INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADJUSTMENT:
DOES THE SIZE OF THE POPULATION Dictate THE EXPERIENCE?

A thesis presented

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ABSTRACT:
The purpose of this study is to examine the cultural adjustment experiences of international students to determine if there are differences in the adjustment experiences when more than half of the international students come from one country of origin. Phenomenology was used as the qualitative research approach to examine the experiences of eight undergraduate international students in the first semester of their second year of study at one institution in the northeastern United States. During two semi-structured interviews each participant discussed their expectations and adjustment experiences during their first year of study in the U.S. Results from the study include ten unique themes placed into four overarching domains. The data generated shows that the cultural adjustment experiences of the participants were largely similar.
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International Student Adjustment Experiences: Does the Size of the Population Dictate the Experience?

Introduction

The number of international students studying in the United States has risen significantly over the last 9 years and is expected to continue to grow in the future. In 2016, 1,043,839 international students were studying in the U.S., up from 564,000 in 2005 (Institute of International Education, 2016). As can be expected, not all international students are the same and the needs of the various groups within the population vary. As more and more international students choose to study in the U.S. it is important to understand the differences in the cultural adjustment experiences of the various groups. As a high-risk population, international students are prone to “feelings of uneasiness and insecurity” and are likely to struggle with both the social and academic adjustments of college life in the U.S. (Yakunina, 2012, p. 216). International students are less likely than domestic students to get involved on the college campus and are more likely to feel isolated and alone (Toyokawa, 2002). A considerable amount of research has been conducted examining the adjustment of international students, focusing on cultural adjustment, stress, language issues, and family pressure (Carr, 2010; Kashima, 2006; Moores, 2011; Sodowsky, 1992; Yaunina, 2012; Zhang, 2011). Research focusing on the country and regions of origin of international students has shown that different types of stress are prevalent for certain groups of international students (Zhao, Kuh, Carini, 2005).

According to the 2015 Open Doors Report, three countries account for half the number of international students coming to the U.S.: China, India, and South Korea (Institute of International Education, 2015). With just a small number of countries making up the majority of
international students studying in the U.S., the population of international students on college campuses is rarely evenly distributed. For the purpose of this study, “evenly distributed” means approximately the same number of students coming from each country of origin. For many institutions, students from one country of origin make up the majority of the international population. Despite this reality, little to no research has been done to determine if there are differences in the ability of international students to adjust to college when one country of origin accounts for more than half of the international student population. In other words, does having most of the international student population come from just one country change the needs and experiences of any (or all) of the international student population? Meeting the needs of a Chinese international student on campus, who is the only Chinese student among 1,000 international students, may be very different from meeting the needs of a Chinese student on campus who is 1 of 600 Chinese students of a total international population of 1,000. The same could be said for the needs of a Nigerian student who is 1 of 1,000 where no country makes up the majority of the international population, versus a Nigerian student who is 1 of 1,000 where 600 of the international students are Chinese. This research study focused not on the country of origin, but on the significant disparity amongst the number of students coming from each country (when more than half come from just one country) and hopes to shed more light on how institutions can best serve their international student body.

Colleges and universities have a vested interest in providing their international students an excellent collegiate experience. International students often pay the highest tuition rate of any student and provide classroom perspectives and experiences that their domestic counterparts cannot (Cantwell, 2015). Understanding the cultural adjustment issues of the college or university’s international student population allows faculty and staff to provide the best
experience possible. Administrators, faculty, and staff who work on providing the best experience possible greatly increase the likelihood of expanding the size of the international student population and their global presence.

Significance Statement

There has been a large amount of research dedicated to the experience of international students on campuses (Baba, Hosoda, 2014) (Burkhardt, 2013) (Duanmu, Li, Chen, 2009) (Fritz, Chin, DeMarinis, 2008) (Kagan, Cohen, 1990) (Lefdddahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern 2015) (Wang et al., 2012) (Zhang and Goodson, 2010). International students, as a whole, are known to be at a higher risk than their domestic student counterparts for struggling with social and academic adjustment in the classroom (Fritz, Chin, DeMarinis, 2008). Risks that are higher for international students than domestic students include elevated levels of stress and a greater propensity for anxiety. Institutions have realized that not every international student is the same and knowing the differences is the only way to properly provide them service. In an effort to properly provide services for these students, institutions have studied individual international student groups in a number of different ways, including looking at international students based on where they are from and how they manage stress (Fritz, Chin, DeMarinis, 2008), what region they are from and how this affects their ability to integrate into the U.S. college campus (Rienties, Tempelaar, 2012, p. 198), the English language ability of a student and their propensity to become depressed (Sumer, Poyrazli, Grahame, 2008, p. 435), stress in international students based on the country of origin (Wei, et al, 2007 p. 392), and which students from which countries are more likely to form relationships with members of the domestic student population (Li, Gasser, 2005, p. 573). However, research does not take into account any variations that may occur when students from one country make up the majority of international students on a
campus. Knowing if having one country make up the majority of international students on a campus causes a change in how these students experience college can allow institutions to further tailor their services to meet their international students’ needs.

**Research Questions**

The research questions below compare and contrast the cultural adjustment experiences of international students who study at a U.S. colleges and universities. As the literature review below discusses at length, the cultural adjustment of an international student can vary greatly based on a wide variety of factors. This study attempted to determine whether the cultural adjustment experiences of international students differed when the institution’s international population consists primarily of students from one country of origin. If more than half of an institution’s international population comes from one country, are the experiences of international students different? The study focused on two main research questions:

- When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the “majority” country of origin, the country that makes up more than half of the international student population?

- When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the other countries of origin?

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework chosen for this doctoral thesis is cultural adjustment theory. Cultural adjustment theory (Kagan & Cohen, 1990) involves the combination of two main principles, an individual or group’s ability to 1) acculturate and 2) assimilate to new
surroundings. In simple terms, cultural adjustment looks at how people adapt to new places and new experiences. Kagan and Cohen focused their research on the adjustment of international students to college campuses in the U.S. For international students, studies have shown that there are a number of factors that contribute to adjustment (Fritz, 2008; Furukawa, 1997; Sumer, 2008; Hendrickson, 2011). These studies list some of the most significant factors that contribute to cultural adjustment experiences as: making friends with domestic students, English-language ability, depression and stress management. The paragraphs below discuss how cultural adjustment theory was born, why the theory is so often studied on college campuses, and how the theory has been used in contemporary studies to dissect and examine differences within international student populations.

When discussing the origins of the study of cultural adjustment, we can examine the topic’s beginning by looking at anthropologists. From an anthropological perspective, we can use the work of Melford Spiro and his focus on the acculturation and cultural adjustment of various groups within the United States (1952). Spiro’s research examined how different cultures came together and how the combining of cultures led to a loss of one’s identity and place in their own culture. Similarly, we can then look at the work of Edward Bruner (1956). Bruner studied the differences in acculturation, with a focus on the specific factors that allowed certain Native Americans to acculturate into “American” society while others struggled with the acculturation process. Bruner and Spiro’s research can be viewed as the foundation that later led to the studying of individuals in new cultures, and how these individuals were able or not able to adjust to the new environment.

Lysgaard (1955) is credited with being the first to describe cultural adjustment as a three step “U-Curve” process. Lysgaard’s research focused on how individuals going through cultural
adjustment start off in good shape but experience a period of decline in their sense of well-being as they get to know the foreign culture better. However, Lysgaard describes that individuals will then “learn to cope” with the differences and return to feeling better about themselves. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) expanded on Lysgaard’s U-Curve process, referring to cultural adjustment as a W-Curve. The additional “U”, or back and forth in the individuals’ well-being, is representative of the individuals’ experience upon returning to their home culture. Gullahorn and Gullahorn described the individual having to re-adjust to their home country before being able to feel safe and secure.

Moving away from the two different cultural adjustment “curves”, the next generation of research focused on social skill learning and its effect on the cultural adjustment process (Brislin, 1981) (Church, 1982) (Furnham & Beohner, 1986) (Pruit, 1978). Within that research was a common focus on the various skills and traits that helped with the adjustment of individuals in forming interpersonal relationships with individuals in the “host” country. Researchers believed that based on their findings, individuals struggled with cross cultural adjustment when they were unable to negotiate day to day social interactions within their new communities.

From skill-based studies of cultural adjustment, came the modern focus on cultural adjustment as a multidimensional process (Black et al, 1991). Within that focus are three dimensions of adjustment: day to day life adjustment, work adjustment, and interaction adjustment. Day to day life adjustment referred to comfort with the living conditions of the individual in the new environment (food, transportation, sleep, etc.). Work adjustment referenced the individual’s comfort with the tasks assigned at work. Interaction adjustment referred to the interactions of the individual and the host country individuals surrounding them. An individual’s ability to develop a high level of comfort in all three dimensions (or function
with minimal stress) determines their ability to adjust to their new environment as a whole. Research by Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley (1999) provided validation to the multidimensional theory and its value in cultural adjustment research.

Since the establishment of cultural adjustment theory, and throughout its development, there has been great interest in studying cultural adjustment on college campuses (Lee, 2007). College and university campuses lend themselves to research projects as they are often ideal locations for conducting studies. College campuses represent a controlled space where students (subjects) share similar experiences and maintain consistent schedules. College campuses, especially at large residential institutions, offer researchers interested in studying cultural adjustment the opportunity to examine a population in a number of different ways (Russell, 1992) to determine potential patterns and commonalities. This includes studying specific ethnic groups, gender specific studies, and studies focusing on the cultural adjustment of students coming from another country of origin.

International students come to study in the U.S. from an array of different backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences. Their expectations of what a U.S. education will consist of and what life will be like on an “American college campus” are often very different from what they experience when they arrive (Bukhardt, 2013). When variations in background and cultures are coupled with unfulfilled expectations upon arrival on campus it creates tremendous variety in the experiences and cultural adjustment of international students studying in the United States. Pederson (1991) has influenced much of the research on how the unfulfilled expectations and differences in cultural experiences have led to international students being high-risk for mental health issues, including depression and suicide.
International students should not be looked at as one homogeneous group as there is great variation in the adjustment experiences of the students as well as the factors that lead to successful adjustment to the college campus (Fritz, Chin, DeMarinis, 2008). To better understand their needs, studies of the cultural adjustment of international students are often completed by examining international students in “slices”. The various “slices” that are often used in examining cultural adjustment theory include country of origin, places of study, region of origin, gender specific studies (with a large number of studies focused on females), and psychological profile studies focusing on the personality types of international students.

The most prevalent “slice” of international student populations that is examined when using cultural adjustment theory is the country of origin of students. Research has been conducted examining students from almost every country in the world, including, but not limited to, Canada (Yang, 2013) Korea, India, or the most commonly studied, China (Duanmu, 2009). Cultural adjustment theory studies focusing on the country of origin have attempted to determine if there are differences that are consistent with students from a specific country culture. These studies have shown that cultural norms for seeking help from mental health professionals, and making friends with those who do not share the same background are often consistent with students from the same country.

When selecting how to “slice” up the international population for cultural adjustment theory research, some researchers have wanted to study similarities in the region, rather than the country, that international students come from. Wilton (2003), Constantine (2005) and Wang (2014) examined the adjustment of international students by looking at similarities across regions. These studies produced a number of insights on the differences between students
coming from Asia, Latin and South America, Africa, and Western Europe. Each region has displayed areas of strengths and weakness when adjusting to studying in a foreign country.

Studies on cultural adjustment theory are often focused on personality types. The studies also attempt to determine if international student adjustment to a college campus is determined not by where a student is from, but rather by the personality of the individual student. Studies by Yakunina (2012) and Lin (2012) attempted to push cultural adjustment theory studies that focus on international students in this direction, going beyond where a student is from or where they have chosen to study. Their research has shown that regardless of where a student is from, students with both a desire to learn more about other cultures and with a greater understanding of cultural norms are more likely to have a smooth adjustment to a college campus in a foreign country than those who are not.

While much of the research on cultural adjustment theory that pertains to international students is focused here in the United States, there are certainly exceptions. A substantial amount of research has been conducted that focuses on international students studying in other countries outside of the United States. Some of the more common countries of study have been Germany (Zhang, 2010) and Australia (Sakurai, 2010). The research conducted on adjustment of students studying at countries outside of the United States has shown that cultural adjustment to studying at a foreign university carries with it the same difficulties regardless of which country the student will be studying in. For example, the acculturation and adjustment struggles of Chinese students studying in Germany were most often very similar to the struggles identified in research on Chinese students studying in the United States (Zhang, 2010).

Providing a voice to the cultural adjustment experiences of female international students has become the target of many research studies with Constantine (2005) and Carr (2010),
creating highly influential research on what is necessary to help females (particularly those from Asia) adjust and thrive in the college campus environment. The research of Constantine and Carr have shown that female students are often in need of peer groups, to share their struggles in a comfortable and safe setting.

**Description of the use of the theoretical framework.** The problem of practice for this study focuses on the desire for institutions to know more about the ability of international students to adjust to the campus culture in order to provide international students with the proper level of service and support. If institutions want the international students who study on their campuses to be successful, they need to know why some international students are able to quickly adapt and feel at home on campus, and why others are not. Students who feel at home and comfortable on campus are far more likely to be academically successful than those who are not. International student populations are also comprised of students from an array of different cultures. As mentioned above, studies have shown how different “slices” of the international population are able to manage acclimating to the campus culture quicker and easier than others. As cultural adjustment theory focuses specifically on the challenges that occur when individuals or groups are placed in a new environment, the theory made for an excellent framework for this research. The literature review describes these challenges in greater detail.

The cultural adjustment theory framework went a long way towards formulating interview questions and data analysis. When setting up an interview it was important for the subject to understand the purpose of this study. While yes, the problem of practice references schools wanting to provide better service, the subjects (international students) need to feel valued and that they are indeed the “focus” of the study. Using cultural adjustment theory in setting up the interviews and creating questions allowed for a focus on the student. The interview was
described to the subject as a way to understand their individual adjustment from their own culture to the new culture of the college campus. Similarly, when analyzing the results of the interview it was vital to establish themes and commonalities that are “cultural specific” as well as specific to “moments of adjustment”. “Cultural specific” refers to the background of an individual; specifically, for this study to the subject’s country of origin. “Moments of adjustment”, for the purpose of this study, referred to events or experiences that had a positive or negative effect on the student’s level of comfort and adjustment to the college campus. The assumption here was that there may be common events or experiences amongst the subjects studied. These common experiences may be more common, or exclusive to students from the country that makes up the majority of the international student population, or conversely, more common or exclusive to international students who are not from the country that makes up the majority of the international student population.

While cultural adjustment theory is a strong framework for this study, it is not without weakness. The study focused on the experiences of international students; examining students from one country of origin that makes up the majority of the international student population as well as international students from other countries of origin. Only one country of origin can be the “majority” country, and students from the other countries were compared to the majority country. Students from each country and region have been shown to have variations in how they adjust, how they struggle, and what makes them thrive. As cultural adjustment theory has already shown the great number of factors that can come into play in determining what makes a student more or less likely to feel comfortable on a college campus, how was this controlled in the study? By using cultural adjustment theory as the framework for this study, it was of great importance that the researcher had an in-depth understanding of the factors that come into play in
a student’s adjustment and how to control for these factors when discussing the findings of this research.

