What is it like to be a pathway student? : Voices of international undergraduate students at a large public university in New England.

A thesis presented
by
Kristof Zaba
To
The School of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
In the field of Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
October 2019
Abstract

Over the last decade, American institutions of higher education have experienced a phenomenal growth in the number of international students. In part, this growth can be attributed to the growth of pathway programs. Pathway students usually come from diverse academic backgrounds, various skill sets, and they represent varying degrees of oral and written English abilities, creating challenges for both the students and teaching faculty. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into transitional experiences of international undergraduate students as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program. The study applied liminality as a theoretical framework and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine the transitional experiences of eleven international undergraduate students following a pathway completion. Findings concluded that: (A) Pathway students experience anxiety from independence, and fear for potential isolation, (B) They are overwhelmed with academic difficulties, but they feel supported by university resources, and encouraged to learn and overcome obstacles. (C) Despite challenges, students feel liberated by the classroom climate and find comfort in new relationships with international peers and faculty (D) Pathway students feel isolated from their domestic peers in first-year experience. (E) Pathway students find comfort in being a part of the community, and feel united by shared experience.

Keywords: international student, globalization, immersion, undergraduate, pathway, transition, transitional experience, liminality, IPA, academic adjustment, English adjustment.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all the brave and courageous international students who, despite numerous challenges, are driven to explore the unknown world beyond their own comfort zone in pursuit of their educational ambitions. I truly appreciate all the interactions with you and all the teaching moments that have instilled my deep appreciation for other cultures and my innate curiosity for learning and exploring the unknown.
Acknowledgements

A decision to enroll in a doctoral program at Northeastern University came to me at the least expected period of my life around the time when my kids were already in school and some of my peers began having discussions on career advancement and post-career plans rather thinking of furthering their education. This process has been time-consuming, intellectually and physically challenging, but encouraging and rewarding at the same time. It required that I learn how to juggle the duties of a doctoral student, and a working professional with the family obligations.

Obtaining a doctoral degree has been quite the arduous undertaking. To this day, I can still recall sitting on the back porch on a sunny summer day, writing my very first literature review in the initial semester, while panicking that I would never be able to pass the first class. It has not been easy, but it was so worth it. The accomplishment of getting a doctoral degree has provided me with the skills and the ability to excel as a scholar-practitioner in the field of higher education, and look at the world, and the students that I work with through a different lens.

Of course, it would not have been all possible without the support along the way. If it were not for the continuous support from my dear wife, Kasia, I would not have been able to make it to the finish line. During the moments of self-doubt, she was the one who encouraged me not to give up, and motivated me to move past the challenges that I was facing. She never refused to act as a sounding board. She never refused to listen to my ideas, and always offered the first line of critique that enabled me to improve. I would also like to thank my children, Natalie and Oliver, who showed the maturity to understand why I may have been distracted or not always involved ‘full-time’ in the family matters that were happening around me while I was focusing on studying and writing. Further, I would like to thank all my family members and friends who supported me during this journey. I would also be greatly remiss if I did not acknowledge Deepa
Bhalla, a friend and a former colleague of mine, and a peer doctoral student in the program, for having numerous discussions on my study, for acting as my supporter and pushing me to continue.

Above all, I would like to thank Dr. Tova Sanders, my dissertation advisor, who has been the best advisor I could have asked for. I truly appreciated your timely feedback, revisions, and suggestions, which helped shape my work. I cannot express enough how much grateful I have been for the way you trusted my ideas while giving me the space to grow. If it were not for your words of encouragement, I do not think I would ever finish the program. I would also like to thank Dr. Margaret Kirchoff Gorman, my second reader and a committee member, for her direction and expertise. Thank you for being a wonderful professor in class and for serving as a second reader on this thesis. Last, but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Elsa Wiehe, for agreeing to act as my external third reader and a committee member, whose feedback I found helpful and invaluable. I appreciate your support and your interest in my work.

Table of Contents
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 2  
Dedication .......................................................................................................................... 3  
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... 4  
Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................. 10  
  Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................. 10  
  Purpose Statement ......................................................................................................... 13  
  Significance .................................................................................................................... 14  
  Research Problem ......................................................................................................... 16  
  Research Question ......................................................................................................... 17  
  Rationale behind the Central Research Question ......................................................... 17  
  Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................. 18  
    Liminality in research ................................................................................................. 21  
    Rationale and alignment of theoretical framework ..................................................... 22  
    Application of liminality to the study ......................................................................... 24  
  Summary ......................................................................................................................... 25  
Definitions and Terms ...................................................................................................... 25  
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature .............................................................................. 27  
  Literature Review Purpose and Organization ............................................................... 27  
  Pathway Programs ......................................................................................................... 27  
    The rise of pathways in the U.S. higher education ..................................................... 27  
    Pathways: University and third party partnerships .................................................... 29  
    Pathways: An Untraditional way to enter a degree program ..................................... 30  
    Scarcity of research on pathway programs ................................................................ 31  
    ‘Learnings’ from existing research on pathway programs .......................................... 32  
      The Australian context .............................................................................................. 32  
      The Canadian context .............................................................................................. 34  
      The U.S. context ....................................................................................................... 36  
  International Student Experience .................................................................................. 38  
    English language skills and student experience ....................................................... 38  
    Asian Students: More language difficulties ............................................................... 40  
    Academic experiences ............................................................................................... 42
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of teaching practices.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom communication</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with professors</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other academic challenges</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and social experiences</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and social interactions</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of social networking</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived prejudice</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methodology</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Researcher in Qualitative IPA Research</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Tradition</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An IPA Overview</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Research Site</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Selection</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection and Participant Overview</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection procedures</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data storage and management</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member checking</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thick descriptions</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining commitment and rigor</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling method</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transferability and generalizability of findings. ................................................................. 74
Researcher’s bias. .................................................................................................................. 74
Positionality Statement ....................................................................................................... 75
Positionality .......................................................................................................................... 75
Personal life influences on positionality ............................................................................ 76
Professional life influences on positionality ................................................................. 76
Final reflections on impact of positionality on the study .................................................. 77
Summary ................................................................................................................................ 78
Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings ............................................................................... 79
Organization ....................................................................................................................... 79
Overview of Super-ordinate and Sub-ordinate Themes ....................................................... 79
Super-ordinate theme 1: Fear and anxiety from the unknown. .......................................... 81
  Anxiety from independence ............................................................................................. 81
  Concern for potential isolation and not fitting in ......................................................... 82
Super-ordinate theme 2: Overwhelmed with academic difficulties. .............................. 84
  Challenged by writing ..................................................................................................... 85
  Disoriented and confused by academic honesty. ......................................................... 86
  Intimidated by English ................................................................................................... 89
    Experiencing Insecurity .............................................................................................. 89
    Intimidated by class participation ............................................................................. 91
    Overwhelmed with additional burdens to learn ..................................................... 93
Super-ordinate theme 3: Liberated by the classroom climate. ....................................... 96
  Liberated by freedom of expression .............................................................................. 96
  Confused but encouraged to overcome academic differences .................................. 100
  Appreciative of teaching aids ..................................................................................... 104
Super-ordinate theme 4: Supported by the university resources ..................................... 108
  Contented with introduction to university life ............................................................ 108
  Guided by the pathway program ............................................................................... 111
  Helped by tutors .......................................................................................................... 113
Super-ordinate theme 5: Embracing sociocultural differences ......................................... 115
Curious but anxious about diversity ................................................................. 115
Cognizant of different values ........................................................................... 117
Confused and surprised by informal relations with faculty ............................ 119
Super - ordinate theme 6: Comforted by new relationships ............................ 123
Comforted by pathway peers .......................................................................... 123
Reassured and supported by professors ......................................................... 128
Consoled and guided by pathway advisors .................................................... 131
Super - ordinate theme 7: Isolated from domestic students ............................ 135
Super - ordinate theme 8: United by shared experience .................................. 139
Comfort in shared experience ......................................................................... 139
Family - like togetherness ................................................................................ 142
Finding happiness in a new community .......................................................... 145
Turning into action ........................................................................................... 148
Summary ............................................................................................................ 151
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings .................................................... 152
Implications for Research ................................................................................ 154
Academic Experiences ...................................................................................... 154
English language challenges ........................................................................... 157
Socio-cultural differences ................................................................................. 160
Social networking as a copying strategy .......................................................... 160
Pathway programs ............................................................................................. 160
Implications for Theory .................................................................................... 163
Implications for Practice ................................................................................... 166
Recommendation 1: Create an immersion center to ease international students’
adjustment and offer a platform for domestic students to engage in multicultural learning .............. 165
Recommendation 2: Integrate domestic students into the pathway experience. ........ 167
Recommendation 3: Offer joint opportunities for community building ............. 168
Recommendations for Future Research ............................................................. 169
Recommendation 1: Examine if present findings are in line with the experiences of
strugglers in the pathway and student populations outside of Asia and East Asia ........... 169
Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Over the last decade, American institutions of higher education have experienced a phenomenal growth in the number of international students (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015, IIE, 2017). International students can now be found pursuing different degrees and disciplines on
thousands of college campuses in all fifty states (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015, Perry, 2016). In the 2017/18 academic year alone, the total number of international students in the United States surpassed a record high of 1,094,792 students with undergraduate degree-seeking students accounting for about 41% of the total international student enrollment in the United States (IIE, 2018). This represents an increase of 1.5% in total enrollment from the previous year and an eleventh consecutive year of growth with an average growth rate of 6.0% each year since the fall of 2006 (IIE, 2018).

In part, this growth can be attributed to the growth of pathway programs, often referred to as ‘bridge programs’, ‘foundation years’, ‘pathways’ or “conditional acceptance programs (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015; Choudada, 2017). In the 2015/2016 academic year, for instance, 6% of all international students enrolled in the United States were the students enrolled in the pathways, which became the fastest growing trend in international education (Choudada, 2017). Pathways integrate English language training with academic instruction, and they provide students with the language, cultural, and academic skills needed for success in their undergraduate and graduate courses (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015). Students who seek admission to pathway programs are often the students who meet university admission requirements, but may not have the required minimum English language proficiency levels to meet institutional requirements for direct admission to degree programs (Dooey, 2010). Pathway students usually come from diverse academic backgrounds, and they represent varying degrees of oral and written English abilities as well as mixed levels of academic skills (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015). While university administrators enjoy the benefits of having more international students on their campuses, the faculty point to inadequate language skills, and a lack of understanding of the American teaching
methods as some of the reasons why international students may not do well (Caluya, Probyn, & Vyas, 2010; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015).

Existing research on student success reveals a number of factors on multiple dimensions to shape the international student experience (Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjo hi, 2015). International students go through a variety of experiences associated with the transition to academic studies in an English-speaking university, in particular the experiences that are embedded in the students’ academic, linguistic and sociocultural integration to a new environment (Lobo, 2012; Campbell, 2015; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Several past studies on international students have focused on identifying and exploring the challenges that students experience while studying in the United States (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Common themes that emerge in the literature revolve around international students’ academic difficulties associated with navigating the new learning environment (Akanwa, 2015). The most commonly referenced experiences include, but are not limited to, the English language challenges (Campbell, 2015; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2015; Leong, 2015; Li, et al., 2018); coping with the demands of a new academic culture (Kim, 2011, Akanwa, 2015; Gartman, 2016, Li, et al., 2018), and the communication challenges (Kim, 2011; Gartman, 2016).

Importantly, there is a plethora of scholarly work on culture shock and acculturation including the various non-academic domains of the international student-sojourner’s experience (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Akanwa, 2015; Belford, 2017). A number of research studies explored acculturation process of international students and its effects on international student experience both in and outside of the classroom (McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Belford, 2017). International students experience numerous challenges that stem from a lack of knowledge of cultural differences in a host country (Belford, 2017). While adjusting to the new
culture, students go through a range of experiences that may include, but are not limited to, loneliness and homesickness, social isolation and relationships, and the stress triggered by the changes in their everyday lives (Baba & Hosoda, 2014).

Despite the recent growth of international students enrolled in pathway programs in the United States, both pathway programs and international pathway students have remained largely unexamined and under-theorized (Choudada, 2017). To date, there has not been a body of work to focus specifically on the experiences of pathway students (Percival, et al, 2016). Understanding student experience has been of great interest to researchers and practitioners, but little has been done to get insights into the perspectives of international undergraduate students on their experiences in pathway programs.

Gaining an understanding into student experience is critical for any institution seeking to support its students. Such knowledge informs faculty and administrators of the student experience, which enables them to become cognizant of the difficulties that students go through, and encourages institutions to create appropriate mechanisms to support students (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). The literature suggests that pathways aim to prepare students for the academic study, but for many students, the pathway experience may not always be as easy as suggested by the notion of the pathway (Benzie, 2015). While in the pathway, students may be in the third space, a liminal space in which they need to engage in the process of becoming by having “to negotiate a world shaped by different and often conflicting discourses” (Benzie, 2015, p. 17).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into transitional experiences of international undergraduate students as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program.
Significance

The presence of international students on U.S. campuses has pedagogical, social and financial consequences (Leong, 2015). International students contribute to the cultural diversity of the host institution, the local community, the state, and the country at large (Leong, 2015, Li et al., 2018). The creative and intellectual contributions of international students can be found in American research across multiple disciplines (Leong, 2015; Gartman, 2016). International students further enrich the quality of learning by bringing the perspectives and values rooted in their home-country cultures into the classroom, which contributes to cross-cultural understanding among nations and global economic and business communities (Leong, 2015; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015; Gartman, 2016).

For numerous institutions, especially those struggling with enrollments, bringing international students to campus translates into an additional revenue stream as international students bring in tuition dollars often needed to preserve institution’s financial integrity (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). The tuition revenue brought in by full-paying international students often compensates for the decreasing public funding of higher education (Cross & O’Loughlin, 2013). By supporting international students on campus, institutions improve the quality of student experience, but they also improve student retention, which is an important indicator of institutional financial performance and effectiveness (Yorke & Longden, 2004). Yet, the economic contributions of international students go beyond the immediate tuition revenue streams of higher education institutions (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). In 2017, international students and their dependents contributed $42 billion dollars to the U.S. economy according the U.S. Department of Commerce, about a $3 billion increase from the year before (IIE, 2018).
Given the high number of international students in the United States, particularly a growing number of pathway students, the responsibility lies within individual institutions to examine student experience and ensure an adequate provision of resources to meet international students’ diverse academic and social needs (Andrade, 2008; Akanwa, 2015). From a personal and institutional perspective, gaining insight into the student experience is vital for any institution seeking to increase the chances of a successful and positive college experience.

Numerous audiences will benefit from this study. The primary audiences include the pathway students, program leaders, student affairs professionals and the faculty who teach and support international pathway students at the studied institution and beyond. By openly sharing their perspectives on their transitional experiences in the pathway program, international undergraduate students will contribute to the very limited knowledge on pathway students at U.S. based pathway programs. Such stories, in turn, will encourage multiple entities supporting pathway students to enhance and/or re-think their present support mechanisms that will benefit multiple groups including undergraduate pathway students as well as the students who have already transitioned from such programs into the sophomore, junior and senior years in college.

The learning from this study will further benefit multiple institutions that deliver programs to international students, and the communities that host them. First, program leaders, student services and student affairs professionals will become more cognizant of the challenges that international undergraduate pathway students face so that they can understand how to support students better during their academic pursuits. Further, faculty members who may not have had much experience with mixed-ability, culturally and linguistically diverse and non-traditional student groups, such as international pathway students, will become more aware of the students’ experiences and behaviors so that they can better respond to and support such student
populations. Second, the researchers and university administrators need to understand students’ needs to uncover new knowledge that will provide new frameworks for the development of adequate intervention mechanisms and auxiliary student support services catering to the needs of international pathway students. The outcomes of this research might also be of interest to the communities that host international students within their localities. Understanding student experience might help de-stigmatize international students by helping the community understand students’ needs and their behaviors. Finally, this study will also contribute to a growing body of student retention research by bringing unique perspectives and in-depth understanding of the transitional experiences of international undergraduate pathway students following a completion a U.S. - based pathway program.

Although the idea for this study was borne out of practice at an institution, where the instances of academic challenges sparked a larger debate on pathway students and the supports they need, it is evident that the benefits of the knowledge gained from this research extend beyond the effectiveness, the teaching methods, and the support services of a single institution. Not only will this study benefit several institutions with international pathway students, but it will also benefit all international and domestic students at large. By understanding students’ experiences, students, university and local communities will become better prepared to welcome international students, to support them and ultimately benefit from their presence.

**Research Problem**

International students go through a variety of experiences associated with the transition to academic studies in an English-speaking university, in particular the experiences that are embedded in the students’ academic, linguistic and sociocultural integration to a new environment (Lobo, 2012; Campbell, 2015; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Understanding such
experiences becomes even more pertinent because of the increasing numbers of international pathway students, who account for a significant proportion of all international students enrolled in the United States in (Choudada, 2017). Students who seek admission to pathway programs are often the students who meet university admission requirements, but may not have the required minimum English language proficiency levels to meet institutional requirements for direct entry to degree programs (Dooey, 2010). Pathway students usually come from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds and they represent varying degrees of oral and written English abilities as well as mixed levels of academic skills (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015). While university administrators enjoy the benefits of globalization efforts on American campuses, the faculty are concerned about students’ inadequate language skills, and a lack of understanding of the American teaching methods, which might be some of the reasons why international students may not be doing well (Caluya, Probyn, & Vyas, 2010; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015).

Research Question

The central research question guiding this qualitative inquiry is - How do international undergraduate students make sense of their transitional experiences as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program?

Rationale behind the Central Research Question

Gaining insight into student experience is of great importance to any higher education institution that aims to improve the quality of student experience and support its students. The problem of practice in this study focuses on the student perspectives and sense making of the transitional experiences following a participation in an on-site pathway program. This study
seeks to gain insight into the international student perspectives of their transitional experiences in the pathway program, and its impact on their further academic journey at a university in New England.

**Theoretical Framework**

Drawing upon the theory of liminality (Van Gennep, 1960) and embedded in interpretivist assumptions that experience can be viewed through diverse perspectives (Ponterotto, 2005; Butin, 2010), this study aims to gain an understanding into the experiences of international undergraduate students, and their perspectives, as they perceive and make sense of their transitional experiences following participation in an on-site pathway program. Liminality denotes rituals of transition, the quality of disorientation that takes place within the middle stage of rituals when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status, but have to begin the transition to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1967, Turner, 1977; De Amorim E Sa, 1980; Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003).

Liminality, as a sociological construct, was first conceptualized in the book *Rites of Passage* (1960) by Arnold van Gennep, and subsequently developed by Victor Turner (1967; 1977). Van Gennep (1960) came up with the concept of liminality by learning from tribal societies in which the youth were isolated from their families and society as they approached maturity. Van Gennep (1960) theorized that any life transition that an individual or a group collectively goes through is marked by a rite of passage. A transition would start with a pre-liminal stage (separation from the previously held social state), followed by a liminal stage (transitional phase during which an individual is initiated to a different state of life), and a post-liminal stage in which an individual gets incorporated to a new state of being (Van Gennep, 1960). In Van Gennep’s research (1960), within the transitional period, members of the tribal societies experienced feelings of confusion.
and disorientation as neither the rules of childhood nor the rules of adulthood applied to their present state. After a transitory liminal period, individuals were returned to the society, and they needed to define and structure their new identity, the new relationships and their position within the community.

International pathway students may go through the very similar liminal phases when they transition to study at an American university. Having studied the experiences of European exchange students in a small southern town in the U.S., Williams (2001) posited that liminality is a phase “during which individuals who have entered into a new social environment actively pursue a means of combating negative feelings and emotions” (p.21). Analogously, in the pre-liminal phase, international students enter an unknown cultural and academic environment in the U.S. Aligned with Williams’s (2001) observations, the liminal experiences can be characterized by the student's loss of social connectedness while navigating the uncertainties and ambiguities of the new cultural and academic norms of the university, and the host country. Finally, during the post-liminal phase, the past and present get integrated to create the new normal when a student earns a degree, returns home or enters workforce, and goes through a new form of adaptation (See Appendix A. Depiction of Transitional Stages in Rite of Passage). The pathway program, in itself, might also be thought of as the liminal phase or the beginning of the liminal phase in the transition that continues into their senior year of study at the university.

A common thread that emerges in the literature is the quality of the relationships during the liminal phase. Turner (1967; 1977) posited that relationships between liminal individuals and among liminal groups, which would normally be fragmented, become very compacted and intensified. Liminal relationships are of extreme equality, and liminal individuals are structurally invisible because they are “betwixt and between” structural classification (Turner, 1967, p.97).
Turner (1967) characterized liminal relationships by having no hierarchy, rank, property or any other marker that could distinguish individuals from others within the group (Turner, 1967). Members of liminal groups are equal and “share mystical solidarity in the absence of hierarchical structures (Adorno, Cronley, & Smith, 2015, p.633). Analogously, international students come with a range of cultural and socioeconomic attributes, but their prior backgrounds may not necessarily define their position among fellow students.

De Amorim E Sa (1980) turned attention to the rites of intensification (different types of celebrations) during liminal periods as a solution to the disturbance in relationships of students. To cope with the uncertainties of the new environment, liminal individuals build a sense of community, begin their own rites of intensification, and create “a kind of communitas” with intensified relationships among those of equal status (De Amorim E Sa, 1980, p.7; Anfara & Mertz, 2006). Such liminal occasions that connect liminal individuals are privileged spaces that can be characterized by heightened reflexivity (Turner, 1977). Those intensified relationships, and rites of intensification for Brazilian resident students in De Amorim E Sa’s study (1980) included birthday parties, soccer games, joint festivities as well as welcome and farewell celebrations for those returning to and coming from home to host country.

For liminal individuals, establishing relationships often becomes a strategy that helps work through the challenges of the liminal phase (Dutta, 2015). While in the liminal phase, international students need to renegotiate social boundaries, with many turning to those more familiar with the new culture and forming in-groups (Turner, 1967; Williams, 2001; Dutta, 2015). Groups play a critical role in supporting international students during the transitional phases of student experience (Sovik, 2009). As students go through their experiences together, they form groups and start relationships, which become the foundation of a new support system
that replaces the family support that students had back home (Williams, 2001; Sovik, 2009; Dutta, 2015).

Liminality encourages action, experimentation, and exploration of new possibilities and opportunities (Turner, 1982). Turnbull (1990), as cited in Anfara and Mertz, 2006, re-emphasized, “the transformative possibilities embedded in the liminal state” (p.62). With the lack of social status in the liminal groups, individuals could explore, create, and establish new social identities. Within liminality lies the transformative potential and fertile chaos, which is shared collectively by the group (Adorno, Cronley, & Smith, 2015).

**Liminality in research.** Liminality has been applied as a framework in education research to guide studies on different student groups previously. Williams (2001), for example, examined the experiences of European exchange students residing in a small southern town in the United States focusing on how students coped with understanding in the ins and outs of the American small town culture. In another study on international students, Singh and Doharty (2008) examined how international students form their identities. Star-Glass (2013) applied liminality to examine the effects of mentorship on international students. Baker and Stirling (2016) applied liminality to examine how social networking sites, such as Facebook, influence student experience as they go through the first year of study. In transformative learning, Meyer and Land (2005) posited that occupation of liminal space is a pre-requisite for effective learning of new, troublesome knowledge. In higher education, student experiences are often described as ”a tumultuous transition” in which community building within those of equal status help many students establish new identities and “survive the first semester” (Adorno, Cronley, & Scott-Smith, 2015, p.637). Outside of education research, liminality has also enabled examining cultural change and organizational change processes (Howard-Grenville et al. 2011).
**Critics of liminality.** Liminal periods refer to an inter-structural, in-between phase during which individuals shed previous roles and responsibilities, but had not yet assumed the new responsibilities and perspectives (Turner, 1967). Yet, one could argue that everyone and everything is in a constant state of flux. People go through continuing life changes and transitions, which create uncertainty requiring ongoing “cognitive processing to revise our former understandings” (Bettis, Mills, Miller Williams, Nolan, 2005, p. 48). In that sense, the construct of a liminal state is paradoxical (Bettis, et al., 2005). Further, some scholars have argued that certain processes, especially in the political, economic, and social context are liminal in nature to start with (Bettis, 1996). Turner’s (1967) conceptualization of liminality was individual and referred more to personal identity rather than to social, group or culture change. Aligned with that note, the individuals in Van Gennep’s (1960) original research returned to the very same culture they came from so that the village elders could guide them into their new roles. The organizational and social elements of contemporary change alter the character of liminality by shifting the focus from individual to culture and group change (Bettis et al., 2005).

**Rationale and alignment of theoretical framework.** Identification of liminality as a theoretical framework did not emerge without a thorough consideration of other theories. One of the theories that was considered for this study was Mezirow’s (1996) transformative learning theory which rests on the assumption that the learning process relies on “a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1996, p.162). Although this theory could be applied to understand student experiences during transition, the theory has some limitations. Learning is a part of culture, and cultural influences have implications for an individual’s ability to cope with the unfamiliar behavior in a new environment. International students come pre-socialized in their
home countries and, therefore, they bring aspects of their national and professional cultures that need to blend with the values of the host country and the institutional culture (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). One of the main limitations of the transformative learning theory is that it does not account for the differences in student’s cultural backgrounds, and cultural influences in the learning process. As this study seeks to understand the experiences of a diverse group of international undergraduate students who enrolled in the pathway program, a failure to acknowledge cultural differences may limit their role in the learning experience.

Another theory that was under consideration was Schlossberg’s theory of transition. Schlossberg’s theory of transition (1981) defines “the capacity of human beings to cope with change in their lives” while recognizing that individuals cope differently with similar situations” (p. 3). To understand the meaning the transition has on an individual, one needs to understand the context, the type, and the impact of the transition. Schlossberg (1981) recognized three types of transitions: unanticipated (unplanned), anticipated (scheduled), and non-events (expected but did not happen). Schlossberg (2011) further identified that there are four sets of factors, often referred to as the four S, which influence an individual’s ability to cope with a transition. Those factors are: a) situation; the person’s situation or the type of transition; b) self; the degree to which an individual’s life has been altered; c) support that an individual has through family, friends and relationships, and d) strategies; the resources that can be applied to make the transition successful.

Schlossberg (2011) further posited that what makes change difficult for individuals is not the transition in itself, but the degree to which the transition alters the person’s routines, roles and relationships.
While Schlossberg’s theory offers an easy-to-apply framework to assess people’s individual abilities to cope with change, it may not account for the group dynamic and the collective experience of a group of people going through the very same experience together. Considering that this study was to examine the experience of international undergraduate students following pathway program completion, in this particular case, liminality offered a better lens to look at student experience.

Additionally, culture shock and culture adaptation and transition theories were also given a consideration. Although these theories fit the context of international students, liminality offers a less-explored and more exciting lens to analyze student experience in the undergraduate pathway program.

**Application of liminality to the study.** Liminality aligns with the problem of practice as it offers a unique lens on student experiences that are critical to student academic success and their well-being during the liminal stage, a very crucial time during students’ academic endeavors. Rite of passage rituals take place in any culture, any country and any society during different stages of human life. International students may seem to exhibit some characteristics of the individuals who may jointly go through liminal experiences in a new environment. Further, liminal experiences facilitate changes in students’ beliefs, assumptions and perceptions. Students share the same experiences, and their liminal interactions help them cope with the change in their lives. With the in-depth understanding of student liminal experiences comes an opportunity to support them more strategically to ensure that they are progressing in their educational endeavors and attaining their educational goals.

Anfara and Mertz (2006) argued that “the purpose of a theoretical framework is to make sense of the data, to provide some coherent explanation for why people are doing or saying what
they are doing or saying” (p.68). The research question within this study intends to frame the research within the theoretical framework by focusing on student transitional experiences in the liminal phase and exploring how participation in the university pathway program may have influenced students’ further academic journey. Applying liminality will create an opportunity to gain insight into students’ experiences and behaviors, which will ultimately benefit the larger university community, and with that comes an opportunity to create more targeted supports to ensure a successful and positive experience of international pathway students.

**Summary**

With an influx of international students into U.S. higher education, particularly growing numbers of international pathway students, many institutions are trying to understand their needs to find ways to better support students and facilitate their adjustment. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into transitional experiences of international undergraduate students as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program. The theoretical framework to guide this study is liminality. This study seeks to contribute specifically to the larger body of knowledge regarding the experience of international students who have been begun their academic journey in the pathway programs. Gaps in current literature highlight the need for additional research on pathway programs and international pathway students enrolled at institutions of higher education in the United States.

