throughout the Summer Bridge term. The types of events ranged from trips to local museums, to pick-up wiffle ball games on campus, to even bigger trips to the beach or the Harbor Islands. At the beginning of the term the GSAs sent out a survey asking students for input into activities they would like to do in an effort to encourage participation, but the GSAs also hosted events that were entirely new to students. The GSAs decided to host a wiffle ball game so that the students could understand an activity that American students like to engage in after classes. Chinese students were not familiar with the game of wiffle ball, but they showed up and played so that they could engage, have fun and learn how to be just like other American college students. Students mentioned the beach or going shopping, while others mentioned trips to Harvard Square or to various museums around town as their favorite activities. GSAs also took the students to the nearby public transportation stations and showed them how to purchase tickets to ride the subway. They explained that they could buy monthly passes or just keep reloading a ticket as needed. One aspect of activities during Summer Bridge that was common to all the students interviewed in this study was that the activities helped students become more comfortable with their surroundings and feel confident to visit sites off campus once enrolled at the University.
In addition to visiting sites off campus, Tian highlighted the value of the tour around campus. “Also, during the first day, he [the GSA] just show us around the University and that kind of things like help us get involved in the University.” Tian was happy to get to see the campus and understand more about campus groups; and the tour made him feel comfortable knowing where to find all his classroom buildings as well as the library, dining hall, and other buildings on campus. During the first days of orientation to Summer Bridge, students were taken on tours of campus. They were shown the bookstore, the library, and the athletic facilities; and the GSAs even pointed out the academic buildings where they would be attending classes.

Throughout the summer the campus hosted various social events for students living and studying on campus for the summer. GSAs organized groups of students to walk over to the ice cream socials and other events hosted by the University to ensure they had an opportunity to engage with other students on campus.

**Activity Participation after Summer Bridge.** Once students enrolled at the University they became involved in a variety of groups on campus and visited many locations off campus. Some students, like Hui and Cai, joined groups with students from their own culture, like the badminton club. Cai volunteered to help with the Chinese spring festival. Other students, like Kang and Tian, participated in clubs associated with their area of study. Tian participated in the steel bridge competition and Kang attended lectures associated with mechanical engineering. Both Kang and Tian socialized with students outside of their culture and found friends who shared their interest in their field of study. Hong struggled to find groups to participate in because she was unfamiliar with how groups plan activities. Lian enjoyed volunteering with a variety of local charities within the Boston school system; she enjoyed getting off campus and meeting people in the community while volunteering for a worthwhile cause. While the number
of students in the program was small, Jeffery suggested that the percentage of students who participated in campus organizations was higher compared to students entering American universities from other pipeline programs. This high percentage of student engagement with activities on campus was linked to their participation in various activities during Summer Bridge and the comfort level they developed throughout those two months on campus.

**American Culture.** Students in the Summer Bridge program enjoyed the American culture they were living in. Students enjoyed dorm life, and some even looked forward to moving off campus into apartments in the following year. They enjoyed the food available to them on campus, but they also liked to take advantage of their close proximity to Chinatown, and to go out with friends for more authentic Chinese food. Students noted that they had much more free time in America and more freedom to choose how to spend their time. Lian and Tian spoke about balancing school work with social time, but both enjoyed the freedom they had to participate in activities. Hui, Cai and Kang all mentioned they liked to go shopping, while Hong and Tian liked going to the beaches. Kang even visited a local amusement park with friends from his classes. In China these students had a very strict academic schedule and had very little time for social activities. As college students in America they were finding ways to balance their academic life with an increasingly active social life. In America they were able to participate in social events with friends, and whether those were friends from China or new friends from different cultures, this group was finding ways to be involved both on and off campus.

**Family Support/Homesickness.** None of the students expressed any major challenges related to homesickness. Tian and Kang were used to having their parents play an active role in their schedules, and they did not have to be responsible as much when they lived in China. In America they were responsible for deciding when to study and when to socialize and sometimes
they missed being away from home. Hong really missed authentic Chinese food. She enjoyed cooking and brought a lot of food products from home when she arrived at Summer Bridge so that she could prepare dishes similar to what she had at home. Hong visited Chinatown to eat, but also to shop for products similar to what she found at home. Each of the students interviewed in this study had support from their parents. Their parents wanted them to experience another culture, meet new people, and get a good education. Cai’s parents also wanted her to develop more maturity. When she called home to ask for money her parents made her justify her need for more money rather than just giving her what she asked for. Her parents want her to persuade them to send her money so that she understood how to be more mature living on her own.

**Friends from China.** In addition to family support, each of the students spent time with classmates from their own culture. Hui and Cai participated in activities with other Chinese students, and because of the number of Chinese students in their program they often worked with other students from China on group projects in their classes. Working and socializing with other Chinese students was more comfortable for both of these students.