Conclusion

Cultural Adjustment Theory provides an excellent framework for the problem of practice in this research study, the need to know more about the ability of international students to adjust to the campus culture. This study attempted to answer (with regards to institutions where one country of origin makes up the majority of the international population); *what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the “majority” country of origin (the country that makes up more than half the international student population)? And what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the other countries of origin?*

From the anthropologist Spiro and Bruner, who examined how cultures came together and adapted to new surrounds and experiences, to the modern day researchers who “slice and dice” international student populations into various subsections, cultural adjustment theory posits that there are fundamental differences in what is needed to aid in the acculturation of individuals to new surroundings. This belief that people from different backgrounds, with different characteristics, acculturate and adjust differently has remained a fundamental principle of cultural adjustment theory.

Using cultural adjustment theory provided this study with a lens to better focus the study and be more specific in formulating interview questions. The framework of cultural adjustment ties into the desire to address the problem of practice, and helped create the questions used to form this study and analyze the data. While cultural adjustment theory is not a perfect framework, it was without question the right choice for this study.
LITERATURE REVIEW

International students represent a growing percentage of the student population in colleges and universities around the world. Forward thinking institutions should realize that international student recruitment will likely become easier when current students are successful in adjusting to campus life and have a positive experience on campus. For U.S. schools that house a large international student population, it is often the case that the majority of students in the international student population come from just one country of origin ("IIE Open Doors", 2016). When there are more international students coming from just one country of origin than the number of international students coming from all other countries of origin, institutions should question if this inequity within the international student population changes the adjustment experiences of any (or all) international students. When students from one country of origin make up the majority of an international student population, do students from the country of origin that makes up the lion’s share of the international student population have different cultural adjustment experiences than the other international students?

In 2016, 1,043,839 international students studied in the U.S. compared to 564,000 in 2005 ("IIE Open Doors Report," 2016). In the coming years, as colleges and universities continue to expand on their international recruitment, the number of international students studying in the U.S. is expected to grow significantly. Institutions that wish to maintain a steady growth in their international populations, or to keep an already sizeable international population, will want to understand how to serve the needs of the various groups of international students. According to the 2016 Open Doors Report, half of the international students in the U.S. came from just three countries; China, India, and South Korea (Institute of International Education,
For many institutions, students from one of these three countries will hold a majority stake in the college’s international student population.

The initial literature review below discusses three main areas of research in cultural adjustment (Mental Health and Causes of Stress, Academic Difficulties, and Student Support Services) in-depth. A fourth area of research focusing on the importance of student interactions with their peer students, faculty, and staff, was added after completing the research study. The commentary on the research will discuss the value added by each study and how, if at all, the international population study was looked at in segments. At the end of each section is a summation of the findings for each section of the literature review. In closing, recommendations are made for future research with the hope of improving the ability of institutions to properly understand and serve their international students.

**Mental Health and Causes of Stress**

Adjusting to life in a college classroom in the United States is no easy task for any student. For many students, both domestic and international, adapting to life outside of the classroom is often the most difficult adjustment when compared to adjusting to life inside the classroom. This fact is often particularly true for international students who struggle with adapting to a new life so far away and so different from what they have experienced back home. International students tend to struggle more than their domestic counterparts, and statistically show greater levels of stress during their studies at U.S. college campuses. The list of common struggles for international students when they come to the U.S. to study include English-language difficulties, family pressure, cultural adjustments, acculturation, and the handling of stress; these are often higher than for domestic students (Carr, 2010, p. 131). When students are unable to cope with such stressors outside of the classroom, studying inside the classroom
becomes that much more difficult. If colleges can mitigate the stresses and difficulties students experience outside of the classroom, they may greatly increase the chance for students to be successful within the classroom.

There have been a number of studies that examine the likelihood of a student having difficulties adjusting to the college environment in the United States. Zhang (2011) completed an analysis of sixty-four research studies that focused on international student struggles. Zhang concluded that there was a common set of factors that were present in most academically struggling international students. The factors that predict academic success that had the highest level of occurrence for international students were English language proficiency, length of time in the U.S. and the amount of time spent interacting with domestic students (Zhang, 2011, p. 158). Factors in these studies can be used as a list of potential warning signs for predicting which international students will struggle during their time as college students. Yakunina (2012) examined how students with a multicultural personality would be better suited for academic success when studying at colleges and universities in another country. Students who displayed a higher level of social initiative, or social openness, were more likely to have an easier time adjusting to life on college campuses. The same was also found in this research for students who were deemed as emotionally stable.

Having examined stress by looking at international students as a whole, it is now important to examine studies that have observed stress in specific segments of the international student population. These studies focused on the characteristics of specific groups within the international student population that are different than the characteristics of the entire population. There are differences when examining segments rather than looking at the entire international population. One such study revealed that Asian students who choose English-speaking nations
for furthering their higher education often experience higher levels of social stress than other international students (Fritz, Chin, DeMarinis, 2008). The study also found that students from Western Europe were more likely than other international students to experience stress related to being so far away from their families. In examining both Chinese and Taiwanese students, studies have shown that for students from these two countries, attachment anxiety (feeling anxiety from being displaced from loved ones or their home) occurs at a higher level than their counterparts and that such anxiety is highly relative to a student’s ability to adjust to campus life in a new country (Wang, 2006, p. 423). Another study, focused on African students studying in the United States, found that the students’ ability to adjust to prejudicial or discriminatory treatment was a key factor in their ability to adjust to their new college environment (Constantine, 2005, p. 63). Each study, in focusing on a particular group within the international student population, showed that there are differences for each group adjusting to life (dealing with stress, anxiety, etc.) on a college campus. Depending on the makeup of an individual institution’s international student population, warning signs to look out for can vary greatly.

Students from an individual country or region often share a number of similarities (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern 2015) (Wang et al., 2012) (Zhang and Goodson, 2010). However, not all members within a group experience stress exactly the same way. Within each particular population there still remains the potential for variation. There are countless ways that individuals within a population can vary compared to the population as a whole. Specific traits within an individual can trump traditional aspects that apply to the students’ own culture or specific country/region of origin. An example is whether or not an individual international student identifies a strong relationship between themselves and their home country (Sodowsky, 1992, p. 57). The study suggests that international students who get to know and identify with
their domestic counterparts at an institution will be better at cultural adjustment. This adjustment includes being better at managing stress, compared with students who do not get to know their domestic counterparts. This increased ability to adjust and manage stress was consistent in the international population regardless of the country of origin for the student.

Another common concern for college students is managing and fending off depression. While depression is an issue affecting many college students, rates of depression are higher amongst international students when compared to domestic students (Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008). Depression amongst international students is related to a number of factors including anxiety that often stems from being so far from home, a general lack of social support, and language difficulties (Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008). Of great concern for international students is the snowballing effect of feeling anxious or uncomfortable in a social setting. Anxious students become less likely to engage socially with other students and may avoid social interaction all together. Without social interaction international students may begin to isolate themselves. In isolating themselves students increase the possibility of depression from a lack of social interaction. The more isolated the student, the less social interaction and the more difficult it becomes for a student to break the cycle.

Any student regardless of where they are from can suffer from depression. Within certain cultures, however, it appears that there is a greater propensity for depression (Wilton, Constantine, 2003). For example, Chinese students were reported to have a higher propensity for depression than the rest of the international student population (Wei, et al, 2007). This propensity may have a direct tie to a commonality amongst Chinese students who experience a high rate of maladaptive perfectionism. Maladaptive perfectionism refers to an individual’s desire to achieve an unattainable level of success (Wei, et al, 2007, p. 392). Maladaptive
perfectionism, and the mental health issues related to it, may explain the higher percentage of Chinese students suffering from depression than their counterparts from other cultures.

Making friends is something that can seem so simple; however, with so much change going on and so much stress to manage, making friends can be very difficult for international students. Without friends, international students’ ability to have satisfying experiences at college is highly unlikely. The ability to make friends with domestic students is highly beneficial but often difficult for international students (Hendrickson, Rosen, Aune, 2010, p. 281). When unable to form friendships with their domestic counterparts, international students often fall back on forming friendships solely with students from their own country of origin.

Forming friendships solely with students from their own country of origin is far from an ideal choice for international students (Wu, Garza, Guzman, 2015). While forming relationships with domestic students is ideal, this is often extremely hard for many international students. A helpful middle ground that early research showed was key to international student acculturation was for international students to establish relationships with international students from another country (Kashima, Loh, 2006, p. 482). While it is important to note this middle ground as a “better” option for international students than solely forming relationships with students from their own country of origin, it is still preferable that international students form relationships with domestic students.

Although international students experience difficulties on campus, it is important to note that for the majority of international students studying on foreign soil the overall experience is highly positive (Rajapaksa, Dundes, 2002). There is a good reason more and more international students are choosing to study internationally each and every year; they are happy with the education they are receiving and the experience they are having on campus (Water, Brooks,
Many schools have taken a number of steps and put outstanding programming in to place to help make the experience of international students positive (Ozturgut, 2012). To do so, a number of methods have been used to help make the tough transition to such a new environment easier (Vauterin, Linnanen, Marttila, 2011). One of the most prudent focuses on student services for international students has been instilling confidence into newly arriving students as quickly as possible. When focusing on instilling confidence in Asian students it is important to note that the importance of pushing these students to make use of self-efficacy (Li, Gasser, 2005, p. 573). For an international student, finding and maintaining self-confidence is not easy. Becoming part of the campus by joining a social club or student activity can be vitally important to helping an international student develop self-confidence. When international students join a club or organization they are often able to “let their hair down” and feel comfortable asking the questions about resources and assistance available on campus. Studies have also shown that involvement in clubs, particularly those that are multicultural in nature, are helpful in creating an environment where international students can feel safe. Many of these clubs, through the use of humor and jokes, break down the anxiety and concerns of international students and help them feel at ease (Sobre-Denton, 2010, p. 90). Remaining open-minded, gathering support from the college community, and discovering one’s own strength are all effective ways to deal with acculturation issues (Moores, Popadiuk, 2011, p. 304).

The literature above highlights difficulties relating to mental health and stress that so many international students struggle with as they attempt to adjust to an environment that is very different than the one from which they come. The research has done an excellent job in identifying and detailing the various reasons why stress and mental health issues are a large part of international students’ struggle with cultural adjustment. While some of the research takes a
holistic approach when looking at international students, the majority of the literature is more focused on specific groups. By pointing out the variations and differences among groups of international students, with regards to struggles with adjusting, the literature provides specific information that can be used by colleges and universities. Unfortunately, no literature was found that places emphasis on any variations in cultural adjustment that may be related to one country of origin making up the majority of international students on a campus.

**Academic Difficulties**

After addressing issues that are related to social adjustment, the focus now shifts to academics and the learning environment. Many international students experience difficulties when they are first placed into a new academic setting (Kagan, Cohen, 1990). It should be noted that academic issues and concerns often go hand and hand with cultural adjustment issues. Cultural adjustment and academic struggles are often related, and experiencing one or the other often leads an international student to suffer from both at the same time. A lonely student who is having trouble making friends may find it difficult to concentrate in class as he/she continues to worry about making friends and feeling supported (Hendrickson, Rosen, Aune, 2011). Likewise, a student who has early struggles with grades may quickly become depressed and begin to isolate him/herself more and more as time goes on (Sumer, Poyrazli, Grahame, 2008). Despite the fact that academic difficulties and cultural adjustment issues are closely linked, this literature review will examine them separately. Academic issues of international student groups, and how likely international students are to be affected by these issues, can vary greatly. In the section below, the literature on academic difficulties and how they affect specific groups, as well as international students as a whole, are discussed.
International students are, on average, more focused on their academic goals than their U.S. counterparts (Zhao, Kuh, Carini, 2005). Why then is it the case that international students often have a lower first-year retention and six-year graduation rate than their U.S. counterparts? When it comes to the academic environment for international students, the issues they face often begin before the first day of classes (Zhao, Kuh, Carini, 2005). The inopportune timing of orientation programs leaves a hole in the body of knowledge used by international students to manage the new environment they face in the academic classroom (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2011). Orientation for newly arriving international students generally takes place a few days prior to the start of the first semester. For international students this is a time of adjustment where they have numerous challenges to manage in a very small amount of time. Tasked with making friends, learning to navigate the campus, buying essentials and basics, finding how to get to class and where to buy books, international students are in information overload when first arriving on campus. It is during this time that they experience orientation and learn what to expect in the classroom. With all that is going on during this initial time period, it is clear to see why international students struggle to remember any of the important information that is conveyed to them during orientation (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2011).

Academic issues do not affect each segment of the international student population in the exact same way. For Asian students, coping with “shame” (or the fear of shame) is an issue that the particular group struggles with more than any other. Asian students are often unprepared for what goes on in an American classroom. Compared to a traditional Asian classroom where a professor lectures and students simply listen and take notes, the American college classroom (built on debate and discussion) can be a bit overwhelming. Many Asian students come to
college with a belief that they should only speak in class when asked a question, and only then when they are 100% sure of an answer (Wu, Garza, Guzman, 2015). It would be “shameful” for a student to give a wrong answer or to utter a comment that is not considered valid by those in the class (Johnson, 2012, p. 15). It is this fear of “shame” that leads many Asian students to hold back from participating and speaking up in class. As participation is factored into many class grades, the students who do not “speak up” in class do so to their detriment. In many of these classes participation is part of the final grade in the class, leading to lower marks for students who do not speak up. The fear of “shame”, in this situation, has led to the student scoring lower than they had expected (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2011). The student may in fact feel more “shamed” for the low grade than they did when they were unwilling to participate in class discussions.

One area that could have been considered in the mental health section of this literature review, but fits more properly in the academic difficulties section, is the student’s expectation for success and their motivation in the classroom. Jernigan (2004), studied how a student’s belief in their abilities to learn and study in another language had a direct effect on their tenacity and motivation to work hard in those classes. When a student perceived themselves as being “bad” at learning another language, they often put less effort into mastering the coursework. While this study was done focusing on all students attempting to learn another language, its relevance on international students, who often are studying solely in a second or third language, would share these types of experiences, and likely share similar struggles with motivation.

In examining international student issues in the classroom it is important to note that not all academic difficulties involving international students solely affect international students. The vast majority of the time, international students share the classroom with domestic students.
There are only a few exceptions of specific courses where institutions provide classroom environments that consist solely of international students. In some classroom environments, the mere presence of international students has a negative effect on the learning of traditional English-speaking domestic students. An example of this effect can be seen in a number of remedial courses that consist of many non-native English speaking international students. According to Foster (2012), domestic students in remedial classes tend to achieve a lower level of academic success when the course contains non-native English speakers, compared to when the class consists solely of domestic students (Foster, 2012, p. 596). In such classes there are many questions that are left to be answered. Are instructors in these classes spending too much time working with the international students to the detriment of the other students? Are domestic students putting in less effort when they are in remedial classes that include international students who are non-native English speakers? Unfortunately, the current research has not gone far enough to examine this issue.

**Student Support Services**

Many international students who come to study in the United States have a much greater focus on their education than their domestic counterparts. This may help in explaining the fact that international students, in comparison to domestic students, have considerably less involvement in student life on college campuses. Research has shown that domestic students by and large have a greater expectation on the support services that will be available to them on the college campus than their international counterparts (Shank & Walker, 2015). Social support, in the adjustment experiences of international students, has shown a direction relation to the student’s ability to adapt to their new environment on the college campus (Baba, Hosoda, 2014). Throughout the United States, international students (as a percentage of the student body) are
consistently underrepresented with regards to involvement in student life. Many international students may feel they have come to the U.S. to study and must remain focused to be successful. However, studies have shown (Hayes & Lin, 1994) (Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999) that by not participating in student life organizations, international students are preventing themselves from establishing the much-needed connections with students from the host country. These relationships are the best predictor for international student success on college campuses (Toyokawa, 2002, p. 376). The following section explores research into the areas of service provided to international students at colleges and universities.

