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A Study of Factors Contributing to Acculturation Stress for International Graduate Students in a Small Non-Profit Graduate School

Nkenge Friday
NRFriday@gmail.com

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A Study of Factors Contributing to Acculturation Stress for International Graduate
Students in a Small Non-Profit Graduate School

by
Nkenge R. Friday

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University
2018

Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Nkenge R. Friday under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Verona McCarthy, EdD
Committee Chair

Ronald Hunter, EdD
Committee Member

Kimberly Durham, PsyD
Interim Dean

Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the Student Handbook of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Nkenge R. Friday

Name

February 27, 2018

Date

Acknowledgments

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. – Nelson Mandela

My love of education has been a wonderful journey, one filled with discovery and passion. Education has been a testament to my life and aspirations, starting with my love of reading. The path has consistently led me towards roles that have allowed rare opportunities and inspiring characters. Each experience has pushed me towards larger responsibilities with additional requirements, the final one being met with the completion of my doctorate. The culmination of years of hard work, late nights, bumps and curves have all led to the best title I could have hoped to receive.

First, I would like to thank my wonderful husband, Otis. You have believed in me before this journey began and have been my most understanding ally. Over 10 years ago your naval career took us to Naples, Italy. This journey led me to the discovery of international education and my place in it. You not only indulged my love of travel, you shared it. Thank you for never attempting to stifle my love of learning, discovery, travel and constant need to push myself. You have shown me unwavering support, loyalty, understanding, and so much love. This journey would not have been possible without you; you inspire me to be more and to want more. Thank you for explaining the little things and thank you for always wanting to hear more of my work and serving as my unofficial advisor. My work and the culmination of research are dedicated to you and our love.

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purchase used books, and the patience shown while hearing of my many dreams, it all started with you. You have shown me such strength and wisdom, in short, thank you for being who I needed when I needed it.

My family is composed of so many, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention my siblings, the ones who know me so well. As the youngest of 6, I am so lucky to have been sheltered from turbulent times by all of you, as difficult as I know it must have been, you allowed me to be me. To my siblings - my oldest brother John, my oldest sister Shantae, Marlo, Jennifer, and Joy, thank you for loving me and my assertive yet endearing ways. My completion of this venture was in many ways due to the lessons I learned from being your little sister. Your indulgences of my many tantrums and your continued support of my dreams are deeply appreciated. I am proud to be a member of our clan.

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Abstract

A Study of Factors Contributing to Acculturation Stress for International Graduate Students in a Small Non-Profit Graduate School. Nkenge R. Friday, 2018: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: acculturation, stressors, cross-cultural adjustment, globalization, international students

The increase of international students studying in universities and colleges in the United States has led to the need for additional programming and resources on campuses that support the transitioning needs related to campus and community culture. Given the diverse cultural needs of international students and the metropolitan culture of Washington, DC, acculturation stress can be a common occurrence while attending the intensive graduate program.

In this study, international students attending a small graduate school in Washington, DC were interviewed while resources provided for transitioning and ongoing support for the students were examined. Factors related to areas of programming and resources that were designed to support the arrival and ongoing needs of international students, yet limited in structure such as international student orientation and health and wellness, were analyzed as possible areas that contribute to acculturation stress. Following the study, updated transitioning programs will be created that is reflective of international student needs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The number of international students pursuing higher education in the United States has continued to rise, with New York and California receiving the greatest numbers of these students (Institute of International Education, 2013). According to Institute for International Education (2014), the United States hosted a record number of 886,052 international students during the 2013–2014 year. Over the past decade, undergraduate enrollment for international students has increased over 40%. Projections have indicated that in 2020 the number of international students studying in the United States will increase to seven million (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). In this era of global competition, prospective international students have become well-informed, selective consumers of higher learning. In anticipation of the projected growth in the number of these students, colleges and universities across the nation have begun directing increasing amounts of resources toward the recruitment of international students. Although the United States has received more international students than any other nation, this trend must continue for many institutions and states to remain economically viable and efficient.

As higher education continues to evolve into the cornerstone of socioeconomic mobility and career advancement, the tide of participants has continued to evolve. As viewers continue to study the increase of international students attending higher learning institutions in other nations, the demographics of higher education have continued to evolve as well. These trends have undoubtedly impacted these international visitors and their experiences studying in the United States. These trends have also impacted the services international students receive during their time at an institution. The National

Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA; 2014) found that although colleges and universities understand the need for delegating funds to recruit international students, they appear to delegate fewer resources to retaining and transitioning these students.