**Friends from Other Cultures.** For Kang, Lian and Tian, there were not many Chinese students in their majors, so they often socialized with American students and other international students. Hong lived with Americans, but her love of Chinese food and desire to stay connected to her culture often resulted in her dividing her social time between students from China and students from other cultures. Each of the students mentioned visiting Chinatown with friends for dinner, and this was something they tried to do each week. These dinner outings gave students the chance to hold on to some of their own culture, even if they were deeply engaged in American culture. For Hong and Tian, meeting students from other cultures became very
important. Hong wanted to live with American girls so she could meet new people. “That's the reason I wanted to go there and live with American girls. Because my parents, they pay a lot for me to go abroad.” Hong knew her parents spent a lot of money for her to get this unique cultural experience, in addition to her education. She knew that meeting students from other cultures was another important aspect of her overall experience in an American university. Tian found that because not many students in his major were from China he had to meet friends in other cultures. Because so much of his time was spent with those students, he developed a lot of friendships with students from the United States and other international cultures. Kang found a good friend from Chile through his classes. This friend was someone he socialized with often but who also helped him to improve his English skills and worked with him on class assignments. The opportunity to meet students from other cultures improved the English language skills for Hong, Kang, and Tian. The more they socialized with non-Chinese students, the better their conversational English skills became.

**Summer Bridge aided students in their transition through a unique Pace & Process.**

**Pace of the Program.** When asked about the pace of Summer Bridge, all of the students felt that it was slower compared to what they experienced when they enrolled in the fall semester. For some this was problematic because they were shocked by the faster pace of the regular term. Hui talked about staying up late and getting less sleep during mid-terms and final exams. She felt so stressed that sometimes she would tell her friends, “I hate college.” She was quick to clarify that she liked school most of the time, but thought if Summer Bridge had been a bit faster and more intensive, she might not have been as shocked by her experience in the fall. Other students felt the slower pace of the program helped them to improve in areas that were problematic for them. For Kang, having slower paced courses in Summer Bridge gave him the
opportunity to spend more time reading his textbook for Physics. “Maybe the fact that physics was a little slower pace, little easier class gave you more time to work on reading the text and your writing?” For Kang having more time to practice reading and writing, made him more prepared for the fall semester. He struggled less with reading his textbooks as a result of the time he spent in Summer Bridge. Students were enrolled in nearly a full course load during Summer Bridge, but the staff acknowledged that the pace is slower because students are dealing with other transition issues outside of the classroom. Students had some experience with American teaching styles during their two terms in China, but now they were in an actual American classroom and in a brand new country. They needed to rely more heavily on their English speaking skills, so the program was designed to be slower and with a lot of support to make sure students successfully transitioned to this new environment.

Global Student Ambassadors. The role of the GSAs was important to the transition process of the Chinese international students in this program. Staff, faculty and students all expressed strong, positive opinions about the roles these students played in the lives of the Summer Bridge students. GSAs served three roles in this program. They acted as TAs and tutors for the Academic Writing class. In this role they attended class twice a week with students and assisted the professor with small group work. In the evenings during the week the GSAs had to tutor each student for thirty minutes. Some classes were as small as 14-15 students; but according to Rachael, her classes had 18 students and this was a lot of responsibility for the GSAs. Tutoring sessions were an opportunity for GSAs to review the students’ writing assignments and to watch for issues related to academic integrity. GSAs served as a liaison between students and faculty to ensure that students were learning the rules of academic integrity and to make sure those rules were being followed in the writing assignments. GSAs also served
as RAs in the dormitories. They were responsible for checking in on students and reporting any student conduct violations related to residential life. Finally, GSAs were also activity planners for the students. They were required to think up ideas for activities, publicize, and organize the events as well. For some activities like movie nights and wiffle ball, organization was easy, but for field trips to the museums or the Harbor Islands, the GSAs had to take reservations, buy tickets and ensure students got to the event and back to the campus safely. In addition to these roles assigned to them in their job description, GSAs kept an eye out for students dealing with any emotional issues. GSAs served as liaison between students and program staff, and in cases where a student was having problems, they contacted staff members to make sure the student was cared for before the issues became too serious. The program administrators looked for students who had leadership skills, planning skills, and tutoring skills. The role of GSAs as tutors allowed the faculty to focus more on the students’ writing skills, while tutors helped students with brainstorming and idea development for their assignments. All of the students interviewed for this study enjoyed the activities organized by the GSAs, and they appreciated the tutoring support they provided. Students attributed their comfort level with campus and with visiting locations off campus to the activities organized by the GSAs. Students also felt that having American students to speak with was helpful as they improved their English fluency. The GSAs were peers for the Chinese students. They have been through the experience of being a first time student and have learned how to transition to a new environment. Their ability to be friends, supporters and, at times, disciplinarians for the Summer Bridge students was very important to everyone involved in the program.