When it comes to international students and their willingness to make use of support services on campus, the cultural diversity represented by the faculty and staff plays a significant role (Rice, et al, 2009). When international students examine an institution’s staff and faculty, they are hoping to see individuals who look like they do. There is a certain comfort that comes from seeing someone you feel you can identify with. With a lack of diversity amongst many college faculty and staff, many international students will struggle to find a connection to the campus administration. This is likely a reason why international students struggle with creating emotional bonds with the staff and faculty at many institutions in the U.S. (Rice et al., 2009, p. 389). Without being able to identify with a member of the campus staff/faculty, international students become less likely to make use of student services. As international students are often the most in need of campus services, the inability to connect may go a long way to international students having lower retention and graduation rates, as they are not making use of the services available to them.

Other areas of student services are underutilized by international students, as well. An extremely important, yet dramatically underused, service provided on college campuses are the
offices that provide mental health counseling for students (Mori, 2000). There are a number of reasons that may lead to international students’ reluctance or unwillingness to use mental health counseling services. First and foremost, having such services available is not universal for institutions of higher education. For international students coming from countries where services do not exist at colleges and universities, it is not surprising that students may not think to ask if they are available. Additionally, international students may not feel any connection to mental health service providers who do not look or talk like they do (Mori, 2000). While not knowing and not connecting are two of the reasons international students are not making use of counseling services, there is at least one other significant reason. In many Asian countries, a cultural stigma surrounds making use of mental health services which may preclude Asian international students from making use of the services here in the U.S. even when they are greatly needed by the student (Carr, Koyama, Thiagarajan, 2003, p. 131). Additionally, for Asian women (especially those who lack English language skills) a tendency for shyness often precludes female Asian students from seeking help from mental health counselors (Constantine, 2005, p. 173). These studies recommend finding alternative options for therapeutic intervention of Asian female international students rather than traditional counseling techniques.

Another area of student services for international students where institutions often struggle is providing career counseling. International students have a number of additional obstacles placed in front of them when it comes to finding employment. Many employers are unfamiliar with the various types of work authorization available to international students here in the U.S. and therefore may make the decision to not hire international students for internships and full-time employment opportunities, regardless of their qualifications. International students who are aware of this reality often experience anxiety around finding employment. For this
reason, career counselors who work with international students must be aware of this anxiety and work to alleviate this in their students (Reynolds, 2007, p. 347). When career counselors are able to form strong positive relationships they are able to provide a high level of service to their international students.

Having discussed some of the reasons why international students are less likely to make use of the student services available to them on college campuses, there are a number of studies that offer recommendations and insights on how colleges and universities can reach out to international students to increase their usage of campus services. A number of studies have focused on what international students have indicated is important to their success on college campuses. By focusing on international students who have found success on campus, as well as those who have made use of student services, colleges and universities can create a successful game plan for international student success. When asked what factors were the most important to their success, international students indicated; “Knowing self and others, making friends and building relationships, expanding individual worldviews, asking for help, establishing cultural and social connections, improving English proficiency, and letting go of your past” (Tseng, Newton, 2002, p. 5).

When it comes to the work that faculty and staff do with international students it could be argued that, for many of these cases, international students are a high-risk group. High-risk, when applied to college students, refers to groups that often require a higher level of attention and service to be successful. When working with such a group it is important that colleges and universities use staff with high levels of customer service skills to meet their needs. The staff who are best suited to help international students have a desire to make a difference and care greatly about their students (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011, p. 332). Staff
members such as these are more likely to go above and beyond to help international students. Such interactions with outstanding staff will likely create a greater willingness amongst international students to seek out assistance.

A willingness to help international students and go above and beyond is certainly a great first step for college and university staff; however, the willingness to help can only go so far. Faculty and staff need the proper resources in order to properly assist an international student population. Included in the required resources is the ability of staff to understand the needs of the international population. Global competency, being knowledgeable about the world and other cultures, is of tremendous importance for staff who wish to properly assist international students (Bresciani, 2008, p.1). Dedicated staff must also use “caution, critical thinking, and use of their own intuition” when attempting to help international students (Guiffrida, 2010, p. 317).

By making use of global competency and critical thinking skills staff are able to avoid numerous pitfalls that can surround the advising of international students. These pitfalls include failing to understand the culture and background of an international student, and making assumptions of an international student’s cultural background based on their “look”. Such pitfalls, if not avoided, can turn off an international student from future usage of student services.

While human capital resources are important, financial resources of international student service may be of even greater need. International students represent an excellent income source for colleges and universities, particularly here in the United States (Cantwell, 2015). There remains, however, a great need for this revenue to be invested into services that provide services for international students (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, Forbest-Mewett, 2010). When universities fail to put the additional revenue back into international student services, colleges and
Colleges and universities do not need to look far to find a service model that consistently shows success. Throughout the U.S., collegiate athletic departments of all levels of competition consistently provide a high level of service to their student athletes (Ridinger, Pastore, 2000). With this high level of service comes an outstanding level of student success. While athletes have to maintain the difficult balancing act of athletic practices and games, along with a full academic class load, the assistance provided by athletic departments allows them to achieve at a consistently higher academic level. Despite the additional time constraints, student athletes graduate at a higher rate than their non-athlete counterparts. Even more compelling, these statistics hold true even when applied to international student athletes. When compared to their peers, international student athletes are “significantly more well-adjusted than peers” and “adjusted as well as students and student-athletes from the United States” (Ridinger, Pastore, 2000, p. 33). By providing a high level of personal attention, athletics provide a model that can work for international students as well. Institutions, however, would need to be willing to provide the additional resources necessary to make such a level of personal attention a reality.

**Interactions with the Campus Community**

While conducting this research study, forming relationships with faculty, staff, and a diverse group of students as part of the international student adjustment experience repeatedly showed up during interviews as being of great importance. Research in the three previous sections includes studies that discuss aspects of the importance of relationships, adding research that specifically focused on this research was deemed valuable to this literature review. This
section will focus on studies that discuss cultural adjustment experiences of international students and their relationships with three groups; students, faculty, and staff.

Student to student interactions and the ability to form positive relationships with a diverse group of peer students is important to the cultural adjustment experience of international students (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). The more positive the interactions an international student has with other students the likelihood the international student will experience a heightened sense of belonging to the campus community. This study indicated a link between the campus climate and its inclusion of diversity and the transitional experience being positive or negative for international students.

On the other side of the coin, negative interactions often lead to greater difficulty in adjusting the new campus culture (Pyrazli & Lopen, 2007). International students who feel discriminated against or who have negative interactions with domestic students are more likely to feel homesick and to feel lonely on campus. International students were more likely to feel discriminated against and to have negative interactions on campus then their domestic student counterparts. The more negative the interactions the less likely the international student will feel welcomes and be able to adjust to their new campus environment.

International student interactions with the other members of the student body, as discussed, have a significant impact on the adjustment experience of the students. The adjustment experience is also impacted by the relationship the students form with the faculty at the institution, and how positive or negative these interactions are. The adjustment experience of international students can be dictated by the faculty at their college or university, who often want them to adjust to their environment, rather than having the environment adjust to them (Ladd & Ruby, 1999). Faculty, more often than not, are unwilling or unable to change how they
interact in the classroom to meet the needs of international students. This unwillingness to seek out ways to help international students can create a negative adjustment experience for many international students.

Conversely, studies have shown that faculty who are willing to change and adapt to the needs of international students go a long way towards providing the type of interactions that lead to positive adjustment experiences (Adrian-Taylor & Noels & Tischler, 2007) (Leask, 2009) (Pedersen, 1991). When international students’ interactions include an understanding of their needs and a willingness to answer questions and assist with the transition to the classroom experience in the U.S., international students are significantly more likely to be successful in their academic pursuits. These interactions with faculty assist with overcoming the academic difficulties international students often struggle with that were discussed previously in this literature review. This includes, as studied by Olivas and Li (2006) the importance of faculty not only being willing to assist international students, but also being knowledgeable about the needs of international students. Similar to the importance of staff working with international students being knowledgeable in the needs of international students, faculty who are aware of the difficulties international students experience in the classroom are more likely to develop and foster positive interactions with international students.

The third group of individuals who interact with international students on the college campus are the staff of the colleges and universities where international students study. Interactions with the staff who make up part of the campus community have great importance in helping international students meet their sociocultural needs (Bartram, 2007). Interactions with staff are seen as having significant importance in helping international students create and maintain their own social networks. Staff who assist international students build a social
network their first semester of staff provides a blueprint for how international students will interact with the college community in future semesters. This blueprint on how to interact serves as instructions on how to have a positive cultural adjustment experience when studying in the U.S.

**Summation**

International students have been the focus of a large amount of research, especially in the last fifteen years. As the number of international students continues to grow, the importance of continuing to research the experience of international students will also grow. In attempting to understand the experiences of international students on college campuses, this literature review focused on three main areas: cultural adjustment, academic difficulties, and student services.

When examining mental health and stress it was clear that there were many differences between the various groups within the international student population. A number of mental health and stress factors that made cultural adjustment difficult for one international student group were different than those from other groups. Despite the differences within the population commonalities exist for all international students, including additional difficulties in adjusting to college life when compared to their domestic student counterparts.

When examining academic adjustment, international students start off their college careers already a step or two behind domestic students. Before classes even begin international students are in information overload and are unlikely to step into the classroom and fully concentrate on the material from day one of the semester. Additionally, the stresses of the classroom are often linked to how those international students feel outside of the classroom, with the two stressors often building upon each other.
In terms of student services, many colleges and universities do a poor job of providing the proper level of resources to international students. As a group that is often unwilling or unaware of the resources available, colleges and universities need to be proactive in bringing international students into the student service fold. Investments need to be made in training staff in customer service, as well as global competencies, so that international students can feel at home when using the resources that are available to them.

Interactions with the various members of the college community go a long way to determining the cultural adjustment experience of internationals students. An international student’s interaction with a diverse group of students on campus has a direct impact on their ability to adjust to the new campus environment. Positive interactions with their fellow, especially during the first semester, help set the tone for whether or not an international student will feel lonely or homesick while studying on campus. Interactions with faculty play a significant role in determining if an international student will have a positive experience studying in the U.S. Faculty who are unwilling or unable to adapt their classroom experience to international students create negative interactions for international students. Faculty who are seen as welcoming and flexible to the needs of international students create positive interactions that help international students overcome their initial difficulties adjusting to a new classroom environment. Staff who are unfamiliar with the needs of international students are more likely to create negative interactions for international students adjusting to studying in the U.S. Staff who help international students meet their sociocultural needs can assist in the creation of social networks, which can be maintained over the course of their time studying in the U.S.

Finally, while the research above provides a picture of the international student experience on college campuses, as well as the existence of variations within the population,
there has not been any research that examines the issue of possible variations tied to the size of the international student population, particularly when one country of origin represents the majority of an institution’s international student population. Research on this issue may show that international student experiences are different when there is one country of origin making up more than half the international student population.
METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study was to examine the cultural adjustment experience of international students as they transition to studying at an institution of higher education in the United States. As a high-risk population, international students are more prone to “feelings of uneasiness and insecurity” and are more likely to struggle with both the social and academic adjustment of college life in the U.S. (Yakunina, 2012, P. 216). International students are less likely to get involved on the college campus and are more likely to feel isolated and alone (Toyokawa, 2002). The purpose of this study was to understand the cultural adjustment experiences of international students studying at a university, when one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population.

Research Questions

- When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the “majority” country of origin, the country that makes up more than half of the international student population?

- When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the other countries of origin?

This study focused on the cultural adjustment experiences of international students who have chosen to study in the U.S. For many of these students the U.S. college campus is very different from the environment of their home country. From the moment these students step on campus they are experiencing what could be described as “a new world”. Studying how they
adjust to this world, and how positive or negative these experiences (studying in the U.S.) were for these international students can certainly be described as studying a phenomenon. This study focused on an institution with a large international population (where more than half the international students come from one country of origin), which provided a large enough population of students for interviews.

**Positionality Statement**

I have worked in higher education for over 10 years, with roles in both enrollment management and student affairs. I began my career as an international admissions counselor before moving over to international student services, and eventually over to the Dean of Students office. Five years ago, I returned to my alma mater where I serve as the Associate Director of International Recruitment and Enrollment in the Office of Undergraduate Admission. In all my positions in higher education I have had a high level of interaction with international students coming from an ample number of countries. The international students I have worked with have often been my very favorite students as many of them have a tremendous passion for education and they truly make the very best use of their time on the campuses I have worked in. I have also noticed a wide variety of attitudes of traditional domestic students when it comes to their international counterparts. A number of domestic students I have known have displayed a lack of tolerance for all international students when they feel that too many international students “look” the same and are “taking over the campus.” It is this display of intolerance that has made me wonder if the experience of international students’ changes, when one country of origin makes up the majority of an international student population.

I was raised in the suburbs of New Jersey as a white, middle-class male where my classmates in my primary and secondary schooling were also white and middle class. After
graduating from high school, I attended my state university where I had a “traditional” college experience living in a “college-town” as a residential student. During my time at my institution, my friends, while diverse in ethnicity, were all domestic students, mainly from the state of New Jersey. I had little interaction with international students while in college. The interactions I had often involved international students speaking in foreign languages to each other, which made me feel uncomfortable. It is likely my demographic positioning that made me look at the international students I encountered as being the other, and feeling that it was not right for them to be speaking in another language (Briscoe, 2005).

In my current role of Associate Director of International Recruitment, I have a large amount of experience and knowledge regarding the international student population at my institution. This includes knowing that the majority of international students coming in to my institution come from just one country. Machi and McEvoy would argue that this has created a bias for me with regards to conducting my study (2009, P. 19). It is likely that I have formed inherent opinions on the effect having the majority of international students coming from one country of origin is having on the international student population at my institution.

My previous experience working in international student services may also lead to an internal bias for me. In working with international students throughout their academic careers, I have seen a number of successes and failures. It is possible that I have created internal beliefs that one group or groups is more inclined to have “deficits of character, morality, work ethic” (Jupp, 2006, p. 203). If this is indeed the case, I may expect certain things from one group that I would not expect from another.

My upbringing as a white middle class male has certainly cloud my ability to judge the experiences of international students studying in the United States. As Fennel describes where I
may see challenges or difficulties, those from different background may see opportunities or improvements (Fennel, 2008, p. 528). I cannot assume what I view as a positive change (or a negative change) in a student’s experience is viewed as a positive or a negative in the student’s opinion. I also cannot assume that what I see as a difference or change in experience is viewed as such by an international student. Finally, I have to realize that because I work with a population of international students where one country of origin makes up the majority of students, I may believe that these students’ experiences are already different for various reasons.

Bias is inherent in all of us and we can only fight bias by being aware of its existence. If we fail to understand we dramatically increase the odds that our research will not be fair and just. Having taken the time to reflect on my own biases, I must now go about the difficult task of minimizing (and wherever possible eliminating) their presence in my research. I also must be sure that when I examine the answers of each student (and if used as part of my research the in person follow up interviews conducted) that I do not go looking for information to support my bias as an employee of my institution. If I can properly do this, my results will carry with them substantially more weight than if I am not.