**Definitions and Terms**

**Direct entry:** A non-conditional and full acceptance to a degree program at a university.

**Liminality:** A construct that denotes rituals of transition, the quality of disorientational that takes place within the middle stage of rituals when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual
status, but have yet to begin the transition to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1967, Turner, 1977).

**Pathway programs:** Programs set up by universities with third party providers, also known as ‘bridge programs’, ‘foundation years’, ‘pathways’ or “conditional acceptance programs (NAFSA, 2016). Pathway programs integrate English language training with academic instruction, and provide international students with the language, cultural, and academic support (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015).

**Pathway students:** International students who begin their academic study by enrolling in a pathway program at a U.S. university.

**Progressed students:** International students who successfully completed the pathway program and matriculated into the sophomore year of college.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Literature Review Purpose and Organization

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into transitional experiences of international undergraduate students as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program.

The literature review presented in this chapter intends to enhance an understanding of the experience of international undergraduate students in the pathway programs. The aim of this literature review is twofold: to examine the current state of knowledge on conditional pathway programs and to analyze emergent themes and concepts in the peer-reviewed literature regarding the experiences of international students at an English-speaking university. This literature review further constructs the grounds for this study by offering a literary foundation for an understanding of how international undergraduate students make sense of their experiences in the pathway program while focusing on the aspects of the learning process that may enhance and/or hinder their experience. The literature review is organized into two major sections with the first section focusing on the exploration of the existing literature on international pathway programs followed by the discussion of the key emergent concepts and themes on the international student experience at an English-speaking university.

Pathway Programs

The rise of pathways in the U.S. higher education. Having originated in Australia and the United Kingdom, pathway programs, also known as pathways, conditional acceptance programs, enabling, bridge and foundation programs, are now the fastest growing trend in international education (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015). In the 2015/2016 academic year, 6% of all international students in the U.S. enrolled in the pathways, and this percentage is expected to
increase with the growth of pathway programs in the United States (NAFSA, 2016). The Association of International Educators (NAFSA) defines pathway programs as university and third party entity partnerships whose goal is to recruit international students and offer English language preparation along with academic level courses applicable towards graduation requirements (NAFSA, 2016). Pathway programs can be further defined as university-affiliated programs integrating intensive English language training and a set of prescribed academic courses with an overall goal to prepare international students academically and linguistically for the academic-level work (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015; Benzie, 2015). Bataille (2017) referred to pathway programs as “a specialized first year of study”, which prepares students for mainstream academic programs, improves retention and graduation rates, and ultimately, leads to student success” (p.39).

McCartney and Metcalfe (2018) noticed that pathway programs recruit international students “who would not otherwise be eligible for entry” to a university program in order to get them prepared for entry a degree program. Pathway programs cater to the needs of (1) students who aspire to get a university degree, but may not have proper academic credentials and skills to enter desired degree programs directly; (2) students who would benefit from additional support in developing essential academic skills to succeed in a degree program; (3) and the returning students who see the benefit in having additional support to jumpstart their academic careers (Boyle, S. & ABM, A., 2015). To support students, pathways typically provide non-credit developmental courses, credit-bearing courses, additional student-faculty contact hours, tutoring, English language instruction, and cultural, social and academic supports while students complete a year of academic coursework (Bataille, 2017). Pathway programs enable international students develop and enhance their language skills, get acquainted with the expectations of a different
academic culture, and complete a number of credit-bearing courses applicable towards the degree (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015; Benzie, 2015).

**Pathways: University and third party partnerships.** Although pathway programs are “a relatively recent innovation” in the United States, there were 45 programs reported in the United States in 2016, and this number is likely to increase as U.S. universities attempt to diversify and expand the pool of international students (NAFSA, 2016, p. 7). The pathway program structure may vary from one institution (or provider) to another, but pathways are usually set up as service agreements or joint venture partnerships between not-for-profit universities with for-profit third party providers (NAFSA, 2016). In the United States, the partnering institutions include both private and public universities (NAFSA, 2016). To create pathway programs, these universities entered into contractual agreements with entities such as Bridge Pathways, Cambridge Education Group, INTO University Partnerships, Kaplan Global Pathways, Kings Education, Navitas USA, Shorelight Education, or Study Group (NAFSA, 2016, Bataille, 2017).

In many instances, pathway programs hire their own faculty or utilize the faculty selected by the university (Bataille, 2017). In either case, the faculty get compensated by an external partner (Bataille, 2017). Pathways do not usually make it a requirement for the faculty to have strong research backgrounds as “they attract international students through their affiliation to the parent institution.” (McCartney & Metcalfe, 2018). Because third party partnerships combine the deeply seeded values of the non-profit public higher education sector with the for-profit and commercial approach to providing education services to students, there exist mixed feelings about pathway programs in the American academia. Pathway supporters would argue that such programs provide a bridge that enables underqualified students to develop academic and language skills and get prepared for the academic study. Critics would see such programs as a back door
admission into American universities questioning the academic rigor and the commercial aspect of such programs (NAFSA, 2016). One could argue that the issue of academic quality of pathway programs lies within the ongoing dialogue between the pathway provider and the university (Bataille, 2017). To ensure academic quality, both the university and pathway provider are responsible for forming joint academic committees to oversee an ongoing assessment of student outcomes in these programs (Bataille, 2017).

**Pathways: An Untraditional way to enter a degree program.** A traditional path for an international non-native English speaker student to pursue acceptance in a degree program at an American university requires a submission of required academic credentials with sufficiently high grades, a submission of standardized admission tests along with English language proficiency scores (Kuo, 2011). International applicants are required to submit English language scores from such tests as Test of English as a Second Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Pearson Language Test (Dooey, 2010; Kuo, 2011). Yet, most international students do not typically follow an American curriculum at home country institutions and, for that reason, they often ‘fail’ to meet one or more admission criteria by not having sufficient credentials or language test score for direct admission (Cross & O’Loughlin, 2013). Driven by a strong desire to get a university degree, many international students, who may not have sufficient credentials for direct entry admission, see the benefits in getting additional support and having an opportunity to develop their skills in the pathways (Boyle, & ABM, 2015). For such students, pathway programs eliminate admission barriers and provide access to degree programs to which they may not be admitted as direct entry students (Cross & O’Loughlin, 2013; Chesters & Watson, 2016; Dooey, 2010).
Because entrance criteria to pathway programs are usually set slightly lower than for direct admission, pathways attract students with varied academic skillsets and mixed levels of English proficiency: though some students may speak or read well in English, their comprehension and speaking skills could be much lower (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015). With that in mind, pathways have been created to provide the foundation for degree programs and help international students develop academic and English language skills that will support their success throughout their academic careers (Benzie, 2015; Cross, & O’Loughlin, 2013). Further, pathways facilitate a transition to an American university by providing international degree-seeking students with an opportunity to improve academic skills in discipline-focused courses (Thomas, 2014) and develop academic skills such as critical thinking, academic writing, referencing, researching, and literacy skills (Hodges et al., 2013).

**Scarcity of research on pathway programs.** Even though pathways exist now across North American institutions of higher education, there has been no systematic assessment of such programs (La Sage et al., 2014). Little program-level evidence exists on the benefits of the pathways, and the challenges and successes of the students enrolled in such programs (Percival et al., 2016). There are very few research studies on the experiences of ‘graduates’ from pathways creating a substantial need for credible knowledge and data on pathway students (Benzie, 2015; Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015; La Sage et al., 2014; Percival et al., 2016). Also, majority of all existing theoretical and empirical studies that focus on the pathway students are set in the Australian and Canadian contexts rather than within the U. S. higher education. Although, there is a lot to learn from the pathway research that originated in other countries, there is a substantial need for knowledge on the pathway students and the pathway programs set in the U.S. higher education context.
‘Learnings’ from existing research on pathway programs.

The Australian context. In one of the very few studies of pathway students transitioning to degree programs, Benzie (2015) argued that pathway programs introduce international students to different higher education practices and protocols that support students’ academic success. However, pathways may provide students with a limited idea of what the student experience set in an English-speaking university will be like (Benzie, 2015). Benzie’s (2015) qualitative research aimed to capture “raw experiences of transition” (p.20) of the sample of eleven international students who completed the pathway program, and began their first semester in a commerce program at an Australian university. While in the pathway, students moved through their coursework as a cohort, and participants were interviewed twice: once at the end of the pathway and once about five to ten weeks into their first semester in the degree program (Benzie, 2015). The results of the study revealed that students benefited from the pathway cohort experience, which enabled the development of social connections within a group of peers. Such peer connections made in the pathway set up students for the learning interactions in the context of degree program studies that followed the pathway completion. More importantly, this study also revealed that the pathway introduced international students to a different academic culture, and prepared them for their academic careers through the English language development.

Similarly, Dooey’s (2010) examination of the experiences of a mixed group of undergraduate and graduate pathway students enrolled in a pathway program at an Australian university emphasized that English language skills of the non-native pathway students did improve over the course of one semester. Through the language training, the students gained confidence in dealing with day-to-day tasks required of them in their academic courses and they learned how to utilize a range of study skills they acquired (Dooey, 2010). Some students, however, were concerned
with a lack of diversity in the pathway program. Having by too many Chinese students around prevented students from getting enough opportunities to practice English as students tended to speak their native tongue among themselves. Despite this concern, pathway students in this study did see the pathway program as “a very useful point for launching into tertiary studies” (Dooey, 2010, p.196).

In addition to the language skill development, as noted in Benzie’s (2015) and Dooey’s (2010) pathway research, Chesters and Watson (2016) further noticed that students who complete pathway programs prior to the start of undergraduate programs are more likely to thrive in their studies when compared with the students who enrolled as direct-entry students, suggesting that pathway programs support students’ academic skill development. The results of data analysis from a single Australian university further highlighted the benefits of pathway programs and the role they play in supporting student retention. Pathway programs provide students with confidence and skills to persist regardless of the levels of their academic achievement (Habal, 2012; Chesters & Watson, 2016). Students enrolled in the pathway programs get to sample and adjust to the program demands and expectations. Even through pathways may be associated with a lower GPA of the students to enter them; pathways should be associated with “increased staying power” at the university (Chesters & Watson, 2016, p.11).

Even though persistence rates of international pathway students may stay strong as indicated in Chesters and Watson’s (2016), pathway students’ academic journey may not always be a worry-free experience as suggested by the notion of the pathway. An independent study of pathway student perceptions of the pathway programs at an Australian university suggested that pathway students experience difficulties with academic writing, English language demands in their programs, and some issues with academic and social adjustment (Dunworth, Fiocco, &
In this study, pathway students were requested to comment on how they felt the pathway program prepared them for the university experience in regards to their language skills, study skills, social skills and understanding of the university academic culture. Though majority of students believed that the pathways prepared them well or very well, some students suggested that the program could do more to help them improve their English, and develop their study and social skills.

The Canadian context. The findings of another study examining the impact of pathway programs at The University of Ontario Institute of Technology support the assertion that the academic outcomes of pathway students are not much different from those of non-pathway students enrolled in the same courses (Le Sage, et al., 2014). In this quantitative study, the researchers focused on the statistical analysis of academic outcomes of the students enrolled in pathway courses and in university courses. The study resulted in a comprehensive comparison of the pathway students’ academic outcomes with those of non-pathway students. While traditional students may outperform their pathway peers in select academic courses during the first year of study, pathway students do as well as or better in academic courses after pathway completion than the students who enter university programs directly (Le Sage et al., 2014).

Percival, et al.’s (2016) study of the experience of international students enrolled in a Canadian pathway program provide further evidence in support of Le Sage et al.’s (2014) research findings. This mixed methods research, which analyzed data from online surveys, course performance, focus groups and interviews, has revealed that pathway students perform as well as their traditional peers (Percival, et. al., 2016). This study has also emphasized that pathway programs facilitate the transition to higher education programs and support the training of highly skilled ‘graduates.’
Yet, pathway students are subject to a plethora of hurdles during their study, which shapes their overall experience (Percival, et. al., 2016). The literature suggests that there exists a disconnect between the pathway students and the traditional fully admitted students in their social and academic experiences at the university. Pathway students in this study reported feeling isolated and excluded from university-led social and cultural events. They further reported not being able to register for the courses they needed. Additionally, more likely than their non-pathway peers, pathway students stated that they had been placed in inappropriate academic courses. They also reported extreme overlap in course content between pathway and university courses, which visibly highlighted deficiencies in inter-institutional communication and a lack of holistic oversight over the program structure. Furthermore, pathway students felt confused about their study path due the inconsistent communication between their advisors and academic departments (Percival, et. al., 2016).

In another study, Percival at al., (2015) further pointed out that assimilation could be very problematic for pathway students during the initial weeks of the school year as they exit the pathway and begin the mainstream university classes. Because pathway students did not have any or much exposure to mainstream classes and missed interactions with traditional domestic students while enrolled in the pathway, pathway students struggle trying to “find their place in the class culture” (Percival et al., 2015). When commenting on the experience in starting mainstream courses, some students noted that many other students already knew each other, but pathway students felt stigmatized and upset (Percival et al., 2015).

Percival et al.’s research on pathway students in the Bachelor of Commerce program (2015) further revealed pathway students’ frustration with their perceived inability to become members of student associations on campus. Students argued that, unlike other student organizations, the
Accounting Association, which accepts traditional students in their first year, would not offer the same opportunity them. For that reason, students felt that they miss out the networking opportunities, and they cannot assume professional leadership opportunities available to other students. Because of that, pathway students felt disadvantaged, leading them to believe that “obtaining a leadership role was not within their realm of possibilities” (Percival et al., 2015, p. 411).

Aligned with Percival’s (2015) observation suggesting some disconnect between the pathway and the university affecting opportunities for students, Hadley (2015), as referenced in McCartney & Metcalfe (2018), referred to pathway colleges in Canada as a ‘third space’, a space that is administratively separate, but linked to the parent university. Having examined a number of pathway programs in Canada, McCartney and Metcalfe (2018) acknowledged some of the shortcomings of the pathways. Pathways tend to separate their students from the broader student body. This practice may just amplify the feelings of isolation and segregation from domestic students, resulting in no educational contact with domestic students. Because pathway students are in classes with other international students, pathway students find it hard to make connections with domestic students, failing to establish what should become a support system for them. Further, pathways may create additional hurdles for the students. In order to matriculate to a degree program at a parent university, pathway students need to meet certain language and academic criteria upon pathway completion, and only upon meeting such criteria, they are allowed to continue with their degree study whereas traditional students do not have to meet similar requirements to be able to continue their studies.

*The U.S. context.* In the U.S., the number of universities that consider establishing formal programs with external providers is on the rise (Bataille, 2017). Yet, pathway programs, offered
jointly with pathway provider companies are “a relatively new type of partnership for U.S. campuses” (Klahr, 2015, p.44) resulting in a shortage of the U.S. based pathway research in peer-reviewed journals.

Miller, Barkey, and Griffin’s study (2015), which is set at a large private university with a pathway program in the Northeast, focused on the examination of the service-learning component in the English language pathway for international students. The university recognized that pathways can indeed be very insular without giving international students much exposure the larger student body (Miller, Berkey, Griffin (2015). To support international students’ English skills development, create opportunities for international students to get exposure to different aspects of the American culture, and prepare students for experiential learning, the university introduced service-learning elements in the curriculum. The findings highlighted the impact of service learning on the development of students’ English skills, academic skills and professional development, the core competencies that pathway students need as they progress to the mainstream degree courses within the university.

Another study of a U.S. based pathway program further turned the attention to the pathway services and support offered to pathway students (Li, 2016). While pathway students in this study experienced many social and academic barriers in their first year of study in the United States, they found the pathway program to be a very useful resource in their learning. Students praised the pathway program for the support to help them improve writing skills, exam tutoring and preparation, class registration, and other opportunities that facilitated their socialization (Li, 2016).
International Student Experience

The student success literature has cited multiple factors that define international student experience focusing on international students’ needs and struggles, and highlighting a need for universities to support their international populations (Gautman, Lowery, Mays, & Durant, 2016). International students undergo an abundance of challenges in their pursuit of American education (Chavajay, 2013). Many of the obstacles that international undergraduate students must overcome are not unique to international student populations only (Perry, 2016). While there are many differences between international and domestic student experiences, many struggles are shared by the two groups (Perry, 2016). In fact, international undergraduate students as well as domestic students enrolled at away-from-home institutions report having to go through similar challenges, some of which include academic, social, and cultural issues (Benzie, 2015; Campbell, 2015). For non-English speaking students enrolled at institutions at English speaking countries, English language barriers are the biggest challenge that influences students’ academic and social experiences at the university (Gautman, Lowery, Mays, & Durant, 2016). Other commonly referenced dimensions related to the international student experience include: communication and language struggles (Dooey, 2010; Kuo, 2011, Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015); different classroom practices and teaching methods (Harryba, Guilfoyle, & Knight, 2012; Kim, 2011; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010, Williams, 2008), unfamiliarity with the host country culture, and a need to rebuild a social support system (Kim, 2011; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015).

English language skills and student experience. The relationship between English language skills of non-native English students and their experience has emerged as the most prominent theme in the international student literature (Andrade, 2006; Dooey, 2010; Kuo, 2011; Benzie,
English language is one of the biggest obstacles for international students on U.S. campuses (Andrade, 2006; Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010; Leong, 2015; Li et al., 2018). Andrade (2006) posited that English language proficiency is critical for international students’ academic and social adjustment. Language proficiency influences students’ ability to participate actively in the classroom (Sawir, 2005; Sawir et al., 2008; Lin & Schertz, 2014; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). It helps students establish communication in the academic and social contexts (Burdett & Crossman, 2012). Further, it influences students’ emotional state, and their own perceptions of their experience in the United States (Perry, 2016).

English language skills and the academic experiences of international students are closely connected (Perry, 2016). According to Kuo (2011), English language oral proficiency and listening comprehension skills are the biggest hindrance to successful learning in an English-speaking environment. Kuo’s (2011) quantitative study of the international students’ struggles at a southern university in Alabama identified several language barriers among international students. The foremost indication of the language obstacles was listening comprehension, which manifested itself in many different ways. Several students reported trouble understanding the lectures blaming a) a fast speed of speech by the professors and the classmates, b) the Southern accent of professors, c) English words pronounced differently than back home, and d) inability to understand particular terms and phrases. Kuo (2011) concluded that despite meeting institutional proficiency levels on entrance admissions tests, international students often lack the conversational usage of English resulting in their inability to understand lectures, prepare and present written and oral reports, and actively participate in the teaching and learning (Kuo, 2011).
Asian Students: More language difficulties. Similarly, Li et al.’s qualitative research (2018) on the experience of Chinese students, the largest international student population in the United States, revealed that the English language creates even bigger challenges for Asian students. Unlike their European counterparts, Asian students, who possess relatively lower levels of English proficiency, are more likely to face acculturation stressors in the academic and social contexts. Chinese international students in Li et al.’s research (2018) reported difficulties understanding lectures and participating in academic conversations in the classroom. Students argued that the spoken English used in U.S. is different from the English they learned back in China. Students argued that American students use informal language and slang, and that they speak too fast, which makes it hard to understand.

English conversation skills also emerged as one of four themes in Wu, Garza and Guzman’s study (2015) on international students, majority of whom were also Asian students. International students reported feeling hesitant about joining in-class discussions and they experienced difficulties establishing communication with their classmates and professors due to language barriers. Language limitations make many international students feel anxious when they have to speak publically in front of American students (Lin & Scherz, 2014). Students in Wu, Garza, and Guzman’s research (2015) reported feeling embarrassed and isolated in their classroom experience, as they could not understand what was being discussed. Findings from this study revealed that international students often choose to pretend to understand the conversations as they fear public humiliation. International students pretend that they understand everything because they want to be recognized as competent members of the community (Kim, 2011). Aligned with this argument, international students in Wu, Garza and Guzman’s study (2015) worried about negative impressions from professors and classmates who may perceive them as
unprepared for class. A Japanese student reported that she could not understand why her classmates kept laughing, worrying that she may not have understood the conversation or misunderstood some words. Kim (2011) also noted that it is not uncommon for international Asian students to avoid participation in classroom conversations, as students are afraid that they might be stigmatized by the limitations of their English language.

In addition to the language challenges associated with the learning, English language skills affect different facets of the student experience. A Vietnamese student in Wu, Garza and Guzman’s research (2015) described how challenging it was to communicate with bank representatives to open a bank account and calling a cable company to set up a cable service. It was embarrassing for the student to interact with the bank and cable company, as he had to ask to repeat many times and speak English slowly. International students in Leong’s study (2015) reported feeling socially isolated and withdrawn as they struggled to communicate with American students. Similarly, the Chinese students in Li et al.’s research (2018) noted that their language struggles influenced their social interactions and quality of life outside of classroom. Simple things like ordering a sandwich in the cafeteria become problematic when the seller does not understand what you want (Li, et al., 2018). The students also reported not understanding casual conversations and jokes, and they described their interactions with American peers as superficial and very limited. Many scholars have further contended that low language proficiency deters non-native speakers from seeking professional services including mental health counseling and medical services, which is particularly important to international students who may not be able to get professional help in their native tongue in the United States (Shi, Lebrun, & Tsai 2009; Sue & Sue, 2013).
Although particularly challenging for Asian students, English language problems are shared by all students for whom English is a second language. Language limitations, particularly international students not being able to express themselves in English, also emerged as one of the two major themes in Mitchell, Del Fabbro and Shaw’s research (2017). The ten international undergraduate and seven graduate students enrolled in a nursing program at an Australian university reported not feeling confident about their language skills. They reported experiencing stress, which they attributed to their perceived low English language proficiency. Students felt stressed as they struggled expressing themselves in English. One student explained how he knew the answers in his native language, but found it hard to translate it back to English. Further, students reported not having many opportunities to speak English outside school and having to spend more time on readings in order to understand the medical terminology in their coursework.

**Academic experiences.** Academic success of international students is mostly determined by their ability to cope with the demands of the new academic environment (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2011; Perry, 2016). Yet, despite sufficient scores on English language admission tests, international students “are unprepared for the different cultural styles of both the administration, classroom teachers, and American students” (White & Rosado, 2014, p.242). International students usually have little or no experience in participating in classroom discussions, exchanging ideas and opinions freely, and expressing their opinions without having to produce evidence to support their point of view (White & Rosado, 2014). As part of their learning, international students need to adapt to a different education system (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002), and many of the challenges that international students face take place in the academic setting (Lin & Sherz, 2014; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015).
Lack of understanding of teaching practices. Li, Chen and Duanmu (2010) referred to “academic culture shock” when describing the challenges that international students go through as they learn how to navigate through a new learning environment (p. 394). As learning is set in the context of a particular culture, international students often struggle with the understanding of the academic rigor, academic standards, different classroom behaviors, and the relationships with the faculty and classmates (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010; Leong, 2015). Classroom practices and learning tools that originate in the American culture are not always transparent to international students (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010; Leong, 2015).

Academic challenges also emerged in Sato and Hodge’s (2015) qualitative study of international students from Japan at an American university. Japanese students in this study reported feeling ‘academically inferior’ and ‘academically frustrated.’ They found it hard to adapt to American professors’ teaching styles, which made them think of themselves as low-achieving students. In addition to their academic struggles, students also reported feeling alienated, and isolated in their academic experience. They were unable to make meaningful connections with their American classmates, who they hoped would mentor and support them through their struggles. Sato and Hodge (2015) argued that it was difficult for Japanese students to transition from a collectivist and harmonious learning approach, which they experienced back home, to a very individualized learning pattern in the U.S.

International students, especially those without prior learning experiences beyond those at their home countries, experience a significant difference as they begin their study at a western university (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010). A part of the academic culture at an American classroom is that students actively contribute to each other’s learning, the practice that is new to many international students (Throy, 2015). International students have hard time adjusting to a less
structured classroom with less instructor supervision, which often manifests itself in their passive classroom behaviors (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010; Kim, 2011; Gartman, 2016). Consequently, international students often seem shy, quiet and withdrawn from classroom activities (Gartman, 2016). International students feel isolated and they do not actively participate in discussions or activities that require group collaboration, but their lack of participation may be a result of the exposure to the new teaching methods that they are not accustomed to (Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010; Wearing, 2015; Gartman, 2016).

As a former international student, Kim (2011) noticed that Asian educational experiences are very teacher-oriented and, for that reason, Asian students often struggle with the understanding of the American student-centered teaching methods. A lack of understanding of the sociocultural context in which students’ prior learning was situated results in a lack of support that international students need to overcome their academic struggles (Kim, 2011). International students may be proficient in English, but they often come from cultures in which their ‘duty’ as a student was to reproduce memorized information after a lecture they had received (Spencer, 2003). Group discussions and in-class presentations, the two teaching methods most commonly used in American classrooms, might not have been a part of the learning in the student’s home-country cultures (Kim, 2011). International students in Kim’s research (2011), for instance, were not familiar with “the culture of presentation”, and they felt pressured to speak publically in a second language when they needed to present in front of their classmates (Kim, 2011, p.268). Students further reported not knowing how to prepare a presentation, and pointed out that the professor did not provide specific instructions, but assumed that all students knew how to do it. One student noted that while preparing a presentation, she was far more concerned with having a
word-by-word script including the greeting, the conclusion, and the scripted jokes in between rather than with the actual contents of what she was to present.

**Classroom communication.** Leong (2015) argued that international students face the challenges that stem from the American education system, which domestic students take for granted. Aligned with such an argument, both international undergraduate and graduate students in Wu, Garza, and Guzman’s (2015) study experienced challenges in their academic learning. One of the themes that emerged was navigating in-classroom communication. All participants noted difficulties in communicating with their professors. A Korean student, for instance, shared that it was very inappropriate to interrupt a professor in his country, and out of respect for the professor at an American university, he was hesitant to join any conversation unless he raised his hand and was called upon to answer. The student felt even more confused why the professor kept engaging in conversations with students who did not raise their hands. The student would not know how to join the conversation, and he often missed a chance to express own opinions in the discussion.

**Interactions with professors.** Unlike in many countries across the world, in the United States, the learning experience is less formal and so are the professors (Kuo, 2011; Leong, 2015). Interrupting a professor who is lecturing or engaging in a group conversation is seen as impolite and disrespectful in some countries (Kuo, 2011). Because the American classroom is very informal and more interactive, international students find it challenging to find themselves in such an unstructured environment (Kuo, 2011; Leong 2015). International students in Leong’s study (2015) expressed their confusion with the classroom interactions by acknowledging that the American professors, though stricter, are less formal. A Chinese student could not understand why American students call their professor by first name, something that he would never do back
home. Students further reported significant differences between student-faculty relationships in the United States noting that they were surprised when professors engaged in casual conversations on topics unrelated to the coursework after class.

**Other academic challenges.** In addition to the challenges discussed in prior sections, numerous prior studies have also identified other worries that shape student academic experience at English speaking universities. Those include, but are not limited to, a lack of clear understanding of curricular differences (Williams, 2008), different expectations (Campbell-Evans, & Leggett, 2007), academic integrity and plagiarism (Velliaris, & Breen, 2016); assessment methods (Wearing et al., 2015), and course selection and advisement (Li, et al., 2018).

**Cultural and social experiences.** In addition to the English language and academic challenges, which have emerged as major threads in the student literature, another recurring theme is the concern that international students have with fitting in culturally and socially (Gartman, 2016). Transitioning to a different culture offers many opportunities for cross-cultural learning, but it also presents a wide range of challenges that international students need to face (Moores & Popaduik, 2011). When interacting with a host culture, language and cultural barriers cause stress and anxiety in social and academic settings (Zhou, et al., 2008; Jones & Kim, 2013). International students are often not able to express themselves comfortably in English, which puts restrictions on their academic and social interactions (Jones & Kim, 2013).

The cultural and social challenges that international students go through can manifest themselves in many different ways (Gartman, 2016). About 95% of all international students enrolled at U.S. universities report experiencing homesickness, loneliness, anxiety after they arrive (McLachan & Justice, 2009). Transitional challenges associated with cultural and social
adjustment can result in students’ withdrawal from leisure activities (McLachlan & Justice, 2009), stress (Zhou et al., 2008); an inability to find common interests with American students (Huang & Brown, 2009), social isolation, (McLachlan & Justice, 2009) and social awkwardness (Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013).