**Time Management.** Another aspect of the Summer Bridge term that was instrumental in providing students with an understanding of their new environment was the time management
skills students learned. Students came from a very strict academic environment in China, where they were in class and studied most of the day. They did not have much time for social activities, and as a result, getting off campus for events was a new experience for them. Students quickly began to realize that studying in America provided them with more freedom to choose what they would do. Kang learned that he needed to study for himself. At home he would study because his parents and teachers wanted him to learn. He explained that he did not like to study. Once he was here in the U.S., he realized how studying was important to his academic and career success. Lian found the biggest difference between her life in China and her life in the U.S. was the freedom she had. She mentioned that in China she did not have time for social activities, but here she was able to go out with friends and have fun. She learned that she had to make time for both studying and socializing in order to do well in school, while finding time to be with her friends and participate in fun activities. Tian felt freer in America, and for him that meant he has more freedom to study what he wanted. He also liked being able to go to different activities with classmates and participate in groups on campus. He enjoyed his work on the steel bridge team, and that was an experience that was new and unique for him. He also mentioned that he must prioritize his study time. In China his parents made sure he studied and was academically successful, but now he must make time for studying. Sometimes he missed his family and the fact that they used to be the ones ensuring that he was acting responsibly.

**Conclusion**

Summer Bridge was designed to help Chinese international students transition to a new academic culture, improve English language proficiency, and enter a new social culture. Activities were designed to make students comfortable with American culture, but also to familiarize them with opportunities for involvement on campus once they enroll in the fall. In
addition to these three transitional themes, the pace and process of Summer Bridge was important, because it gives students time to adjust in a slower paced environment with the support of American college students who had already been through a first time college experience. Finally, the Summer Bridge term helped student to learn time management skills and personal responsibility before they enrolled in the fall and were faced with even greater challenges with regard to the pressure and pace of their academic programs.
Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

Previous research suggests that Chinese international students need a longer period of adjustment due to the extreme cultural and academic differences between China and the U.S. (Anderson et al., 2009; Tochkov, Levine & Sanaka, 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2009). This research was designed to study a Summer Bridge program that helped Chinese international students transition to U.S. academic and social culture and improve language proficiency. The overarching question guiding this research was: How has the Summer Bridge program affected the ability of Chinese international students to advance their English-language proficiency and transition to a new social and academic culture?

The experience of two staff members, three faculty members, and six students are discussed in this chapter to understand how the Summer Bridge design, implementation and lived experience improved the transition process of Chinese international students. Data provided by these individuals were evaluated through the dual theoretical lens of transition theory and social learning theory. Implications for the transition process of Chinese international students to American higher education will be discussed within the current and future research section and the discussion will conclude with implications for practice.

The combination of the three perspectives of students, faculty, and staff provided a robust data set that addressed the central research question. Convergence and divergence among interviewees were identified through the use of themes and subcategories. The information gained in this study was used to develop an understanding of the challenges faced by Chinese students studying in American higher education institutions for the first time. Program evaluation was used not simply to determine the effectiveness of the Summer Bridge program,
but also to understand how longer orientation programs improve the successful transition of Chinese international students.

**Transition Theory**

Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory was designed to understand how a person moves through a transition and what outside influences impact the process of that transition (Schlossberg, 1984). Perception of the transition, characteristics of the environment, and characteristics of the individual all play a role in the transition process. Additionally, Schlossberg’s transition model addresses the approach to a transition; the coping resources of a transition, including the 4 S system of situation, self, support, and strategies; and taking charge of a transition. Transition theory informs student affairs administrators on how to recognize events and non-events in the transition process and prepare students to understand the unique differences between school in China and American higher education (Anderson et al., 2009). Additionally, transition theory recognizes the need of students, along with the assistance of college administrators, to have more time to better manage the transition process that will take place.

Relating specifically to this research, transition theory was used to identify which aspects of the Summer Bridge program have an impact on the transition process of Chinese students. During Summer Bridge students participated in traditional American higher education courses related to their desired field of study. Additionally, students continue to take a course in academic writing in order to continue their English language proficiency while also developing strong academic writing skills. Finally students participate in a variety of cultural events throughout the course of the Summer Bridge program. These events are aimed at introducing
students to American social culture and to make them comfortable in a new social environment. During interviews with faculty and staff, the researcher asked questions aimed at understanding how the program and courses are designed to introduce students to a new academic and social environment. Through student interviews and the use of student satisfaction survey data the researcher developed an understanding of how the various components of Summer Bridge impact the transition process of the student.

This research also tested the success of Bandura’s (1977) social learning strategies. Social learning theory supports the internal processes through which these students perceive themselves as capable English-language speakers and American university students. Through the Summer Bridge program, students have a longer period of time compared to traditional international enrolling students to manage the transition; and they have a community of fellow students, college administrators, faculty and American student mentors who work together to develop an understanding of the social culture and academic culture while improving English language proficiency. Summer Bridge students study, learn, live and socialize together for the duration of the term. How they perform and participate in classes may impact their comfort level with a new learning environment and participating in social events together may impact their comfort level with a new social environment.