**Research Design**

To accurately gauge the experience of these students, a qualitative approach was selected in order to examine what the cultural experiences were of the two groups of the international students. Qualitative research examines definitions and themes that develop through the course of a research study (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative research provides the opportunity to examine the individual student experience in greater detail than could be studied through a quantitative method. The qualitative approach emphasizes the qualities of entities, processes and meanings that are not experimentally
examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 8). To put it more simply, quantitative research could measure the number of interactions an international student had with students from the host country, and qualitative research could emphasize an in-depth examination of what those interactions meant to each student participant. Having a deeper understanding of how a student feels during an interaction is essential to understanding their cultural adjustment experience. Qualitative research can examine what the interaction meant to the individual, and what they learned from the experience, and how this altered future interaction.

**Research Tradition**

The qualitative research method that was selected is phenomenology, which examines how an individual(s) experiences a particular event or series of events. Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. Phenomenology studies how an event, or series of events (a phenomenon), is experienced by a number of individuals. Edmund Husserl is widely considered the “founder” of phenomenology in the early 20th century. Phenomenology challenges positivism and its belief that the world operates according to laws and rules. Phenomenologists believe people can understand how events and experiences present themselves in their (the individuals’) own consciousness (Groenewald, 2004). In other words, people are able to describe how they felt after experiencing a particular event or a series of events. Phenomenologists research believes that these individual representations of an experience can be studied. In phenomenology the findings are determined by going “back to the things themselves!” (Eagleton, 1983).

One of the ways in which phenomenology challenged positivism is by challenging positivism’s belief that researchers can be detached from their own presumptions and
predispositions. Phenomenologists believe that when researchers pretend to be detached from these presumptions in their research it is folly (Hammersley, 2000). Phenomenologists believe that it is impossible to eliminate one’s own experiences when conducting research, and that it is impossible to eliminate the beliefs we have formed because of those experiences. Phenomenologists strive to minimize, rather than eliminate, the impact of past events on a new study. The attempt to relegate the impact of past experiences is a part of phenomenology known as Phenomenological Reduction.

Amedeo Giogi (1997), provided a detailed description of how Phenomenological Reduction is carried out: (a) bracket past knowledge about a phenomenon, in order to encounter it freshly and describe it precisely as it is intuited (or experienced), and (b) to withhold the existential index, which means to consider what is given precisely as it is given as presence or phenomenon. Phenomenologists believe that you cannot conduct phenomenological research without incorporating Phenomenological Reduction as part of the study.

While phenomenologists are brought together with the understanding of the importance of Phenomenological Reduction, there is another aspect of phenomenology that creates divergences within the methodology. This particular aspect involves the interpretation of the data that are produced as part of a research study. Husserl would argue that in its purest form phenomenology believes in the importance of describing findings rather than interpreting them. Rather than interpreting findings researchers should offer a description that is rich in details on the subject’s experience. This description would include all essential information about the experience of the phenomenon without clouding the findings. Scholars such as Merleau-Ponty (1945) and Mohanty (1982) argued that by interpreting we take apart the phenomenon and are altering the authenticity of the subjects’ experiences. Today this method, looking at just the
essential elements of the subjects’ experience, is called Transcendental Phenomenology (Husserl is considered the originator of this method as well).

Other phenomenologists would argue that interpretation is a key element in phenomenology, and that any phenomenological research that does not include this key step is severely lacking. Martin Heidegger (1927) would be the leader of this belief and could be seen as the founder of Existential Phenomenology. Heidegger (a former assistant of Husserl) believed that one does not just observe the individual and their ability to perceive a phenomenon; rather, one goes further and must look to understand what that experience means in a greater sense.

Site and Participant Selection

For this research study, one university campus in the northeastern United States served as the site for this study. The university is one of the largest in the United States in both the size of the campus and the size of the international student population. The institution’s undergraduate international student population consists largely of Chinese students. In fact, Chinese students make up over 50% of the undergraduate international student population at the institution.

The participants for the study are degree seeking international undergraduate students who have returned for their second year of study at the institution. A list of all second semester international undergraduate students was obtained from the university’s Registrar’s Office. Outreach to these students was conducted via email and with a poster placed in the university’s international student service office.

Students were asked to complete a short form indicating basic demographic information (Age, Sex, Religion, Major, etc.) including their country of origin. From the group, 8 participants were chosen using purposeful selection. A purposeful selection was chosen to meet the needs of the study, ensuring that the participants cover a wide range of countries and
experiences (Morse, 1991, p. 128). The goal of the selection was to have 3-4 of the candidates from China, the country making up over 50% of the international undergraduate student population, and the remaining participants from as wide of a variety of countries of origin as possible. Four participants came from China as their country of origin. The remaining four came from other countries of origin. Participants were asked to take part in two semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes. During this second interview, participants were afforded the opportunity to add additional information.

Data Collection

In phenomenological research, the commonly-accepted best practice for collecting data is through interviews with the participants who are experiencing the phenomenon. When conducting phenomenological research, it is important to acquire interview responses that are great in depth and breadth. According to Bentz (1998), it is important that interview questions capture rich descriptions of how the phenomenon is being experienced, as well as the setting in which the phenomenon is being experienced. Bentz also stresses the importance of the researcher remaining neutral in the process. The goal of a phenomenological study is to get the purest account of the subject’s experience of the phenomenon.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of the cultural adjustment experiences of international students during their first year at one institution in the United States. One-on-one interviews were conducted with each student. Questions in the first interview looked to identify common themes and experiences in the cultural adjustment of the students (see appendix A). The second interviews and focus groups were used to confirm the common themes and conclusions drawn from initial interviews.
Additionally, to provide reliability in phenomenological research it is recommended that researchers use data triangulation as part of the data collection process (Bentz, 1998). These strategies include interviews as the center piece of any data collection efforts. Additional measures for data collection as part of triangulation include using focus groups, as well as asking participants to complete essays as a follow-up to the interviews that were conducted as an avenue for the participant to provide additional information to the researcher. For this study, participants were asked to participate in follow-up interviews to discuss the initial results of the interviews and provide clarification and confirmation of findings.

Data Storage

All data collected was kept solely by the researcher. Notes and written accounts of the interviews and focus groups were kept in a locked drawer in the researcher’s work desk. All transcribed and electronic data are kept on the researcher’s computer, which requires a two-step verification process for logging on. All electronic documents created by the researcher were also password protected. After completing the study all data remains secured on the researcher’s computer with password protection on all files which are maintained or destroyed in accordance with northeastern University IRB guidelines.

Data Analysis

The divide among phenomenological scholars when it comes to analyzing the data that are gathered during phenomenological research was introduced earlier. As noted, the purest form of phenomenological research seeks to explain the experience of the participant without providing any analysis. Groenwald (2004) goes as far as refusing to label this section of a research study as “analysis,” rather calling this section explication. As described by Hycner (1985) analyzing can lead to breaking apart the experience which can take away from the
participant’s experiences of the whole phenomenon (p.161). Hycner provided a five-step process for explication of data that was simplified by Groenwald. This process was used in analyzing the findings of this research study. The process included the use of phenomenological reduction, which required the researcher to suspend or alleviate any judgment of what an experience should mean or what the experience should feel like and instead focus on the experience of the phenomenon itself. For phenomenological researchers who think that analysis is a required part of research, an additional step of providing analysis of the findings could be added as step six. The five steps are as follows:

1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction
2) Delineating units of meaning
3) Clustering of units of meaning to form themes
4) Summarizing and validating each interview, and where necessary modifying them
5) Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary; follow-up interviews were used to validate the findings placed into the summary.

The use of bracketing and phenomenological reductions refers to the suspension of any judgment on the reality of an experience, and focusing solely on the experience itself. For example, if someone was describing their experience seeing a unicorn, the listener would remove any question of whether a unicorn really exists and just focus on the individual’s experience of seeing the unicorn and what this meant to them. Next, delineating units of meanings refers to the researcher’s attempt to isolate and pull out statements from the participant that highlight the true meaning of the experience of the phenomenon. From here the isolated statements are woven together into clusters (or themes) when multiple participants display similar experiences. The
researcher then summarized the findings, including all substantial clusters. The findings are then taken back to the participants for confirmation. After confirming findings, a final extraction was done of the most common themes that were found consistently throughout the research study. A summary was then created including counterpoints to the themes that were found in the research to provide a complete picture of the findings.

**Trustworthiness**

Goodson and Sikes (2001) conveyed the need for researchers to acknowledge their own bias and confront it head on, rather than becoming detached from participants. Goodson and Sikes suggested that by confronting our bias, rather than avoiding it, researchers are better able to form rapport and develop positive relationships with research subjects, a crucial step in qualitative research. The researcher’s upbringing as a white, middle-class male has the potential to cloud the researcher’s to judge the experiences of international students studying in the United States if left unchecked. As Fennel described, where the researcher may see challenges or difficulties, those from different backgrounds may see opportunities or improvements (Fennel, 2008, p. 528). The researcher made everyone effort not to assume that what the researcher viewed as a positive or negative change in a student’s experience was viewed by the student as positive or negative. The researcher also did not assume that what the researcher saw as a difference or change in the student’s experience was viewed as a change by the student. Finally, the researcher had to realize that because the researcher works with a population of international students where one country of origin makes up the majority of students, the researcher may believe that these students’ experiences are already different for various reasons. All appropriate efforts were made to ensure the protection of the research subjects. This included the usage of
bracketing, act of suspending judgment about the world itself to instead focus on analyzing the experience (Hycner, 1985)

After conducting initial research, “member checking” was used through the use of follow-up interviews with each participant. Creswell outlined member checking as taking the findings from initial research back to the participants themselves to determine accuracy of the findings drawn from the participant’s responses (Creswell, 2009). By completing these steps, the research can be deemed as valid as the research is plausible, trustworthy, credible, and when put to the test, defensible (Johnson and Tuner, 2003).

PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Qualitative research can be more intrusive than quantitative methods (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is personal. It involves bringing to life information from participants about their own personal experiences. In doing so the potential for harm exists in qualitative research, and steps must be taken to mitigate this potential for harm. Researchers must take caution to ensure that the questioning and discussion conducted as part of the study do not produce any harmful side effects for the subjects (Tisdale, 2004). A number of safeguards were used throughout this study to prevent such side effects. These safeguards included confidentiality, anonymity and the use of informed consent forms (Appendix B). Throughout the study all outreach for participants included notification of the voluntary nature of the study. Participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time until data is analyzed without penalty. Participants were advised that if they felt uncomfortable with any questions, they could decline to answer. Participants were informed of the research objectives of the study, as well as all data collection methods. All participants were given pseudonyms and data was encrypted. Prior to the initial interviews, all participants were asked to complete and sign a written consent
form detailing their willingness to participate and their understanding of the above. With the above process in place to protect each participant, the risk of harm to the participants was considered minimal.

**CONCLUSION**

There has been a large amount of research focused on the experiences of international students on college campuses; however, this research study sought to examine an angle that (to the researcher’s knowledge) had not been specifically discussed. The research study sought to examine the cultural adjustment experiences of international students at one university when the majority of those international students studying at the university come from one country. The study examined, 1) What are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the “majority” country of origin (the country that makes up more than half the international student population) when one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population? 2) What are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the other countries of origin when one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population?

The framework of cultural adjustment theory was used throughout this research study; it focuses on studying how individuals acculturate and assimilate to new surroundings. This study sought to understand the experiences of international students as they adapt to their new environment on a college campus in the United States, to determine if there were any differences within the population. The differences were examined by studying students from the country that makes up the primary share of the international student population as well as the experiences of international students from other countries of origin. The literature review for this study was broken into three main areas of cultural adjustment with respect to international student
experiences. The three areas are: Mental Health and Causes of Stress, Academic Difficulties, and Student Support Services.

The study was conducted using phenomenology, which focuses on how individuals experience an event or a series of events. Phenomenology is a research method used in qualitative research where the researcher attempts to provide an unaltered presentation of the descriptions provided by participants when they experience a phenomenon; in this case the phenomenon is college life in the United States. The study took place on one college campus located in the northeastern United States. The participants in the study were international undergraduate students who had just completed their first year of study in the United States. The participants in the study participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Participants were brought back for follow-up interviews to ensure data validity. The researcher for this study conducted the research having engaged and challenged his own biases.
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to use qualitative analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the adjustment experiences of 8-12 international students studying as second-year undergraduate students at one university in the northeastern United States. For the purpose of this study the school will be referred to as East Coast University. A purposeful sample of eight students was selected, with four of the students coming from the country making up the majority of international students at the university (China). An analysis of each student’s adjustment experience, after coming to study in the United States, was conducted using two semi-structured interviews for each participant.

The eight selected participants came from five different countries and were all undergraduate students at the university. Four of the students were from China, one from India, one from the United Arab Emirates, one from the Philippines, and one from Singapore. The study recruited the eight participants for two separate interviews, taking place at least two weeks apart, with the goal of creating a conversational approach to collecting data (Smith et al., 2009). The study focused on answering two main research questions:

- When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the “majority” country of origin, the country that makes up more than half of the international student population?

- When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the other countries of origin?
All first interviews took place at a location convenient to the participant and were later transcribed by the researcher. An analysis of the initial information gained from the first set of interviews led to the identification of several themes. Follow-up interviews were conducted with each participant to determine the validity of the themes that were uncovered. The following chapter begins by describing the background of each participant in the study, and then concludes with the themes that emerged from the interviews.

Participants

Eight undergraduate international students participated in this study. All participants were enrolled full-time and pursuing their bachelor’s degrees. Table 1 provides background information on each participant. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. The participants are presented in the order in which they were initially interviewed.

Tina. Tina is a sophomore from Shanghai, China. Tina is twenty years old and majoring in accounting at the business school. She chose the university based on its strong business program and its proximity to New York City. After living on campus the first year, Tina moved off campus as she found living with a roommate to be inconvenient and preferred to have her own room. Tina chose East Coast University because of the reputation of the business school and the school’s proximity to New York City. Tina was nervous about coming to study in the U.S., but she expected to meet a lot of “foreign” students, make friends, and have fun when she came to East Coast University. Tina did not think the campus would be as big as it is; the universities she had seen in China were much smaller. One of her concerns was that U.S. students would not interact with her because she was Chinese. Since arriving, she has found U.S. students to be friendly but generally feels that students hang out with those who are similar to them, and they are not interested in taking steps to become friends with those from other cultures.
Della. Della is a sophomore from Guangzhou, China. Della is nineteen years old and majoring in psychology through the School of Arts and Sciences. Della chose to come to East Coast University because the school had a good reputation, and because of the school’s proximity to New York City. Della did not think the campus would be as big as it is, and thought the campus would be small enough that everyone would know each other. When it came to her fellow students, Della expected that making friends would be fairly easy. However, since arriving she has found the campus a bit overwhelming, with too many students. Della’s group of friends, despite her initial expectations to meet many U.S. students, consists largely of international students. Overall, she feels there are just so many international students on campus and conversely that you do not see a lot of U.S. students on campus. Della has found the classes to be less challenging than she expected, however, she enjoys the faculty and staff, whom she feels are very nice. Since moving off campus, she feels less involved with the campus community and feels that you do not have as good of friends in college, compared to high school, because you do not get to spend as much time with your friends.