**Culture and social interactions.** Aligned with such observations, international students in Li et al.’s (2017) and in Li and Zizzi’s (2018) research reported not being able to make meaningful connections with American students. Not knowing what to talk about with American students, having superficial conversations, not enjoying American jokes and not understanding the American passion for sports were how international students described their interactions with domestic students (Li et al., 2017). Similarly, international students in Li and Zizzi’s study (2018) experienced cultural barriers when trying to socialize with American students. They also reported having nothing in common with American students and felt uncomfortable with social interactions. One of the students noted that cultural differences made it hard for her to engage with domestic students. Social drinking and dancing in bars, for instance, which, in her eyes, seemed a common weekend pastime of American students, is not something that a female Muslim student would want to participate in (Li & Zizzi, 2018).

Belford’s study (2017) further attributed an encounter with unfamiliar cultural norms in academic and social settings to the lack of self-motivation and the loneliness that international students experienced while at an Australian university. Having investigated international students’ experience of cross-cultural transitions, Belford (2017) noticed that the cultural distance between the home country and host country cultures influenced student experience. The greater the cultural gap between the new culture and the host country values, the more challenging the student experience could be. Students from China and Korea, the cultures so
different from the American culture, described being confused why Americans would strike a conversation with a stranger, maintain an eye contact during conversation or why they would lie on the bed with their shoes on, to name a few. Similarly, Yan and Berliner (2009), when discussing stressors of Chinese students, linked the cultural distance to the acculturative stress that students go through. Students from cultures distant from the American culture, such as the Chinese culture, would experience a greater degree of acculturative stress as opposed to the students from the cultures less distant from the American culture (Yan & Berliner, 2009). As part of their learning, international students need to learn new cultural norms in the social and educational spheres (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Belford, 2017); learn the communication patterns (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015; Li et al., 2017); tackle the financial pressures (Sherry, Thomas, & Choi, 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2013); and, most importantly, establish friendships and social interactions to build a support system (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015; Belford, 2017; Li at al., 2017).

Importance of social networking. The formation of the social network appears to be a critical aspect of college experience that helps students cope with the challenges, in particular during social and cultural transitions (Sovik, 2009). For international students, friendships and social networks become a useful coping strategy that replaces the family support system back home (Li & Zizzi, 2018). Sovik (2009) posited that peer groups ease the feelings of stress, anxiety, and isolation that international students experience when in an unknown culture.

Having studied international Asian students at an Australian university, Kashima and Loh (2006) emphasized that as part of the university experience, it is critical that international students have opportunities to develop personal connections with co-national, domestic and international students. Friendships with co-national students serve as the primary social network,
offer psychological support, and connect students through shared heritage. The bicultural network includes domestic students, advisors, professors and the university administration. This network can help students in their academic endeavors. Finally, the international network supports students’ recreational endeavors, which contributes to their overall well-being and satisfaction with their college experience. International students who manage to develop local ties are better adjusted socially, culturally and psychologically.

Aligned with such observations, the Chinese students in Li et al.’s study (2017) acknowledged the benefits of socializing with both the Chinese and American students. Even though some students felt disappointed with not having enough interactions with American peers outside of class, they reported feeling less stressed and less isolated. Furthermore, students found the new connections very helpful. When interacting with more experienced students, international students received advice that helped them deal with the difficulties they had to overcome. Students also reported that social interactions with peers and professors during office hours helped them reduce stress, enabled them to improve their English and get more insights about the American culture (Li et al., 2017).

**Perceived prejudice.** Furthermore, when describing their university experience, some international students report experiencing prejudice and discrimination in their social and academic lives (Lee & Rice, 2007; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). International students in Wu, Garza, and Guzman’s research (2015), for instance, reported feeling marginalized in class and during social events. They believed that American students made conclusions about them, as they did not know much about their backgrounds. Leung (2015) noted that in many cases, interactions between domestic students and international students result in cultural misunderstandings as American students may misinterpret the behaviors of international
students, and vice versa. Thus, it is important for international students to gain international competence through friendships and social interactions with both host nationals and co-nationals (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Belford, 2017).

**Summary**

The primary goal of this literature review was to examine the current state of knowledge on conditional pathway programs, the pathway experience, and to analyze emergent themes and concepts in the peer-reviewed literature regarding the experiences of international students while pursuing study at an English speaking university. This literature aimed to construct the grounds for this study by offering a literary foundation for an understanding the transitional experience of international undergraduate students as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program.

The first section of the literature review provided an overview of the pathway programs and examined existing theoretical and empirical studies regarding the experience of international students in pathway programs. While the number of international students enrolled in U.S. based pathway programs has increased in recent years, pathway programs are relatively new in the United States highlighting the rationale behind this study and the need for research to examine the experiences of international undergraduate students in the U.S. based pathway programs.

The second section focused on the examination of emergent themes on international student experience, and it identified English language integration, academic integration and sociocultural integration as the key emergent dimensions that play a major role in shaping the experiences of international students at an English speaking university. The existing knowledge on international student experience informs this study. It further establishes the foundation for a better
understanding of the transitional experiences of international undergraduate students at an American university following participation in a pathway program.

The following chapter will discuss the methodology and the study design.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into transitional experiences of international undergraduate students as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program.

The selection of an appropriate research method is a critical step in the research process. This section outlines details of the research design for this study, including a detailed overview of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the selected research method. The IPA will enable the researcher to explore student lived experience, and help understand how the participants make sense of their experiences in the pathway program. IPA will further allow the researcher to draw on own expertise and experience in the subject matter to offer a more insightful interpretation of the examined phenomenon.

Research Question

The central research question guiding this qualitative inquiry is - How do international undergraduate students make sense of their transitional experiences as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods are appropriate when the phenomenon of interest needs to be explored rather than measured in quantitative terms (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) argued that qualitative research methods are appropriate when “we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2013, p.48). Qualitative research design enables researchers to gain a complex and detailed understanding of the studied issue and
the context, which requires talking to people who are willing to share their personal stories (Creswell, 2013). Aligned with Creswell’s (2013) observations, Miles and Huberman (1994) further noted that qualitative studies aim to capture perceptions and perspectives of participants on their experiences while allowing multiple interpretations.

This research is rooted within an interpretivist paradigm, which concerns an understanding of how people interpret what they encounter in the world around them (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Because the primary goal of this research is to understand human experience, more specifically the experience of international undergraduate students the IPA research method is the most appropriate for this study.

**The Role of Researcher in Qualitative IPA Research**

An IPA researcher becomes the key instrument in data collection, and is an active participant in the research process (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Qualitative researchers usually collect data themselves in the participants’ natural setting by talking directly to participants, asking open-ended questions, observing participants’ behaviors and examining documents (Creswell, 2013). An IPA researcher’s role is to create a safe space for a conversation with a purpose, within which participants feel encouraged to open up, and share own perspectives and stories on their experiences (Owens, 2006).

A critical step in the qualitative research design is for researchers to position themselves within the study. Researchers share details of their backgrounds including professional and personal experiences, and articulate how those experiences may inform their interpretation in the study (Creswell, 2013). It is particularly important in the IPA studies due to the dual role of the researcher who is trying to make sense of the interpretations of participants who, in turn, are trying to make sense of the studied experience (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009).
Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher engages in a self-reflection process to become more cognizant of his or her own pre-understanding of the phenomenon while remaining open to participants’ interpretations of own experiences. In contrast with the descriptive phenomenology, the researcher’s biases are not bracketed out. They are embedded in the interpretative process. The researcher actively participates in making data. Researcher’s own views inform the study and allow making informed interpretations of participants’ lived experiences (Laverty, 2003).

Research Tradition

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an inductive empirical research method that aims to explore participants’ lived experiences and understand how participants, themselves, make sense of those experiences. IPA’s theoretical underpinnings lie within phenomenology, a philosophical perspective that helps researchers explore and understand human experience.

Deeply rooted in the work of Edward Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer (Converse, 2011), phenomenology rests on the assumption that knowledge originates with humans who “construct meanings” as they “engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives (Creswell, 2013, p.9). For Husserl, who is credited with the start of the descriptive phenomenology movement, phenomenological inquiry sought to understand human experience through an unbiased study of things as they appear while stripping away the researcher’s preconceived assumptions about the studied phenomenon “to experience its pure essence” (Converse, 2012, p.29).

In Heideggerian view, phenomenology should focus on investigating the ‘being’ of the phenomenon rather than the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon, that is being concerned with the meaning of our understanding of the phenomenon rather than being focused on the experiential
aspect of the phenomenon (Converse, 2012). Heidegger recognized that the world around was not separate, but a critical part of our understanding of the meaning (Converse, 2012). Therefore, unlike in Husserl’s view of phenomenology, for Heidegger, the notion of removing the person from the world of the studied phenomenon did not seem right. In his view, one could investigate the meaning of being through the hermeneutic circle that interprets, and the interpretation starts with the understanding that the researcher is embedded in the world (Converse, 2012).

To account for the fact that researchers do hold preconceived assumptions before trying to understand a phenomenon, in Heidegger’s view, researchers enter into a hermeneutic circle to become cognizant of their assumptions (Converse, 2012). Heidegger argued that “all understanding is interpretation of a particular perspective”, and therefore, being aware of how the researcher can influence the understanding of the investigated phenomenon is more critical than trying to reduce those preconceptions by bracketing them out (Converse, 2012, p.30).

Similarly, Gadamer supported Heideggerian view of phenomenology in it being an interpretative process. Gadamer emphasized that the ‘situatedness’ of the researcher needs to be incorporated into the interpretative process of understanding that shifts from preconceptions to new understandings (Converse, 2012).

**An IPA Overview**

As a phenomenological research method, IPA, which emphasizes personal perspective and interpretation, is based in a paradigm of subjectivity and personal knowledge (Van Scoy & Evenstad, 2014). Fade (2004) argued that the main purpose of IPA is “to attempt as far as possible to gain an insider perspective of the phenomenon being studied, whilst acknowledging that the researcher is the primary analytical instrument” (p.648).
The underlying principle of phenomenology is that “experience should be examined in the way that it occurs, and in its own terms (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009, p. 12). Such a study of structures of experience and consciousness, originates with Husserl’s pursuit to “construct philosophical science of consciousness” (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p. 215). Husserl aimed to focus on the essence of understanding human experience, and its intertwined nature with hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, and symbolic interactionism, which argues that “the meanings an individual ascribes to events are of central concern and are only accessible through an interpretative process” (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p. 215).

In regards to its theoretical stance, IPA is based on three distinct areas of the philosophy of the knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Wagstaff, Jeong, Nolan, Wilson, Tweedie, Phillips, Senu, & Holland, 2014). IPA draws on phenomenology with its focus on the essence of the experience by identifying and describing common meaning for participants’ lived experiences (incorporating the what and how), but it also recognizes the researcher’s role in making sense of the experiences (Smith, 2004). For IPA, human research is strongly linked to the hermeneutic tradition, more specifically double hermeneutic. As the participants are trying to make sense of their experiences, the researcher is attempting to make sense of the participants’ interpretations of those experiences (Wagstaff et al., 2014). IPA extends hermeneutics “by studying the concept of being in the world rather than knowing the world” (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). Hermeneutics seeks meanings embedded in everyday occurrences, and IPA rests on a stance that describing and interpreting experiences requires prior understanding (Reiners, 2012).

The third most important influence on IPA is idiography. IPA’s idiographic focus assumes that a participant is an active interpreter of his or her subjective experiences. In a
subjective world, there is no objective truth, and therefore, both the participant and the observer actively participate in the generation and interpretation of the meanings, which are hidden and embedded in human experiences (Smith, 2004; Wagstaff et al., 2014).

Unlike Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology that brackets or suspends judgement of the natural world by helping researchers identify and rid of their preconceived assumptions and biases, IPA takes a different stance on it. IPA recognizes that it may not be fully possible for researchers to separate their prior assumptions and biases about the investigated phenomenon. For that reason, researcher’s views and expertise bring forth an additional level of understanding as he or she is trying to make sense of the participants’ experiences. Within IPA, researcher’s beliefs and assumptions are considered biases that do not need to be bracketed and eliminated. Beliefs and assumptions enable the researcher to make sense of the experiences of the studied individuals (Fade, 2004, Smith, 2004; Wagstaff et al., 2014). IPA requires that researchers engage in an ongoing reflexivity to help them identify and present own perspectives, but also to enrich the way they interpret the world (Rafique & Hunt, 2015).

The Research Site

The selected research site is an urban and residential public research university in New England. The university is one of the five-campus university system within the state. As of fall 2018, the university enrolled slightly over 16,000 degree-seeking students. Close to 80% of all enrolled students are undergraduate students, including about 1,500 degree-seeking international undergraduate students each fall semester.

In 2010, the university entered into a service agreement with a pathway provider to establish pathway programs for international students. Undergraduate pathway programs have been in existence since the fall 2010, and graduate pathway programs enrolled first students in the fall
2013. It is estimated that about 1,000 pathway students have completed pathway programs and transitioned into degree studies to date, with many pathway ‘graduates’ who have already earned bachelor and master’s degrees and graduated from the university.

The pathway program brochures indicate that international undergraduate pathway students are matriculated degree-seeking students from day one, and they enjoy the same privileges as any other domestic or international degree-seeking student on campus. The pathway year is the freshman year experience, and it may entail two or three consecutive semesters of enrollment in classes with other international pathway students. The pathway year leads to a completion of 27 - 30 academic credits. As part of the program requirements, pathway students need to complete a selection of academic for credit courses offered through the university departments, and a selection of non-credit support courses offered through the third party provider. The pathway experience at the university also includes the student orientation, additional instruction time with faculty, tutoring, academic oversight and advisement, academic and social support, on-campus and off-campus events offered by the designated staff in the program office. To progress out of the pathway program into the sophomore year, a student needs to successfully earn 27-30 credits and meet a required minimum cumulative GPA as set by the university.

**Sample Selection**

The baseline criterion for inclusion in the sample of participants is that all students must have completed the international pathway program at the research site. The participants in this study were international undergraduate degree-seeking students who started their academic journey by completing the university pathway program, and then progressed into the mainstream undergraduate coursework upon a successful completion of the pathway year. The participants
were all foreign nationals on student visas in the United States, and they were at various stages of their bachelor degree study at the research site at the time of interviewing.

According to Smith, Flower, and Larkin (2009), IPA research studies typically utilize small, homogenous, purposively selected, and carefully situated samples. For professional doctorates, a sample size between four and ten participants is recommended. Such a sample size provides “sufficient cases for the development of meaningful points of similarity and difference between the participants, but not so many that one is in danger of being overwhelmed by the amount of data generated (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009, p.51). The idea behind the smaller homogeneous samples is to enable thorough in-depth understanding of a particular perspective rather than to achieve generalizability.

Participants in the sample should represent the perspectives of “a particular group with similar characteristics or within a similar context” (Van Scy & Evenstad, 2014, p.344). According to the university’s Office of Institutional Research, Fall 2018 Tracer Study Report, about two-thirds of all international pathway students identified male and about one-third identified as female, which is in line with the university’s larger international population. About 57% of all undergraduate pathway students declared management as their major, followed by economics, computer science, information technology, undeclared, communication, and information technology. In regards to the fall 2018 student outcomes, international pathway students performed at comparable levels following pathway completion compared with domestic and direct entry international students on many of the key metrics for student success as defined by the university. In regards to country of origin, the Fall 2018 undergraduate progressed students could be characterized in the following terms: a) the student body represented 43 different countries, b) 49% of all students declare China as their home country, c) top five countries of
students’ origin include China, India, South Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia. These characteristics may slightly change from one semester to another.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher planned to recruit a sample of eight to ten international undergraduate students trying to create a sample that would be representative of the actual progressed pathway student body at the research site. The sample of participants that the researcher attempted to recruit could be characterized as follows: a) students’ country of origin should represent a diverse student body, but must include students from at least three of the top countries of origin as specified in the Tracer Report b) 7-8 students (or 70% - 80% of the sample) should come from an Asian country, c) the sample must include both females and males; participants cannot be one gender. Additionally, the researcher was determined to recruit students who are at various stages of their bachelor degree study in order to get more insightful perspectives on their student experience in the pathway program.

Although 57% of all international pathway students declared management as their intended major in the Fall 2018, the researcher decided not to consider the student’s major as a selection criterion in the sample selection. Regardless of their intended major, majority of classes offered in the pathway year are general education courses that any student, regardless of their intended major, can take. Further, all pathway students, regardless of their major, move through classes along with other pathway peers, hence it is assumed that intended major has no bearing in regards to student experience. Also, it is a common practice for students to change major. In the advisement sessions, pathway students are actually encouraged to explore multiple disciplines, determine if the selected major is a good fit for them, and change the major within the freshman or sophomore year.
Selection and Participant Overview

In IPA studies, participants grant access to a particular perspective on the studied phenomenon (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). Participants are usually identified by referral from gatekeepers or snowballing, a referral by participants (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). For the purpose of this study, a sample of eight to ten international undergraduate students got recruited. This sample size allows for a diversity of opinions, and it is large enough in case a participant decides to withdraw from the study. There is no specific cap on how many participants should be recruited (Bernard, 2002), but at least five participants are suggested for the data to be reliable (Siedler, 1974).

In this study, participants were recruited through purposive sampling, often referred to as key informant sampling. The purposive sampling technique refers to a non-random deliberate choice of a participant by a researcher due to the qualities and/or knowledge that an informant would have. In purposive sampling, the researcher determines what needs to be known, and she or he needs to identify the people who could know, and are willing to provide the information by virtue of experience or knowledge (Bernard, 2002). In purposive sampling, only a few key informants are solicited, and they are reflective and observant members of the community (Bernard, 2002). As part of the preparation for sampling, one must know about the culture to identify reliable and knowledgeable informants. Asking someone with direct access to the community or asking the community in helping identify appropriate informants is a common practice (Bernard, 2002).

Access

The researcher is an employee of the studied program at the research site, and he requested initial referrals for prospective participants from the student success office at the international
pathway office. The student success manager in the pathway office is responsible for the academic oversight and course registration of all international pathway students. The student success manager, along with her advisors, has direct access to, works very closely with all international pathway students during their pathway year, and usually maintains good contact with students until graduation and after students graduate from the university. Through the nature of her position, the manager was able to identify prospective participants for the study.

First, the researcher contacted the student success manager via email with a request for help in identifying prospective students. See: Appendix B. The manager appointed one of her advisors to identify potential students for the study. The advisor emailed the researcher a list of about 30 students with contact information. Each of the recommended candidates was contacted in writing via email with a request for participation email. See: Appendix C. The researcher further sought additional referrals by already identified participants who recommended their former pathway classmates.

Participants

All participants selected for the study were international students who either completed the undergraduate pathway program at the research site or were at various stages of completion of their bachelor degree studies at the research site. See Table 1. For Participants Overview.

Table 1: Participant Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Field of Study (Major)</th>
<th>Year of Study</th>
<th>Self-reported GPA - Fall 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>International Management</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonny</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While recruiting participants, the researcher made efforts to ensure that the sample mirror the ethnic and gender diversity of the pathway students as closely as possible. As a result, of the eleven participants who agreed to participate, 82% came from an Asian country including China, India, and Indonesia, which are among the top five countries of origin of the student body in the pathway program. In regards to gender diversity, 55% of the sample were females and 45% were males. Furthermore, to get a deeper understanding of how participants make sense of their transitional experiences following pathway program completion from the perspective of time, the researcher made an effort to recruit students at various stages of their bachelor degree studies. Of the eleven participants, three students were in their sophomore year, three were juniors, two were seniors, and three had already completed their bachelor studies prior to participating in the interview.

While the country of origin of the participants in the sample reflected the diversity of the students in the pathway at a given time, the researcher did recognize that nine out of eleven participants originated in Asia and South East Asia. Further, the self-reported cumulative grade point average (GPA) at the end of Fall 2018 for study participants ranged from 2.90 to 3.90. According to institutional reporting, the cumulative GPA for an undergraduate pathway student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Graduated*</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Graduated**</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Graduated**</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Earned bachelor's degree and pursuing a master's degree at research site at the time of interview
** Earned bachelor's degree in 2018, and on Optional Practical Training (OPT) at the time of interview
at the end of Fall 2018 was 2.88, and the first-year grade point average for Fall 2011-17 pathway cohorts was 2.89. Additionally, the overall retention between the freshman (pathway) and sophomore years between Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 was 91%, which was in line with historical freshman retention rates in the low-to-mid 90% for pathway students. The Participant Overview Table 1. lists participants’ profiles along with a self-reported cumulative GPA at the end of the Fall 2018 semester or at the time of graduation from the bachelor’s program. The following are brief profiles of all eleven participants.

Anna

Anna is a sophomore female Indian student who resided with her family in the Middle East before joining the pathway program. Anna seems to identify with her family’s country of residence rather than her country of citizenship. English is not Anna’s first language. Anna is bilingual, and English was the language of instruction when she was in high school. Just like about 56% of all pathway students, as reported by Institutional Research, Anna is pursuing Business as her major. Her self-reported cumulative grade point (GPA) at the end of the Fall 2018 semester was 3.20.

Betty

Betty is a female student from Mexico. She describes herself as an upper sophomore and lower junior who is just at the point between her second and third year of study in the bachelor program. Betty is on track to major in International Management. Anna’s native tongue is Spanish, and she learned English as a second language. When Anna enrolled in the pathway program, it was the very first time that she experienced English as the language of instruction at school.

Jonny
Jonny is a male student from China who is a lower sophomore who just completed the pathway program last semester. Jonny’s intended field of study is Business Management. Jonny’s self-reported GPA was 2.7 at the end of Fall 2018. Jonny’s first language is Mandarin, and he was schooled in China before joining the pathway. When Jonny joined the pathway program, it was the first time he needed to communicate in English in the classroom.

Eliza

Eliza is a female Chinese student who is a lower junior. Her intended major is Accounting, and her self-reported GPA was 3.3 at the end of Fall 2018. Eliza learned English as a second language. Eliza spent the last two years of high school as an international student in the United States before deciding to join the pathway program in 2016.

Fiona

Fiona is a female Pakistani student who is interested in majoring in Communication. Her self-reported GPA was 3.5 at the end of the Fall 2018 semester. Although Fiona’s first language is not English, Fiona considers herself a fluent English speaker as English is commonly used in her country. Fiona thinks of herself as an upper sophomore and lower junior. Once she has completed the current semester, she will be over the amount of credits to be a junior.

Greg

Greg is a junior male student from China pursuing History as his major. He is very passionate about history. He was initially planning to join another university in the United States before deciding to join the pathway program at the research site. His self-reported GPA end the end of
Fall 2018 was 3.9. When he enrolled in the bachelor program, it was the first time that Greg needed to start using English as a language of instruction.

**Angie**

Angie is a female student from Indonesia. She speaks fluent Indonesian and English. She says that she was very lucky as her family spoke a lot of English at home. English was not something that she was concerned with when she arrived in the United States. Angie is a former pathway student who earned her bachelor degree and majored in Sociology already. Her self-reported major upon completion of her last semester was 3.7. Angie is currently pursuing a master’s program at the research site, planning to graduate in 2019.

**Esther**

Esther is a female Indonesian student who is a senior pursuing International Relations as a major. Esther completed the pathway program during the 2016/2017 academic year. She is bilingual and speaks Indonesian and English. Esther was initially planning to pursue a bachelor’s degree program in another English-speaking country, but ended up joining the pathway program at the research site. Esther’s self-reported GPA at the end of last semester was 3.9. Esther is very involved on-campus student life volunteering her free time to advocate for student rights and enhance the experience of international students.

**Tom**

Tom is a male student from China. He is a senior planning to major in Accounting by the end of Spring 2019. His self-reported GPA at the end of Fall 2018 was 3.6. English is not Tom’s first language. Tom was schooled in Mandarin prior to joining the pathway program at the research site. Tom states that his part-time employment on campus gives him opportunities to practice English.
Pat

Pat is a male Indian student who completed bachelor’s degree requirements at the end of Spring 2018. Pat majored in Management and his final self-reported GPA upon program completion was 3.9. English is not Pat’s first language, but coming from India, he learned and used English back home. Pat is currently pursuing full-time employment as part of his post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT).

Tony

Anthony is a male student from Zimbabwe who earned his bachelor’s degree at the end of Spring 2018. Tony majored in Management, and his self-reported GPA upon program completion was 2.9. English is not Tony’s first language, but according to him, having come from a former British colony, he is very fluent in English. Tony joined the pathway program at a bit more mature age than most traditional first-year students in the U.S. Tony is currently on his post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT).

Data Collection

Data collection procedures. The most common method for IPA researchers to collect data is semi-structured in-depth interviews (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Brocky & Wearden, 2006; Fade, 2004; Smith, 2011; Van Scoy & Evenstad, 2014; Williams & Reid, 2012). It is critical for each interview to be transcribed verbatim with considerable detail including pauses, mistakes, speech dynamics, and mis-hearings (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; du Plessis, du Plessis, & Saccaggi, 2013). While the researcher usually follows an interview protocol with main guiding questions for discussion, the interview protocol should not be prescriptive in order not to limit or override the interests of interviewees. Additionally, it is important that the interviewee is encouraged to take a lead in the interviewing, which may result in rich data, much different from
what the interviewer may have expected (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). For the interview protocol, see Appendix E.

In this study, in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one and in-person interviews were the primary data collection method (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Brocky & Wearden, 2006; Fade, 2004; Smith, 2011; Van Scoy & Evenstad, 2014; Williams & Reid, 2012). Each interview lasted between forty five to sixty minutes. The researcher attempted to conduct the interview at the research site to make it easier for student participants, but accommodated any location of choice as long as the location was deemed safe and appropriate by both the participants and the researcher. The researcher followed the interview protocol as outlined in Appendix E, and encouraged participants to describe own experiences and reflect on those experiences without any constraints. Each interview was recorded on a password protected IPhone Voice Memo Application and then backed up on a password protected laptop. The researcher utilized www.rev.com, a professional transcribing service, to obtain professional transcription of the interviews.

While interviewing, the researcher also took notes of observations specifically being mindful of non-verbal cues and body language, which were not captured via audio recording. The researcher further reviewed and analyzed any available materials such as student guides, institutional reports on pathway students to gather additional data prior to interviewing.

**Data storage and management.** The basic task for all qualitative researchers is to develop a secure data filing and storing system, which allows an organized retrieval of information (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher and the principle investigator were the only ones with access to raw data. To protect the anonymity of participants, the researcher masked
participants’ names in the data unless asked otherwise by the participant (Creswell, 2013). Further, the researcher obscured the names of the research site, the pathway program along with other identifiable elements. The interview recordings have been stored in secure files on the researcher’s password-secured laptop. Handwritten and typed notes and materials have been stored in the interview notebooks, which the researcher keeps in a secure locked file cabinet. To ensure full confidentiality, raw data, including digital audio files and the handwritten records will be destroyed five years after the study has been published.

**Data analysis.** Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) argue that there is no one single method of working with data in IPA studies, which allows flexibility in regards to how a researcher would want to approach data analysis. The essence of the IPA methodology lies in its analytical focus, which guides the researcher’s analytical attention to the participants’ sense making of the experience under investigation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). While the researcher can exercise a degree of flexibility in data analysis, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) characterize the IPA data analysis as an inductive cycle and a set of common practices, which direct the researcher in moving from the particular and descriptive to shared and interpretative elements in understanding the participants’ sense making.

In this study, the researcher followed Smith, Flowers and Larkin’s (2009) steps to analyze data as follows: 1) reading and reading, 2) initial noting, 3) developing emergent themes, 4) searching for connections among emergent themes, 5) moving to the next case, and 6) looking for patterns across cases.

After data had been collected and transcribed, the researcher began with listening multiple times, and reading and re-reading of each transcript. This was to make sense of the text with the focus, which shifted back and forth from the participant’s description of the experiences to the
researcher’s attempts to make sense of each participant’s narrative (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). While listening, reading and re-reading, the researcher made annotations (on paper and electronically) on each transcript to better identify participants’ own meanings of the experiences to develop interpretative themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This was to examine the sematic content and language, and encourage the researcher to take descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments of anything of particular interest from the interview recollections and/or anything in the interview transcript.