In this research, the use of theory guided the questions asked in interviews with faculty, staff and students. Responses provided in those interviews were grouped according to the themes identified in the theories. Understanding how students learned new behaviors and how they built their confidence helped to address the research question about how Summer Bridge can improve the transition process of Chinese students. The Chinese word for crisis combines
the symbol for danger and opportunity, and the literal interpretation of the word is opportunity riding a dangerous wind (Corlett & Millner, 1993). While the transition process of Chinese students can be dangerous emotionally as the student moves to another country, studies in a new learning environment and speaks in a foreign language, the transition may be an opportunity to develop new relationships, learn about a new culture and complete a degree program that will enhance the student’s adult life after school.

**Approaching Transition**

Students entering Summer Bridge had an idea of the transition they faced before they came to the U.S. They already had two terms of college preparation in China in classrooms designed to be more American in academic style. Students were also studying in English in China during those two terms. However, those early preparations only partially prepared students for the transition process they faced. Throughout their time in China they studied English in school, but they did not spend much time practicing their conversational English until they arrived in the U.S. They quickly realized that they struggled speaking English, correctly pronouncing words, and understanding what professors were asking them. Additionally in classrooms they struggled with reading textbooks, and their struggle with conversational English made them less eager to participate in class discussions. Yan and Berliner (2009) address this in the literature suggesting that while students have met the language requirement necessary for enrollment, lack of confidence in their speaking skills leads Chinese students to be less participatory in their classes.
Perception of the transition: Situation

Each of the students interviewed in this study believed that coming to the U.S. to study was a positive experience. Students and their parents discussed their educational and career goals in order to identify the ideal field of study. Each student indicated that their parents encouraged them to study abroad in a new environment, and the students were excited about the opportunity to attend an American university. Students dealt with some homesickness issues as a result of taking on personal responsibility that was once held by their parents and teachers. The positive aspect of more personal freedom studying away from home was tempered with the challenge of learning to become more personally responsible for their success.

Timing of the transition was a critical factor in how students handled the transition process. Transition theory suggests that there is no set amount of time that it takes a person to successfully transition to a new environment (Schlossberg, 1984). Time to transition may be influenced by the perception of the transition, the personal characteristics of an individual in transition or the characteristics of the environment around the person in transition (Schlossberg, 1981). The design and pace of Summer Bridge was intentionally kept slower than a regular academic term. Students were enrolled in three classes but also participated in various activities while becoming accustomed to the differences of studying in an American university. Jeffrey and Jennifer both spoke about limiting the number of classes in order for students to become more familiar with the American classroom while also experiencing a new culture and improving their English language proficiency. For the students in this program, the move to the U.S. is sudden rather than gradual, but extending the time to experience the transition allowed for a more gradual approach to coping in this new environment. The slower pace of the program, the support of staff, faculty and the GSAs all combined to give students time to experience the
differences in the academic and social environment, and to improve their English language skills both inside the classroom and in social conversations with individuals outside of the classroom.

**Characteristics of the Environment: Support**

Each of the students had family support for their studies at an American university. Jeffrey spoke about how parents encouraged their children to study in the U.S. and to get a college degree so they could get a good job and take care of the parents when they got older. For many parents, their children’s success is important to their own quality of life. Additionally the Summer Bridge program provided a lot of support to students throughout the term to prepare them for enrollment at their destination institution in the fall. GSAs were on the front line of this support. GSAs served as liaisons between faculty, staff, and students to ensure that any case of academic or emotional difficulty was quickly reported to the appropriate person so that proactive measures could be taken to help the student with their individual needs. Faculty members met three times during the semester as well and shared their concerns about any student having trouble in class. Often in these instances, other faculty members were experiencing the same issues with the same students, and this reporting mechanism allowed the program staff to step in and assist students with any issues. The staff hired an individual who is a native of China and spoke the same language as the students. While English-only was encouraged in all facets of the program, sometimes if a student was dealing with emotional issues or was having trouble adjusting, the ability to speak in their native language to explain their feelings was a way to avoid adding any further emotional stress. All the students in this program were from China and this served as both a comfort and a hindrance for students throughout the Summer Bridge term. Students had classmates from their home country to whom they could relate, and who were going through the same transitional challenges. This provided a supportive and understanding
environment as they faced a new academic and social setting and became accustomed to speaking in a second language. One hindrance to all the students being from China was that when students spoke with one another, they most often spoke in Chinese rather than English. In the literature, Chinese students express concern and stress about speaking with native English speakers (Li et al., 2007). They are concerned they may not understand the deeper meaning of the words or be able to understand the context of social conversations. The implications of not practicing speaking English, is that students will be slow to develop this comfort-level and less likely to develop relationships cross-culturally once enrolled. The absence of students from other cultures prompted students to speak in Chinese when out in social settings. The addition of students from other cultures could result in more time spent speaking in English because this would be a common language among students of different backgrounds.