Wayne. Wayne is a sophomore from Hunan, China; he is twenty years old. Wayne is studying business and only chose to apply to universities that he considered to have good business programs. While he got into several business schools, he chose East Coast University because the location was much better for students who wished to pursue business. After living on campus his first year, Wayne moved off campus his second year. Before coming to study in the U.S., Wayne was concerned about the food offerings on campus and whether the campus, and the U.S. in general, would be a safe place compared to China. Having attended a boarding school since he was twelve years old, Wayne felt he would be able to manage the campus; he convinced his parents it was a worthy endeavor. Wayne has found that he has made friends with mainly
U.S. students, as he feels the Chinese students who come here are not as focused on academics as he is. Joining clubs when he arrived was very helpful with forming friendships with U.S. students. While Wayne admits East Coast University is a very big place, he never feels lonely or overwhelmed.

**Greg.** Greg is a twenty-year-old sophomore who was born in mainland China, but spent his high school years in Taiwan. Greg is studying industrial engineering through the School of Engineering and chose East Coast University because of its cost, compared to other institutions he had been accepted at, and its location. Greg had expected that all students at East Coast University would get along, regardless of where they were from, and that all students would live and learn together all the time. Greg expected the campus to consist mostly of American students and few Chinese students, with international students making up only a small percentage of the student population. Greg felt the faculty would be tough in their grading and classroom demeanor, but would also provide assistance when asked. When it came to the college staff, Greg expected he would not “get the run around” as much as he had when living in mainland China. Since arriving, Greg has been surprised with how many Chinese students are on the campus. He has found that making friends with U.S. students is a much more difficult endeavor than making friends with Chinese and Indian students. According to Greg, his lack of familiarity with slang has held him back from making U.S. friends. Greg moved off campus his second year as he found it more convenient to get around if he had his own car, and the cost was much less.

**April.** April, 20 years old, was raised in Dubai, in the U.A.E., but she is of Indian descent. April chose to come to East Coast University because of its location, the research opportunities it provided, and because of her desire for a program that included programming specifically for women. April is a biology major who is considering pursuing medicine. When
discussing what the campus would look like, April expected that the campus would be surrounded by gates and that it would not have nearly the amount of buildings and land that it actually has. Based on a friend’s experience from attending East Coast University, April expected the students she met to be friendly and welcoming. After having a bit of trouble getting around the first few weeks of school, April quickly became accustomed to the campus. Although she feels welcomed by everyone on campus, most of April’s friends are other international students. April feels that the upbringing of most of her international students’ friends more closely matches hers, which allows for an easier time making friends. Overall, she has been surprised and pleased by the helpfulness of the faculty and responsiveness of the staff.

**Ursula.** Ursula is a nineteen-year-old sophomore who came to East Coast University from the Philippines. The location of East Coast University was important in her decision-making process as was her selection to be part of the Honors College program. Ursula is majoring in mechanical engineering and has remained on campus for her second year of college, having lived in the Honors College dormitory her first year. Ursula and her family had concerns over the safety of the campus prior to choosing to enroll at East Coast University, but overall, she expected the students she met on campus to be friendly and that she would be surrounded by very intelligent students in the Honors College. The group of friends Ursula has created largely consists of fellow Honors College students and she attributes the closeness with these students as the reason she is enjoying her experience at East Coast University so much. While she found U.S. students to have had a different upbringing, they were willing and able to relate to her after spending time talking in intimate settings. Ursula has also enjoyed the research opportunities available to her and the helpfulness of faculty and staff.
Carlos. Carlos is a nineteen-year-old sophomore from Singapore. A genetics major, Carlos chose East Coast University over a number of other schools because of its research opportunities at the undergraduate level. Carlos did not consider much about what East Coast University would be like before he arrived, he was solely concerned with what research opportunities he would have within his major and how he could get started working towards his academic pursuits. His expectations of his fellow students were that they would be friendly. During his first year, Carlos felt that he was surrounded by Chinese students in class and on campus. The feel of the campus he had chosen to live on was not right for him so he decided to move off campus. Most of Carlos’ friends are fellow genetics majors, including both U.S. and international students. Carlos has been most impressed with the quality of the faculty at East Coast University, and how helpful they are with students’ questions and concerns. Unfortunately, while he has been able to gain research experience, he feels the best research opportunities are highly competitive and difficult to obtain.

Rita. Rita is a twenty-one-year-old sophomore from Bhopal, India. Rita came to East Coast University to pursue a degree in electrical and computer engineering. Rita has an older sister who attended East Coast University and set expectations that the campus would be big, but the students would be friendly. Despite this, Rita was surprised by how big the campus was and how overwhelmingly friendly she found her fellow classmates. In choosing East Coast University, Rita indicated that she was choosing the school based on its location and the diversity of the student body. Overall, Rita indicated that the campus and environment can be stressful, but students are provided with ample resources to assist with dealing with the stress. The opportunities to get involved have really helped Rita with meeting people and attributed to her being friends with both international and U.S. students. She describes her experience as having
only gotten better since she first arrived, because she has figured out what opportunities and clubs are best for her to be involved with.

**Thematic Structure**

As mentioned earlier, this study makes use of the five-step process of phenomenological research in order to analyze the data gathered through the semi-structured interviews. The five steps are as follows:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction
2. Delineating units of meaning
3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes
4. Summarizing and validating each interview and modifying where necessary
5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary; follow-up interviews were used to validate the findings placed into the summary.

The researcher was careful to focus specifically and solely on the experience of the participants through bracketing without interjecting his own beliefs or experiences. As an example, a number of participants indicated that they felt the university contained more international students than domestic students. The researcher, while knowing this was not factually correct, focused on this feeling of being part of the experience of the participant and did not provide an analysis as to why this would be the case. From the results of the first round of interviews the researcher was able to formulate ten themes which were combined into four overarching domains.
Table 1
Domains and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 Students Expected a Convenient and Friendly Location</td>
<td>#1 Where They Will Study Is Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#2 Students Expect Friendships of All Kinds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 The Campus is Friendly and Students are Treated Fairly</td>
<td>#3 Students found the Student Body Friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#4 Students found the Faculty Friendly and Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#5 Students found the Staff Friendly and Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#6 Students are Treated Equally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 Students are Likely To Stick With Who They Know</td>
<td>#7 Students Hang Out with Those from a Similar Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#8 The Traditional U.S. Student Has an Upbringing That is Difficult for International Students to Relate to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 Students Biggest Regret? Not Being More Outgoing</td>
<td>#9 Being a Non-Native English Speaker Makes It Difficult to Make Friends with U.S. Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#10 Students Wished They Had Been More Outgoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 provides a snapshot of the consistent themes that were drawn from the initial interviews and follow-up interviews with the eight participants in this study. The ten themes were placed into four larger domains: Students Expected a Convenient and Friendly Location, The Campus is Friendly and Students are Treated Fairly, Students are Likely to Stick with Who They Know, and Students Biggest Regret? Not Being More Outgoing. Each theme provides information to answer the two research questions of this study. Each theme provided information on the cultural adjustment experiences of the international students from the majority country of
origin, as well as the cultural adjustment experiences of international students from countries other than the majority country of origin.

In the section below, the themes identified in Table 1 will be expanded on. Direct quotations, taken from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews, are used to demonstrate the cultural adjustment experiences of the participants in the study. The intention of this section is to describe the experiences the participants faced prior to and during their first year and a half of studying in the United States at East Coast University. The study describes the similarities and differences in the adjustment experiences of the participants by comparing their experiences with a focus on the participants’ country of origin. Describing the similarities and differences included comparing the experience of those from the country of origin that makes up the majority of the international student body to that of students coming from any other country of origin. More specifically, the study looked to compare the experiences of the Chinese undergraduate students at East Coast University, who make up more than half of the undergraduate international student population, to the experiences of international students from countries other than China to see if they were different. The examples of similarities and differences between the two groups are highlighted throughout the themes below.

**Domain 1: Students Expected a Convenient and Friendly Location**

Before discussing the adjustment experiences with each participant, it was important to determine what the participants were expecting their college experience to be like prior to arriving on campus. Each participant was asked to reflect on the months leading up to their arrival in the U.S. to pursue their education. Common responses from the participants reflected the importance of the location of the university, as well as the belief that the atmosphere and individuals at the university would be welcoming and friendly.
Theme 1: Where They Will Study Is Important. Of the eight participants in the survey, six referenced the university’s location as a key component of why they chose to study at East Coast University. The six participants included three Chinese students and three students from other countries. All of the participants indicated having been accepted into a number of different universities and provided reasons as to why they chose East Coast University as their university.

For the three students from China who referenced the university’s location as being important there was emphasis on the school’s proximity to New York City and the opportunities this provided. Tina conveyed the importance of the school’s location and how important this is for a business school student. “Business students they need a lot of opportunity to have internship and to work, so it is in greater New York Area, so it has many great job opportunities” said Tina. Another participant from China, Wayne, described having been admitted into a school with a higher ranking but, “my teacher told me that other school in the middle of nowhere and I talked to some of my senior friends that [East Coast University location] is much better for business school.” Proximity to New York City was also important for Della. Della discussed how “being so close to New York so I can visit there is really good” and how this factored into her choosing East Coast University over other institutions. Being so close to such a major city with opportunities to learn more of the American culture seemed highly important to Della’s choice to come to East Coast University.

Greg indicated that he chose East Coast University because, “everything was here [around the campus] and it’s a good school.” For Greg, access to New York City with job opportunities and social events was important as long as it was still at a school he found to be of high quality. East Coast University matched this desire with its location and reputation. For Ursula, the location of East Coast University provided both positives and negatives when she
was making her decision about where to attend. Based on what she had seen online, Ursula and her parents had concerns about safety. Specifically, her parents had mentioned that “where East Coast University is located there is [a significant amount of] crime.” However, the proximity to New York City and the ability to get home quickly to see her family were such compelling factors that she decided to attend East Coast University despite the safety concerns. The location also trumped her concern about the size of the institution, as her initial thoughts were that “it wasn’t that great that it was a very big school.” None of the participants made any indication that the choice of location was because of the diversity of the area surrounding the campus.

**Theme 2: Students Expect Friendships of All Kinds.** All eight participants in this study indicated that after arriving on campus they expected to make friends with both U.S. students and other international students, as part of their adjustment. Participants indicated a belief that they would arrive and meet students coming from all over the world. Tina “expected that [she] would meet a lot of foreign people, and make friend, and have a lot of fun.” Similarly, April indicated that she “kind of knew there were a lot of international students, and a lot of Indian students and people of my kind, so I knew I would get adjusted really quick.” April also indicated that the diversity of the campus, specifically its having a large number of international students, would be helpful in assisting her with the adjustment to the campus culture and fitting into her new environment. This led April to state, when asked if she felt the students would be warm and friendly, that they “would accept her” for who she is.

For other students, coming to study at East Coast University seemed to take on an almost utopian expectation in which they believed the environment would bring everyone together. Della described how she expected everyone “to be friendly and very outgoing,” and that the campus would be a place where “everyone knows each other.” Della went on to discuss how she
felt she would make friends with all students, including expecting “to make more friends with American students." Greg offered a similar idealistic belief of what the college would be like, describing how he believed that on the campus "people come together, live together, learn together all the time. Hang out together all the time."

For others, the expectations on friendships were a bit more muted but still included a belief that they would encounter a friendly student body. Carlos came to East Coast University with a greater focus on his academic pursuits. Carlos indicated that he “came here to do research so I wasn’t as concerned with [making friends]. But I expected [the other students] to be friendly." Wayne believed that most students would be “welcoming and willing to help international students both academically and socially.” Ursula was the most tepid in her expectations indicating, "as far of the people, I was hoping people who generally have a friendly attitude” and that she, “was more or less sure it wouldn't be a hostile environment."

**Domain 2: The Campus is Friendly and Students Are Treated Fairly**

After arriving on campus, an important aspect of the cultural adjustment experience for the participants revolved around how they feel treated by other members of the college community. This includes not only the other students on the campus, but also the faculty and staff of the university. This domain brings together multiple themes that discuss how the participants feel regarding their treatment by the other members of the college community, as well as whether they feel they are treated equally. The findings show similar experiences for both the Chinese participants and the participants from other countries of origin.

**Theme 3: Students found the Student Body Friendly.** All eight participants, when discussing their experiences adjusting to their campus community, indicated that they feel the student body is very friendly overall. For some of the students this was simply a match with what
they had expected prior to their arrival on campus. When describing the student body and how she felt they treated her, April explained, “as I told you I expected them to be really friendly and welcoming. It pretty much has been on par with my expectations.” April described how the campus being so big makes it hard to form friendships and stay in touch, but the student body overall is friendly and “we make time and stay in touch to meet up.” Ursula also expected the students to be friendly, and her expectation has been met. "People have definitely been friendly,” said Ursula, “the ones I’ve met and interacted, they’re nice people, they are friendly." Ursula described how despite being introverted, her experience in the residence hall allows for “something as simple as getting water” to help initiate conversations that lead to friendships.

For other students, the friendliness of the student body has exceeded what they had expected prior to their arrival on campus. Rita described how her fellow students “have definitely exceeded my expectations. I made a lot of good friends and I’m really happy about that.” Rita described how studying at such a friendly campus can lead to friendships with students from all over. “I made friends,” says Rita, “with so many different people: Korean friends, Mexican friends, Chinese friends. It’s been a great experience for me.” Wayne also described how “the students are more welcoming than I thought they [would be].” Wayne described how the friendliness of students led to his joining various student clubs, and how this allowed him to establish friendships with both U.S. students and other international students. The friends he has made in the clubs have helped with his adjustment, as they help him when he struggles with his English language skills. For Tina, her roommates were helpful in making her adjustment experience positive by bringing her into social interactions with other students. "My roommates brought me to a lot of parties and introduced me to their friends, so they were more friendly than I expected." Tina still found it easier to make friends with other students from
China, but found that her roommates forcing her to attend social events helped her in her adjustment experience which is why she has the U.S. student friends she has. Five of the eight students indicated at the beginning of their adjustment experience that they found the campus overwhelming. However, this was only a short-term issue, and they all indicated feeling comfortable on campus now.

**Theme 4: Students found the Faculty Friendly and Helpful.** All eight participants indicated that, with regards to their adjustment experiences, they found the faculty of the college to be helpful and friendly. The participants, when asked about their expectations of the faculty prior to arrival, had great variety in what they were expecting. Some, such as Della, “didn’t have expectations of the faculty” and had not thought about what their interactions or classroom experiences would be like after arriving at the college. Others, like Tina, believed that the faculty would be highly knowledgeable about current events and “talk more than just books and would talk about outside events.” Greg and Ursula thought the experience with faculty would be more difficult than in high school and “the faculty would be stricter and wouldn’t spoon feed you as much”. However, when asked about their impression of the faculty since arriving on campus, the participants’ responses shifted towards the willingness of the faculty to help when issues or problems arose as well as the ease of communicating with the faculty members. Carlos and Wayne were expecting to interact with the faculty more than they had with their high school teachers. “I thought when I got here I would interact more with professors and go to office hours,” said Wayne. April was concerned that faculty “wouldn’t respond to [her]” if she reached out.

Despite the variation in their expectations of faculty, all of the participants have had positive interactions in their adjustment experiences, describing the faculty as friendly and
helpful. The responsiveness of the faculty, and how helpful this has been as part of the students’
adjustment experiences, came up multiple times during the interviews. April described how fast
the faculty “get back to me” and even if she is unable to meet them during their scheduled office
hours they “tell me when I can meet them” and find time in their schedule to address her
concerns. Ursula found the faculty easy to reach both “via their emails and office hours.”
Wayne’s interaction with the faculty was important in influencing his adjustment experience. He
was initially reluctant to go to office hours, as the concept was unfamiliar to him back in China.
“The professors always tell us if you have any questions come to us and we will figure that out,”
says Wayne. “I did struggle a lot before I went to the office hours because we didn’t have that
kind of thing back in China, and once I went there it really helped me out.” The faculty’s
willingness to help made Wayne feel comfortable enough to seek the help he needed to be more
successful in the classroom. Della was surprised at the ease of the faculty’s grading and referred
to them repeatedly as “super nice.”