The IPA data analysis further involved several steps, which guided the researcher through the process of developing emergent themes and identifying connections among those themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). To identify how the themes fit together, identify which themes to be aborted or incorporated in further analysis, the researcher developed and maintained charts, tables and maps with exploratory annotations in Excel. Listing all themes in a chronological order, then moving them around allowed the researcher to identify thematic clusters, patterns and connections among the themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In keeping with the idiographic tradition of the IPA, the researcher repeated the same process with each participant’s transcript while trying to bracket the ideas that emerged from the analysis of previous cases. The next step required identifying the patterns across multiple cases by mapping, charting and making annotations while pulling out rich data in support of emergent themes from across multiple transcripts (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

While working on data analysis, the researcher continued to engage in memoing, which was an integral part of the IPA process, to capture current observations and to make a record of reflective thoughts on what is being learned from data. To organize the collected data and enhance data analysis, the researcher further utilized to MAXQDA computer software for
qualitative analysis, which enabled further analysis, color-coding, and linking transcript excerpts to emerging themes, and participants.

Following the interviews, between March and July 2019, the researcher further engaged the participants in member checking exercises to seek clarifications; first by sharing the transcribed transcripts to ensure accuracy, and then by reaching out to particular participants on as-needed basis via email to seek clarifications in writing, and to ensure accuracy of interpretation.

**Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative research requires gaining approvals from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northeastern University and an IRB office at the research site to gain access to participants in order to facilitate data collection (Creswell, 2013). The IRB’s oversight over research studies protects the rights of study participants and it promotes the ethical conduct with human subjects (Creswell, 2013). Prior to engaging in this study, the researcher filed an IRB application and pursued an approval of the Institutional Review Board at Northeastern University. Once that approval was granted, the researcher pursued an additional approval from the IRB office at the research site. The IRB office at the research site and Northeastern’s IRB office finalized an authorization agreement by mid-January 2019 allowing participant recruitment in the Spring 2019 semester. Upon the receipt of both IRB approvals, and prior to engaging in data collection, the researcher presented each participant with an Informed Consent Form, which provided the participant’s protection of rights (Creswell, 2013). See Appendix C.

To protect the privacy of participants and ensure full confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms and obscured any identifiable elements such as the research site name, the program name, the location, etc. Select participants made a decision and authorized the researcher to use their own names rather than pseudonyms, to receive recognition for their contributions to the
study. As the primary researcher is an employee of the studied program at the research site, during the participant recruitment process, the researcher identified himself as a graduate student of Northeastern University, and not an employee of the studied institution. The researcher also used Northeastern University’s student email account for all communication with prospective and recruited participants. The researcher further ensured that undue influence was not enforced to recruit participants.

**Trustworthiness**

Researchers can incorporate different measures to address the issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985), for instance, proposed that trustworthiness in qualitative studies involves establishing the following: a) credibility, b) dependability, c) conformability, and d) transferability. Yardley’s (2000) framework, as referenced in Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, (2009) suggests adhering to four principles to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These principles are: a) sensitivity to context, b) commitment and rigor, c) transparency and coherence, and d) impact and importance.

Having familiarized with techniques to ensure trustworthiness, the researcher has decided to follow the following principles.

**Member checking.** Member checking enables qualitative researchers to improve the credibility and accuracy of collected data (Creswell, 2013). Member checking can be done at various points of the research process. The researcher strove to create a safe interviewing environment to encourage open responses. When unclear, the interviewer restated his understanding of the discussed matter back to the interviewee to ensure accuracy. Following the transcription, the researcher shared the interview transcripts with all participants to request a review for accuracy and completeness. Following the interview completion, between March and
July of 2019, the researcher further connected with participants and engaged in an email exchange to seek clarifications in writing, and check for accuracy of interpretation. All these techniques were to ensure that the summaries captured by the researcher reflect participants’ perspectives and express their feelings.

**Thick descriptions.** Rich and thick descriptions enable research readers to determine whether they could transfer and apply information from the research to the settings outside of the research site based on selected shared characteristics (Creswell, 2013). Throughout the study, the researcher ensured transparency, and provided rich and detailed descriptions of the research site, the researched program, and the context for the study. The researcher further provided thick descriptions in regards to the research process outlining details on how participants were selected, how the interviews were conducted, and what steps were used to analyze data.

**Maintaining commitment and rigor.** The principle of commitment and rigor in Yardley’s (2000) framework, as recommended by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), is another technique that the researcher followed in this study to ensure trustworthiness. The researcher maintained commitment and rigor throughout all research stages. Commitment refers to the degree of attentiveness to the participant, and the manner in which the analysis has been conducted. Rigor refers to the thoroughness of the study in regards to the sample selection, the quality of interviewing, and the systematic and thorough analysis of data. The researcher committed to giving utmost and serious attention to detail throughout the research process.

**Limitations**

There were some limitations in regards to the sampling method, transferability and generalizability of findings.
Sampling method. This limitation stems out of the choice of the sampling method. An important aspect of purposive sampling is its inherent bias and the informant reliability. Unlike random sampling in research, purposive sampling, as a non-probability method, is not bias free. The risk with this sampling method is that the researcher must exercise own judgement when selecting participants in regards to their knowledge and/or skills, which is critical to the data quality (Tongco, 2007). Participants might be selected out of convenience or based on the recommendations of the people with access to the studied community.

Transferability and generalizability of findings. Despite its inherent bias, purposive samples can produce robust and reliable data, and contribute to the internal validity, rather than external validity, over the population under study (Bernard, 2002). It is critical that the researcher state the bias to stop readers from inferring general conclusions beyond those applicable to the studied population (Bernard, 2002).

The study utilized a small sample of participants situated in a specific context. While the findings offer insights to help understand the experience of international undergraduate students in the pathway program, the findings may not be directly transferable to other contexts beyond the research site.

Researcher’s bias. Researcher’s bias is not necessarily a limitation in IPA studies provided that the researcher identify own biases and become cognizant of how biases may affect research outcomes. Aligned with the principle of commitment and rigor to ensure trustworthiness of the study, and to be transparent to the potential readers, the researcher has acknowledged and discussed positionality in the following subsection of this chapter.
Positionality Statement

**Positionality.** As a researcher, I am determined to gain insight into international student perspective of their experience in the undergraduate pathway program and its impact on the further academic journey in the bachelor’s degree program. In this section, I will reflect on my positionality, which will include my position and place in relation to the participants and this study. Maxwell (2005) argued that humans tend to interpret the world through the lens of their own background and identity leading to the researcher’s bias. Because preconceived biases are formed within the context of own social position that is pre-determined by race, gender, social class, and culture; the understanding of my own positionality can shed light on my ability to form objective interpretations of the observations that may affect data collection and research integrity (Carlton Parsons, 2008; Franklin, 2014). “Positionality affects one’s perceptions, some question whether more accurate perceptions come from the privileged, especially in the regards to the representation of the other” (Briscoe, 2005, p.25). While identifying the privileged [the observer] and other [the observed] may not present a challenge in the case of an anthropologist studying the relationships among the tribal Indians, in educational research, and in this case, considering my background in particular, this distinction becomes blurred.

There are many advantages to being an observer - insider within the studied group. An insider seems better equipped to understand and interpret the observations, and some scholars argue that the ability of the outside researcher to accurately interpret and represent the experiences of the group of people she or he is not a part of is questionable (Briscoe, 2005). If the observed do not accept and trust the outside researcher, they may censor and misrepresent their true behavior resulting in misinterpretations of the researched phenomenon. Am I an outside observer or a true insider to the group that I intend to study?
**Personal life influences on positionality.** My personal experiences have played a major role in how I perceive international students, make sense of their experience and approach any challenges that they may experience. Being born and raised outside of the U.S., just like international students, I had the privilege to experience college education in another country. Since early age, I also participated in study-abroad exchanges, which instilled my appreciation for multicultural and educational experiences that let me appreciate the world beyond the very homogenous society that I came from. Albeit never a true international student in the U.S., the experiences of a non-native English speaker immigrant-student who has been ‘transplanted’ from one educational and cultural setting to another makes me feel as if I walked in the shoes of millions of students who come to the U.S. at a young age with high ambitions and little experience. While my bilingual background and schooling split between Europe and the United States can undeniably give me a better understanding of the dynamics of the students’ immediate needs, it can also make me prone to culture-based biases that stem from a particular perspective that I may have.

**Professional life influences on positionality.** As an administrator who has spent years in the field of international education, I have also developed a deeper understanding of students’ needs and expectations. In my position, I closely work with international undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the pathway programs and participate in numerous collaborative initiatives that aim to improve their experience and support their academic success. My present position as the head of a pathway program provides me with many opportunities for direct interaction with prospective and enrolled international pathway students, the faculty, and the heads of administrative units across the university. Further, in my former positions in international admissions, I had visited a great number of schools across the world, which gave me an excellent
platform for making direct observations and interactions in the students’ ‘natural habitat’. It is through such interactions that I have developed an appreciation for international students and the expertise in other countries’ educational systems. Further, through direct participation in numerous on-campus initiatives that support international students, I have been provided with several learning opportunities that made me an expert, a mentor, and an advocate for international pathway students and international students in general on campus.

**Defining own positionality.** It could be argued that being a privileged and experienced professional with a broad view on the issues of international students, deeply rooted in my professional experiences and shaped by my Western education, would make me a well-informed researcher who could interpret observations in an objective manner. Yet, I often struggle in defining my positionality; trying to find a balance between being a privileged external outsider and feeling an external or indigenous insider in the group that I attempt to study (Banks, 2006). Because of my personal and professional experiences, I may not hold unfavorable feelings against international students. I may tend to over-sympathize with students and see their problems through their own eyes rather than through the eyes of an administrator who should form objective opinions and make sound judgements.

**Final reflections on impact of positionality on the study.** Maintaining objectivity in a research setting, regardless of the researcher’s position in relation to the studied subjects, has been and will continue to be challenging, as biases are part of being human - all of us have personal history and emotional tendencies to look for familiarity in newness. We naturally like what we understand and avoid unfamiliar territories. My territory covers Caucasian central and Eastern European population in their 40-s who came to the U.S. from behind the iron curtain with expectations based more on their own fantasies of ‘the land of free’ than on factual
information. My social circle covers self-made people who came with no family fortunes to pay for their education.

Researcher’s influences cannot be eliminated, but they can be isolated, understood and used productively (Maxwell, 2005). Aligned with this argument, separating the researcher from the person that I am and from the people that I am to study is rather impossible. Recognizing my own biases and beliefs, the negative ones and the overly favorable ones, will be critical in determining whether the observations that I make are truly objective and neutral. The exploration of my positionality makes me fully aware that the challenges that I may face may not come from the environment that I am to explore, but from what I, as a human, may already know and what I may bring to this study. While my viewpoints, shaped by experiences and background can affect the formulation of the true representation of the experiences that international students from cultures other than mine may have, as a researcher, I will strive to let the facts lead me. I will look for multiple possible explanations rather than the one I may already know. What I can see is the tip of the iceberg, and hope that my international background can provide a rough compass to navigate uncharted waters.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the research design for the study, discussed the selected research method, and provided an overview of the research tradition and methodology. This chapter further provided details on the research site, the participants, and described the process for data collection, data handling and data analysis. The researcher further discussed strategies to ensure trustworthiness of the study, and identified the limitations in the study. The following chapter will report research findings.


Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings

Organization

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into transitional experiences of international undergraduate students as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program.

This chapter presents Super-ordinate and Sub-ordinate Themes to provide a thematic overview of the emergent themes in the study. With IPA’s focus on participants’ lived experience, a significant portion of the analysis includes interview excerpts of thick descriptions, giving participants a voice to describe their experience, and enabling readers to make sense of the arguments and interpretations made by the researcher.

Overview of Super-ordinate and Sub-ordinate Themes

According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), a key decision that any IPA researcher needs to make is to identify a set of criteria to define a theme recurrence. In this study, a theme was classified as recurrent when it was present in at least five interviews out of the eleven interviews, which is in about half of all of the participants’ interviews.

The primarily inductive data analysis led to the identification of emergent themes, which were analyzed both individually and across all interviews. As a result, eight super-ordinate themes along with corresponding sub-ordinate themes were identified. Table 2. provides an overview of the super-ordinate themes and sub-ordinate themes by participant. Each of the themes represents an underlying interpreted meaning rather than just being the words that happen to have been used in reference to each theme. Further, a ‘Y’ stands for ‘yes’ indicating that that the select theme appeared in the interview.
### Table 2. Super-ordinate and Sub-ordinate Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate theme 1: Fear and anxiety from the unknown</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Eliza</th>
<th>Fiona</th>
<th>Greg</th>
<th>Angie</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Pat</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Anxiety from independence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Concern for potential isolation and not fitting in</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Super-ordinate theme 2: Overwhelmed by academic difficulties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate theme 2: Overwhelmed by academic difficulties</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Eliza</th>
<th>Fiona</th>
<th>Greg</th>
<th>Angie</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Pat</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Challenged by writing</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Disoriented and confused by academic honesty</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Intimidated by English</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Super-ordinate theme 3: Liberated by the classroom climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate theme 3: Liberated by the classroom climate</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Eliza</th>
<th>Fiona</th>
<th>Greg</th>
<th>Angie</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Pat</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Liberated by freedom of expression</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Confused but encouraged by academic differences</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Appreciative of teaching aids</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Super-ordinate theme 4: Supported by university resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate theme 4: Supported by university resources</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Eliza</th>
<th>Fiona</th>
<th>Greg</th>
<th>Angie</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Pat</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Contented with intro. to academic life</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Guided by the pathway</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Helped by tutors</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Super-ordinate theme 5: Embracing sociocultural differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate theme 5: Embracing sociocultural differences</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Eliza</th>
<th>Fiona</th>
<th>Greg</th>
<th>Angie</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Pat</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Curious but anxious about diversity</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Cognizant of different values</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Confused by informal relations with faculty</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Super-ordinate theme 6: Comforted by new relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate theme 6: Comforted by new relationships</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Eliza</th>
<th>Fiona</th>
<th>Greg</th>
<th>Angie</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Pat</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Comforted by pathway peers</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Reassured and supported by professors</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Super-ordinate theme 7: Isolated from domestic students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate theme 7: Isolated from domestic students</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Eliza</th>
<th>Fiona</th>
<th>Greg</th>
<th>Angie</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Pat</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Longing for interactions with American students</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Super-ordinate theme 8: United by shared experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate theme 8: United by shared experience</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Betty</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Eliza</th>
<th>Fiona</th>
<th>Greg</th>
<th>Angie</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Pat</th>
<th>Tony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Comfort in shared experience</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Family-like togetherness</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Community building</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4 Turning into action</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Super-ordinate theme 1: Fear and anxiety from the unknown.

Anxiety from independence. When sharing their thoughts on how they felt about their experience at a university in the United States, eight out of eleven participants described going through a range of emotions including fear, nervousness, anxiety, and insecurity associated with coming to the unknown environment. Most students experienced anxiety, fear and nervousness but, only for a small portion, these feelings were mixed with some excitement about the change that was about to happen in their lives.

Fiona, for instance, who had been in the United States prior to joining the university, described her fears about living alone without her family and having to take responsibility for doing the dishes and cleaning - the duties that her mom used to do at home. She stated,

So first I was really scared and because it was very new coming to US studying. I've been to US before, but, uh, living alone and studying was something very new for me. I was feeling scared. I was feeling, um, a little weird. Also, like, I'm gonna be living on my own. I have to do my own dishes. I have to clean myself. I have to cook myself. And coming from Pakistan, where everything is already done for me or my mom does it, and I don't do much, so coming here I was shocked, I was scared, I was like, "Okay, maybe I won't be able to do this" (personal communication, March 1).

Similarly, feeling scared and worried about coming alone to the U.S. and, more specifically, not being able to find food as a vegetarian were the biggest fears that Pat was going through. This experience was particularly stressful for him as it was the first time he left India. He stated,

It was my first time going to any city or like alone by myself, and it was not just a different city, it was a whole different country. Um, talking the language that was my second language, not my first language, I was not really used to that either. First I came...
alone, I didn't know anybody. Um, outside of class, um, the biggest thing I was worried about was food. Trying the food from a completely different culture. So that was pretty interesting that now, I know to make the food at that, that I like, but I can, I also try food from different countries as well. So that was my biggest fear coming into the US that food. I didn't know anything about making food (personal communication, March 13).

Betty and Greg felt nervous about being college students in another country as well. Betty described feeling “super nervous” when she first came to the orientation, but felt comforted by seeing many students like herself going through this experience together.

Well, at first I thought it will be like really hard and I was like super nervous, but when I came to the orientation, I saw like a lot of support. I saw international students, people like me, that we really have like the same experience (personal communication, February 25).

Greg also felt nervous, as he did not fully understand details of the program he was joining.

At first, I'm a little bit nervous because I'm not pretty sure what is the pathway, because pathway means you are being half enrolled or something (personal communication, March 5).

While most of the students experienced anxiety from independence, while they were assuming responsibilities as university students living alone in a foreign country, for some, this was also coupled with some excitement about this rite-of-passage life-changing experience.

**Concern for potential isolation and not fitting in.** Not fitting in was another concern that students expressed. In addition to fear and anxiety from independence, students also shared having concerns for potential isolation and not fitting in academically and culturally.
Pat, for instance, felt hesitant he would not be able to fit in right away, resulting in him feeling isolated and lonely. He said, “I'm coming from a different culture, different educational background, and not, uh, I'm not gonna like directly fit into” (personal communication, March 13). Pat felt overwhelmed. Similarly, Angie, who admitted not having clear expectations from her college experience in the pathway, feared that she would be isolated from university peers in her experience. Angie anticipated “separate classrooms for international students in our program [the pathway], and more in-depth guidance from the advisors and more workshops or, um, extra classes to build our skills and to help us adapt with American culture” (personal communication, March 7).

Analogously, Esther anticipated some level of isolation and hierarchy between pathway students and university students. She feared she would not be “a normal college student” when she is in the pathway. She reiterated,

I came expecting that because it's a foundational or like a pathway program that I'll be learning very, very basic English stuff, that I wouldn't be participating as a normal college student. Um, but then, that doesn't seem to translate into reality. Um, because I expected some kind of, uh, hierarchy between the pathway students and then the university students. But once I become part of the pathway, I'm also part of the [university] community. At first, I thought that it will be segregated, that my student status will be slightly lower than the normal university student but then it doesn't apply (personal communication, March 8).

Eliza, on the other hand, thought that she would be isolated from the rest of the university because of her level of English language fluency. Aligned with Esther’s earlier observations, she thought she would be isolated from the university based on the level of the coursework she was
to be enrolled in. She stated, “I thought it [the pathway] just gonna be like, um, it's like, academy-ish, like a prep course.” She recognized that she needed some help with her English and commented, “So, I used to think about this [being in the pathway] 'cause, this one, we might be just separate even [when] you are in the university, but you’re kind of like separate from the university. She then added to clarify,

I thought it [the pathway experience] was gonna be separate, but then actually you are like, just like any other university student. Like of course, we have different classes and different stuff, but then the GPA, everything, is counted like in a regular class, like, you will continue to, when you go to like a sophomore, junior, senior [year]

(partial personal communication, February 27).

Eliza felt happy to learn that she was “just like any other university student” having the same privileges and the same opportunities. Even though she was taking different classes, just like any other student at the university, she felt comforted and connected as a result of being integrated into the larger community. Similarly, Esther’s hesitations about being excluded from the university community and having a lower status as a pathway student fell short of her initial hesitations. She soon recognized that being a pathway student meant becoming a full member of the larger university community. Esther felt welcomed and embraced as a result of being integrated into the community. Further, Angie’s experience was also much different from what she may have anticipated. Despite her initial fears, Angie described regaining “self-confidence, and “like self-worth” and becoming “the best me” as a result of her experience in the pathway program.

Superordinate theme 2: Overwhelmed with academic difficulties. Another significant theme that emerged from data was the theme of academic and language challenges that
participants were experiencing in the first year of college. This theme was interwoven in the students’ reflections on their academic experiences in many places across several interviews.

**Challenged by writing.** Students described struggling with different writing expectations. They often felt they needed help with writing assignments due to either unfamiliar expectations and/or English language difficulties. Esther commented on the differences in writing by describing how challenged she felt when she had to write an argumentative essay, the type of writing that she had not been taught back home. She stated,

> It was something that I recognized the first time I encountered it, however, it is still a challenge. Uh, for example, um, teachers would, professors would ask me to write papers, um, arguing something of my thoughts or ideas of how ... but I was never familiar with doing or writing papers in that way. I was mostly doing uh, summaries or descriptions instead of argumentations. So, that was something that I really, really struggled with, although I did finally grasp it. Um, but it was a really tough challenge, especially being an international student, not speaking English as their first language and then having to present your cases really well in a written paper, um, not knowing what academic English, uh, is being like (personal communication, March 8).

Esther struggled with completing her assignment. She felt challenged, as she was not familiar with that type of writing. Fiona also made a similar observation when she described how some of her friends struggled with writing essays. It was very challenging for the students, and they needed to get help from tutors. Fiona stated,

> One of my friends, their- their first language wasn't English, and they struggled a lot while writing their essays. And they actually had to get help from tutors and everything, and they said that not having English as their first language did make it really difficult.
But, then, um, they started learning, so for them, it was tough (personal communication, March 1).

Similarly, Betty felt challenged by writing assignments. She described her experience of writing essays in English as ‘super hard’ and time-consuming. She explained that it took her “hours and hours’ to write a single paragraph before she could go back to try to correct all the grammar mistakes that she could find.

Okay, I will have some grammar mistakes but at the end I'll, I will fix it and I actually I'm surprised because for writing it was super hard for me. Like it took me like hours and hours just to write a paragraph because I didn't know how to write (personal communication, February 27).

For pathway students who did not have any prior exposure to the American English writing in prior school settings, written assignments were one of the biggest challenges that students faced. Not only did the students struggle with writing in a second language, but they also struggled with adhering to the writing conventions and expectations they had not experienced before. Many admitted to utilizing tutoring services to improve their writing in the first year. From the perspective of time, however, they felt accomplished and proud, especially when they saw how the skills they gained benefited them in other classes.

**Disoriented and confused by academic honesty.** Several students also pointed out that the concept of plagiarism and proper citation methods were unknown to them when they joined the university. That is something that students had to discover, either on their own or in a guided fashion through university or pathway-provided resources. Students struggled to learn how to apply proper citation methods, often making what they described as ‘innocent mistakes’ that violated academic honesty guidelines in the American academic context. When explaining how
unfamiliar she was with academic honesty when she arrived in the U.S. first, Eliza shared how confused and ashamed she felt that she did not add bibliography to her writing. Eliza stated,

So I forgot to put, um, like bibliography and because when we're back in China, when you usually just do like paperwork, like practice things. We barely write, probably in college, but I was in high school when I was in China. And so we don't, like, really write any like resources, like articles or essays, you need to find a resource from online. We don't ever use that [citation] before (personal communication, February 27).

Eliza was also quick to point out that “the college requirements [in regards to academic honesty] are different than high school. It's totally different. There's much more… you need to be more specific I mean be more serious. Because it's a very important issue” (personal communication, February 27). Even though Eliza did not name it openly, from her demeanor during the time when she talked about it, one could visibly infer that she felt ashamed, yet motivated to do it right. She felt uneasy about applying proper citation methods in order not repeat the same mistake again.

Angie also expressed her lack of familiarity and confusion with citation methods expected at an American university describing how she was used to just a single citation method back home.

Um, in terms of citing- citation style, in Indonesia, we only have one general citing style as long as you cite, um, the page number of the author and then made a bibliography doesn't matter. But now we have more specific choices from MLA, from APA and from Chicago and bunch of other stuff that I didn't mention. Um, and you have to stick to one style and even in one style, somehow there's sub-styles and stuff like that. So knowing the differences, knowing how to do each of this style actually helps because different professor- professor, for different task, requires us to know everything. So, now that if
my professor says I want APA, I don't have to worry about it (personal communication, March 8).

Angie further described her experience of having to learn to apply the American citation styling as a stressful and exhausting process. She said, “We [the students] were so stressed and tired from all the task [s] that she [the teacher] gave us and all the explanation, and she [the teacher] made sure that we knew it (personal communication, March 8). She was very encouraged and proud to acknowledge “but now it [styles of citing] felt like it's just second nature to us.” Angie found learning about citation extremely helpful, especially that she was at the final stages of completing her master’s degree.

Fiona further echoed Angie’s concerns in regards to not having prior exposure to the styling methods in Pakistan describing her experience of completing her writing assignments as intimidating. She felt perplexed with different styling methods. She described her experiences as hard and time-consuming, often requiring that she stay up long hours into the night while checking on the Internet if what she was doing was right. Fiona felt confused. This was all due to the fact that she did not have the advantage of being taught and/or exposed to proper citing in high school just as her American peers did. She stated,

Yeah, um, the formatting - that it has to be APA style and MLA style. We didn't really do that back at home, so for me, it was pretty hard. And, um, I had to google, like, I had to stay up all night figuring out what it is and how to make it perfect, but then, uh, now I got a hang of it (personal communication, March 1).

From the perspective of time, however, Fiona felt accomplished and appreciated learning to cite properly while seeing how useful such knowledge was in her studies beyond the first year.
**Intimidated by English.** Another matter that almost all participants brought up in several places across all interviews was the English language challenges in the learning context. Several students brought up their struggles with English being the language of instruction, and they described how those challenges affected their experience. Participants described how they were ‘not confident’ about English. Many experienced ‘a lack of confidence’ when it came to English language skills. ‘A lack of confidence’, ‘not having confidence’ or ‘not being confident’ were the most common phrases that a number of participants used to describe how they felt about English in the contact of academic learning.

**Experiencing Insecurity.** Feeling insecure about English skills was a common emerging theme across several interviews. Jonny, for instance, anticipated language challenges when thinking of his level of English as an international student in comparison with the perceived English language skills of domestic students. He commented,

> There were a lot of challenges for international students because I think for local students, like, the English language is really, like, easy for them, while like we, we might struggle with it. So, that's, like, you went in to [the] whole new world- like whole new language (personal communication, February 26).

Jonny felt intimidated and anxious about his English knowing that, unlike his American peers, he did not have the advantage of being a native speaker. Jonny was concerned and worried that he may not understand or will get misunderstood. He stated, “since English is like our second language- we sometimes get miscommunication. So, I think except [for] that, everything was fine (personal communication, February 26).
A number of participants also described how hesitant they felt to speak English, both in academic and social settings. Pat, despite coming from a country where English is commonly used, had no confidence to talk to people after he arrived in the U.S. Pat stated,

> Uh, when I first came in, I was not really confident about my English. Because back in India, even though I went to an English school, so I studied English my whole, whole life, but I still wasn't confident enough to talk in English (personal communication, March 13).

The lack of confidence was also a common experience for Esther. Esther, who described herself as a star English speaker back at school in Indonesia, also admitted to being very insecure about her English skills and feeling intimidated. She stated,

> Um…, at that time, I … well, my first semester, to be completely honest, I was, um, even though I know that I can speak English well, I was still very insecure about my level of fluency (personal communication, March 8).

When elaborating further on why she felt insecure, Esther explained that what fueled her insecurity even more was the fact that her ‘prodigy label’ as an excellent English speaker back home did not mean much in an English-speaking country.

> Well, I, I speak really, really well English, um, especially in high school because, um, no one really spoke English, um, as well as me. So, then I was like very confident about it. Um, and that's sort of like part of my label. "Oh," like, "She speaks English very well." "She won a lot of English competitions." So, that was kind of like, uh, a prodigy label that I have. But when you transfer yourself like, from a non-English speaking country, um, to an English speaking country, and then whereas before, um, you're ... I don't know. Like your star label is like, "Oh, she speaks English really well." And then suddenly you
are here and then you are nothing. Like, that's kind of like, um, so what am I now? Just like every, everybody is speaking English. So, like, what am I now? Um, so, that also fuels the insecurity that I have (personal communication, March 8).

Another student, Tom, was also anxious that he might not understand conversational English. He felt confused when American students used slang or the English phrases that he may not have heard before. He stated,

Um, what I was little concerned about was that sometime if, um, if I’m interacting with American students and if they’re using slang, some phrases I haven't heard before then it is kind of like, um, confusing for me because I don't know that (personal communication, March 8).

Even though students described a range of underlying reasons that may have heightened their language insecurities, for majority of participants the fact that English was not their first language and the fact that they exhibited varying levels of English proficiency influenced their interactions and communication in and outside of academic context.