**Characteristics of the Individual: Self**

The participants in this study were college-aged students from China who were experiencing their first study abroad program. Some students like Hui, had spent time in a boarding school and had lived in dormitories with other girls. The students were all only-children and their parents were paying for their education in an American university. Several students expressed that their parents worked in the business or engineering industry and their parents were supportive of the academic advancement of their children. Chinese students rely heavily on family and social communities for the support needed to persist in their studies (Andrade, 2008). In an interview with an Asian student, Andrade (2008) found that family support for the student’s educational goals was critical to her success and overcoming feelings of homesickness. The student expressed that other classmates had family members who only expressed how much they missed the student, and this led the student to have greater feelings of
sadness and homesickness (Andrade, 2008). All of the students in this study had the support of their family in pursuing their education in America and none of the students expressed any serious issues related to homesickness. All of the students interviewed for this research engaged in some activity either with the context of their major, volunteering in the local community or through social organizations and activities on campus. Students did not express having any physical or mental illness that adversely affected their academic success. All of the students expressed that the time they had during Summer Bridge helped them to feel comfortable in class, on campus, and off campus. They found that their language skills improved and they understood how to be academically successful in their classes.

**Taking Stock of Coping Resources – The 4 S System**

In the above sections Schlossberg’s model (1981) addresses three of the four Ss. The perception of the transition relates to the situation students find themselves in and the nature of the transition they are experiencing. Characteristics of the environment relates to the support that the students have available during the transition process. Characteristics of the individual relates to the self and who students are as individuals, and how they are prepared to face a transition. The final S is strategies, and in the model of human adaptation to transition, strategies are part of the adaptation process. They are the methods students use to adjust to their new environment. There were many strategies mentioned in the various interviews conducted for this study.

In the writing class, Rachael used scaffolding techniques to teach students how to write academically. Samuel spoke about teaching students how to cope with English language challenges. Once enrolled in their destination institution, Chinese students used different
strategies to adjust based on their field of study. The business programs had a high volume of Chinese students. This allowed these students to form study groups with other Chinese students in order to better understand one another and to work with classmates who shared the same academic standards. For students who entered engineering programs, they had far fewer Chinese students in their classes. They found that meeting friends from other cultures helped them to improve their understanding in class. Finally, the GSAs provided students with social strategies during Summer Bridge. Through activities on campus, students became more familiar with the activities they could participate in once they enrolled in the fall semester. Through activities off campus, students became comfortable with public transportation and learned where different places were around town. This gave them the confidence to return to these places and to find new activities off campus once they enrolled.

Taking Charge

Schlossberg suggests that taking charge involves an individual using the 4 Ss, identifying support available, and developing coping mechanisms for embracing the change they are going through (Anderson et al., 2012). Each of the students interviewed in this study was successful at taking charge of their situation and improving their transition with the resources available to them. Some students learned to participate in class discussions and meet with their professor after class. Having more attention from their faculty in Summer Bridge made these students confident to meet with their professors during office hours in the fall and spring semesters. Other students recognized the value of class participation. In Summer Bridge it was easier to participate, but with students from different cultures in their classes in the fall and spring semesters, students needed to continue to raise their hand and ask questions.
Hong was a very powerful example of a student who really made a strong social adjustment to America. She did not want to live alone and she wanted to be just like any other American college student. She decided to live with American roommates in an apartment on campus and really enjoyed the opportunity to meet new friends. She found a way to balance her love of her Chinese culture with a desire to fit in with American college students. Some of the students found opportunities to develop friendships with international students through student groups related to their field of study while other stayed closer to friends within their own culture. Even if students decided to stay closer with their Chinese friends rather than meeting students from other cultures, they did find ways to engage in on-campus activities with their friends.

**Social Learning Theory**

Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory highlighted different ways of learning through observation and modeled behavior. Learning through direct experience can help students to understand what actions will make them successful and which actions may not be as successful. An individual will also use motivation to learn appropriate behaviors by performing a correct action continuously in order to receive a positive response. Individuals also learn through modeling. The opportunity to observe a successful individual and model their behavior allows a person to learn how to best perform an action in order to be as successful as the person they are modeling. Students in the Summer Bridge integrated various learning methods throughout the course of the two-month program in order to become more comfortable in the American classroom setting. Additionally, their experience in an American classroom setting helped them to develop comfort and confidence that would be important once enrolled in the fall and spring semesters.
Learning methods

In this study, Chinese students were enrolled in the summer term and exposed to an American classroom for the first time. In this slower paced term they were able to become more accustomed to the expectations of American college students. Through this direct experience students learned how to write academically. For the students in this study, citing references was a new technique for them and this took practice. Working with tutors and their professors each of the students became more comfortable writing academically. Professors in each of the classes encouraged students to participate in class discussions. As a result students became more comfortable asking questions, answering questions, and engaging with their professor and other classmates both during and after class.