Carlos and Rita appeared to have the most positive opinions of the group, describing the
faculty as “amazing.” "What they do is amazing. You don’t think they do a lot, but they actually
do; even spending ten minutes is hard for them, but they do it,” said Carlos. When discussing her
feelings about the faculty since she arrived, Rita said, “So faculty for sure are amazing. I’ve built
some really good relationships with my professors. They’ve been really helpful and supporting
no matter what the issue is.” The positive influence of the faculty on the cultural adjustment of
all eight students was very apparent during the interviews.

**Theme 5: Students found the Staff Friendly and Helpful.** All eight participants
indicated in their interviews that the staff of the college were a helpful and friendly part of their
adjustment experiences. Prior to their arrival on campus, the students expressed little or no
expectations for the role college staff would play in their college experience. Carlos had interacted with a number of offices prior to his arrival on campus which led to an expectation that the staff “would be open about what they do, and not just say I have work to do, I can’t talk to you right now.” Wayne’s interactions with staff in his home country of China led him to believe he would “not have a close relationship with staff because that’s how staff treats students [in China], I didn’t know if I would get help or not.” Greg didn’t know what to expect but was hopeful that when he went to an office they would not “refer you to another office, and then they refer you to another place.” The remaining students had little to no interaction with the staff prior to arrival and indicated that they had hoped they would be helpful, but this was not something they had put a lot of thought into.

Since their arrival on campus and the beginning of their adjustment experiences, the participants all indicated that overall, the staff of the college have been friendly and helpful. When describing their experiences with the staff, the Center for Global Services (CGS) was referenced a number of times as a place with a positive impact on the adjustment experiences of the participants. Carlos described the staff of the CGS as being the most helpful to his adjustment on campus in part because of their sole focus on international students. “As a first-year international student you are scared, but I talked to staff a lot,” said Carlos, “CGS is helpful and more friendly than academic advising, because academic advising takes care of many more students." Wayne conveyed similar appreciation for the CGS and how helpful they had been during an emergency situation. Wayne described CGS by saying, “They are really great. This summer I had an emergency and I contacted global services. I lost my I-20 right before my flight. It was during the summer and I didn’t expect they would respond to me very quickly, but they responded the next day and I was able to get my friend to pick up my I-20 for me." The
responsiveness helped remove a substantial amount of fear and doubt from Wayne’s adjustment experience. While two participants indicated having had one or two negative interactions with staff members, this did not detract from their overall impression of the staff.

Tina, Della, April, and Rita all described their interactions with staff as friendly and helpful. Tina stated that while not all members of the staff have provided positive interactions, she “seldom meets someone who is not friendly.” Ursula indicated that while she has not had to make use of the staff of the university very often, when she has “they have been helpful” to her. Overall, the staff provided a friendly and helpful service to the students when called upon, supplying resources for assistance needed as the students engaged in their adjustment to the college campus.

**Theme 6: Students are treated equally.** As part of the interviews the participants were asked to describe, in detail, their opinions on how students are treated on campus, focusing on whether or not they believed all students were treated equally. Six of the eight participants indicated that they felt all students were treated equally on campus. This included three of the four Chinese participants and three of the four non-Chinese participants. April described how the campus consists of such a wide variety of people. “It’s really good,” said April, “there’s people of different cultures so there’s no discrimination. Basically, everyone is treated equally.” April went on to describe how she has never felt any discrimination or differential treatment from the campus community because she is an international student or because she is from a different culture. Wayne’s responses largely mirrored April’s, as he described that from his experiences, “we’re all treated the same.” Wayne went further in describing how the faculty and staff want all students to succeed. “Both the faculty and staff would offer extra help for international students
if needed,” declared Wayne. Wayne’s responses indicate that the faculty and staff want all students to have the same opportunity to be successful regardless of where they are from.

Ursula indicated that, “As far as my experience goes, I feel I have gotten the same treatment as all other students.” Ursula went on to describe her own beliefs, “Ultimately, we’re all students at East Coast University trying to get an education regardless of our citizenship. I don’t see a reason for staff, faculty, or even other students to treat others differently based on nationality unless it is due to some sort of inherent prejudice.” Ursula elaborated by saying that she felt the college community, as a whole, mirrored her own feelings on diversity and inclusion. The diversity of the campus was cited as the main factor for equal treatment, with the belief that the student body is so diverse that everyone is almost required, or forced, to get along with those from different backgrounds or cultures. Della and Rita echoed the belief that every student is treated equally, and no one is treated differently because of their country of origin. The findings indicate that as part of their cultural adjustment experiences, both the Chinese and non-Chinese participants did not feel they were treated differently than the other students.

Domain 3: Students are Likely to Stick with Who They Know

Despite finding the campus community (the students, faculty, and staff) to be friendly overall, the participants in the study generally found that students tend to hang out with those who have a similar background. The participants also expressed that their backgrounds as international students make it more difficult to make friends with U.S. students who were raised in the U.S. Additionally, for the non-native English speakers, limitations with communicating in English were seen as a detriment to their ability to make U.S. student friends.

Theme 7: Students hang out with those from a similar background. Seven of the eight participants indicated that the collegiate student body tend to hang out with those from
similar backgrounds. The seven participants included all four Chinese students and three of the four non-Chinese students. Della discussed the issue of individuals spending the majority of their time hanging out with other individuals from the same background by discussing the size of the Chinese student population on campus. "When you have certain amount of a group on campus” said Della, “they will form a group and isolate themselves from the American culture." Della’s experience led her to believe that the majority of the campus was comprised of international students. Della indicated that it was not just the Chinese international students who had formed groups and isolated themselves from the U.S. students, but that all international students had formed groups with those from similar cultures and isolated themselves from the larger campus community.

Wayne’s adjustment experience, when referring to students only hanging out with students from their own cultural group, extended beyond international students. Wayne describes, "My experience has found that there are so many groups here, white people play with white people; black play with black; American-born Chinese, ABCs, play with ABCs. Separate." Wayne’s description of “ABCs” refers to “American Born Chinese” who, according to Wayne, do not hang out with the students who come directly from China. Rather, the ABCs only hang out with other ABCs.

The participants indicated that having a shared upbringing and culture made it easier for them to hang out with those from a similar background as they had something in common and a greater sense of familiarity with students from their home. As described by Tina, "Everyone likes to hang out with someone similar to them, so not everyone is willing to hang out with international students." Tina went on to discuss how this tendency to hang out only with those you know has affected her adjustment experience by limiting her ability to get to know U.S.
students. “Sometimes it feels like they want to talk to you,” said Tina, “but they still have a little
distance.” Carlos provided additional context on how far the tendency of individuals to hang out
with those like themselves goes by describing his daily life on campus. Carlos described how
when he is on a university bus, he can look around and see “gangs of students that hang out”
only with those from the same background. The participants felt that students hanging out only
with other students of a similar background was part of their cultural adjustment experience and
limited their ability to create connections to students from different backgrounds. However, as
noted in the themes above, they still felt they were treated equally by the college community and
that the campus was friendly.

Theme 8: The traditional U.S. student has an upbringing that is difficult for
international students to relate to. Seven of the eight participants indicated that the traditional
U.S. upbringing was different from their own and made it difficult for the participants to relate.
Carlos describes how he expected, as part of his adjustment experience, that the campus
community would be easy to relate to. “I did not think it would be [difficult to relate to U.S.
students],” says Carlos, “but in the end it was.” Carlos’ experience was that it was not just about
being from another culture originally, but instead about where you completed your secondary
school years. Carlos describes, “Even the other international students who have been brought up
here seem to have vastly different attitudes towards things.” Carlos went on to say that he has
been able to get past these difficulties by forming friendships with U.S. students in the same
major as their shared research has brought them together.

For April it was not that she could not make friends with U.S. students, it was that she did
not feel the same sense of closeness that she feels with other international students. "Frankly
speaking,” says April, “I do have friends from my classes and stuff but most of my really close
friends who I frequently hang out with are international students because I think we understand each other and have the same upbringing.” April went on to say that she also met her U.S. student friends in her class and that “they are really helpful friends to have.” Greg’s experience has been similar to April’s experience of not feeling a deep connection to U.S students. "To be honest, it is very hard to make true friends with American students because we don’t have the same culture," said Greg. Greg went on to say that it is easier to make friends with other students from Taiwan and other international students, particularly highlighting Indian students.

Included in the responses of the participants were references to U.S. students’ social habits like partying and drinking, as well as an overall lack of seriousness about their studying. Tina described the culture of going to football games and how important this seemed to be to most U.S. students. “Most American students like football but in China we never see football, we can, now I can understand the rules, but in the first time, I didn’t know much, so when some American student talk about that, I cannot talk much because I don’t understand the rules, but now it became better, but it was hard.” Tina also described the party scene and how, “Since people in China do not party much, it is a bit hard for me to really enjoy the party due to the culture difference. In that year, I realized that the way U.S. students hanging out is a bit different from the way Chinese students hanging out.” Wayne described his fellow students as displaying a lack of seriousness about their education and his own inability to relate to not focusing on academics. “Sometimes when I’m on the bus I listen to the students talking and they are like, ‘Oh my god how can I get a 3.0 gpa?’ and I’m like 3.0 that’s really easy!” Wayne went on to describe how he feels international students focus much more on their education while U.S. students are just looking to have fun.
Theme 9: Being a non-native English speaker makes it difficult to make friends with U.S. students. Five of the eight participants indicated that they were non-native speakers of English. All five of these participants indicated that being a non-native speaker of English made it more difficult to connect and relate to the U.S. students on campus. The participants indicated that a lack of confidence in their English-speaking abilities held them back from interacting with U.S. students more often. Wayne described the areas where his English language training was not sufficient in helping him with his interactions with U.S students at the university. As Greg describes it, “We learned English in school but they don’t teach you slang or how to make conversations, they just teach you to read articles. Uh, but when we make friends with others they speak slang a lot and I always ask what that slang mean.” Wayne also experienced difficulties with the nuances of American slang, but he felt fortunate having joined the Christian fellowship on campus where he was able to make friends who helped him in learning the slang he did not learn in school. However, Wayne describes how this was not the case for many other students as, “I talked to a lot of Chinese students who came here who didn’t know who to talk to when they have problems.”

Tina describes her upbringing in China as an additional difficulty when paired with her language barriers. Tina stated how "Chinese students, because of our culture, we're more introverted; [We] sometimes want to be more involved on campus, but just afraid . . . Afraid to talk to American students." Tina went on to describe how she would be afraid to slow down conversations with U.S. students because “even though my English is not too bad, I cannot speak very fast and cannot speak fluently all the time. Sometimes I do not want to slow down a very exciting conversation, which also lessen my opportunities to meet more U.S. friends.” Tina went on to describe how most Chinese students, while going through their adjustment experience, are
afraid to leave their comfort zone because “they don’t want to jump out.” She went on to describe that being introverted is not a good or bad trait, it is just a difference between the Chinese and U.S. students. Della echoed this feeling of being introverted and lacking confidence to talk to U.S. students by describing how "it’s hard to even start talking to them, to initiate conversations with Americans." For all these students, not knowing English made their cultural adjustment experience more difficult because they were not able to communicate easily with U.S. students.

**Domain 4: Students Biggest Regret? Not Being More Outgoing**

The final aspect of the adjustment experience that was examined in the research study was asking the participants to look back at their time at the university and reflect on what, if anything, they would change. The students were asked if they could have the college itself change one thing what would it be. They were also asked if they could go back in time and change something themselves what would they change. The common theme that emerged from this aspect of the study was the desire to change their level of openness upon arrival on campus.

**Theme 10: Students Wished They Had Been More Outgoing.** Seven of the eight participants in the study indicated that their experience at the university would have been better if they had forced themselves to be more outgoing when they first arrived on campus. Each student’s cultural adjustment experience led them to believe that being more outgoing would have had a positive impact on their college experience. Additionally, all four Chinese students indicated that their cultural upbringing led to a greater tendency to be introverted. The findings indicate that being more outgoing would have likely allowed students to form a greater number of relationships with U.S. students.
Before arriving on campus Tina was “quite afraid,” as she “had never been to the U.S.” Tina describes feeling that U.S. students wanted to talk to her, “but they aren’t sure if you can speak English.” Tina felt that her experience would have been better if she had become “part of this place.” Tina wanted to be more involved and more assertive. Tina’s advice to herself if she could go back to her first semester was, "I need to step out of my comfort zone, I need to be more outgoing. I need to talk when I don’t want to talk.” Della expressed a similar experience as a Chinese student, when examining her adjustment experience since her arrival on campus. Della described how “it had been hard to make American student friends” and this was something she was looking forward to doing as part of her college experience in the U.S. Della felt she was not getting the experience that “you see or expect when studying in the U.S. instead of China.” If she could go back to her first semester, she believed if she “was more outgoing I would make more [U.S.] student friends.” Della felt this would have made her experience more in line with what she was expecting when she decided to study in the U.S.

Greg’s adjustment experience, with his Taiwanese heritage, contributed to his ability to make friends with Chinese students and not with U.S. students. Greg, however, did not feel that this was just a result of his being introverted, but also a result of his being lazy. "I’m very lazy when talking to American students. I lack the courage to talk to them. And I can be lazy and not talk to them," said Greg. Greg feels if he had gotten over his laziness he would have been able to get more involved and his grades would have been better in his first semester. Better grades would have minimized his stress and made his overall experience, which he describes as positive, even better.

Rita, in describing her experience, felt a bit overwhelmed when she first arrived but overall felt she fit right in to the college culture. However, when describing her own experience
as well as how she feels East Coast University can improve the adjustment experience for all international students, Rita discussed the need for more interaction between newly arrived international students and U.S. students on campus. "It would be really great if East Coast University could have a program where, the first time international students come on campus, where they come on campus and meet U.S. students right when they get here rather than just talking to international students." Rita’s own adjustment experience, and her knowledge of her fellow international student’s adjustment experiences, led her to believe that getting over the initial shock and fear that international students often struggle with is possible. To get over the initial shock, Rita felt East Coast University needed to provide smaller environments for international and U.S. students to interact early on in their adjustment experience. Finally, Ursula’s experience led her to believe that you miss out on the U.S. college experience by not taking advantage of all the college campus offers. In order to capitalize on all that is available you need to get to know the resources sooner. Ursula stated that you need to "take advantage of more of the resources on campus . . . different organizations, the rec centers, academic offices, meet professors more."

**Findings Relation to Research Questions**

As previously discussed, the goal of this study was to address two main research questions:

- When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the “majority” country of origin, the country that makes up more than half of the international student population?
• When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the other countries of origin?

Both the participants from the “majority” country of origin and the participants from other countries of origin displayed similar cultural adjustment experiences. Participants from each group displayed similar expectations on how they would be treated upon arrival at the university and parallel reasons for selecting East Coast University as their institution. Participants from both groups felt that, as part of their cultural adjustment experiences, they were treated equally by the campus community and that the faculty, staff, and students were friendly and welcoming. Participants from both groups felt that students at the university tend to spend most of their time with students from a similar cultural background. Both groups’ participants indicated that their adjustment experience included difficulty in relating to U.S. students because of differences in their upbringing. For the members of both groups whose first language was not English, difficulties in forming relationships with U.S. students were attributed, in part, to their lack of English language abilities. Participants from both groups indicated that they would have had an easier time adjusting to the campus culture if they had been more outgoing when they first arrived on campus.