**Intimidated by class participation.** The language insecurities that most students experienced influenced their academic experience, in particular, their perceived ability to participate actively in the learning. Several students described how their English skills limited their ability to participate actively in class despite the fact that they really wanted to fit in and do well academically. For the fear of being judged if they made mistakes in English, a number of participants shared how they chose not to speak up in class, which some referred to as being ‘quiet’ or ‘shy.’ Pat, for example, described how he experienced anxiety when he needed to talk to anyone to avoid being laughed at, if he did make mistakes. He stated,
I was scared to talk to anybody ’cause I don't know what I might say wrong and I don't know who's gonna judge or something so then I was like not really confident. Uh, like that's what I was thinking. Um, because, I have seen things like, you know, you don't speak English well and people start laughing and stuff like that. So I was like, "No, I don't wanna do that (private communication, March 3).

Similarly, Betty noticed that international students were, what she perceived as, ‘shy’ in classes, and they refrained from asking questions. Betty, herself, felt anxious and hesitant to participate. She was worried that her classmates might not see her as a competent class member if she struggled with English when asking questions. She stated,

The only thing is the language, it was different and I think…what I noticed the most is that students were shy to ask. Because they didn't know how to ask or they will feel like, oh maybe if I ask this, I will look like I don't know anything or so (personal communication, February 25).

Betty further pointed out how she feared that American students would not understand her. For that reason, she hesitated to participate in class conversations out of fear of saying something wrong. Additionally, she described how it took her a while to feel more comfortable after she had observed that classmates did not seem to care how they, themselves, spoke English. When describing her classroom experience, he explained,

Because English is not my first language so sometimes I feel that people misunderstand me and I don't want that. I mean I didn't participate a lot but I did. Like few questions yes, I participated, because I didn't know if I was speaking like the right way. Like without making mistakes out and all people I was afraid like all people hear my English like oh, she's making a mistake. But after I heard people talking and participating in the
class, making mistakes but they didn't, they didn't care. They didn't mind. I was like okay, why I, I shouldn't do it too. I'm here to learn, I'm here to make mistakes and learn from them, my mistakes and I'm still, my English isn't good. But it's fine (personal communication, February 25).

Eliza also experienced anxiety about speaking English. She worried that she may get misunderstood, and that she wouldn’t be able to express what she wanted to say due to language limitations. This is how she described her experience,

And from beginning I was very kind of anxious and talk to people because I might…Because I just worry about the things I said people wouldn’t have understood.

And it just sometimes you know something but then cause your vocabulary and stuff, it's not like I would say as broad as like now, I'm still learning. And then it just kind of like, you don't know how to explain something to people because of your vocabulary (personal communication, February 27).

Overwhelmed with additional burdens to learn. In addition to affecting class participation and speaking, English skills further affected students’ learning experience on many different levels. Several students felt overwhelmed and stressed with the amount of additional work they had to engage in to complete assignments, prepare for classes, and keep up with the demands of the academic work. Students admitted to using translation and/or interpretation from English to their native languages as a sense-making tool to understand what was taught. Several students reported having to translate and interpret the class materials to themselves to break down what they learned, which was a time-consuming process. Greg, a history major, described how he felt overwhelmed with the amount of content-heavy readings, and how he had to translate back and forth in his head to make sense of what he read.
It's the speed of reading, you gotta finish about 100 pages every week, this is of course a requirement, we cannot reach that in a week. The professor would require us to do maybe 60 pages a week or something and, of course, he knows the content and then dialogues, and the writing style was totally different to Chinese and American styles so, I needed to translate to Chinese, and then turn it in my mind (personal communication, March 5).

Despite being a fluent English speaker from Indonesia, Angie also engaged in translating back and forth in her head, an additional burden on her learning, which she described as “more effort.” She compared the translating during the transition period to ‘daydreaming’ when she came to realize that she was thinking in Indonesian. She said,

I remember the first couple months I had to somehow, um, like translate in my head. From English back to Indonesian and then back to English in my head. So I needed ... It didn't slow me down, but I did have more effort. There was- there was a transition period. Just from little things like when you're daydreaming or just being quiet and then you're thinking about something in your head, you realized you were thinking in Indonesian. And then if you have to speak it up, you have to turn it into English. U, but as the time goes by, sometimes even your ... my head language became English (personal communication, March 7).

When talking about her experience, Betty also described how she initially struggled with writing assignments as she was thinking in Spanish and translating it to English.

Like it took me like hours and hours just to write a paragraph because I didn't know how to write. I was thinking in Spanish and I wanted to translate it in English but it was wrong. And now when I'm writing English- uh, essays I think in English. Uh, and it's
more fluent. Uh, makes sense and I think I- improved a lot (personal communication, February 25).

Anna, who has friends from China, pointed out how her friends coped with English by using the Internet and the technology for language learners. She observed that “They-they [Anna’s friends] somehow managed to understand you know, either using Google Translate. They have apps for that” (personal communication, February 22).

Even though majority of students felt motivated and pressured to fully participate in classes, they felt disadvantaged by the additional ‘task’ or ‘effort’ surrounding their use of English to make sense of the material being taught. Greg, for example, noticed, that “Every time the professor raised a question, they [native speaker students] would raise their hand rapidly but I need to take a think” (personal communication, March 5).

To overcome the language disadvantage, several students reported making deliberate and consistent choices to develop their language skills in their day-to-day lives as they were very motivated to do well. When prompted to comment on how he felt about his language skills during the first year of college, Pat described trying to use English outside of classroom by staying away from the people who spoke his native tongue. Pat felt both pressured and motivated to get more comfortable with English to benefit his learning. His way of reaching his goal was to surround himself with the people who did not speak his language. He stated,

Um, then we try to interact with English. Uh, what I tried is not to hang out too much with the person who has the same first language as me. Not that I avoided them at all, but hangout with somebody who's going to speak English with me so that I built my English and they can improve on theirs too (March 13).
Improving English through peer interactions with English speakers was a common strategy that several students applied. Eliza also shared how she practiced English with her friends.

And then sometimes you talk to people, because I made friends, they're international students but because they're from Indonesia so they speak English. Some of them speak English as a first language. So they taught me a lot. I learned English a lot from them (personal communication, February 27).

Similarly, Angie reported ‘talking more with people’ who were not from her country rather than seeking English practice through university resources when trying to improve her English skills.

Not, um, officially, but I did try it unofficially by talking more with people. Um, not Indonesian students. Um, and make sure that I talked to them on daily basis and making sure that I'm not being quiet and being open to a new conversation. And that helps me more than just learning English itself (personal communication, March 7).

**Super-ordinate theme 3: Liberated by the classroom climate.** When asked to reflect on their first year experience, all participants spent a significant amount of time discussing how they recognized, experienced and made sense of the differences within the academic and socio-cultural contexts. Participants further offered insights on how they coped with the challenges that they faced and what strategies they applied to overcome those challenges. The key themes that emerged out of data analysis are grouped into the following sub-ordinate themes: *Liberated by freedom of expression, Confused, but encouraged by the academic differences and Embracing teaching aids.*

**Liberated by freedom of expression.** Many participants pointed out that they were not used to sharing their opinions freely at school back home, and that is something they needed to get
comfortable with. Tony, for example, emphasized that it was hard for him to get used to the conversational learning and sharing own opinions with his classmates and professors. He stated,

And also being able to go to the class and voice your opinion and ask questions, it was- it was kind of new to me 'cause my classes [before] were more sit down, take notes, pay attention. It wasn't really more, you know, conversational, a lot was the teacher will stand up and lecture. So for me, that was a bit of a difference. It was hard to get used to it at first, but after a few weeks, like, it was relaxing to know that I could ask questions, you know, voice my own opinion because nothing was ever wrong (personal communication, March 15).

Although Tony felt anxious about sharing his opinions in a public forum, after a few weeks into the semester, he felt liberated that he could freely share his perspectives without much worrying that he might be wrong.

Eliza also noticed that not only was it the students to share opinions freely, but it was also American teachers who could also express their opinions freely in front of students. Having come from China, she described the fact that she could share her opinions as ‘fun’ and “amazing’, while emphasizing that she was not used to “this kind of system.” She also noticed an abundance of resources available to students and teachers, which is not the case in her home country. She stated,

A professor in the USA, will… they will prefer [to] give you a frame and you build your own buildings. It's pretty fun, and amazing cause like in here, teachers talk to you more freely. Then, you like, as I'm a Chinese (laughs), so, we have like kind of internet ban issues. So like some of the resources I cannot find when I'm back in China and using those kind of websites. Here I can get much more resources. And then, usually in here,
the professor won't give you too much. They will give you a frame and you need to build a house. Then back in China, it's like you actually learn stuff but then it's more, cause first when I came here, I was not really used to this kind of system (personal communication, February 27).

Eliza felt empowered and liberated as a result of having experienced freedom of expression and access to unrestricted resources. That sentiment was shared by a number of students including Greg who also welcomed the idea of free expression in the classroom. Greg felt surprised that it was such a ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary’ practice to share opinions in an American classroom. Freedom of expression is something that he had been trying to exercise at his school in China, but due free speech restrictions, he said he was always labeled as a rebel who would get into trouble when his teachers believed he had crossed the line. He commented,

…in China, I'm kinda like a liberalist, you know in a classroom, in the Chinese courses I really practiced the free expression and independent thinking to the whole class. Of course, I've been blamed as the liberalist and the rebel, but here it’s so normal, it’s just ordinary, daily course, everybody just does that. Everybody shows his opinion, nobody can cut you down - okay, you cannot say it anymore and the professor works very respectfully to notice you, what's your point and what's your conclusion... (personal communication, March 5).

As a history major, Greg, felt happy and liberated that the American education system gave him an opportunity to engage in free debating on many hot button topics with his classmates. An opportunity that he could not have had back home. Independent thinking that Greg mentioned was something that he was longing to experience in a classroom setting.
Just like Greg did, Angie also observed that students are welcome to challenge their professors in a polite way to either agree or disagree with their opinions much more freely than back home. It was her experience that the free exchange in the classroom is encouraged by fewer boundaries between professors and students. Angie said, “Um, students here are more open to argue to the professors, um, and it won't offend the professors. Well, of course if it's addressed in a polite way (personal communication, March 7).

For Angie, debating with professors in the classroom meant stepping a bit further out into what is unconventional and out of the bounds of her cultural norms; the experience that most Asian students experience to varying degrees. Disagreeing with or challenging professors is a form of disrespect that may not necessarily warrant a penalty, but it is frowned upon in some Asian cultures. Angie felt liberated as a result of being exposed to free classroom debating.

When asked to comment on what this meant to her, Angie responded,

I personally felt more liberated, although not that surprised as I was fortunate to be in a high school that adopts “western” approach (but it isn’t an international school with IB curriculum, or others), so they are more creative and “woke” in terms of creating a critical space for students (personal communication, July 3).

Angie further shared that other Asian students felt more reserved in her classes.

I did, however, noticed [sic] other Asian students to be more reserved but at that time, I did not rule personality as a factor. Maybe it is just how they are in the classroom... But I believe culture certainly has an influence, from personal experience and observation. For me, engaging in even hot button discussions during classes like criminology, gender studies, religions, felt natural and it doesn’t surprise me, at THAT moment (personal communication, July 3).
Angie was not surprised with the free opinion sharing in the classroom, and neither were the majority students. Though students may not have experienced free speech in the academic context first hand back home, they anticipated that this would be their experience in the U.S. When asked about it, Jonny said, “So like, it was like in the movies how students work in the class, I- I like oh so, I expected that the professors are gonna let students talk (personal communication, February 26).

Confused but encouraged to overcome academic differences. Navigating academic differences stemming out from not having sufficient knowledge of the university system in the United States was the prevailing theme across all eleven interviews. Several participants shared their observations on the academic differences they experienced at the university, and described what it meant for their experience. Betty, for instance, was motivated to fit in and do everything right, but she felt confused by how the American university works. She had no prior knowledge of what grading system American universities use to evaluate students’ performance. When prompted to reflect on her academic experience, she responded,

Well, the difference that I noticed from here and back home - I think it is pretty similar. There is just like, uh, the way that the university works. Like sophomore, junior and senior, we don't have that in Mexico. At first, it was confusing for me how the GPA works. And also, for the grades A, B and C, we don't have that. We have 100, 90 and 80. And, it took me like one semester to start like - real - like to start understanding the way that the system works here. The educational system works differently, but I actually like it more (personal communication, February, 25).

Betty indicated that it took her about one semester to start getting a sense of how the university system works. She felt confused as a result of not having been exposed to the American
university system. After a while, however, she came to realization that she appreciated the American system more than the system that she was used to back in Mexico. Similarly, Tom was not familiar with the education system in the United States, either. He was glad and relieved that the program registered him for the courses he needed to take in the first semester. If it had not been for the program advisors who registered him for classes, he would not have known what to do. Having come from a country where students do not follow individualized study paths, but move together as a cohort from one grade to another, Tom felt comforted to know that he had less to worry about in the first semester. He stated,

…before I arrive, the program already selected courses for me, which means that it saved me a lot of work because for the freshman, I couldn't be familiar with the school system, this kind of thing, so um, I don't, like, I always attend[ed] national school (personal communication, March 15).

Another difference that Esther experienced in her classes in the first semester was the teaching style. Within the American system, as she discovered, courses were dialogue-based rather than lecture-based, and they required active participation from students unlike back in Indonesia. For Esther, that meant that she would have to get used to the discussion-based learning, and stay away from the lecture-based learning that she was used to. Ester stated,

However, I do see that there's a different academic learning environment being in the way that the classes are more dialogue-based. Um, it's more discussion-based, whereas in Asia, or where I come from, it's more instruction-based. So, uh, you learn or you just receive whatever your instructor tells you to do, whereas here, the academic environment asks you to also participate in the learning activity (personal communication, March 8).
Pressured to fit in and do well, Esther experienced anxiety about her oral performance in classes as a result of the direct exposure to more participatory teaching. What made it even more stressful on her was that she was a high performing student back home, and was not used to academic struggles. She said,

“at first I really struggled to articulate my argument in a really clear way where everybody can receive it the way that I want to. And then the message that I wanted to be conveyed is conveyed the way I want it to. So, that's something that, um, I struggled with (personal communication, March, 8).

At the same time, Esther felt encouraged. She perceived the struggles she was going through as a challenge that she needed to face. “It was a really tough challenge, especially being an international student, not speaking English as their first language” to adjust to the teaching techniques that she learned to appreciate later.

Participatory learning was also something that Eliza talked about when comparing the university learning with the learning methods back in China. She referred to more engaging teaching, which she compared to the Chinese system in which students are being ‘spoon-fed’ by the teachers.

[In the U.S.] You learn a lot by searching those things by yourself. Sometimes you learn or you get to know by yourself or you experience things. It is more important and more useful than what other people tell you to do. Back home is more like a spoon-feed [learning] - kind of- like they tell you what to do. I mean, they learn stuff but it is easy to forget. (personal communication, February, 27).
Eliza felt encouraged and empowered to engage in exploratory and participatory learning, which was not a practice back in her home country. She felt even more motivated to participate, as she knew that this type of learning was not something that she could fully experience back home.

Several students described not being used to and having to adjust to engaging teaching methods, but they felt encouraged (or forced) to overcome the fear of participation in English in a public classroom setting. It was definitely the case for Tom. He explained what the expectation of class participation meant for him, and other students, who had to learn to engage if they wanted to get a good grade. Participation was necessary to succeed in American classes and Tom left he had no choice, but learn to participate. He said,

I do really pay attention because the participation is a count as part of the total grade, which means I have to engage even though no matter what I want to, you know, you know what I mean (personal communication, March 8).

Tom experienced initial discomfort with class participation. He stated that it was not really a struggle for him to engage, but it was something he needed to pay more attention to. He did realize that active participation was something that he needs to do more of. He said, “I have to…like… be more engaged in class” (personal communication, March 8).

Similarly, Pat noted that participation was an important part of the learning. As he saw it, international students needed to overcome their shyness and push themselves to participate actively to get better grades. He stated, “Um, another thing was that you were graded on your participation. Yeah, so that was good as well. So if somebody starts shy, they still have to pursue it, participate so that they get that grade” (personal communication, March 13). Even though it was difficult for Pat to overcome his shyness to participate in classes actively, Pat did recognize
that this type of activity enhanced his learning by, as he put it, ‘building confidence’ and enhancing his presentation skills.

Anna, on the other hand, shared a different observation on her experience in the first semester math class. She described how confused she was when she was taught to solve a problem in a way that she was not familiar with. When describing her experience, she stated,

The way they teach you…so, this only bothered me in math. Certain, um, formulas and, you know, solving ... for example, solving a simultaneous equation. Um, there were two ways to solve it. But, we were only taught one. And then, when I got here, my math professor was stunned by the fact that I only knew one way to solve it. Um ... So, back home we learn differently. You know…different formulas, for example, in math. We have, you know, um, certain rules in math and certain formulas in math, like, for example. And when you come here, they—they teach you something completely different. And, then you're kind of confused. You have no idea what's going on. You know, you've been taught a different way. So, that's pretty much it. You know, like, the only thing that I've had to adapt was learning …different styles (personal communication, February 22).

Anna described feeling bothered and confused by saying that she had no idea what was going on. It took her a while to adjust to, as she put it, different teaching styles, but admitted to regretting not taking more math classes in the first year as she felt helped and supported by the faculty in small classes.

Appreciative of teaching aids. When talking about their classroom experience, some students further described a number of unique situations in which they experienced different teaching materials and technology. Although the same specific situations may not have been shared unanimously by the majority of participants in this study, those experiences do paint a much
broader picture of what type of experiences international students encounter as a result of direct exposure to different teaching. A number of students reiterated that chalk, blackboard and lectures were the most commonly teaching tools they had experienced before. Yet, at the university in the United States, they got to experience a variety of different teaching aids, which brought about different experiences.

Tom, for instance, described having to get used to the classroom technology and “teaching materials” when he talked about how he got a low grade in his first semester as result of not having a habit of submitting assignments online. He said,

Um, first probably is the teaching materials that I experienced. Um, the first time when I came here is like, because there's some assignment you need to submit online, so ah, at that time I didn't know how to use it…What I remember the first time, the first semester I have a course named [course name]. So that course is basically like information systems courses, so like, it requires using Excel, this kind of thing. Um, but not just simply just practice by the computer, but also I need to submit homework online. At that time, forgot to submit it, so I got a very bad grade in that course….I didn't experience that kind of thing before. Because what we usually do, we do have like a projector or a computer, but we, I never submitted homework online (personal communication, March 5).

Although Tom had to learn the hard way to submit assignments online rather than on paper, he appreciated it. Once he learned how to use the system, he got into the habit of submitting homework online. He found it very useful and convenient.

Jonny, on the other hand, welcomed learning the new technology that the university required students to use from the start. He felt pleased with the fact that professors who taught him classes in the pathway were using the same technology as his professors in his later studies. Jonny
stated, “So, for example the - like the professors [in the pathway], like will use the Blackboard. The same goes with the [university] professors (personal communication, February 26). He further added that because of his professors’ use of the same technology early on, “I won't feel awkward” when he referred to studies beyond the pathway year (personal communication, February 26).

Pat had a slightly different learning experience with teaching aids. He described how he learned to appreciate the use of visually - aided presentations in the classroom. He found the use of visual aids very useful, yet different from the use of chalk and board, which, according to him, are the primary teaching aids used by teachers in his country.

Uh ...Um, so, um, like using visual images and stuff like that, presentations, that was really helpful. Uh, whereas back to India, which is chalk and blackboard so most of the stuff was writing. And what I think for me is, if I see visuals, it's more beneficial for me to learn in that way. And using, um, examples, could also help learn that way (personal communication, March 13).

Pat felt motivated as the different teaching aids, which he described as ‘beneficial’ and ‘helpful’, enhanced his learning, and made it easier for him to retain what he learned.

PowerPoint presentations and presenting emerged across several conversations when students described their academic experiences. Betty, for instance, shared that it took her a while to get used to presenting in front of the classroom. This is how she described her initial experience with presenting. She stated,

It's not like the first year that I was making presentation in front of the class and I was just like super nervous. I couldn't talk once, I had to say to the professor sorry, I can't do it. And I just went and sat. I, I didn't present (personal communication, February 25).
Betty felt pressured to present in front of the class. She experienced feelings of nervousness and anxiety, as she had no prior experience with public speaking. What is more, she shared that she was also worried about speaking in English in front of her peers. Although her initial experiences with presenting were stressful for her, as she got more comfortable, she enjoyed presentations as she managed to overcome her initial fears. She stated,

Well, when I was presenting in front of the class, I got supper nervous, I wouldn’t be able to remember all I wanted to say and my word[s] were all mix[ed] up. I learned to control my nervousness and practicing over and over again. I feel more comfortable speaking in front of the class [now] (personal communication, July 4).

Unlike Betty, Tony felt happy that he learned how to present in the first year of the pathway. He observed professors use different technology and/or teaching materials to learn. He embraced the presentations as a form of teaching, which enhanced his learning, and made it more interesting. When talking about his experience, Tony described how he was…

…getting used to how professors would lecture, how they would use more PowerPoint presentations, and then instead of blackboards, um, using the blackboard, whiteboard. So it just got me ready for ... to what expects outside of the pathway program (personal communication, March 15).

Greg, on the other hand, welcomed and embraced presentations right away. He saw presenting as an opportunity for him to improve his English, which, as he said, he really needed to participate in debates in his classes. He stated,

I mentioned about the presentations, this was a sociology class, which is a part of the pathway program. So, we got probably three presentations in those courses and every
time the professors were grading very strictly and sometimes they allowed us to have a debate. So you see, there were a lot of opportunities for us to improve my...our English (personal communication, March 5).

**Super-ordinate theme 4: Supported by the university resources.** Another super-ordinate theme that has emerged from data was how appreciative and supported students felt in their experience as they learned and made sense of the academic differences they experienced. Several students described the support that was available to them, as they explored and learned the ins-and-outs of the unfamiliar academic and non-academic worlds. The three sub-ordinate themes that emerged were: *Contented with Introduction to Academic Life, Guided by the Pathway,* and *Helped by Tutors.*

*Contented with introduction to university life.* When describing academic experience, almost all participants talked about “a support class” offered in the first semester of the freshman year. The course was a non-credit freshman seminar designed specifically by the pathway program for international pathway students. Almost all students experienced initial hesitations about having to take a non-credit course, yet from the perspective of time, they all credited it for being a great resource. They appreciated that the course provided them with the knowledge on the university culture, life in the city, and taught them the skills they found useful in their post-pathway experience. Students felt contented, appreciative, and supported as a result of being in the course despite the fact that some expressed their dissatisfaction with a four-hour and once-per week meeting format.

Fiona, for instance, felt supported and prepared by being in the course. In that course, Fiona felt that she learned how to fit in, how to interact with professors, and how to progress to the sophomore year. She stated,
That non-credit class was really helpful, because [the course name] taught us how to fit in, how, uh, to be with professors, how, if you moved to uni- ... the ... instead of going from the pathway program to a normal university life, how we should handle it (personal communication, March 1).

Tony appreciated learning about the university code of conduct and citation methods early on, which he found helpful in his later studies. Tony shared,

When they told us we had to take it [college prep course], it was, I thought for starters it's gonna be a waste of time because it's a noncredit class. And, um, like, the first few days are very slow and they were talking about certain things, I was just like, “Okay, I don't need to know this or I don't ... it has nothing to do with me or my educational career.” But after like the whole class, now I'm thinking ... looking back at it, it was very ... it was actually something I needed. Like again, like I said, without that class, I don't think I would have just been able to reference a paper properly. I wouldn't have, uh, known most of like some of the code and conduct so the university go through, I probably ... 'cause we went through that as well, so I wouldn't have known in depth about them and, um, to soon, um, I can't exactly remember everything we covered, but it was definitely worth it (personal communication, March 13).

Pat further described how he was learning about academic honesty in the seminar. Pat felt guided, and explained how he found his professors helpful as he was learning proper citation.

[The course], that was just like a guide. We went through a lot of practice and how if you wanna use some of the data from the internet and how you can use that correctly or how to rephrase those so that you don't get in plagiarism. Um, so we went through a lot of training. There were a few times like once or twice that I unknowingly, I did that. And
the professors were really helpful that, "Okay, this is not what you're supposed to do"
(personal communication, March 13).

Ester also appreciated the support she got in the seminar. In addition to the knowledge on
academic honesty, Esther shared how she improved her presentation skills and public speaking
skills through that course. She further recalled a trip to a museum, which she described as a fun
experience. Esther commented,

In that class, our professors will teach us how to cite properly, um, like citation methods
because it is really important here not to plagiarize. Again, something that I did not know
before coming from my country. The professors also give us, um, I believe presentation
assignment, um, just to help us enhance our public speaking skills and, um, our
presentation skills as well. Um, we also have a study tour I believe, and then, uh, my
class particularly went to uh, the [name] museum. That was really fun um, because, um, it
encourages students obviously to get to know the area around [the city] and not just stay
in class or like stay at home (personal communication, March 8).

Betty also acknowledged that in addition to improving her skills, the course encouraged her to
interact with people through activities. She found the social aspect of the class extremely helpful
as this gave her an opportunity to make friends with fellow students.

[The college prep course] is useful because they make you do presentations for the
classes, interact more with people. It's more about like, um, be open like with people, talk
with people, interact, activities and that it was so helpful because I make a lot of friends
and all of us we were supporting each other like okay maybe you did this mistake they
tell you, and I was like okay, thank you. Like we were there just to help each other and I
think that it's useful (personal communication, February 25).
For a number of students, being a part of the seminar was a useful experience that gave them a more in-depth exposure to the academic life and the U.S. culture, facilitated peer relationship building and taught them about the resources available on campus. Students further felt that the course had provided them with knowledge that they could fall back on in their later studies.

**Guided by the pathway program.** Another sub-ordinate theme that emerged was participants’ experience with the pathway program, which acted as a primary resource and the first point of contact for students in their first year. When reflecting on their academic experience, a number of participants described feeling supported academically and socially by the program.

Angie, for instance, described feeling supported and guided by the pathway through the first year of college. She also felt encouraged to explore opportunities and do well. As a result of such support, she began believing in herself and felt empowered to seek out further opportunities to pursue. She stated,

> Because how the [pathway] program supports me to make sure that I became the best me, actually influenced me to seek out opportunities, to seek out internships, to seek higher degrees, and, um, even believing in myself. Because the [pathway] program and the people in it actually walked with you through every single step and show their support and, um, appreciation. So you feel like, “Oh, I can do this, I can do that.” So I think that's more important than the skills that I learned (personal communication, March 7).

Similarly, Pat, who felt he would be “figuring things out” by himself, felt supported and guided, which, in his eyes, allowed him to avoid many mistakes he would have made along the way. Having recently graduated from the university, this is how he recalled his pathway experience,
Overall experience, I felt like it was, uh, it was pretty helpful for me to come in with the pathway program and to slowly transition into the university. Because if I would have just jumped directly into the university, not knowing how everything's worked out. Uh, it would have been a lot difficult for me to learn things. I would have, uh, like, made a lot more, um, errors. And then like ... Now, it's a good thing, make an error and learn, but it's better to just learn before you can make those errors. You know what is coming to you rather than you just walk into something that you don't have any idea about. So I felt like, uh, with now, uh, the pathway program, I was kind of guided, and I knew what I was getting into (personal communication, March 13).

For many students, the pathway program brought a level of comfort and security. The pathway offered a way to prevent anticipated and unanticipated challenges that students feared. Tony, who recognized he was never a strong student, found security and comfort in the pathway hoping that the program would help him better integrate into the community. When looking back, he stated,

So that pathway program really helps international students get into the system or the environment that they were now living in. And 'cause I was never a strong student, so I also knew that the pathway program would also help me in like educational sense where it will be towards slower, and it will help me integrate into like, into the actual university (personal communication, March 15).

Tony felt supported and guided from even before he arrived. He also pointed out that the support and guidance he found in the pathway may not have been the exact same experience his friends from outside of pathway had. He commented,
“So just being like just that support system was very important for me. And it just truly helped me in every step of like coming in. Because I've had some of my friends who didn't go through the [pathway] program, they, I would ask them like, oh, how did you get housing or whatever?’ They'll be like, “Oh, they just sent us an email of like, we had to go to the website, look at whatever’” So I think, yeah, that difference between the pathway program and just the general university was, um, the support system was, I think, the biggest difference (personal communication, March 15).

By the same token, Anna, not knowing much about studying in the U.S., felt comforted as a result of being in the pathway program. This is how she described her experience,

In sense of, because I as an international student, I have never studied in the US. So, I don't really know the system, how it works here. And, being in the pathway program kind of eased the, you know, the transition basically. They would help out students from, you know, international students who kind of come from a far country, to come here and study. So, they help you with, you know, more attention. They give you more attention. They offer you more help in classes (personal communication, February 22).