Students learned to avoid issues of academic dishonesty through motivation. Hui shared her paper with a friend and was called out by her professor on an academic integrity violation. The embarrassment she felt about this incident was a learning experience about not sharing your work with fellow students. The negative experience served as a motivation to never repeat that action again. Peter believed that motivation played a role in the participation levels in his class. He found students to be more engaged in class compared to other classes he taught because these students were motivated to get good grades.

While students had to learn about a new academic environment, they also had to become more comfortable with the new cultural environment and to improve their English language skills in order to communicate with others. The GSAs served as models for the students in helping them to communicate better and to show them how to be active both on and off campus. The GSAs planned a variety of activities aimed at showing the students what life is like for an
American college student. Socializing during their free time was a unique experience for the students in this program. Learning about the opportunities available to them was something the GSAs were able to help model for them.

GSAs also spoke with the students often and the way they spoke to the students served as a model of how to communicate with other English language speakers. Conversations with native English speakers served as a model for Chinese student of how to communicate in this new environment.

Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1997) highlights the importance of self-efficacy in an individual’s ability to preserve in the face of adversity. An individual will take adaptive measures when faced with the challenge of a transition and will use this adaptation to improve the outcome (Schwarzer et al., 1996). Self-efficacy is not related to unrealistic optimism or risk-taking behavior, but rather it relates to bold action taken by an individual within their own capabilities (Schwarzer et al., 1996). The Summer Bridge experience helped to build the confidence of students. Throughout the interviews it was clear that students felt comfortable with their new academic setting, the new cultural setting, and speaking English. There were variances among the students in their level of self-confidence, and the more a student spent time with classmates outside of their culture, the more they were confident in their ability to succeed. Kang, Tian and Lian, all engineering students, expressed that because there were not a lot of Chinese students in their program of study they developed friendships and participated in activities with individuals from other cultures. This caused them to become more confident in their English language proficiency as well as in their new academic and social surroundings. Hong wanted to be just like an American
college student and living in an apartment with three American girls helped her to be more confident meeting students from other cultures and conversing with them.

Each student mentioned the one limitation of Summer Bridge was that there were only Chinese students and that when they were not in class they would speak Chinese with one another. Yan and Berliner (2009) found that Chinese students tend to be more comfortable with students from their own culture. The literature also suggests that students develop confidence through the practice of speaking English (Li et al., 2007). To develop self-confidence, students need to practice their English regularly in order to be prepared for the experience of a multicultural classroom experience. All the students in this study suggested that having classmates from other cultures in the program would have forced them to practice their English skills more often. Once enrolled in classes they had more opportunities to work in study groups with students from other cultures and to better develop their English language proficiency. The slower pace of Summer Bridge helped students to adjust to this new environment and to become confident before they enrolled in the fall semester. Schlossberg also emphasized the importance of self-efficacy in the transition process (Anderson et al., 2012). By not setting a time table for transition and giving students the opportunity to slowly develop a comfort level with a new environment, Schlossberg suggests that students will experience a more successful transition process (Anderson et al., 2009, Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Once enrolled, students expressed confidence in speaking with their professors and fellow students. They were willing to raise their hand in class to answer questions and they actively participated in their study groups. Finally, their improved English language proficiency made them more confident to participate in activities on and off campus and to feel comfortable working and socializing with students from other cultures. Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1977) is evident when looking at
the impact Summer Bridge had on the experience of the study participants once they enrolled at the University. They not only improved their English language proficiency skills, but they became confident in their ability to engage with both faculty and fellow students once enrolled in a more diverse classroom setting.

The literature on Chinese students suggested the need for an extended orientation program to aid in their adjustment process (Anderson et al., 2009). Chinese students had to adjust to a new academic culture, a new social culture and they needed to develop confidence in their English language proficiency. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1984) stated that transition is something that could be faced by an individual at any age and the transition process is not a set time but rather something unique to each individual. Bandura (1977) suggested that individuals learn in different ways through direct experience, motivation, and modeling, but that self-efficacy, or belief in one’s self, was an important part of the learning process. Schlossberg also agreed that self-efficacy was an important factor in improving the transition process of an individual. The Summer Bridge program gave students two months to adjust to a new academic and social culture while improving their English language skills. By the end of the program, students were more confident speaking English with their professors and with their classmates. They developed confidence to participate in class discussions and work on group projects. They learned the rule of academic integrity and how to work both jointly on projects and separately on tests and papers. Finally these students became comfortable around campus and around Boston. This confidence led them to become involved in student organizations and to seek out various social activities both on and off campus. The slower pace and extended term gave students time to learn from mistakes and to develop confidence in order to be successful once enrolled in the University. The use of extended orientation programming that encompassed these three areas
showed that Chinese students were better prepared for enrollment in the fall as a result of the time spent in transition during the summer.