**Summary**

This study used qualitative analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the experiences of eight international students studying at East Coast University. Analysis of the data resulted in ten broad themes that were then grouped into four domains. The themes and broader domains provide answers to the research questions posed for this study. Interviews with the participants revealed that they chose to study at East Coast University because of its location,
and they felt they would make friends with students from all different backgrounds (international students, like themselves, and U.S. born students). After arriving on campus the participants found the college community to be friendly and fair. The participants indicated that the students, faculty, and staff were all friendly and that the faculty and staff were helpful overall. Additionally, the participants felt that all students on the campus were treated equally and that being an international student did not mean you were held to a different standard or treated as less of a member of the college community. Despite finding the campus friendly overall, the participants found that students at the college typically hung out with those who shared a similar background rather than intermixing with those from different cultures or places of origin. The participants also found that the common upbringing of U.S. students was different from that of an international student. U.S. students were found by participants to be less serious in their studies and more likely to be involved in social habits, including partying and drinking alcohol. The Chinese student participants felt this was a substantial factor in their choosing to hang out mainly with other Chinese students. For the participants who were not native English speakers, a lack of confidence in their ability to communicate with their U.S. counterparts contributed to difficulties in making friends with U.S. students. The participants also displayed similarities in their desire to change their level of outgoingness when they first arrived on campus. Being more outgoing and getting involved in campus activities was consistently mentioned as the first thing that participants would change if they could go back and do the start of their college career over again.

The next chapter will discuss how the findings above answer the research questions posed in this study. Additionally, the following chapter will look at the results within the theoretical framework of cultural adjustment and how this relates to the adjustment of the
participants into the college setting in the United States. The chapter will then offer suggestions on how this data can be used by colleges and universities to better serve their international students. Finally, the chapter will discuss the limitations of this study, as well as suggest areas for future research.
Discussion of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the cultural adjustment experiences of eight students in their second year studying at East Coast University. Adjusting to studying in the U.S. is often a struggle, both academically and socially, for international students as they attempt to adapt to their new environment (Yakunina, 2012). This study looked to examine potential differences in the cultural adjustment experiences of international students, focusing on differences related to significant variations within the demographic breakdown of the international student population. Specifically, this study looked to see if there were differences in the cultural adjustment experiences when the majority of international students at the university are from one country. Understanding the adjustment experiences of international students is important to any college or university wishing to grow or maintain the size of their international student population. The research problem addressed in this study is that taking a “one-size-fits-all” approach to the cultural adjustment needs of international students fails to recognize differences in the population. Knowing what the differences are is a best practice for institutions with a vested interest in their international student population.

This study examined the cultural adjustment experiences of eight students: their expectations, realities, and what changes they feel would have made their experiences better. From the semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant, ten themes clustered into four domains emerged: Students Expected a Convenient and Friendly Location, The Campus is Friendly and Students Are Treated Fairly, Students are Likely to Stick with Who They Know, and Students Biggest Regret? Not Being More Outgoing. These domains match with the study’s research questions:
• When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the “majority” country of origin, the country that makes up more than half of the international student population?

• When one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population at a U.S. college or university, what are the cultural adjustment experiences of students coming from the other countries of origin?

As phenomenology was used as the qualitative research for this study, semi-structured interviews provided the gateway into the experiences of the participants. The semi-structured interviews allowed for the researcher to explore what the experiences meant to the participants and how they presented themselves in the participants own conscious (Groenwald, 2004). Cultural adjustment theory was applied to the research to build on previous research that examined the factors that contribute to international student adjustment experiences (Fritz, 2008; Furukawa, 1997; Sumer, 2008; Hendrickson, 2011). As mentioned previously, college campuses, especially large residential campuses, offer researchers interested in studying cultural adjustment theory a great space for establishing commonalities and differences (Russell, 1992). For these reasons, combining cultural adjustment theory with the semi-structured interview process used in phenomenology provided an excellent opportunity to examine each student’s experience in great detail.

International students have been the subject of a number of research studies recently, and as mentioned, a large amount of research is dedicated to examining the experiences of these students on college campuses (Baba, Hosoda, 2014) (Burkhardt, 2013) (Duanmu, Li, Chen, 2009) (Fritz, Chin, DeMarinis, 2008) (Kagan, Cohen, 1990) (Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-
McGovern 2015) (Wang et al., 2012) (Zhang and Goodson, 2010). While these studies examine the international student experience in various ways, previous research did not focus on potential differences relating to disparities in the numbers of students coming from individual countries of origin. It is the aim of this study to specifically focus on potential differences when one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population. Since currently more than half of the international students coming to study in the U.S. come from just three countries (India, South Korea, China), the likelihood of universities having a disproportionate breakdown within their international student body remains likely (Institute of International Education, 2015). Therefore, filling in this particular gap in the research will likely be beneficial for institutions with growing international student populations for years to come.

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This chapter addresses the research findings, specifically the ten themes identified in the previous chapter. The themes are discussed through the research questions focusing on the cultural adjustment experiences of the participants and how the experiences of the participants from the country of origin that makes up more than half the population, China, are alike or different from the students from other countries. After each domain is discussed the relation of the findings to the literature review is examined. Next, the chapter shows how the study findings related to the theoretical framework. Moving on after the theoretical framework is discussed, the chapter continues with a discussion on the limitations of this study. Following the discussion on limitations, the chapter continues with the implications of the research findings for practitioners at colleges and universities. The chapter then concludes with recommendations for future research on the cultural adjustment experiences of international students.

**Students Expected a Convenient and Friendly Location.** The first domain defined in this study focuses on the students’ expectations of what their college experience was going to be like when they arrived in the U.S. Studies have shown that student expectations often shape their experiences on common elements of the adjustment experiences such as the services offered at an institution (Shank & Walker, 1996), what the students expect to learn in the classroom (Jernigan, 2004), and what skills they expect to need to be successful in their careers (Gaither & Butler, 2005). Studies have shown that a participant’s expectations, even when studied after the phenomenon has taken place, often play a significant role in shaping the participant’s experience (Krentler & Appleton-Knapp, 2006; Reisig & Chandek, 2001; Montfort, Masurel, & Rijn, 2000). How well the college experience matched what the students were expecting would go a long way in determining the cultural adjustment experience of the students. Of equal importance is noting
any differences between the expectations of the students from China and the students from all other countries of origin. Differences in expectations could lead to differences in experiences which could provide data to institutions on the need to adjust expectations for students coming from a particular country. This topic will be discussed in greater detail in the recommendations for future studies.

Where They Will Study Is Important. The first theme drawn out from the interviews was a focus on the students choosing to attend East Coast University because of its location. As part of the semi-structured interviews for this study, students were asked about their reasons for choosing their institution. In this study, six of the eight participants indicated that their selection of the university was, at least partially, predicated on the university’s location, specifically its proximity to New York City. Location appeared equally important in the school selection process for both the students from the majority country of origin, China, and students from other countries of origin. Of the six participants who indicated that the location was important to their choosing East Coast University, three were Chinese students and three were non-Chinese students. In follow-up questions and second interviews students continued to indicate that the location of the school was important to them, referencing the ease of getting to New York City and the opportunities this afforded them for internships and potential future employment. Based on these responses, the expectations, with regards to the value of the location of the institution, were fulfilled after arrival and during their time on campus up to date.

Students Expect Friendships of All Kinds. Part of the cultural adjustment experience of international students that is often overlooked but can have a dramatic impact on a student’s success acculturating to the U.S. college campus is the student’s ability to make friends (Hendrickson, Rosen, Aune, 2010). As part of the semi-structured interviews for this study
students were asked about their expectations of their fellow students before arrival. When asked about their expectations regarding their fellow students all eight of the participants in this study, including all of the Chinese and non-Chinese participants, expressed a belief that they would make friends very easily. The student interviews provided an insight into how they felt they would be received on campus by their fellow students. The participants believed that the campus would have a great feeling of “community” where “everyone knows each other” and “people come together, live together, and learn all the time.”

As more international students are choosing to study in the U.S., mental health providers are further emphasizing the importance of these students having a strong social support network (Hayes & Lin, 1994). While not speaking about their expectations in such technical terms, it is clear that the participants in this study were expecting a campus where it would be easy to find and create a social support network. This expectation was equally true for three participants coming from the country of origin making up the majority of the international student population, and the participants coming from other countries of origin.

**Domain’s Relation to Previous Literature.** The findings in this domain are similar to those found in the literature review, specifically the research that focuses on 1) Mental Health and Causes of Stress and 3) Student Support Services. International students coming to study in the U.S. who display a higher level of social openness are more likely to have an easier time adjusting to the college campus (Yakunina, 2012). The participants came to the university expecting a friendly campus and as shown in the next theme, they found the campus to be friendly, which helped with their adjustment. Also matching well with previous literature was the participants’ expectations about support services. Expecting the staff to be friendly, the participants did not fully grasp the amount of services that would be available to them on
The Campus is Friendly and the Students Are Treated Fairly. The second domain defined in this study focuses on the treatment of the participants by the various members of the campus community. Campus communities at colleges and universities are made up largely of three main groups: students, faculty, and staff. These three groups help form the “campus climate” of the institution, which plays a significant role in the adjustment experiences of students matriculating at the university (Astin, 1993). Campus climate for a newly arrived international student can be determined by how many positive or negative interactions they have with the other members of the community (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008) as they get accustomed to their surroundings. The next four themes take a look at the campus climate for the participants in this study, examining the similarities and differences in the adjustment experiences of the students from China and other countries of origin.

Students found the Student Body Friendly. The cultural adjustment experiences of students, particularly those of students from a diverse background, can be largely dictated by the amount of positive interactions these students have with their peers (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). The interactions diverse students have with their peers represent the most central element of the campus climate. Positive interactions can be central to a student’s quick and easy adjustment to the campus. Negative interactions can make it difficult for students to adjust and may lead to a greater likelihood of loneliness and homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

As part of the semi-structured interviews for this study, students were asked about their interactions with the students of the institution. For the eight students who participated in this
study, the accounts of the student body overall were the same; they described their fellow students as friendly. The feeling that the student body was friendly was shared amongst all the participants in the study, including those from China and those from all other countries of origin. With all participants expressing the feeling that the students of the campus were friendly, the research shows that international students on campus found the student body to be friendly regardless of their country of origin. This did not vary when one country of origin made up the majority of the international student population.

Students found the Faculty Friendly and Helpful. In their study of international students on campus, Ladd and Ruby (1999) found that more often than not, rather than trying to adjust the classroom to meet the needs of international students, faculty wanted international students to assimilate to the classroom environment. As part of the semi-structured interviews for this study, students were asked about their interactions with the faculty of the institution. The study found that while most professors wanted the students to adjust to their practices, students (as well as faculty) benefited more when the goal of the faculty was to adjust to the needs of the student. Additional studies have shown the important impact faculty have on their students’ adjustment experience, and the importance of forming a positive relationship between international students and the faculty (Adrian-Taylor & Noels & Tischler, 2007) (Leask, 2009) (Pedersen, 1991).

Similar to the experience the participants noted with the student body, all eight of the participants found the faculty to be friendly. Additionally, all eight participants also indicated that the faculty, as a whole, were helpful; there were multiple references to students being pleasantly surprised with the accessibly and responsiveness of the faculty. Participants cited faculty availability during office hours and verbal acknowledgements by the faculty during class sessions about the importance of international students being in their classrooms. These
references support previous research that showed the importance of faculty being familiar with international student needs in order to assist with the cultural adjustment experience of these students (Olivas & Li, 2006). These findings included all four participants from China, and all four participants from other countries of origin showing similar adjustment experiences. These findings indicate that the cultural adjustment of the students, with regards to their experiences with faculty, were similar regardless of their country of origin and did not vary because one country of origin made up the majority of the international student population.

Students found the Staff Friendly and Helpful. The third group within the college community that has an impact on students while they are going through their cultural adjustment to the institution is the institutions staff. Staff, when compared to international students at their institutions, are often more aware of the growing cultural adjustment needs students go through (Bartram, 2007). The study indicates the importance of staff assisting students in the development of their social networks, in order to assist with their adjustment to the campus community. As part of the semi-structured interviews for this study students were asked about their interactions with the staff of the institution.

Similar to the experiences noted for the participants and their positive relationships with the faculty, the participants indicated positive experiences with the staff. All eight of the participants indicated that the staff of the institution was friendly. Additionally, all eight of the participants indicated that they found the staff, as a whole, to be helpful with regards to their needs adjusting to life on campus. These findings included all four participants from China, and all four participants from other countries of origin showing the participants had similar adjustment experiences. These findings indicate that the cultural adjustment of the students, with regards to their experiences with staff, were similar regardless of their country of origin and did
not vary because one country of origin made up the majority of the international student population.

*Students Are Treated Equally.* International students who come to study in the U.S. and feel that they are discriminated against or treated differently than their domestic counterparts may become discouraged from building friendships on campus, limiting their ability to acculturate to their new environment (Guidry-Lacina, 2002). International students are more likely to perceive prejudicial treatment when compared to their domestic counterparts, which can have a significant impact on their cultural adjustment experiences as well as how much they enjoy their college years (Sowosky & Plake, 1992). For the purposes of this study, the participants were asked how they felt students were treated on campus and if all students were treated equally.

Contradicting the previous research, this study found that six of the eight participants believed that students on the campus were treated equally. The six participants indicated that equal treatment was not just their own experience, but rather that all students were treated equally throughout the university. Of the six participants, three were from China and three were from other countries of origin. These findings indicate that the cultural adjustment of the students, with regards to their feelings of being treated equally, were similar regardless of their country of origin and did not vary because one country of origin made up the majority of the international student population.

*Domain’s Relation to Previous Literature.* The findings in this domain are both similar to and different from those found in the literature review, specifically the research that focuses on 1) Mental Health and Causes of Stress and 3) Student Support Services. As displayed in the previous theme, the students came to the U.S. expecting the campus to be friendly, which
displays an openness that allows for an easier time adjusting to campus (Yakunina, 2012). Consistent with Yakunina’s research, these students found the campus to be friendly, allowing for an easier adjustment experience. The findings were dissimilar to Wang’s (2006) research, and his findings that Chinese students displayed a higher level of anxiety during the acculturation process than students from other countries.

With regards to student support services, the study’s results were similar to previous research on the importance of faculty in the acculturation process of international students (Adrian-Taylor & Noels & Tischler, 2007) (Leask, 2009) (Pedersen, 1991). The positive opinion that the participants had of their faculty was beneficial to their adjustment experience, just as previous research had described. Additionally, the study provided similar findings on the importance of staff having global competency and being knowledgeable of other cultures (Bresciani, 2008).

Students are Likely to Stick with Who They Know. The third domain defined in this study focuses on the cultural adjustment experiences as they relate to the students building relationships with other students on campus. International students, as a whole, have a significant desire to form friendships with students from their host country (Kashima & Loh, 2006). However, international students are more likely to have more friendships with students on campus from their country of origin than friendships with students from other countries or origin (Hendrickson, Rosen, Aune, 2011). The next three themes discuss the experiences of the participants in this study and provide reasons why students tend to form friendships with those from the same background or country of origin.