**Helped by tutors.** Another resource and a form of support that students frequently utilized in their first year was tutoring services. Students could access both the university tutoring services and the specific tutoring services offered through the pathway program. Several participants described how they sought out and/or were referred to use the tutoring services offered to pathway students. Betty described how she was provided with tutors at any time she needed help. Betty stated,

So and every time I had problem with, uh, any subject, they [the pathway] provided me with tutors. And also I came here with talk with [tutor’s name] with any questions with
grammar and-uh, I think they helped me a lot. They [tutors] give me a lot of support. And if one tutor couldn't help me, they would set me up with another one. And they [tutors] were soft let's say with hours and materials. So improve like, uh, my educational skills sort of how to … If I’m having trouble like oh focus- focusing on the way I was studying, they give me a, maybe you should try study this way. They give me a lot of advice (personal communication, February 25).

Betty felt supported, advised and helped by the tutors, and she had pleasant recollections of her interactions with tutoring services. Tutors were flexible and shared materials. Betty credited tutors for helping her with the class content and the study skills.

Eliza also indicated that she utilized subject tutors to get help with math classwork. Eliza felt supported knowing there was a resource she could use when needed. According to Eliza, pathway advisors taught students how to look for help and take advantage of the resources available to them. She stated,

Yeah, pretty much, because they [pathway advisors] taught us how to find actual help out of the class- like tutors and pathway program has their own tutors, math tutors and stuff like that (personal communication, February 27).

It was a common practice for the pathway program to refer first year students to both general study tutoring, and subject-specific tutoring support, which many students utilized. While some students, like Betty or Eliza, were “provided” with the tutors, others were proactive about seeking help from tutors to ensure that they were on track with their assignments. Esther, for instance, shared how she reached out to tutors to review a draft essay to ensure that it was fine before submitting it to the professor. She stated,
I remember, specifically for this history class, we were assigned a pathway tutor. And because I was so panicked over the fact that, um, my first paper would not be what, uh, to the degree of the expectations of my professor, I sent him [the tutor] my paper first and then he told me that it was all good and I believe that he was also a pathway student by that time. He, he has already graduated from the pathway program. He told me that I'm all set. Uh, so then that gave me the confidence to just submit it and then I did really well in that paper (personal communication, March 8).

**Super-ordinate theme 5: Embracing sociocultural differences.** When prompted to reflect on their experience outside classroom, several students shared their observations, and described the situations that speak directly to the social and cultural differences as well the culture learning. The sub-ordinate themes that emerged revolved around experiencing diversity, recognizing different values, and experiencing differences in communication and interpersonal relations with faculty.

**Curious but anxious about diversity.** Most, if not all participants in the study, were the students who originated in relatively homogenous societies. Participants also had very limited or no experience with the American culture before coming to the U.S. Many did not have prior experiences with other nationalities, either. Several students made references to being in a diverse environment when it comes to their learning and interactions with both peer students and professors. Several students expressed feeling happy and curious about learning in a very diverse and multicultural environment. They appreciated the learning opportunities that presented themselves to them as a result of being in a diverse environment. For a small portion, however, the feelings of curiosity and happiness were mixed in with the feelings of anxiety about interactions with people from different cultures.
Eliza, who is originally from China, appreciated a diverse environment that enabled her to interact with people from different cultures. She described herself as someone who enjoys learning languages. She found it interesting to interact with people from different cultures. At the same time, she felt anxious about such interactions as she worried that people may not understand what she meant. She stated,

In the United States so it's a very diverse environment so if you can speak to people from different countries, it's quite interesting. And from beginning, I was very kind of anxious and talk to people because I might…Because I just worry about the things I said, people wouldn’t have understood (personal communication, February 27).

For Esther, the fear to interact with people outside of her culture was fueled by two reasons. First, she worried about her English skills. More importantly, her fear stemmed from the fact that she was not comfortable to talk to people who do not share her ethnic background. She explained that she felt intimidated to talk to Caucasian persons, including professors, because of how Caucasian persons were perceived in her culture. She shared,

Well, my first semester, to be completely honest, I was, um, even though I know that I can speak English well, I was still very insecure about my level of fluency- um, and truth be told, I was also very intimidated to talk to a Caucasian person. Um, and I think that derives from the fact that, um, in my own country, a Caucasian individual would always be put higher than, um, the local ones. So, then we always look up to them. Um, so, that scares me of a bit. A lot actually. Um, and that applies to the professors as well (personal communication, March 8).

Even though Esther was just about to complete her degree at the time of interview, she shared that that fear, to a lesser extent, stayed with her throughout her college study.
Tom also acknowledged noticing cultural differences, and described how he learned to appreciate diversity through the interactions with his Pakistani roommate. Not knowing many American students in the first year, his multicultural experiences revolved around interactions with other international students. He felt happy. He described diversity as something that was important to him, as it gave him opportunities to learn from others and respect differences.

So ah, what actually, uh, in the first year, my roommate, from Pakistan, and I, we didn't know Americans. There were like cultural differences, but I think, um, we had a, a very good relationship at that time, and then like we had a very good interaction with each other. So I think that is very important for me because it allows me to know diversity in this environment, and it allows me to know that we have to learn how to respect each other (personal communication, March 8).

Greg also welcomed diversity as “a great opportunity” to learn from each other’s perspectives. He described his interactions with the Chinese, American and Indonesian students during debating in a philosophy class. He further described how he felt hesitant, but took a chance trying to develop closer relationships with diverse students outside of class. He felt happy about his interactions.

**Cognizant of different values.** Alongside with experiencing living and studying in a diverse environment, through observations and interactions, students became cognizant of the fact that their American peers often appreciated different virtues than the values that international students were taught to value in their home cultures.

When prompted to explain what he meant by ‘cultural barriers’, Tom was quick to notice that American values are different from the ones in China. He described American students being more individualistic. He stated,
Oh okay, um, in terms of cultural barriers firstly I mean, the problem is, like, a social problem. Like, in China, like, basically we just, like, live together and then, like, go to school together because it was like a boarding school, but in here it's like everybody can go back home and they have individual lives, and also, and they say it's more like individualistic. Like, basically people just, like, focus more on themselves, their own life. So yes, we do have friends, like, it's not being that close or just not as collectivist as when I was in China, so that is kind of a cultural barrier (personal communication, March 8).

Tom described Americans being more individualistic and focused on themselves, which affected his perception of the type of relations he developed with friends. He described having friends, but not being as close to them as back home, resulting in him missing such closeness and not being able to develop such close connections. What it also meant for Tom was that it was much easier for him to connect with fellow international students rather than develop meaningful relationships with American students.

Expanding on Tom’s observations, Angie further tied the power distance between the American culture and other cultures to the student-professor interactions that she experienced in her classes. She said,

Um, but I feel like there is way less boundaries between professors and students that students are welcome to challenge. Actually, the professor wants the students to challenge them. While back home power distance is definitely wider, um, between older and younger generations, let alone, there's another power dynamic, which is, um, um, students and teachers. So in terms of culture itself, younger people are not to, um, talk back or to argue certain things to the old ... to the elder ones. Um, so I feel like it's not a
problem here as even we go by first names with professors that are way older. So I think that changes the whole game (personal communication, March 7).

Such hidden cultural differences are something that international students have to observe and learn, often struggling to overcome the elements of the cultures they were born into. What this meant for Angie was taking time to navigate the new social norms while trying to maintain the expected level of academic work.

Not only did hidden cultural differences affect students’ interactions with professors, but they also affected their interactions with peer students. Pat experienced fear and anxiety as a result of unfamiliarity with the elements of the American culture. Pat described feeling scared to interact with his classmates just in case he said something that could be offensive to them.

Um, just like, you know, making, going and talking to your classmates. I would be like scared of doing that too, because, you know, I might say something that could offend them or if I say something incorrectly, uh, so I, I was able to get that fear out of me. Uh, but then, still again, I am still anxious about things (personal communication, March 13).

Pat, like many international students, was cognizant that cultural differences do exist which made him hesitant and anxious about the interactions with the people outside his own culture.

Confused and surprised by informal relations with faculty. Several students tied the cultural and social differences to the different communication patterns and interpersonal relationships that they experienced in the classroom, especially with their professors. Quite a few students acknowledged that the interactions with their professors were often less formal than back home. Fiona, for instance, felt surprised that students and professors could develop such close relationships. She stated, “It was just the professors got really close to us and I didn't know that
in universities the professor would get close, so that was surprising for me” (personal conversation, March 1). When asked to clarify what she meant by ‘close’, she responded,

So one of the professors, he wasn't exactly a professor, but he helped us with the university a lot. Like, the university process, how we're supposed to study, what grades we should get, how we should make notes, how we should do this or that. It was basically him helping us as friends, and not only as a professor and a student. And even my other professors for, like, economics or communications, they would say that, "Stay after class and we will help you out." So it wasn't that, um, "Just do it online," or, "Do whatever you want." It was them helping us as, um, friends, not even as a professor/student (personal communication, March 1).

Fiona experienced confusion as a result of her professor’s inherent interest in helping her succeed academically. As her American professor did not fit the framework of the very formal type of professor she experienced in Pakistan, but rather displayed the qualities that Fiona associated with an informal friendship, she was confused. She did not know how to develop that type of informal relationship.

The confusion caused by the perceived merging of the qualities associated with a formal professor with those of an informal friend was a common thread that appeared across several interviews. Esther also acknowledged the informality of the relationships with the professors. She stated,

Um, because um, in Indonesia or in Asia, professors or teachers are always higher than you, whereas here um, there's this sense of familiarity with professors or even um, people older than you. They can call each other by names, but I couldn't uh, really adjust to that because I think that they are of a much higher hierarchy than me. So, then I should really
respect them. That being said, I couldn't really establish a close connection with my professors as other American students would (personal communication, March 8).

Esther felt pressured to develop informal relationships with her professors, but she struggled, as it was not a common practice back in her country. She said, “Yes. I am still figuring it out” when she talked about how hard it was for her to call professors by first names. She added to describe her struggles,

Um, but one thing that I notice is whenever I'm addressing my professor, I will always say ‘Professor’ at the very end of my sentence as if reminding myself or, or reminding the professor that he is or she is the professor. Um, that there's a hierarchy between us. Um, and I always talk uh, about wholly academic related or like class related stuff with my professors. I know that other students ... um, I think even advisors encouraged students to talk to professors. Like basically, just build a connection maybe about topics related to class, but not really, um, within the boundary of the class just to establish that connection. But I couldn't really do that and I don't go to my professor until I really need to (personal communication, March 8).

Greg further noticed that the informality of interpersonal relations with professors expands on how professors expect students to behave in classes. Greg was surprised that, unlike in China, American professors are not that much concerned with the classroom discipline to the extent that a Chinese teacher would. He perceived this as professors not caring about class manners.

And also professors don't actually pretty care about our manners or something they will focus on what we participate, they don't focus on the discipline. So, we can sit very comfortably, we don't need to sit straight. I do get surprised about that. Because I
experienced the Chinese education system so the first thing the teacher requires [from] the student was the discipline (personal communication, March 5).

Some students also acknowledged that there are differences in how students are to interact with professors outside the classroom. Pat felt surprised and confused to learn that you have to schedule an appointment during office hours to speak with professors, which was unlike what he used to do back in India.

Um, so outside of classrooms I observed and that is something that I had to learn ... back in India, if you know the process in the, in the office, you just walk and can see professors. If they're free, you talk to them. Whereas here, you gotta figure out their office hours. If they're not, you can make another like mutual time that you can meet on. So, that was a little bit different that I had to learn that I can't just walk into the professor. Uh, but again, they were not like avoiding students or anything. And they will try, and we just had both, but with their busy schedule, you just gotta make an appointment (personal communication, March 13).

When asked to comment on how she learned to interact and communicate with professors, Angie explained that students could learn by watching how professors and advisors carry themselves around students. She stated,

Um, I think it starts by how the professors and advisers carry themselves around the students. Um, from the beginning, from the introductions that they explain, “Hey, you can call us by first names and feel free to challenge us.” So the fact that they explain since the beginning, how the- the general framework or guidelines, how to communicate with them, that really helps. Because it really shows them ... shows us that they acknowledged that there are cultural differences and they admit that, and they will
overcome it together with us. Because it's not just us, the newcomers who will adapt, but them communicating with us it's also their part to adapt to our culture (personal communication March 7).

Although Angie may not have gone through the feelings of surprise or confusion to the degree other students would, she admitted that she needed to observe, learn and adjust to as she continued her study, which was the case for a number of participants, who recognized the differences in interpersonal relationships while attempting to establish such close connections.

**Super - ordinate theme 6: Comforted by new relationships.**

*Comforted by pathway peers.* Another super-ordinate theme to have emerged is establishing relationships and finding comfort in newly established relationships. Nearly all participants spoke vividly about how important it was for their experience to have made friends, and to have established personal and professional relationships within the new environment.

From the very first moment they set foot on campus, students sought to make connections with their peers. When asked to reflect on out-of-classroom experience, all participants brought up international friends and friendships with pathway peers into the conversation. When talking about friends, students described experiencing feelings of happiness, excitement, and comfort.

All participants described making friends with peer international students in the pathway program. This is how Eliza described making friends,

> My closest friend is still, I met through the pathway program. We've become best friends since like first year. But they're not Chinese. They're from Indonesia. I feel like no matter from which country you are because like you're all international students. So you might just have something in common and then because you guys both study abroad- and then
we just have a lot in common that we can talk about (personal communication, February 27).

Eliza felt comforted by having Indonesian friends. She felt a close connection to them as they shared her experience as an international student. She described making friends with the people that do not share her background or country of origin as “fun”, and shared that she was excited about making friends outside of her “comfort zone.”

Just like Eliza, Betty also found comfort and happiness in her peers. When prompted to talk about her out-of-classroom experience, Betty commented how she felt happy when she was with the friends, and how comforted and relaxed she felt when surrounded by friends. She stated,

With all the friends that I met, people I met, I'm, I'm so happy. As I say, I have friends, it made me feel more comfortable, being more open, participate more in class, actively participate in class, asking questions, going through the study groups. Um, I was more effective because I could organize myself (personal communication, February 27).

Additionally, Betty felt friends motivated her to participate in classes and take advantage of the study groups.

Several students felt they needed someone they could trust and depend on. For many students, friends became the new support system that replaced the family closeness they had back home. Fiona summed up why friends were important to her by stating,

The friends I made, everything is, like, basically, it's family. Like, you can trust them, you can depend on them, everything. It's ... I feel it's just because of the pathway program. It just makes you feel closer, a group of people (personal communication, March 1).

Fiona felt comforted by the closeness she found in peer pathway students.
Students further described how they came to meet people and develop friendships. The three most common ways for pathway students to meet people and make friends in the first year were: meeting at the new student orientation, being in small classes, and through extracurricular activities. Pat described how he made friends in the following words, “Uh, some of them I made during orientation, and we still hang out. Some of them, I met in my classes. And some of them, I met, uh, with the activities around campus” (personal communication, March 13). Pat’s experience reflected the experiences of almost all pathway students.

**Orientation friends - friends forever.** Almost all students described how the friends they made at the new student orientation became their closest friends beyond their first year at the university. Anna, for example, described how she met her closest friend,

So, I was in a group, um, of graduates of 2021 and I met a few people there on Facebook. And I met this one girl who, you know, we kind of clicked, we got along. And then, in orientation we both saw our names on the sticker. And we immediately started talking. From there outside, you know, when we met in school, we met in orientation. Then from the third day of orientation, we got along really well (personal communication, February 22).

Betty also shared that her best friends are the people that she met at the new student orientation when she first came to school as a newly arrived student.

Well, I was nervous but because I'm so open and friendly, I knew it wouldn't be a problem for me. I actually…. the first day of orientation like my, my two best friends, I met them. Yeah and now they, we're like we're close. We’re still being best friends since orientation (personal communication, February 25).
Jonny also credited the new student orientation for providing him with an opportunity to make long lasting friendships.

So, it was really helpful like in making friends, like knowing your names, like what they are interested, what's the major. I've maintained those connections. (personal communication, February 26).

While most students recognized the orientation for being a great platform for them to interact with other international students and make long-lasting friendships, a number of students also emphasized the usefulness of the orientation programming. Majority of participants found the orientation informative and useful. Some of the matters that students recalled learning about at the orientation included: living in the city (Anna), information on housing (Eliza), immunizations, advising and enrollment requirements (Angie), the academic environment (Eliza, Pat, Tom, Fiona), and clubs and organizations (Fiona).

Made friends in small classes. Another typical way that pathway students made friends was through small classes. Frist year pathway classes were much smaller than the university classes starting in the sophomore year, and that close-knit experience enabled students to develop connections, which often turned into friendships. Several students emphasized that they could make friends in small classes. Betty described that being in small classes enabled her to be close with other students. The intimate experience of a small class made Betty feel comforted, reassured, and safe. Most importantly, all students were going through the same experience, which brought them even closer.

I don't know, because we were so close in the classes because the professor[s] make us interact a lot and we and as I, I said before, we were going through the same experience so we were so close. We were just talking, we [were] so honest and - and taking classes
together and then till now I have like, uh, some classmates from the pathway program—now in my classes (personal communication, February 27).

Fiona also pointed out that the small classes of 15 to 20 students enabled her to make close friendships with other pathway students. She stated,

Honestly, I met my friends because of [the pathway], because, uh, when we would be in a small classroom, in a small classroom, people tend to talk more, and like, 15 to 20 students (personal communication, March 1).

Similarly, Eliza noted that it was easy for her to make friends in small classes.

Sometimes I make friends – [it] is kind of like go with the feeling and something, and also because um, nobody tells you they have, first that they have small classes. If it's small class, it’s easy for you to make friends (personal communication, February 27).

Friends via extracurricular activities. Another common way for students to start relationships with peers was through participation in events offered through the pathway program and via student groups on campus. Several students described participating in events and in the pathway leadership program. Fiona mentioned making friends at events. She stated,

And another way I made friends, uh, was because when [the pathway program] would give their events, the first week events and everything, all of us would go together and come together so that's another way I made friends (personal communication, March 1).

Betty, who is a member of the leadership program, described how the program provided her with a great platform to interact with people, make friends, and learn about other cultures.

So I interacted more with people, I learned more from them, new things from cultures, um, difference likes or I learn a lot. I like to interact and be there for students who needed my help. And, I also made more friends. And I will, I will recommend like to join. That
will be helpful for like for other students to make friends, to get more help, to interact, to have better way to make friends or, uh, going through university. If you're so stressed and from the university or exams, and you go to these, uh, organizations [and] make new friends. It will be okay (personal communication, February 25).

Tom also made friends through event participation. He further added that events a great opportunity to rest from school, which he described as ‘stressful.’ He pointed out,

I think international students also need to participate in events because this is great opportunity to make friends in this kind of event, and also, the school life is very stressful, so like, it's a great opportunity to, like, relax. Um, the purpose of the event is also to provide a good opportunity for students to be more entertained, like, have entertainment during school (personal communication, March 8).

When talking about events, students described them as ‘fun’, ‘relaxing’, and ‘good’ experiences enabling them to develop close peer connections, which made them feel supported, comforted and happy.

**Reassured and supported by professors.** In addition to developing relationships with fellow students at the university, almost all students recognized the importance of having relationships with professors, whom many students credited for help and guidance during the pathway year and beyond. As outlined in prior sections, many students felt confused and surprised by the informality of relationships with professors. Yet, they recognized that these relationships were very critical to their academic experience. What emerged consistently across several interviews was that professors played a critical role in pathway students’ adjustment in the first year. All students spoke fondly of their professors, they appreciated their assistance and they credited professors for providing them with the knowledge on academic life, and helping them with the
challenges that students encountered. Participants described professors as ‘helpful’, ‘patient’, ‘important’, “focused”, “respectful”, “polite”, ‘understanding’, and “willing to help.” Students felt reassured and comforted knowing that they could always count on the professors who were so invested in them and so supportive of their academic endeavors.

Greg, for example, described his relationship professors as “the most important experience” at the university, and said he had become friends with some of his professors.

Yeah, well I think that’s the most important experience was with my professors, I made a lot of friends ... my friends were professors actually. Because they offer me an office hour, we can discuss anything (personal communication, March 5).

Jonny also found the professors very helpful stating that he loved them, and never felt rushed by his professors. He stated,

The professors like, they have, I mean, they try to provide, they don't, they don't rush or hush whatever. Um, I love the professors, um, even though like we have like limited [a small selection of] classes but then the professors that I chose, like they were really good.

Eliza further described her professors as patient despite being asked repetitive questions by students. Eliza said, “Professors were patient and then they never get annoyed when you ask them several times about the same question” (personal communication, February 27).

A number of students felt that professors adjusted their teaching methods to accommodate their learning. As a result, students felt supported and confident in their classes. It was Fiona’s experience that professors adjusted their teaching to the audience. She noticed that professors spent more time on explaining things to students in order to ensure that all students understood. In her eyes, that was because professors knew that all students in the class were international.
I guess we could say that, um, they knew we were international students, so they gave us more time to study, they gave us more explanations of a proper topic, or they would just help us more because they know that we were international (personal communication, March 7).

Similarly, Tony also shared Fiona’s experience with professors in the first year. He described his professors as being more focused on the students in the pathway, and giving them more attention. And um, you could see the difference in how they teach inside the program [and] outside, which wasn't huge, but like you could see that inside of the program they're really focused more when you're still in the pathway. They [professors] would, um, really take more care and like, you know, understanding like go student by student. Outside of the pathway program they would ... they'll still be able to like have conversation with the students, but like, it's less attention as within the pathway program. So, and also the fact that the pathway program would offer your class, but like different sections with different professors (personal communication, March 15).

It was also Tony’s experience to see professors slow down the pace of class to ensure all students understood. As a result of such approach, Tony felt supported in his classes. He added, So the professors would take it slower and would actually you wouldn't get mad like stopping and explaining something and like guaranteed it'll be helping someone else in the classes as well. So that's what I meant by slower (personal communication, March 15).

Betty shared a similar experience how professors adjusted their teaching to speak to international students in the pathway program. She described her professors as being ‘more flexible’ in the pathway. When prompted to explain what she meant, she stated,
So what I mean is they [professors] give you more time. I mean like if I have, they had like three times to correct my essay. And they give you like in case like I couldn't finish or I have like some struggle like you know I'm feeling depressed because I'm far away from home, I don't feel like doing homework, they were okay. I'll give you until tomorrow but you have to submit it tomorrow. They will be more flexible like they kind of understood what we international students [were] going through (personal communication, February 27).

Betty felt comforted in knowing her professors had compassion for what she was going through.

For several students, seeking help from professors may not have come naturally. Students were often advised or referred to visit professors during office hours. “Advisors encouraged students to talk to professors”, Esther commented (personal communication, March 8). Esther felt helped and supported by her professors. She described her professors as understanding and, credited them for helping her achieve higher grades. She said,

And, um, you know, seeking that help from them [professors] or like them [professors] being so understanding, um, helped me achieve the kind of grade that I want (personal communication March 5).

While some students may have not pursued such interactions actively, those who did feel supported and reassured.

*Consoled and guided by pathway advisors.* The theme of advisors and their role in in the student first-year experience has also taken center stage across a number of interviews. When talking about their interactions with the pathway program, several students discussed the relationships they developed with pathway advisors. Students elaborated what those relationships meant for their experience. They described advisors as close and friendly. They further saw those
relationships as very critical in helping students address a variety of matters including academic matters, and offering general advice on life in the United States. Many students shared a broad range of matters they came to advisors with, which emphasizes the scope of matters that pathway advisors dealt with. Some of those matters included changing a major (Anna), helping with paying utilities at off-campus housing (Greg), registration and financial matters (Angie), spending free time (Anna), a selection of courses (Jonny), problems back home and wanting to just talk to someone (Tony).

Anna, for instance, shared that she had reached out to pathway advisors, each time when in need. She also added that pathway advisors were a resource for her to address academic issues and non-academic issues. She felt supported.

But, in the pathway program, you're-you're never limited to ask questions. And you know, you're always, um, advisors are always available to help you 24/7, literally. But, um, they helped me in a way. Every time I had a question I would go to the office every day, till I got it solved. And they were never, they would never stop me they…they would not be tired (personal communication, February 22).

That sentiment was shared by several students, for whom the pathway advisors were the first point contact to get helped, get advised or get referred to university services.

Fiona credited pathway advisors for helping her settle in the U.S. She described advisors as “advisors for life” when referring to a range of matters that she needed help with. She said,

A major, major part of me settling in US is because of my, um, [pathway] advisors. They helped me a lot. Like, I would actually go up to them, tell them, so they helped a lot. And they were just not only advisors for studies, but they were advisors for life, also (personal communication, March 1).
Fiona felt consoled knowing that she could always come to seek guidance. Similarly, Jonny spoke of his advisors very candidly. Jonny felt comfortable and connected with the advisors. He said, “I don't know, it might just be me, but I always love like, I always love hanging out here too… in the pathway office. So I think that's how I feel closer, yeah, with the advisors” (personal communication, February 26).

Anna also shared that she often visited the advisors to get ideas how to spend her free time in the city and how to get around. Anna stated,

> I would always go, well, to the pathway, you know, office. And first I would ask [advisor’s name]. She's one of the advisors there. So, I would go to [advisor’s name]. And she would, you know, she would sometimes post on Facebook- What's going on? Is there any event? But, um, because I barely check Facebook, I just, myself, go up to her and ask her. And she recommended a lot of things. She told me what's near by. She talked about the cruise. She talked about the games. She talked about, you know, the [local baseball team] playing. She talked about the [the basketball team] playing (personal communication, February 22).

In addition, Angie described how advisors interacted with students on a personal and professional level, acting as a friend who could advise students on a variety of matters related and unrelated to university life.

> So she [the advisor] placed herself like a friend, but also as someone, um, to come when there's a problem with classes, with, um, registration, um, with financial, um, suggests like tuition or something else. And, um, she made sure that we can come to her for any reason, even personal reasons, because somehow that will influence our performance in school (personal communication, March 7).
Tony shared that he visited advisors whenever he had issues or needed advice. He described advisors as “someone there willing to help”, which meant a lot to him, as he did not have such a connection with anyone else beyond the pathway year. He referred to advisors as “friends” and therapists.” He stated,

Like I said, like the staff within the pathway program. So whenever I had issues, whether it was personal, whether it was, you know, um, financial like in school, whatever it was like I could always come to the office, and they will be someone there willing to help me. And, um, for me that really meant something 'cause you don't really have that outside of the pathway program. You don't really have some people, you know, they say okay, if you need to speak, they're like advisors or you know, the health clinic or something. But like for me that's not very like on a personal level- you know. So I think yeah, just having the staff really available for you, you could come into the office whether you're just bored and just want to chit chat with someone. If they're not busy, they'll come right away and help you. Whether you had issues back home, uh, family issues, you know, you could come. They're kind of like therapists at the same time, as like becoming like friends (personal communication, March 15).

Several students saw advisors as “more experienced friends” whose primary focus and interest was to ensure that students were doing fine. Having a mentor, a guide and someone who is always there to help brought the students peace of mind, making them feel consoled and guided through their experience. Some, but not all students, shared that they continued to maintain such close relationships with pathway advisors beyond the freshman year.
Super - ordinate theme 7: Isolated from domestic students.

Although pathway students engaged in developing friendships early on, it is evident from interview data that their experience missed interactions with American students during the pathway year. All, but one or two participants, who deliberately engaged in extracurricular activities and sport teams in the first semester, admitted to having none or very limited interactions with American students in the first year. Since all students in the pathway program were international students, participants had no in-class exposure to American students in the first year. Furthermore, pathway students’ circle of friends included mostly other international students, whom they had met through the pathway program and its programming. Several students expressed feeling isolated, yet longing for interactions with American students as a result of being enrolled in the pathway program.

Greg, for instance, stated, “I made a lot of friends in [the] pathway but I didn't make friends outside” (personal communication, March 5). Similarly, Eliza added that she did not make any American friends in the first year. Her only exposure to American students was through the tutors that she utilized to help her with assignments. She stated, “Um, I made friends like in the first year, I didn't really get to know that many American students, probably sometime through tutors” (personal communication, February 27). Jonny also expressed his desire for more interactions with American students. Jonny stated, “I think, we, um, I mean, I would love more domestic friends and make ... how do you say? It would be [a] quicker transition for me” (personal communication, February 26). Eliza, Greg and Jonny felt isolated from American students and they were longing for opportunities to interact with them.