**Implications for Current and Future Research**

The main goal of this research was to understand whether an extended Summer Bridge program could improve the transition process of Chinese students in three areas: academic differences, social differences, and English language proficiency. This study showed that Summer Bridge did improve the transition process of Chinese students by acclimating them to the American classroom experience; by helping them to become comfortable both on campus and in the neighboring community; and by helping them to improve their English language proficiency through the practice of reading textbooks, writing academic papers, and speaking both inside and outside of class with fellow students and professors. This research suggests that institutions should develop international orientation programs that are longer in length and that help acclimate students to both the new academic and social setting. These programs are especially important where the cultural differences are greatest, such as the difference between Chinese and American academic and social culture. Additionally, Chinese students need to develop confidence in regards to English language proficiency. Providing these students with opportunities to practice their English with other students is important because while they understand grammar and vocabulary, they have not had much opportunity to practice their speaking skills.

While longer orientation programming is important to improving the transition process of these students, administrators need to remember that Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1984) suggest that transitions do not end on a time table and support needs to continue to be provided
to these students throughout the first year of their enrollment in the institution. In Summer Bridge students were required to participate in tutoring sessions but once enrolled students had to seek out these services on their own. Institutions should proactively reach out to these students to make sure they are continuing to adjust to the new academic environment and provide assistance should they be struggling academically. Additionally, the GSAs served as the first link these students had to American college students. Institutions should consider the development of a mentoring program where the role of the GSA continues into the first year of enrollment. These students would help to organize social activities, provide insight to life on campus, and would serve as academic support for international students experiencing American higher education for the first time. In addition to academic and social support, this mentoring program would provide an additional opportunity for students to improve their English language skills and build greater confidence in their ability to communicate with students in English. Finally, this mentoring program would potentially begin to develop cross cultural relationships among students who might otherwise have a tendency to socialize only with fellow students from their own culture. This would be especially important for students who are in an academic program with a larger percentage of students from their own culture.

In addition to suggested changes that can be made to improve Chinese student transition in the current academic setting, future research should continue to analyze how Summer Bridge or an extended international orientation program might improve the transition process of Chinese students. Several areas of future research are identified below to continue to expand the literature on Chinese student transition to American higher education.
During Summer Bridge GSAs spend a lot of time with students in a variety of ways. They serve as RAs, TAs, tutors, and as activity planners to help students become more comfortable with their environment. Their role with the Summer Bridge students is extensive and several students suggested they were a tremendous support. More research is needed to understand the role of the GSAs and to what extent their involvement with the program impacts the transition process of Summer Bridge students.

One of the goals of the Summer Bridge program was to familiarize students with a new academic culture. Students had mandatory tutoring sessions to help them adjust to a new academic environment. Once enrolled, none of the students mentioned seeking out additional tutoring support for their classes. Additional research is needed to understand the extent to which students in a pathway program reach out for academic support during the regular term and how they progress academically from year to year during their degree program.

Improving the English language proficiency of Chinese international students was another goal of the Summer Bridge program. Yan and Berliner (2009) suggest that while Chinese students have studied English for many years, they lack confidence in their communication skills and this impacts their willingness to participate in class discussions. Students in this study suggested that they did not have many opportunities to be conversational when studying English in China and that their first experience speaking English with Americans was when they arrived at Summer Bridge. They expressed concern that they did not pronounce words correctly. Students did suggest that their English language proficiency improved over the summer and they became more comfortable speaking in class as their fluency improved. Students also suggested that they would like to have more contact with students from other
cultures outside of class, so that they could practice speaking English more often. Faculty members also suggested that the inclusion of students from other cultures as part of the program would mean that English would be the common language among the students. This would require all students to speak primarily in English both inside and outside of class. More research is needed to determine if the addition of students from another culture would prompt students to use English more often both inside and outside of class, and if this increase in English usage would improve their conversational English.

Research suggests that having a longer orientation program for Chinese students would improve the transition process and improve the adjustment process prior to enrollment in an American higher education institution (Anderson et al., 2009). Further research needs to be conducted in this area. Research should be done on other extended summer orientation programs for international students to understand how these other programs may vary from the program used in this study. Additionally, research should be conducted on students who enrolled at other universities after finishing Summer Bridge and how their transition might have differed compared to students who enrolled in the host university. Finally longitudinal research should be done on this Summer Bridge cohort to understand their academic success and persistence to graduation. There is a gap in the literature regarding extended orientation programs for international students. While this study begins to fill that gap, additional studies will add to the literature on international student adjustment to American higher education, and how extended orientation programs can improve the success of this population.
Conclusion

This study shows how an extended summer orientation program can improve the transition process of Chinese international students and how such a program can help build their self-confidence leading up to enrollment in the fall semester in three main areas:

1. English Language Proficiency
2. Transition to a new Social Culture
3. Transition to a new Academic Culture

It also shows that the transition process does not end with fall enrollment. There is no time limit on a transition and those transitions take time (Schlossberg, 1984). Higher education administrators need to continue to engage with international students after their initial enrollment and continue to develop programming that helps them identify ongoing support to ensure that they are continuing to adjust academically and socially, and are improving their English language skills in order to engage with classmates and professors.