Students hang out with those from a similar background. International students who form friendships with students from the host country tend to experience fewer feelings of
homesickness and have a higher feeling of satisfaction with their college community (Hendrickson, Rosen, Aune, 2011). In the previously discussed themes we noted that the participants in this study not only expected to make friends with students from the host country but, as part of their cultural adjustment experiences, they also found the host country students (and the student body overall) to be friendly and welcoming. For the purposes of this study, the participants were asked about their experiences with other students since arriving on campus. Later, participants were asked to describe how they see their relationship with the other students on campus. Additionally, the students were asked to provide details on what factors, positive or negative, have contributed to their adjustment experience being what it was.

This study found that seven of the eight participants found that the students in their college community tend to hang out with other students from a similar background. These seven students spoke of their own personal experiences as well as experiences of other students they know through their time on the campus. The seven participants included all four of the Chinese students and three of the four non-Chinese students. These findings indicate that the cultural adjustment experiences of both the group of participants from China and the group of students not from China were similar and did not vary when one country of origin made up the majority of the international student population.

*The traditional U.S. student has an upbringing that is difficult for international students to relate to.* The college campus in the U.S. brings together students from a variety of backgrounds including but not limited to: differences in cultural background, country of origin, socioeconomic status, quality of previous education, etc. For many international students the cultural adjustment experience, particularly the ability to make friends with U.S. students, is made difficult by a lack of understanding of the customs and values of the U.S. students on
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campus (Guidry-Lacina, 2002). International students may find it difficult to make friends with U.S. students because their upbringing and formative years were vastly different from the U.S. students’, making it hard to relate. For the purposes of this study, the participants were asked about their experiences with other students since arriving on campus. Later, participants were asked to describe how they see their relationship with the other students on campus. Additionally, the students were asked to provide details on what factors have contributed to their adjustment experience, positive or negative, being what it was.

This study found that seven of the eight participants indicated that their own upbringing, being different from that of their U.S. student counterparts, made it difficult to relate to the U.S. students as part of their adjustment experience. The seven participants included all four of the Chinese students and three of the four non-Chinese students. These findings indicate that the cultural adjustment experiences of both the participants from China and the participants from other countries of origin were similar and did not vary when one country of origin made up the majority of the international student population.

Being a non-native speaker of English makes it difficult to make friends with U.S. students. When international students look to study in the U.S., studies have shown that the students’ level of proficiency in the English language is a significant factor in their ability to acculturate and adjust to their new environment (Hayes & Lin, 1994) (Olivian & Li, 2006) (Yeh & Inose, 2003). These studies go further, to discuss how a lack of ability or confidence in English language ability can lead to students feeling isolated, homesick, and often like outsiders on the college campus they attend. As noted above, previous themes discussed how participants found the student body to be friendly and welcoming upon arrival on campus. For the purposes of this study, the participants were later asked about their experiences with other students since
arriving on campus. Participants were also asked to describe how they see their relationship with the other students on campus. Additionally, the students were asked to provide details, positive or negative, on what factors have contributed to their adjustment experience being what it was.

Of the eight participants in the study, five indicated that they were non-native speakers. This group of five included all four participants from China and one of the four non-Chinese participants. The other three participants indicated that they did not consider themselves to be non-native speakers of English. This indicates that all of the participants who were non-native English speakers felt that being a non-native English speaker made it difficult for them to build friendships with U.S. students. With only one participant from the non-Chinese group being a non-native speaker there is limited information to indicate if the experiences were the same when one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population.

**Domain’s Relation to Previous Literature.** The findings in this domain are both similar and different to those found in the literature review, specifically the research that focuses on 1) Mental Health and Causes of Stress and 2) Academic Difficulties. Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) described in their research that making friends with domestic students is often very hard for international students. The participants in this study described their own experience and found the same difficulties in making friends outside of those from their own country of origin. A number of the participants also described it as easier, and helpful to their acculturation, to make friends with international students from other countries. This is consistent with the research that showed making friends with international students from other countries as a good “middle ground” between only having friends from your own country of origin and making friends with domestic students (Kashima, Loh, 2006, p. 482).
Unlike previous research, the difficulties the participants described with their language abilities and their inability to make friends with domestic students did not seem to translate into difficulties within the classroom. Jernigan’s (2004) research describes how students with little belief in their language abilities often lacked motivation in classes as they often felt it was a lost cause. This research study shows that despite feeling limited by their language abilities in their pursuit of domestic student friends, the students did not feel their academic pursuits were hindered by their language abilities.

**Students Biggest Regret? Not Being More Outgoing.** International students studying in the U.S. are not afforded a chance to have a “do over” when it comes to their college experience. While they may wish they could simply try their cultural adjustment experience again, knowing what they know from studying in the U.S. for a year, the world just does not work this way. The final theme below discusses a similar finding: what the participants indicated they would do differently if they were given the opportunity to start their cultural adjustment experience with what they know now having completed over a year of study in the U.S.

**Students Wished They Had Been More Outgoing.** At the end of the study participants were asked about what aspect(s) of their experience they would change if they could. Interview questions included asking what they feel could be changed by the institution, and if they could go back and change one thing what would they go back and change. Seven of the eight participants indicated that being more outgoing when they first arrived on campus would be the change they would make when looking back at their adjustment experience. Their description of how they wished they had been more outgoing included wishing that they had taken more time to speak more with U.S. students and getting involved in clubs and activities as soon as they arrived on campus. The seven participants who indicated that they wish they were more outgoing as the
change they would have made included all four Chinese participants and three non-Chinese participants. These findings indicate that the cultural adjustment experiences of both the participants from China and the participants from other countries of origin were similar and did not vary when one country of origin made up the majority of the international student population.

**Domain’s Relation to Previous Literature.** The findings in this domain are similar to those found in the literature review, specifically the research that focuses on 1) Mental Health and Causes of Stress. Much of the research from the literature review discusses the factors that make cultural adjustment and acculturation hard for international students (Carr, 2010) (Wang, 2006) (Yakunina, 2012). In these studies, the students describe anxiety and stress when first arriving on campus, along with an inability or unwillingness to reach out and make connections with domestic students. The participants in this study displayed similar struggles, and identified their inability to be more outgoing when first arriving on campus as a factor that slowed down their acculturation.

**Summary: Similar Findings for Both Groups**

The findings above indicate that overall, the cultural adjustment experiences of the two groups were largely similar. No theme was found to be relevant to specifically one group. When a commonality existed amongst the Chinese student participants it was found to also exist for the non-Chinese students. Overall, the students experienced similar cultural adjustment experiences during their time studying at their institution.

**Research Findings and the Theoretical Framework**

The most recent focuses of Cultural Adjustment Theory, the theoretical framework used for this study, explore the cultural adjustment process as a multidimensional adjustment process focusing on day to day life adjustment, work adjustment, and interaction adjustment (Black et al,
1991) (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). Studies by Yakunina (2012) and Lin (2012) examined cultural adjustment by focusing specifically on the cultural adjustment of international students. These studies explored cultural adjustment research not by looking at experiences based on where students came from but on the type of personality the students have and how this effects their cultural adjustment.

The research findings of this study match with those of Yakunina (2012) and Lin (2012) as the students displayed similar cultural adjustment experiences despite having different countries of origin. Looking at the multidimensional adjustment process, the study covered all three aspects of the process: day to day life adjustment (what the experience is like for the student on campus), work adjustment (what the experience is like for the student in the classroom), and interaction adjustment (what the experience is like relating to other members of the college community). For all three areas the participants’ cultural adjustment experiences were highly similar regardless of the country of origin of the student.

**Limitations**

As discussed previously, this study attempted to examine the cultural adjustment experience of international students to see if there are differences in the adjustment experiences of these students when one country of origin makes up more than half (the majority) of the international student population. While the study found that the experiences of the eight participants were largely similar, the study itself is limited in its scope and therefore limits the overall meaning of these findings. The limitations of this study included the limited sample size, the focus on second-year undergraduate students, the use of only one university, and the use of only one example of one country of origin for the country that made up the majority of the
international student body. In the paragraphs that follow, each limitation will be discussed in greater detail to provide additional information for future research on this question.

To conduct this study, the researcher sought out a purposeful sample of 8-12 participants. Of this group, at least half were to come from the country of origin that made up more than half of the international student population; for this study, the country of origin was China. The other participants were to come from as wide a variety of countries of origin as possible. After conducting outreach, eight participants were selected; four of the participants were from China and the other four participants came from four other countries of origin. While the sample size of eight participants, four participants from China and four from other countries, allowed for a meaningful comparison, a larger number of participants may have brought out additional themes and potential areas of similarity and differences that were not found with the sample size used for this study.

The eight participants who took part in this study were all second-year undergraduate international students. The selection of second-year undergraduates was part of the purposeful selection of this group as the study sought to include only participants who had shared the same time frame of cultural adjustment. It is possible that a study conducted earlier in the students’ cultural adjustment experience, during the first year of their study, may produce different results. This study focused on students reflecting on their experience to date, where as a study focused more on the initial “growing pains” of cultural adjustment experienced when the students first arrive may produce findings that include greater variation.

The study conducted took place at one university in the northeastern United States. The university selected was a large, residential research university that houses one of the largest international student populations in the United States. It is possible that a university with a
smaller population of international students would produce different cultural adjustment experiences for the students from the country of origin that makes up the majority of the international student population, as well as the students from all other countries of origin. Additionally, campuses that offer less of a residential experience would likely offer students a different cultural adjustment experience. Finally, a university located in a different part of the United States, or in a different country, may produce different results as the environment on and around the campus may lead to a different cultural adjustment experience for the students at the institution.

Lastly, this study focused on cultural adjustment experiences when one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student population. For the university selected for this study, the country of origin that made up the majority of the international student population was China. For other colleges and universities another country of origin may make up the majority of the international student population. It is possible that a different country of origin making up the majority of the international population could lead to variations in the cultural adjustment experiences of the international student body.

**Implications for Professional Practice**

In making suggestions for practitioners who have a vested interest in their institution’s international students, the domains and themes from this study provide a number of insights. Despite differences in their countries of origin, the participants felt that the campus environment at their university was friendly and welcoming. Based on this finding, it could be suggested that colleges and universities that have a positive and welcoming feel will be helpful to the adjustment experiences of students of all backgrounds and countries of origin. Practitioners working in enrollment management, particularly those in admissions, should take note of the
expectations they create with their admitted students prior to their arrival on campus. The participants in this study felt the campus location and environment matched the expectations they had prior to their arrival in the U.S. As the expectations matched the reality, the experience of these students was positive upon arrival at the institution. If the campus had failed to match the expectations, it is likely the cultural adjustment experience would have been more difficult.

The final implication that practitioners could surmise from this study is the need to create an environment that encourages international students to be outgoing when they first arrive on campus. All the participants in this study indicated this as their greatest regret in their adjustment experience. The participants indicated that upon arrival on campus they were nervous and anxious about engaging with domestic students, and they were unable to overcome this for a significant amount of time. Fostering an environment that helps international students overcome this anxiety sooner rather than later would likely go a long way to helping with the acculturation process.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

When considering both the findings and limitations of this study, there are a number of recommendations for future research that can be suggested. As this study solely focused on experiences of undergraduate international students, future research could explore differences in cultural adjustment experiences of graduate international students when one country or origin makes up the majority of the international student population. Graduate students are generally older than their undergraduate student counterparts and likely go through a different cultural adjustment experience. The cultural adjustment experiences of graduate students may vary from those of undergraduate students when one country of origin makes up the majority of the international student body.
Future research could add greater depth to the data in this study by examining students on multiple campuses across the U.S. By doing a study of multiple universities, themes that are drawn out from the research study will more likely be representative of the cultural adjustment experiences of all international students studying in the U.S. Such a study would also allow the researcher to examine student adjustment experiences on different types of campuses (residential, commuter, etc.).

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of the eight participants in this study. To incorporate a greater amount of data, researchers could include a survey of a larger selection of the international student body. The survey could be done as a first step in a mixed methods study; semi-structured interviews with purposefully selected respondents to the survey could be used as the next step in the study. Such a study would provide both a general overview of the international student experience along with an in-depth look at smaller segments of the population.

Finally, as research builds on the cultural adjustment experiences of international students in the U.S., further studies could examine the phenomenon on campuses in other countries. Even though the U.S. is the largest recipient of international students, many other countries have colleges and universities with large international student populations. As institutions in other countries may have students coming from one country or origin make up the majority of their international student population, it would be prudent to study how the campus environment in these countries compares for international students as they adjust to the new campus culture.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Protocol and Questions

1) Before getting started I’d like to review the consent form with you and see if you have any questions before signing. (confirm signature before moving forward)

2) As you know, we just went through the consent form and you’ve signed it. At this point may I ask your permission to record this interview? (confirm consent before moving forward)

3) Great now we can get started. First can you tell me a little bit about where you are from?

4) What made you choose to come to UNIVERSITY NAME?

5) What are you currently planning on majoring at UNIVERSITY NAME and where are you currently living?

6) Can you think back to the time right before you left to come to UNIVERSITY NAME, back then, what were your expectations of:
   a. The college campus?
   b. What your fellow students would be like?
   c. The Faculty who would be teaching you?
   d. The staff who would work in the administrative offices?

7) Having completed your first semester, how has the college campus compared to your expectations?

8) Having completed your first semester, how have your fellow students compared to your expectations?
9) Having completed your first semester, how the faculty compared to your expectations?
10) Having completed your first semester, how has the staff compared to your expectations?
11) Would you say your overall experience has been better, the same, or worse than you had expected before arrival?
12) What factors have led you to feel it was better/the same/worse?
13) Since you first arrived have you felt the experience has gotten better, stayed the same, or become worse?
14) Can you provide some examples of experiences or memories you have from your first semester that contributed to you feeling the experience was better/the same/worse than when you first arrived?
15) Can you describe how this experience or memory made you feel?
16) Can you describe how you see the relationship between yourself and your fellow students?
17) Can you describe how you see the relationship between yourself and the faculty?
18) Can you describe how you see the relationship between yourself and the college staff?
19) If you wanted to make your experience better, what steps do you feel you would need to take?
20) If UNIVERSITY NAME wanted to make your experience better, what steps do you feel it should take?
21) Do you have any questions for me?

Other ideas for questions that get to feelings/perceptions/experiences (not through comparison with what they expected):

Describe how you felt immediately after your arrival on campus? (then probe, but stay with feelings)
What were some of the first things you did after arriving on campus? Whom did you meet?
Describe some of your earliest interactions with others.
Can you think of things the University could have done or structured for you that might have
been helpful to you?
Have you ever wondered if you made the right choice in coming to the U.S. to study?
Describe your interactions with faculty members. Have any of them been particularly helpful to
you – how?
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Research Study: Cultural Adjustment of International Students

Researcher: Marco Dinovelli, Associate Director of International Recruitment, Rutgers University

Phone: 848 445 3624

Email: dinovelli@admissions.rutgers.edu

Office Location: ASB, Busch Campus, Room 202

PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to examine the cultural adjustment experiences of international students studying in the United State for the first time.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Participants in the study are asked to take part in 2 semi-structured interviews (at least two weeks apart) and 1 focus group session. During the interviews and focus group sessions participants will be asked questions about their experiences studying in the United States.

You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

CONFIDENTIALITY

For the purposes of this research study, your comments will be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.]
Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board at (732) 235 6043.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature ______________________________ Date __________

Investigator's signature ______________________________ Date __________