Angie further shared how she felt about having very limited interactions with American students in the pathway year as a result of being in the pathway. While she missed American
students, and felt jealous of all other students who had class interactions with them, at the same time, she felt excited and motivated to finish the first year courses. The pathway completion would enable her to start taking regular and more diverse classes in the sophomore year. She stated,

Uh, on one end, it feels like it's exciting. Um, the suspense was exciting because it's something you look forward to finish the pathway program because there's ... it becomes a reward or an incentive that, “Oh, you can finally, uh, experience being with American students in the classrooms, um, next year.” So there's something to look forward to. Um, but at the same time, it's also something that you miss because you get to be curious. And, um, I feel like also a little bit of jealousy of other international students who are not in the pathway program who get to sit in a regular class, which just not that much different, but there's more- there's more diversity in the classroom (personal communication, March 7).

A lack of American students in the first year experience made Angie perceive interactions with American students as “a reward” or “an incentive” to study to complete the first year. She experienced feelings of jealously, excitement while yearning for classes with American students.

On that note, Greg, who spoke passionately about how he felt about not experiencing American students in the pathway year, summed it up by stating that it was not a good idea to separate international students from American students. Such a separation would not help international students to integrate quicker, which contradicts the notion of the pathway program. Instead, international students would have to go through initial feelings of anxiety again when they do start general university courses in the sophomore year. Greg stated,
I don't think that's a great idea to separate the international students. Because the main role of the [pathway] program was like [to have] the people involved to [sic] the local academic community faster, but if you separate ... if you know... segregate them from American students, they [international students] would lose the passion to contact with them [American students]. So, when the sophomore year comes, they [international students] just come to the American classes and they will feel anxieties, they still will feel anxieties (personal communication, March 5).

Several students further shared their thoughts on their experience with American students when they started their sophomore year courses, emphasizing how challenging it was for them to make American friends in their sophomore year. Esther, for instance, argued that it was very hard for her to make friends with American students in large classes.

Um, it was really hard for me to find, to be friends with uh, American students. I mean, um, because it's such large classes as compared to the pathway classes that we have- whereas everybody's international and then the s- uh, the sizes tend to be smaller (personal communication, March 8).

Alike, Tom also implied that the only way to get to know each other is to live together as American students just ‘disappear” right after classes, which limits the amount of time you get to spend with them outside of class.

They [American students], yeah, they disappear. So like, only the way knowing each other is living together. I compare it with the time that we spent in the classroom actually is less than the time that we spent out of class together (personal communication, March 8).
Betty, who is going through her sophomore year, further added that she does interact with American students, but she cannot think of them as her friends. She referred to American students as classmates, but not her friends. When asked to comment, she said,

Well, yes, I have, they're not my friends, they're my classmates. I cannot say they're my friends because we don't go out or something. We just do, uh, university like class work. And yeah, I, I interact with a lot of Americans here at the university when I'm in the dining, when I'm sitting in the sofas in the first floor…or, uh, at the library because we are studying together (personal communication, February 25).

While all the participants experienced feelings of longing for opportunities to interact with American students throughout the pathway year, a small number of participants shared feeling conflicted about such potential interactions. All students wished they had had more opportunities to engage with American students, but a small portion felt that the presence of American students in first year classes would make international students feel less confident and unsure of themselves in first year classes.

When commenting how he would feel about having American students in classes in the first year, Pat stated,

It could go yes and no, because you know. If we have domestic students here, they are brought up with education system here, so they know what to do. So, er, er, now students, who are really shy about asking questions and stuff like that, whereas the domestic students, they're gonna be like, open, confident, because they have been brought up with this education system. So they might just walk over them, not like for exact sense, but they might like ... the other students might not really feel confident about asking things (personal communication, March 13).
While Pat missed interactions with American students in classes, the prospect of having them in the pathway year, made him feel insecure worrying if that could affect his class performance. On the other hand, he did recognize the benefits of having American students in classes, noticing that American students could be a good resource to international students. He said,

You will get to talk to somebody who has been living here for a long time, who knows about the culture, who speaks the language you're trying to learn. Um, so that could help out with that as well. So it could go in both senses. Uh, he's just gotta figure out the balance of that (personal communication, March 13).

**Super - ordinate theme 8: United by shared experience.**

*Comfort in shared experience.* Another major super-ordinate theme to have emerged from data is shared experience. When reflecting on their experience, several students expressed feeling happy, confident and comforted in knowing that there are other international students, like themselves, who are going through the same experience. Not being alone, but sharing the experience with fellow international students brought students comfort, helped them connect, and facilitated developing long lasting relationships, which continued beyond the first year of college. Participants felt that it was easier for them to connect with other international students who could understand them better, as they shared the same experiences of adjusting to the new academic and sociocultural environment.

The theme of shared experience was intertwined throughout the interviews as students spoke about their academic and non-academic experiences. When Betty recalled coming to the orientation, for instance, she described feeling comforted when she saw other international students who were going through the same experience as she was. She said,
Well, at first I thought it will be like really hard and I was like super nervous, but when I came to the orientation, I saw like a lot of support. I saw international students, people like me, that we really have like the same experience (personal communication, February 25).

Betty also explained that because of the shared experience, it was easier for her to connect and talk to fellow international students.

And it was easy to talk with others because we had the same experience. So we could connect. We have this connection like okay, I'm having, I'm going through this and people were, oh, ‘me too.’ It's like we have the same experience so it was easy (personal communication, February, 25).

Similarly, Eliza also reiterated that she felt very comforted and free of anxieties when she was among international students, like herself. She commented,

And, then because like the people that you work with, they're all international students so you wouldn't…, you feel very comfortable- you don't feel anxious (personal communication, February 27).

Fiona further clarified that she found international students “more helpful” than American students because, as she stated, international students were going through “the same situation” that she was experiencing. She said, “I find international students more helpful because they were going through the same situation as me. They knew how I was feeling and I knew how they were feeling” (personal communication, March 1). The feeling of mutual understanding between her and fellow pathway students in the program made her feel comforted.
Furthermore, Jonny emphasized that having other interactional students in classes gave him comfort to speak up, share his opinions, and ask questions (personal communication, February 26). He said,

And the students since they are international students like we have like same kind of mindset, so, it's really comfortable for me to like, give my opinions to the professors (personal communication, February 26).

Esther also shared how comforted and encouraged she felt when she saw other international students from the pathway in the same class. She described her emotions saying, “it’s like having a friend in the class”, which she found motivating and encouraging. Esther stated,

And knowing that there's another international student in the class, especially knowing that they come, you come from the same pathway program really helps. Um, it's like having a friend in the class and I think there's the, it just gives some sort of encouragement (personal communication, March 8).

Esther further added that she felt supported knowing that all international students share the same experience, and that she is not alone “figuring this out” by herself.

And being in the pathway program, knowing that everybody's international, I think, uh, it gives me comfort in some type of way that we're all figuring this out together (personal communication, March 8).

Finally, Tony was comforted in knowing that he was surrounded by international students. He recognized the benefits of going through the same experience together stating that meeting people, participating in joint activities helps students learn, get out of their comfort zone, and become comfortable with themselves. Tony stated,
Like whereas other students are going through the same thing. So by meeting all these students and go into these events, it helps them really get out of the bubble, but at the same time just be comfortable with themselves (personal communication, March 15).

**Family-like togetherness.** There was a strong sense of togetherness among international students, a sub-ordinate theme that emerged in almost all interviews. A number of students compared the state of being together and going through the adjustment period as international students together to being “a family.” Fiona felt safe and secure amongst “the family” of peer international students, the same way she felt when she was with her true family in Pakistan. When talking about her experience, Fiona said “It's more like you're studying with your family.” She described her friends as family by saying, “The friends I made, everything is, like, basically, it's family. Like, you can trust on them, you can depend on them, everything” (personal communication, March 1).

Similarly, Tony experienced the pathway student community as a family as well. He stated,

The pathway program is like a small little family within the university because whether you - whether you notice it or not, at the end of the day everyone helps each other out. You know, whether it's in the classroom, outside the classroom and it's just, yeah, you really be [sic] just become a family (personal communication, March 15).

Several participants experienced and appreciated the tangible benefits of the intimacy and closeness of the pathway community. Having someone to talk to, helping each other, getting helped, sharing experiences, spending free time together, and learning about and from each other were important aspects of being a part of the family-like closeness that students found in peer international students. Pat explained that,
I felt like 'cause you got more comfortable with your group of friends. You got really comfortable with them. You could share things with them. They would help you. You could help them. So I feel like just cooking things together got, uh, the group closer. And we could like talk about stuff because we were all from different countries, different cultures. And we were all just adjusting to the new, newer country and newer culture (personal communication, March 13).

Similarly, Tony described how international students, who were very close to each other, would meet in study groups together to learn math from each other and help each other. Togetherness fostered relationship building and supported their academic experience. Tony felt supported and helped while also feeling good about helping others. He stated,

So, um, math classes- I would- would meet up and study groups and, you know, I would, uh, like some other student will teach me, help me with certain problems. And, um, you know, even like for, yeah, for some students numbers, learning numbers, it's different from- their country it's different, um, totally different system. So just doing, like suddenly like things like that would help, you know, just like getting ... even explaining a certain problem to another student would help me get it even better- and really make it stick. So just, yeah, interfacing and like helping each other students also helped in that sense (personal communication, March 7).

In addition to helping each other with schoolwork, several students shared that it was important for them to spend time together after school, participating together in a number of joint leisure activities whether it is through organized activities or out of their own initiatives. Pat, who also shared about celebrating birthdays and the New Year with friends together, described how he enjoyed cooking and sampling each other’s food in his leisure time.
So I had two roommates, uh, both from India. Um, so we were doing that, um, but I had often friends come over from different countries as well. So slowly, we try and play trying each other's food. So that, so that was pretty good that I did not try something before coming here (personal communication March 13).

When talking about her out of classroom experience, Anna emphasized engaging in several joint activities with other international students as well. Those pastimes included shopping, partying, visiting each other, and spending time together with other international students. Anna stated, Well, okay, so, we would go shopping. Either way, um, if not shopping, we would go to parties, stuff like that, you know, get togethers. Um ... it's either that or we spend-, because we're all, you know, we get tired from classes, we'd just meet up in school sometimes or we would just go to each other's house. That's with my other international friends (personal communication, February 22).

Betty also described spending a lot of time with other international students on getting food together, watching movies and simply talking with friends so that she would not feel lonely, especially during winter months. She said, Well, I have a lot of experiences like food. We always were like, “Oh I miss food, miss food.” And like okay or like in winter, I was feeling alone so we all okay, talk each other like yeah, if my family is not here let's, uh, watch [a] movie, let's hang out or let's be like more close or we have someone to talk to (personal communication February 25).

Greg, who admitted trying to make friends through study groups among students pursuing similar majors, also explained how he took a chance, invited friends to his house and cooked for them to spend time together outside of school. Greg stated, “So this is a great opportunity. So I take it as a chance to invite them [students] to come to my house and have a group meeting, and
after meetings, I cook for them. I cook the Chinese dishes to them” (personal communication, March 5).

**Finding happiness in a new community.** Another sub-ordinate theme that emerged across a number of interviews was community building through events and on-campus organizations. When talking about outside of classroom experience, Eliza pointed out that events were a great opportunity for her to make friends with other students, spend time together, and expand the social network beyond her immediate friends. Eliza felt happy being with friends and making new friends. She stated,

“So you make friends there as well. ‘Cause you hang out and then they also, they [pathway program] encourage you to like make friends from different countries cause this creates opportunities for you to branch out” (personal communication, February 27).

Just like Eliza, a number of students noted that they were encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities offered through the pathway program and the university. As pathway students had limited opportunities to meet American students outside of their program, for many, events and structured outings created an opportunity to ‘branch out’ and widen their social circles within the university. At the same time, spending time together deepened their bond, and brought them closer together. Betty stated that events organized by the pathway program created multiple interest-based opportunities to spend time together and develop close family-like interpersonal connections with other pathway students. Betty described how she participated in numerous events in the first year of college. She said,

Uh, I was going to the events that [the pathway program], uh, organized like- a baseball game or going, uh, on whale watch. And then I was going to…. like barbecues. And yeah like the events that they had here in campus I was like, ‘Oh, I'm going there, free ice-
cream, okay. We all go like, “Oh, you wanna go? Yeah let's go. We were going to those events. I am still open to going to those events. I also, uh, I was part of the soccer tournament. So with my friends hearing that in the pathway were like, “Oh, let' go and play soccer. So we were all going together to intervals and playing soccer or volleyball (personal communication, February 25).

Betty sounded excited and she felt excited about connecting with her peers outside of school. She fondly recalled the events she participated in, and the friendships she made.

Esther further noticed that in addition to making meaningful connections with peer students, you could also connect with university staff who often participated in events. She stated that events were critical to her experience.

Um, and I made a lot of connections there obviously. Uh, one of the things that was really memorable for me was the Ping Pong event uh, that we held, I think ...I don't know…in late Spring I believe, um, just before Summer orientation. There was a lot of participants there and it was just really great. There was a lot of staff attending too. Um, so, yeah.

Yeah. It was really important, yeah (personal communication, March 8).

Tony, who admitted being very outgoing, also described how important it was for him to spend time together with peer students outside of class. He participated in almost all events in the first year. He noticed that events bring people together. They also provide a great learning platform for students to learn about each other’s cultures, often leading students to discover their talents and interests that they share with others. Tony felt that, thanks to event participation, he became feeling a part of the larger student community. Those times, which he described as “memorable”, “fun” and “amazing” filled him with happiness. He stated,
I remember in my first year, I attended. I'd like to say about 80-85% of the events in things done. Whether it was like, I remember the first time I went to, um, the Indian celebration, the Holy, and that was for me a huge shock. I had never seen anything like that. It was amazing. It was fun. Um, so that is something that I don't think I would ever, you know, think of just doing by myself, but the fact that I was given the opportunity to go and do that, that was, um, that was interesting. So again, I've done things where I remember they had an event called the [Pathway] Got Talent. That was awesome since I didn't perform 'cause, uh, my talents once exactly right for the show. But, um, that again, it was just interesting just to see so many different cultures and, you know, whether it was the dance, you know, you see a lot of students like potentially like their hidden skills, like, uh, piano playing or singing or dancing, um, events like that were really fun. Those were memorable (personal communication, March 15).

Pat described having initial hesitations to participate in any events in the first year, but admitted that being together with friends encouraged him to participate. It helped him expand his social network and provided an opportunity to spend the time together outside of school. You could tell that Pat felt happy being with friends and sharing experiences with them. He said,

First year, I attended a few events. Uh, because I was still like, "No, I don't want to go to this event," because I was like, "No," and I was just like shy. "No, I don't wanna go to this event. What if they asked me to like stand up and do something, uh, on the spot?" "And I don't know what to do, I don't wanna do that." Uh, but then, we started talking with my friends in the class. We got together and then we all went to those events together. And that was okay because I was not alone by myself. We went there and then, yeah, friends of friends, uh, got to know them. We made new friends through all those
activities and remember, [but I cannot] remember exactly what those events were (personal communication, March 13).

**Turning into action.** Several students further described how they found self-fulfillment and happiness in on-campus life opportunities, and as part of being in the pathway’s leadership program. A number of participants became members of the pathway’s Leaders Program. Some volunteered their time to become orientation leaders to welcome new students to the university.

Eliza, for instance, applied for a leadership position in the Leaders Program to seek out opportunities. She felt it was a great platform for her to engage with other international students and learn. She described her experience saying, “I love this so much.” This opportunity filled her with happiness. She felt that she would not have been able to get the same opportunities if she wanted to join a university-wide organization, as she would have to compete for positions with American students. Eliza stated,

> I joined [the Leaders Program], yeah at the end of the pathway. It's more like student opportunities, and it's very, very, I would say I love this so much. You are learning a lot, and it is basically it's like a student union for the pathway program. You get to know people, and then you get to learn a lot. But then compared with like the whole school, they also have a student union and you get to compete with a lots of people. Probably you won't get that much chance to get selected when you run [for] the student government because you also compete with the local American students (personal communication, February 27).

Through the Leaders Program, Eliza became an orientation leader, and she actively participated in new student orientations on campus to help new students.
Betty also described how she got a position in the communications and social media, which helped her gain new skills. Betty also emphasized that she enjoyed being in a group with other students. This is how she described her experience,

I think it was like good idea and that's why I decided-I'm yeah, and then I had like an interview because I had to apply for a position. It was in a communications and social media. I was in charge of the social media. So I think that was like also help me to like experience to working like in a marketing way. Like making policy, so I improved my marketing skills, my designs, uh, I was being careful with my grammar and all this stuff.

I think like it's like besides I- uh, I enjoy being in a group I also learn a lot (personal communication, February 25).

This opportunity enabled Betty to make more friends and improve her skills. She enjoyed learning opportunities while being happy that she could give back to other students.

Esther, who also took on a role of a student activity leader in the Leaders Program, described this experience as a stepping-stone towards future opportunities that presented themselves to her.

And that really was the stepping stone towards everything. Um, because in Leaders, I was the student activity leader and we have like multi-plans of events, where we want to conduct um, and um, just being in that and having 11 other leaders working with me. Um, and then having to reach out to the pathway community, letting them know of these events taking place, it established a lot of connection and context. Um, and with that being said, Leaders is also something that I can put on my resume, which I did. And it lends me to more opportunities in the future especially, um, after I, um, after I transitioned from the pathway program (personal communication, March 8).
Esther, who became a vice president of the Model UN Club, and the President of the Indonesian Student Association, is another example of how international students who started in the Leaders Program launched their leadership and student government careers, and how self-motivated they became to give back to the community. When talking about her current role as the club president, Esther stated,

I'm the vice president for the Model UN club. Um, I also run my own club, the Indonesian Student Association, but I'm also listed in government. But what I want to say is that what made me lead to like having all these clubs - joining all these organization was the Leader's Program (personal communication, March 7).

Tom’s story was similar to Esther’s. Having missed interactions with American students in the first year experience, Tom turned his energy and passion into action. He started an on-campus club with a mission to facilitate interactions between international and domestic students. When talking about the club mission, he said,

The club is trying to, ah, bring the international students and American students together for interactions in order to facilitate this kind of, ah, interactions. We had conducted activities in order to make this happen (personal communication, March 8).

Tom further described how his role as the club president pushed him into becoming the Master of Ceremonies for the events, and gave him confidence to give a speech to a large crowd of students, which was a big challenge for him initially.

So, I was, during the offices meeting - like, everybody came up with different tasks and I was asked to do the MC for the event. So it was really a big challenge because I've never done the MC and then like…at the time - it's just like on the process of making me confident, but then I accepted the challenge of becoming the MC and then, on the event
day, like I really liked speaking out to many students - like over hundred [students] (personal communication, March 8).

Despite the fact that participants were no longer a part of the pathway program, and at different stages in the bachelor degree journey, they all felt (and exhibited through their demeanor) a strong connection to the international pathway student community. While many students were pursuing different academic and life goals at the time of interview, a number of students tried to find ways to give back to the pathway community by staying involved, serving as orientation leaders, and acting as mentors to newly arrived students.

**Summary**

The review of the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes outlined in Chapter 4 points to the existence of substantial similarities in the transitional experiences of the eleven study participants. The convergence of the themes identified in the MAXQDA software-aided data analysis enabled a thorough exploration of the experience of undergraduate international students following the completion of an on-site pathway program, which resulted in a detailed account representing their perspectives on that experience.

The emerged super-ordinate themes, along with corresponding sub-ordinate themes discussed in this chapter offered a detailed look into what the transitional experiences were like for the eleven undergraduate international students who enrolled in the pathway program at a large public university in New England.

The following Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the implications of research findings and recommendations.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into transitional experiences of international undergraduate students as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program. The overarching research question: How do international undergraduate students make sense of their transitional experiences as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher
education following participation in a pathway program? led to the identification of several emergent themes discussed in Chapter 4, which addressed the research question.

This chapter includes the following subsections: Implications for Research, Implications for Theory, and Implications for Practice followed by Recommendations for future research.

Implications for Research

Despite the recent growth in the numbers of international pathway students enrolled at American institutions of higher education, international pathway students and pathway programs in the United States have remained largely unexamined and under-theorized (Choudada, 2017). Since very little theoretical and empirical research related specifically to pathway students in the U.S. exists, this section focuses more broadly on the experience of international undergraduate students in an English-speaking academic environment.

Academic Experiences. This study revealed outcomes that were consistent with the body of literature on academic challenges of international students emphasizing a transitional period during which international students discover and navigate the differences of the academic environment while trying to fit in, and find support and guidance in their interactions with peers, faculty and administrators. As evidenced in earlier studies (Li, Chen, Duanmu, 2010; Kim, 2011; Leong, 2015), during the transition, international undergraduate students struggle with the understanding of the American academic culture. The literature has identified a number of troublesome areas, which contribute to, and are the root of, some of the challenges that international students face while adjusting to a new academic environment. The most commonly referenced academic challenges for international students include, but are not limited to, a lack of understanding of the academic standards and academic rigor (Li, Chen, Duanmu, 2010; Leong, 2015); participatory nature of the learning (Throy, 2015); student-centered teaching methods
(Kim, 2011; White & Rosado, 2014); classroom communication with students and professors (Kim, 2011; Leong, 2015 & Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015); curricular differences (Williams, 2008); academic expectations (Campbell-Evans & Leggett, 2007); academic integrity (Velliaris & Breen, 2016) and assessment methods (Wearing et al., 2015).

As presented in the sub-ordinate theme, Confused by encouraged by academic differences, participants shared that they were not familiar with the university system in the United States. More specifically, they reported not understanding the program structure, the letter grading system to evaluate their performance, and the participatory nature of the learning, which was a big challenge for the students, who, in many cases, came from the learning environments where lectures were the primary teaching tools. Further, as outlined in the subordinate theme, Disoriented and confused by academic honesty, the study supports the prior findings in that many of the participants reported struggling with the understanding and the practical application of the American guidelines on academic honesty often resulting in the students struggling while making ‘unintentional mistakes’, resulting in plagiarism. Finally, the subordinate theme, Challenged by writing, further revealed that participants struggled with the understanding of the writing assignment expectations; particularly writing argumentative essays and supporting own ideas in writing. Some students shared that they had never written an argumentative essay before, and following writing guidelines was a challenge to them.

English language challenges. Another significant strand on international students in the literature is the English language struggles of international students in an English-speaking environment. English language skills are the biggest hindrance to successful learning in an English-speaking environment and the biggest obstacle for international students to overcome (Kuo, 2011). English challenges have been reported to result in students feeling anxious (Lin &
Scherz, 2014), embarrassed and isolated (Guzman, 2015), afraid of class participation (Kim, 2011), stressed due to perceived language limitations (Mitchell, Del Fabbro, & Shaw, 2017), and confused due to not being able to understand conversational English (Li, et al., 2018). Language proficiency influences students’ ability to participate actively in the classroom (Sawir, 2005; Sawir et al., 2008; Lin & Schertz, 2014; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015), and it influences students’ ability to establish communication in the academic and social contexts (Burdett & Crossman, 2012).

The finding in this study confirm such observations. As outlined in the sub-ordinate theme, Intimidated by English, participants shared that they had experienced insecurity about their English skills. Almost all students in the study shared that they were not confident about their English, including the students who came from the countries where English was one of the official languages. English language challenges resulted in students experiencing anxiety, intimidation, fear of not being able to understand fast spoken language and slang. Further, aligned with Burdett & Crossman’s (2012) arguments on how English skills affect communication in the academic and social contexts, and students’ ability to participate actively in the classroom (Sawir, 2005; Sawir et al., 2008; Lin & Schertz, 2014; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015), this study supports prior findings in that many of the participants reported feeling intimidated and insecure about classroom participation, and communication with peers and faculty. As delineated in the sub-theme, Intimidated by class participation, several students described how their English skills limited their ability to participate actively in the classroom. Several students reported choosing not to participate in fear of being ridiculed and judged by their classmates if they happen to have made mistakes. For a number of students, fear of class participation was the reason why felt anxious and insecure. On the other hand, almost all
participants credited the small size of pathway classes that, unlike university larger entry-level courses, provided them with an intimate setting, enabling a development of close relationships with peers and faculty, and overcoming some of the anxieties (super-ordinate theme: *Comforted by pathway peers, and a sub-theme: Made friends in small classes*).

**Socio-cultural differences.** A third prevalent theme in the student literature revolves around the socio-cultural differences, and the concern that international students have for not being able to fit in socially and culturally (Gartman, 2016). Transitioning to a different culture presents a wide range of challenges that international students need to face, but also offers many opportunities for cross-cultural learning (Moores & Popaduik, 2011). Unfamiliarity with the host country culture might result in students experiencing stress and anxiety in social and academic settings (Zhou, et al., 2008; Jones & Kim, 2013), social isolation and withdrawal (McLachlan & Justice, 2009), difficulties in finding common interests (Huang & Brown, 2009), making meaningful connections with American students (Li & Zizzi, 2018), social awkwardness (Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013), and loneliness (Belford (2017).

This study revealed outcomes that were consistent with and divergent from the main body of literature on social and cultural challenges of international students in an English-speaking environment. As indicated by the sub-ordinate theme, *Concern for potential isolation and not fitting in*, while some participants expressed having concerns for potential isolation and not being able to fit in socially and culturally, for the majority, a guided transition to a university life in the pathway program offered a form of reassurance, and gave them peace of mind. Students felt reassured by the communication they received from the pathway office about their upcoming experience. They felt encouraged and comforted knowing that with the help of the pathway program, they would be supported in overcoming any potential obstacles they feared. A few
participants reported anticipating some level of isolation between pathway students and university students, but their hesitations fell short of her expectations. Because of the support and guidance they had received from the pathway program, participants reported feeling appreciated, supported, and guided through the first year of college, which, as some shared, may not have been the experience that other international students had outside of the pathway.

Aligned with Zhou et al. (2008) and Jones and Kim (2013), the sub-ordinate theme, Anxiety from independence, further revealed that participants did experience anxiety, fear and insecurity from coming to an unknown environment. Those feelings, however, were largely evoked by the fear of becoming independent, additional responsibilities associated with independent living, and assuming duties of a university student rather than being a direct result of the social and cultural experiences in an unknown setting. Further, the literature (McLachan & Justice, 2009) reports that about 95% of all international students experience homesickness and loneliness. However, it was not the case in this study. Neither loneliness (Belford (2017), nor social awkwardness (Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013), or social withdrawal and homesickness (McLachlan & Justice, 2009) proved to be major concerns for the students in this study.

This could be, in part, due to the very hands-on approach that the pathway program took in creating the community support, which students could fall back on when feeling down or when facing difficulties. As indicated in the super-ordinate theme, Supported by the university resources, along with the corresponding sub-ordinate themes (Contented with introduction to academic life, Guided by the pathway, Helped by tutors), the findings revealed that the majority of participants felt supported by the pathway program and the larger university community. Despite their transitional ups-and-downs, participants felt contented with the introduction to the university life they had received in the pathway. They felt supported and reassured by their
professors, and they felt helped by the tutors. Most importantly, they enjoyed a very close relationship with their pathway advisors, whose role was to support students, guide them, and refer to the university resources. Students felt consoled in knowing that they can always come and seek advice, with some sharing that their international peers outside of the pathway program did not have the same type of close and personal experience.

**Social networking as a copying strategy.** The student literature further emphasizes the need for international students to engage in social networking, which appears a critical aspect of college experience in helping students cope with the challenges, in particular during social and cultural transitions (Sovik, 2009, Li & Zizzi, 2018). International students must have opportunities to develop personal connections with co-national, domestic and international students to better adjust socially and culturally (Kashima & Loh, 2006).

The findings in this study support such observations in that all participants reported engaging in developing friendships with peer pathway students from the moment they arrived on campus. As indicated in the sub-ordinate theme, *Comforted by pathway peers*, participants spoke vividly about how important it was for their experience to have made friends, and to have established personal relationships within the new environment. For the majority, those relationships were comprised of other international students in the program. Participants described feeling consoled, comforted and happy when surrounded by international peers who were going through the same experience. Many described making connections during the orientation for international pathway students, and during extracurricular events offered by the pathway program.