Chinese students bring cultural diversity to American higher education and the opportunity for cross-cultural learning can be improved when these students feel more confident and comfortable in their new environment. Summer Bridge is one way to ease the transition of Chinese students to this new environment and has been shown to be successful in this research study.

This study showed how a Summer Bridge program was designed to improve the transition process of Chinese students to American higher education. These students have been identified in the literature as experiencing greater challenges with transition related to academic, social and language differences between the two cultures. The Summer Bridge program was
designed to aid the transition of Chinese students in all three of these areas over the course of a two month program. Upon enrollment students were more comfortable with the academic and cultural setting and they were more confident in their English language proficiency. This research has begun to fill a void in the literature around extended orientation programming for international students. With increasing international student enrollment in American colleges and universities, this research will help institutions to ensure international students are well prepared for their American college experience.
References


Personal Communication (2012). Various quotations and facts cited in this paper come from interviews conducted with the Dean and Program Director in May 2012.


U.S. Sino-Pathways Program (2013). www.chinapathways.us


Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear

My name is Beth Dixon and I am currently a doctoral candidate in Doctor of Education program in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. I am currently undertaking a small scale research project regarding the USPP Summer Bridge program as part of my EdD thesis work. I was wondering if you would be willing to be interviewed, at a time and place convenient to you as part of that research. The interview should take no longer than 60 minutes.

The title of my research project is, *Improving the social, linguistic and academic success of Chinese international students* and I hope to explore how the USPP Summer Bridge program design impacts to the transition process of Chinese students into American higher education.

Before you agree to the interview I can confirm that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary.
- The Senior Associate Dean of Global Engagement has given permission for this research to be carried out.
- With your permission the interview will be recorded.
- A transcript of the interview will be sent to you after the interview.
- Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party.
- You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your transcript not be used.
- A copy of the interview questions will be sent to you seven days before the interview.
- I will write to you on completion of the research and a copy of my final research report will be made available to you upon request.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to help me with my research. If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about the extent of your involvement in it please email me at dixon.b@husky.neu.edu.

Finally, I thank you for taking the time to consider my request and I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Beth A. Dixon
EdD Candidate
College of Professional Studies
Appendix B: Signed Informed Consent

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Carolyn Bair, Beth A. Dixon
Title of Project: Improving the Social, Linguistic and Academic Success of Chinese International Students

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to take part in this research because of your participation in the USPP Summer Bridge program during the Summer of 2013.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of the research is to understand the impact of the Summer Bridge program on the transition process of Chinese students to American higher education.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in an interview regarding your USPP Summer Bridge program experiences. Additionally you will be asked to review a transcript of the interview to verify accuracy of the transcription.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take about one hour. Within a week you were receive a transcript of the interview that you will be asked to review for accuracy.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
All interviews will be confidential and you will not be referenced by name in either the final document or any presentation of results. You are able to remove yourself from the study at any time.
Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help improve the Summer Bridge program for subsequent USPP students.

Who will see the information about me?
Your identity as a participant in this study will not be known to anyone other than the interviewer. Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

Pseudonyms will be used in the document to protect confidentiality. All interview transcripts and audiotapes will be stored in a secure file cabinet. In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student, employee, etc.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Beth A. Dixon, the person mainly responsible for the research, via phone at (781) 910-7103 or via email Dixon.B@husky.neu.edu. You can also contact Dr. Carolyn Bair, the Principal Investigator, via email at C.Bair@neu.edu.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
Will I be paid for my participation?
Participants will not be compensated for the time.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There will be no cost to participate in this study.

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must be at least 18 years old to participate and you must have participated in the USPP Summer Bridge program.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part   Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the Date
participant above and obtained consent

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title and Name):
Interviewer: Beth Dixon
Date: ________________________
Location of Interview:

INTRODUCTION
Part I: Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and sign IRB protocol and form for tape recording.

Introductory Protocol
You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has insights into the Summer Bridge program and its impact on the American college enrollment experience of Chinese international students. Through this study, we hope to learn more about how the Summer Bridge program impacts the transitions process of Chinese students to a new social and academic culture as well as to an academic setting with a new language.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I may also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The tapes will be transcribed by a Rev.com transcription service, but the pseudonym will be used to label the recordings. I will be the only one privy to transcripts and information and the recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

To meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have emailed to you. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm (allow time to review form). Do you have any questions about the interview process or this form?

We have planned this interview to last no longer than one-and-a-half hours. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. However please feel free to bring up topics that you feel are related. Do you have any questions at this time?

Introduction to Interview

Interviewee Background – my name is Beth Dixon and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. My dissertation research centers on the transition process of Chinese students to American higher education. I am evaluating the Summer Bridge portion of USPP to understand how the program influences the transition process. I am also an administrator at Northeastern University. My research today is solely related to my student work and is in no way linked to my employment at the university.