While supporting community building is not an unusual practice within the university context in the United States, the pathway program at the research site ensured that international pathway students were provided with various opportunities to build the community, and become a close-
knit community. Several students described participating in events and gatherings that the pathway program provided and/or promoted. The pathway program encouraged participants to seek leadership roles within the Leaders Program to assist peer international students in their transition to the university. Participants developed a strong sense of community (as discussed in sub-ordinate themes: Family-like togetherness and Community building), because of the pathway program’s efforts to provide structured out-of-classroom learning opportunities. Their experience, however, lacked interactions with American students (super-ordinate theme Isolated from domestic students), which Kashima and Loh (2006) argued were critical to students’ social and cultural adjustment.

**Pathway programs.** There is a scarcity of research on the experiences of pathway ‘graduates’ to provide substantial knowledge on pathway students (Benzie, 2015; Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015; La Sage et al., 2014; Percival et al., 2016). Most of the existing theoretical and empirical pathway studies are set in the Australian and Canadian contexts focusing primarily on student academic outcomes (La sage et al, 2014; Percival et al., 2016), an assessment of pathway programs (Chesters & Watson, 2016), English language challenges (Dooey, 2010) and transitional experiences (Benzie, 2015; Percival et al., 2016).

The focus of his study was examine students’ experience, and not to assess pathway programs or performance levels of pathway students. For that reason, the study findings may not directly relate to prior research focusing on the assessment of academic outcomes of pathway students or the assessment of pathway programs in other contexts. Despite that, the findings in this study support earlier pathway research an Australian university by Benzie (2015) in that several participants described feeling contented with the introduction to academic life they had received in the pathway as outlined in the sub-ordinated theme, Contented with introduction to
academic life. Further, as discussed in sub-ordinate theme, Comforted by pathway peers and a sub-theme, Made friends in small classes, just like in the case of pathway students in Australia, being in a cohort model and in small classes in the pathway year benefited participants by providing them with opportunities to develop close peer connections. Undoubtedly, those close connections set up pathway students for the learning interactions in their in larger classes upon pathway completion.

**Implications for Theory**

The findings in this research reveal several consistencies with earlier liminality literature in regards to the liminal experience and the qualities of liminal individuals going through a major life transition. Liminality rests on an assumption that individuals get separated from their existing contexts and enter a transitional (liminal) phase, a state of flux, while moving from a previously well-defined environment to a new unknown state of being (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1967). Participants in this study were physically removed from their social and cultural contexts as they arrived to begin studies at a university in the United States. As outlined in super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes presented in Chapter 4, as participants entered an unknown social, cultural, and academic context, they faced the ambiguities of the new environment they needed to make sense of and navigate. As students began familiarizing themselves with the new culture via observations, imitations of the behaviors that they had observed, often leading to interactions though trial and error, they struggled trying to reconcile between what their roles and behaviors should entail in the new context versus the roles they held back home.

According to Turner (1967), while being in “betwixt and between”, liminal individuals experience “ambiguity and paradox, a confusion” (p.97). That was also the case in this study. Participants experienced a range of emotions as a result of their exposure to the unfamiliar
behaviors and values, which may not have been in agreement with the familiar behaviors in their native cultures. Participants experienced confusion (sub-ordinate theme: Confused but encouraged by academic differences), disorientation (sub-ordinate theme: Disoriented and confused by academic honesty), anxiety (sub-ordinate theme: Anxiety from independence), and intimidation (sub-ordinate theme: Intimidated by English) in their struggles to meet the expectations of the new environment while navigating the social, cultural and academic aspects of their new role as university students in the United States.

Theory (Turner, 1967; Williams, 2001; Dutta, 2015) further states that, when in the liminal state, liminal individuals turn to those more familiar with the new culture and form close groups. This was also found to be true in this study in that all participants formed peer groups and developed friendships, which became the foundation of a new support system. Dutta (2015) argued that for liminal individuals, establishing such relationships often becomes a strategy that helps work through the challenges of the liminal phase. The study findings also support such observations in that many participants emphasized finding support in close relationships in the pathway year, emphasizing how critical those close relationships were during their transitional experience. Students found comfort in their pathway peers (sub-ordinate theme: Comforted by pathway peers) while being reassured and supported their professors (sub-ordinate theme: Reassured and supported by professors), and guided by advisors (sub-ordinate theme: Guided by the pathway). While students were confronting the challenges, undoubtedly, the relationships they developed with other international students in the program, staff and faculty were the most critical type of support to their experience in the first year of college.

In addition, theory (Turner, 1967) characterizes the relationships of liminal individuals by extreme equality, with no hierarchy, no rank, nor any other distinguishable marker that would
enable differentiating individuals from others within the liminal group. Liminal individuals have been reported to be structurally invisible as they are “betwixt and between” structural classification (Turner, 1967, p.97). Findings in this study corroborated this argument as well.

Participants entered the university from varied ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Yet, in spite of the varied attributes upon entering the liminal phase, students were stripped of their former selves and began the transition as ‘blank slates’ to be filled with skills and knowledge, while not fully understanding and knowing the qualities they will possess as they exit the liminal phase. Research (Dutta, 2015) also suggests that liminal individuals are bound together by their shared experience. That was also the case for the students in this study. Despite the fact that international students came with a range of cultural and socioeconomic attributes, their prior backgrounds did not define their position among peer students. They were all equal, they all faced similar (if not the same) challenges, and they all shared similar (if not the same) experiences as they adjusted to the university life in the United States together in the pathway program.

Turner (1967; 1977) also argued that the relationships among liminal individuals, and among liminal groups, which would normally be very fragmented, become very compacted and intensified. That was also the case for the students in this study. Participants found comfort and support in knowing that there were other international students, who, like themselves, were going through the very same transitional experiences (sub-ordinate themes: Comfort in shared experience and Family-like togetherness). Students found strength and support in relying on each other (sub-ordinate theme: Comforted by pathway peers), and they developed a family-like bond (sub-ordinate theme: Family-like togetherness), which brought them closer together. In their pathway year, participants developed very close connections and friendships with peer
pathway students, supporting each other in their struggles, helping each other, spending time together in and outside the university. Several students formed friendships that lasted beyond the first year of college, often referring to their peer pathways students as ‘best friends’ or ‘the new family.’ While adjusting to the new life, they enjoyed the family-like intimacy and closeness, and the support they were getting from being in a very close and cohesive group of people whose lives were brought together by shared the experience as international students.

Liminality literature (De Amorim E Sa, 1980; Anfara & Mertz, 2006) also states that liminal individuals begin their own rites of intensification, and create close-knit communities, often referred to as “a kind of communitas” in the literature, with intensified relationships among those of equal status as they cope with the uncertainties of the new environment, (De Amorim E Sa, 1980, p.7). The findings in this study further support such arguments. Whether through the structured nature of the pathway programming or students’ intentional efforts, international pathway students engaged in the community building, and found a community among peer pathway students through the shared experience (subordinate themes: *Comfort in shared experience, Family-like togetherness,* and *Community building*). A number of students described spending time together during the events and gatherings that the pathway program provided and/or promoted, including attending baseball and basketball games, participating in a soccer tournament, or taking a whale-watch cruise on the weekend. Several students made efforts to engage with fellow students outside of the school context. They spent time with friends, shopping, cooking, partying and celebrating birthdays and other occasions together.

Liminality research (Turner, 1982) further indicates that liminality encourages action, experimentation, and exploration of new possibilities and opportunities. Turnbull (1990), as cited in Anfara and Mertz, 2006, emphasized, “the transformative possibilities embedded in the
liminal state” (p.62). That was also the case for the students in this study. As outlined in the sub-ordinate theme: *Turning into action*, and aligned with that notion of action, exploration and experimentation in the liminal phase, a number of participants described pursuing leadership roles within the Leaders’ Program to improve their skills, learn, and support other international students through the duties assigned to their roles in the program. Students wanted to contribute and make a difference. Some participants seized campus-wide leadership opportunities within the university’s student organizations taking upon more senior functions in order to serve and support incoming pathway students.

Most importantly, this study supports the notion of the transformative possibilities, action and experimentation of liminal individuals, as argued by Turner (1982) and Turnbull (1990), in that all participants experimented with new ways of “being” students at an American university. As evidenced in the super-ordinate theme: *Liberated by the classroom climate* and corresponding sub-ordinate themes, students participated in a different way in class than they had done in the past. They learned and recognized academic differences, expectations and requirements of the unknown academic setting. They felt encouraged and liberated by the free and unrestricted sharing of ideas in the classroom, which many had not experienced before. They further embraced more engaging and participatory learning while taking advantage of the close and informal relationships they developed with peers, staff, and faculty in support of their academic learning.

**Implications for Practice**

Gaining insight into the student experience is critical for any institution that hosts international students on campus. From a purely practical standpoint, the understanding of what the international student experience is like helps universities create the appropriate support
measures that aim to ease the challenges that international students go through, and respond to their immediate needs. Understanding the experience of international undergraduate pathway students is even more important. International undergraduate pathway students constitute a relatively new and un-researched student population. As international pathway students come with mixed levels of English language proficiency and the academic skillet levels often lower than the ones of the directly admitted university students, they are at a greater risk to experience struggles that define their experience in the United States.

**Recommendation 1: Create an immersion center to support international students’ adjustment and offer a platform for domestic students to engage in multicultural learning.**

As evidenced in super-ordinate theme *Liberated by the classroom climate* and the corresponding sub-ordinate themes, the findings revealed that a significant portion of the international undergraduate student experience in the pathway year is centered around the learning of, and the transition to, the different and unknown demands of the American academic environment. Students felt liberated and encouraged to fit into the American higher education setting and they made deliberate efforts to fit in. It is evident, however, that they went through the adjustment period in the pathway year resulting in their confusion, disorientation and intimidation stemming from the differences in academic requirements and expectations, and the use of English as the language of instruction.

While participants admitted to having opportunities to learn about differences in requirements and expectations of the academic environment that spoke to their concerns during the new student orientation, in the first year student seminar, and through their interactions with professors, those efforts could benefit students more if they were be more strategically coordinated by both the pathway program and university. While it must be recognized that the
university does offer several resources that speak to student concerns, international students are not used to utilizing on campus resources in a proactive fashion. If it was not for the proactive manner in which the pathway program supported the students in the first year, participants may not have been aware that there were resources available to them, as they did not experience such services back home.

Further, while it is critical for universities to support their international populations, international students must also be recognized for their contributions to the cultural diversity of the university community. International students enrich the quality of learning by bringing their perspectives embedded in their home cultures into the American classrooms, which facilitates cross-cultural and experiential learning between international and domestic students. For many domestic students, international students provide an opportunity to acquire and/or get exposure to global competencies by immersing in intercultural learning and cross-cultural interactions without having to travel overseas.

Thus, as part of institutional globalization efforts, it is recommended that both the university and the pathway program at the research site create an immersion center to increase the awareness of the resources available to both international students in the first year and domestic students while providing opportunities for both populations to engage in cross-cultural learning. Following introduction to academic life in the orientation, it is further recommended that, through the center, both the university and the pathway program offer a series of mandatory workshops geared towards international pathway students, focusing on the specific aspects of academic adjustment. Some of the topics of interests, for instance, may include areas such as, academic honesty and plagiarism, the university grading system, class participation, freedom of expression in the classroom, engaging with professors, on-campus resources, time management
and study skills, etc… The immersion center could further lead the creation of a fully global, inclusive and supportive culture through collaboration, student and faculty development, and collaborative engagement among international students, domestic students, staff, and faculty.

**Recommendation 2: Integrate domestic students into the pathway experience.** As evidenced in the super-ordinate theme: *Isolated from domestic students*, pathway students in this study engaged in developing connections with peers since when they arrived on campus. However, findings indicated that participants’ experience was missing interactions with domestic students during the pathway year. Since all students in the pathway program were international students, they had no American students in the first year classes. Several students in the study expressed feeling isolated, yet longing for interactions with American students. Some argued that the lack of interactions in the first year of their university experience affected their transition to the sophomore year while a few were hesitant about having domestic students in first year classes. Not many, but a few participants argued that they might not feel confident about their participation in classes with American students as American students had the language advantage.

While it might be challenging for universities and pathway programs to determine what kind of role, and in what capacity, domestic students should play in the pathway classroom experience, it is critical that pathway students get exposure to domestic students during the pathway year to better facilitate their academic, cultural and social transition. As evidenced by research findings, international pathway students in this study did not have many opportunities to interact with American students, and they missed those opportunities.

Therefore, it is recommended that both the university and the pathway program identify ways to include American students in the pathway experience. One of the ways to include American
students in the classroom experience could be ensuring that pathway students enroll in a single academic course that would include both international and domestic students. That sort of course schedule would offer an opportunity for pathway students to ‘sample’ a regular class and experience American students in the classroom while still allowing them to take other classes with international pathway students in a smaller and more intimate pathway setting. This type of arrangement would not impose a burden on the students that may have hesitations about “being thrown” into regular classes with American students in their first semester.

Another way to ensure that domestic students are a part of the pathway year experience outside of the classroom could be developing a joint mentorship program, which would match a domestic student with an international pathway student or a small group of international pathway students. A domestic student would serve as a mentor to international pathway students providing informal guidance on the matters of interest to international students. While supporting the pathway experience in the first year, the mentorship program as such could also serve a great opportunity for American students to learn about other cultures.

**Recommendation 3: Offer joint opportunities for community building.** As evidenced in the sub-ordinate themes: *Comfort in shared experience* and *Community building*, findings indicated that international students found happiness, comfort and support in knowing that there are other international students, like themselves, who were going through the same experience. Not being alone, but sharing the experience with fellow international students brought students comfort, helped them connect, and facilitated developing relationships, which lasted beyond the first year of college. Spending time together and learning in the same classes made participants feel a part of the pathway program community while enabling them to develop long-lasting connections with other students.
While it is evident that the pathway program took a proactive role in providing students with opportunities to interact with each other in and outside the classroom through small classes and on and off campus programing and events, international pathway students seemed not to have participated in many activities and/or events outside of those offered by the pathway program and geared towards pathway students. For that reason, it is highly recommended that both the pathway program and the student affairs division at the university make strategic and joint efforts in ensuring that international pathway students have, and are included in, the larger events that take place within the larger university community. While this is not to suggest that such opportunities do not presently exist on campus, a more proactive and inclusive approach could ensure that international pathway students, who may be hesitant about event participation outside of their comfort zone, get included in the student life to take advantage of the many opportunities available to the larger university community.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

**Recommendation 1: Examine if present findings are in line with the experiences of strugglers in the pathway and student populations outside of Asia and South East Asia.** The study findings emerged out of the accounts of eleven participants, who were identified through deliberate sampling by the pathway advisement office, the gatekeeper to the studied population. While the sample size in this study is in line with the IPA recommended practices for qualitative IPA researchers, and every effort was made to ensure the sample diversity, the findings may speak to the experience of a select group of students rather than a larger pathway student population. Although the gatekeeper in this study made deliberate efforts to identify the participants who would know a lot and would have a lot to share about the topic of the study, the researcher took a notice that all participants in this study did relatively well academically. With
that in mind, although the findings do provide a deeper dive into what it is like to be a pathway student at an American university, the study findings might not fully reflect the experience of the students who may struggle with maintaining academic performance at expected levels. Their experience might differ. Furthermore, though the participant sample did reflect the diversity of the students in the pathway program at the time of study, it is evident that nine out of eleven participants came from Asia and South East Asia.

It is, therefore, recommended that future research focus on; 1) examining the experiences of pathway students who may not do well academically (or may withdraw from the program), and 2) the students representing a wider geographic and cultural diversity to examine whether their experiences are in line with the ones the participants in this study had in the pathway year.

**Recommendation 2: Examine how inclusion of domestic students influences adjustment of pathway students.** The scope of this study was limited to the single public institution in New England with an on-campus pathway program in which international undergraduate pathway students were matriculated degree seekers taking classes as a cohort, with other pathway students. As outlined in the super-ordinate theme, *Isolated from domestic students*, findings revealed that, due to the pathway cohort structure, the pathway experience did not include domestic students. Participants missed interactions with domestic students in the first year as American students were not present in the pathway classes, with some participants claiming having difficulties making connections with domestic students following pathway completion.

It is, thus, recommended that future research focus on 1) identifying ways to include domestic students in the pathway experience, and 2) examining how inclusion of domestic students in the pathway experience influences transitional experience of pathway students.
**Recommendation 3: Identify best practices to support pathway students.** The study findings revealed that pathway students in this study experienced a range of challenges associated with the transition to a new academic, social, and cultural environment while finding comfort in the multi-layered supports that the pathway program at the research site provided. In view of the fact that pathway programs and pathway students in the United States are under-researched, it is strongly recommended that future research examine other U.S. – based pathway programs to examine how they support adjustment of international pathway students to identify best practices in regards to supporting this vulnerable population.

**Conclusion**

In closing, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into transitional experiences of international undergraduate students as they navigate their academic journey in a New England institution of higher education following participation in an on-site pathway program. The qualitative data full of rich descriptions collected through in-depth interviews from eleven international undergraduate students resulted in the identification of several emergent themes, which offered a unique perspective on the experience on undergraduate international students.

Conducting this study was of particular importance. Despite the recent growth of international students enrolled in pathway programs across the United States, both international pathway students and the pathway programs have remained largely unexamined. Understanding student experience has been of great interest to researchers and practitioners, but there has not been much scholarly work to examine the perspectives of international undergraduate students on their experiences in pathway programs in the U.S. higher education context.

This research aimed to fill the gaps in the existing literature by offering a student perspective on the transitional experiences of international undergraduate students at a university in the
Northeast following a completion of an on-site pathway program. It is hoped that this study will inspire further research on international pathway students and pathway programs to inform practice so that institutions can better understand and support the experience and academic success of international pathway students during their educational endeavors in the United States.

References


Ello, S., Kaariainen, M., Kanste, O., Polkki, K., Utriainen, K., & Kyngas, H. (2014). Qualitative
Content Analysis: A Focus on Trustworthiness. *SAGE Open, 4*, 1-10,

https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633


students from East Asian countries: A consensual qualitative research. *Journal of International Students, 8*(1), 194-214.


Lobo, A. (2012). Will we meet again?: Examining the reasons why students are leaving first year university courses and moving towards an approach to stop them. *International Journal of Learning, 18*(7), 199-212.


Epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning.
*Higher Education, 49*, 373-388.


Reiners, G. M. (2012). Understanding he differences between Husserl’s (descriptive) and Heidegger’s (interpretive) phenomenological research. *Nursing & Care, 1*(5), 1-3.


241-248.


## Appendices

### Appendix A: Liminality Framework

Depiction of Transitional Stages in Rite of Passage (based on Van Gennep, 1960)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Conceptual Definition</th>
<th>Operational Definition in the Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-liminal</td>
<td>A separation from previous social state takes place</td>
<td>During this period, an international student enters a life transition to a new environment and culture at an American university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liminal</td>
<td>Transitional phase during which an individual is initiated to a different state of life</td>
<td>This period can be characterized by a student's loss of social connectedness while navigating uncertainties and ambiguities of the new cultural and academic norms of the university, and the host country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-liminal</td>
<td>A period during which an individual experiences re-incorporation and re-aggregation into a new state of being</td>
<td>During this period, the past and present get integrated to create new normal when a student returns back home upon earning the degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Request for Participant Referrals

[UNIVERSITY NAME]
[PROGRAM NAME]

Dear [FIRST NAME],

Thank you for speaking with me in person about my study the other day.

As part of my dissertation work, I am undertaking a small-scale research that focuses on the experiences of international undergraduate students in the pathway program at a U.S. university. I was wondering whether you would be able to help nominate potential students who might be interested in participating in this research.

I am looking to interview 10 international undergraduate degree-seeking students who started academic journey by completing their freshman year in the pathway program at [UNIVERSITY NAME] and progressed to the mainstream studies.

I also wanted to assure you that this research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at [UNIVERSITY NAME] and that students’ participation will be voluntary.

If you have any questions concerning the nature of this study or the participant’s involvement in this research, feel free to contact me at zaba.k@husky.neu.edu. I would be happy if you could help me identify prospective students to participate in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Kristof Zaba
Doctoral Candidate
Northeastern University
Appendix C: Request to Participate Email

Dear [FIRST NAME],

My name is Kristof Zaba and I am a doctoral candidate in Doctor of Education Program at Northeastern University. As part of my dissertation work, I am undertaking a small-scale research that focuses on the experiences of international undergraduate students in the pathway program at a U.S. university. I was wondering whether you would be willing to participate in a forty-five to an hour-long interview to share your opinions on your experience in the pathway program.

The Student Success Manager at the [PROGRAM NAME] suggested that you might be a great candidate for this study. As an international student who started academic journey in the pathway program in the U.S., you bring a lot of experience and expertise, and your opinions can make difference in the lives of present and future pathway students.

Before you agree to participate in the interview, I wanted to assure you that this research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at [UNIVERSITY NAME]. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the interview process at any time without any consequences. To ensure your privacy, your identity will be kept confidential at all times unless you would prefer public recognition. After the interview has been completed, you will have a chance to review the transcript for accuracy and feedback. Additionally, prior to the interview, you will be asked to review and sign a consent form, which will provide you with an outline of this study and the participant’s role.

Your opinions do matter, and I hope that you will agree to participate in this study. If you have any questions concerning the nature of this study or the participant’s involvement in this research, feel free to contact me at zaba.k@husky.neu.edu. I would be happy to discuss the study in detail and answer your questions.

Yours sincerely,

Kristof Zaba
Doctoral Candidate
Northeastern University
Appendix D: A Signed Informed Consent Form

Institution: College of Professional Studies, Northeastern University

Name of Investigators: Dr. Tova Olson Sanders, Principal Investigator
Kristof Zaba, Student Researcher

Title of Project: What is it like to be a pathway student? : Voices of undergraduate international students at a large public university in the United States.

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study:

We are inviting you to participate in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain details to you in person first. You may ask any questions that you may have and when you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. Participation in this study is voluntary and you do not have to participate if you unless you want to. Should you decide to terminate your participation, please inform the researcher so that your participation will be terminated without any consequences to you. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to review and sign this statement and will give you a copy for your records.

Why is this study being done?

This study is a part of the dissertation thesis and, under the direction of the principle investigator; the student researcher is interested in conducting a qualitative research to understand the experiences of international undergraduate students in the pathway program at a U.S. university. We hope that the outcomes from this research will allow university administrators and faculty to understand pathway student experience, resulting in enhancements to the student experience in pathway programs in the future.

Why am I being asked to participate in this research?

You have been nominated to participate in this research by Student Success Manager [PROGRAM NAME] because you have started your academic journey as an international undergraduate student in the pathway program. Your perspective on your experience in the pathway program is valuable, and it may enrich an understanding of what it is like to be an international pathway student at a large public university in the United States.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to participate, we will ask you to participate in a forty-five minute to an hour-long interview to hear your perspective on your experience in the pathway program. The interview
will be recorded and transcribed. The researcher may also take some notes during the interview. Once the transcript has been prepared, you will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

There are no likely risks or discomforts to you because of your participation in this study.

**Who will see the information about me?**

All interviews are confidential. The principal investigator and the researcher are the only ones to have access to confidential information. To ensure your privacy, all details will be kept confidential. However, if you would like to be openly recognized in a public research, you may choose to use your real name. This is your choice and not a requirement for this study.

Please initial your choice below:

- I prefer to keep my identity confidential: _______________
- I would like to have my real name used in the research: _______________

**Where will the interview take place and how long it will take?**

The researcher will arrange a location and time that is convenient to you. The interview will take from forty-five to sixty minutes.

**What will it cost me to participate?**

There is no cost associated with participating in this study.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

The participation is voluntary. There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. However, it is a great opportunity for you to share your opinions and experiences with a larger audience. Your feedback valuable, and it could help the universities better understand what it is like to be an international pathway student at an American university.

**Can I stop the participation in the study?**

Yes, you can. You can withdraw from the participation at any time without any consequences. You can also refuse to answer any or all the questions.

**Whom do I contact if I have any questions or problems?**

In case of questions regarding this research, please contact Kristof Zaba, Student Researcher at zaba.k@husky.neu.edu or call at 646.267.4754.
You can also contact Dr. Tova Sanders, Principal Investigator, at t.sanders@northeastern.edu

Who can I contact if I have questions about my rights as a participant?

In case of questions about participant’s rights in this research, you can contact: Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Phone: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Is there anything else that I should be aware of?

You must be at least 18 years of age to participate and you must have been a part of the international pathway program at [UNIVERSITY NAME] to participate.

By signing below, I confirm that I agree to take part in this research. My signature indicates that I have been informed about the nature of this research, I understand the information in this form, and that all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

___________________________________  _________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part  Date

______________________________________
Printed name of person above

___________________________________  __________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to participant above and obtained consent  Date

______________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix E: Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant background information</th>
<th>Background information to be collected prior to interview.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Name/ Assign Pseudonym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Country of Origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Major/Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Year of study in the bachelor’s program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Current cumulative GPA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Protocol</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First, I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate in this study and agreeing to this interview. You have been identified as someone with experience in the pathway program. As part of this research, I am interested in learning about the experience of international pathway students and hear their perspectives on their pathway experience. I hope that the outcomes of this research will inform practice and result in enhancements to the way universities support international students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before we can start the interview, I will need to go over a few considerations with you:

(a) This interview is scheduled to take between forty five to sixty minutes, during which I am planning to ask you several questions regarding your experiences. To stay on target, I may have to interrupt you and ask/or additional questions.

(b) With your permission, and to capture details of our interview, I will be taking notes and will be recording our conversation. The idea behind the recording is to ensure that I can capture the knowledge shared today as accurately as possible. The recording than will be transcribed.

(c) I would also like to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential, and your real name will not be used unless you choose to. I will share a copy of the interview transcript with you and you will be able to check for accuracy.

(d) Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to respond to questions if you are comfortable or withdraw at any time without prejudice or any consequences to you.

(e) Do you have any questions before we begin?

(f) With that, I would like to ask for you permission to record our conversation. Can I record from now on?
Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this interview. Please kindly sign the written contest form for my records. If you have no other questions, we will start the interview.

**Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #1</th>
<th>When you first arrived at [UNIVERSITY NAME], you started your journey in the [PROGRAM NAME] pathway program. <strong>Can you reflect on what you thought it would be like to study at a U.S. university?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prompts:</td>
<td>What did you think it would be like to be in the pathway student?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #2</th>
<th><strong>Please could you tell me about your experience with the transition to college in the U.S.</strong>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prompts:</td>
<td>How did it feel to be a pathway student at the university?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What was it like to be a pathway student? How did it make you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can you give me an example of when you...[refer to participant’s remarks]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So what you are saying is [repeat participant’s statement] and seek clarification if needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #3</th>
<th><strong>How do you feel about you academic experiences?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prompts:</td>
<td>Can you give an example of when you…[refer to participant’s remarks]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How did it feel when you… [refer to participant’s remarks]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Question #4 | <strong>How about your experience having to study in English? Can you tell me more about that?</strong> |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompts:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was it like to use English in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you think the pathway experience influence your ability to study in English?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you give an example of when you… [refer to participant’s remarks]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did it feel when you… [refer to participant’s remarks]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question #5**

You have described your academic and English language experiences, how about social experiences outside of the classroom?

**Prompts:**

- Please tell me how you spent your time after school?
- How did you get to know the people you spent time with after school?
- Tell me about your interactions with domestic students?
- How about other interactional students?
- Was there anyone that may have helped you organize your time after school? Can you talk about that more?

**Question #6**

How do you feel your pathway experience influence your studies in the bachelor program?

**Prompts:**

- Can you tell me more about …?
- What makes you say that?

**Closing Question**

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your transitional experience?

[Encourage the participant to share anything that the interviewer may not have asked about in regards to their pathway experience.]

**Wrap Up**

I would like to thank you again for the interview today. I will be emailing you a copy of the interview transcript for your review to give you an
opportunity to correct anything that I may not have captured accurately. Can you confirm your email address?

Would you mind if I contacted you again in case I had any additional questions or need any clarification? Would you prefer that I email or call?

Also, when I complete this project in the next few months, would you like to receive a copy?

Do you have any final questions for me? Thank you again. I appreciate your help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix F: Interview Field Notes Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Researcher:</strong> Kristof Zaba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Date:  
Time:  
Location:  
Setting:  
Overall Experience with Data Collection:

**Participant:**
- Assigned Pseudonym:  
- Gender:  
- Country of Origin:  
- Major/Program:  
- Year of study in bachelor program:  
- Self-reported cum. GPA:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>