The reality of increasing numbers of international students pursuing their education in the United States has led to the expectations of additional resources for transitional services and affiliated departments. Resources typically include general orientations to campus life and to the cities in which the institutions reside, services dedicated solely to international student issues (e.g., academic resources, peer assistance, clubs and organizations, health services, and immigration and visa offices), introductions to American culture and living, and ways to help students transition into studying in their host country. However, changing student demographics, continuously decreasing state-mandated funding for public institutions, and subsequent consequences on student services have also become factors one must consider in studying the transitional issues of international students. The reality of these issues, coupled with shrinking enrollments at smaller institutions, has resulted in the cutting of allocated resources for international student services.

Student demographic trends have become important in the depiction and discussion of acculturation stressors. Evolving trends have included the higher than traditional age of students on college campuses and the largest number of recipients of bachelor's degrees in the past decade of the millennium. Recent studies (Pelletier, 2010) have indicated stereotypical students (i.e., 18 to 22-year-old who are financially dependent on their parents, carry full-time course schedules, and live on campus) comprise only a small portion of the current college population. Adult students (25 years

old or older) comprised more than 47% of the students currently enrolled in colleges and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). To note the further evolution of higher education, over the past half century, women have consistently dominated men in receiving a formal education. In 2010, 57.4% of all bachelor's degrees awarded in the United States were awarded to women (Guo, 2014). These changing demographics have continued to affect many aspects of higher learning and its increasing number of international students.

Statement of the Problem

Although colleges and universities continue to increase the number of strategies employed for international recruitment and enrollment to ensure sustainability, resources dedicated to the transitional needs of international students have remained insufficient. As global economies strive to be more competitive on a larger stage, interest in Western education has surged, as shown by the largest number of international students studying in the United States in 2013 (Leong, 2015). With increased representation of international students in colleges and universities in the United States has come an increase resources devoted to international student services, all designed to assist these students in transitioning to their institutions. Many institutions have answered the call to assist international students' transition to Western education with newly established departments and staff. However, increased accountability measures in higher education, strained budgets that change each fiscal year, and growing social unrest amongst marginalized students on many college campuses have resulted in growing acculturation factors for international students seeking higher learning at U.S. institutions. Because of these campus issues, institutions have had to answer with sweeping changes, relegating

transitional matters and concerns to lower levels of institutional priorities.

Although the complex issues associated with acculturation are numerous and researchers have been studying international students for many years, modern technology and evolving demographics have revealed the need to update acculturation stressors. Past acculturation issues included limited cultural understanding, English language capabilities, interpersonal communication, depression, anxiety, and difficulty adjusting to new environments. Outside factors contributing to acculturation included housing options, finances, health insurance, and student expectations. These areas have been highlighted in the present study as they are directly linked to the current orientation model in the goal of creating sustainable orientation programs that include expert advice from past students, including the subjects in the current study.

Past research has revealed several approaches, including a broad, sweeping view into the stressors of the college campus and culture for all international students at an institution (Leong, 2015). Although such approaches were undoubtedly beneficial in improving the study of international students, the approach in the current study was to conduct a year-long study of adult learners from international communities. Initiatives developed to support international students in their transition to campus included orientation programs, social activities and events, mental health counseling and services, and first-year academic seminars.

Topic

The present study was an examination, investigation, and detailing of the acculturation stressors of international graduate students at a small private graduate institution founded and lauded for its emphasis on international training for both domestic

and international students. The study consisted of an examination of seven international students through group and individual interviews. The countries represented by the subjects were Malawi, Nigeria, Liberia, and Sudan. The careers of these students ranged from entry-level to mid-level professionals. Many of these international students were blossoming evaluators in their home countries, seeking graduate degrees to offer more practical and experiential approaches that could result in furthering their career ambitions and professional networking goals. The information gleaned by these methods served as the basis for creation of a training program to bridge the concerns given by these international students with a comprehensive staff training plan. Included in the staff training plan was not only a view into recurring student concerns but also concise methods for culture transitioning and staff sensibility and best approaches for developing international student inclusion.

Research Problem

The international students who served as subjects in the present study were members of the Washington, D.C., Center cohort, and separate from the home institution in New England. As members of this cohort, students did not have access to a full campus resource center, an international student office, or dedicated full-time staff available for their varying needs. The problem was the lack of any systematic measure of the impact of the lack of resources dedicated to the acculturation of international students. Because a study of this kind had never been done at such a local graduate program, the findings of the present research study could result in a more consistent approach to the transitioning strategies for international students in the future. Grounded in phenomenology, the study consisted of an examination of the factors that contribute to

acculturation stressors for international students in a small graduate school at a regional campus in Washington, D.C., over the span of a one-year program (2016–2017).

Phenomenology, which is derived from the discipline of philosophy, is a qualitative research methodology employed to understand the essential nature of the lived human experience (Hasselkus, 1995). With this theory, researchers seek to develop new and inventive understandings of lived experience, relying on first-person accounts generally obtained through participant interviews. Creswell (2013) found that authors have developed many diverse approaches to analysis that reflect the philosophical premises of the historically influential originators of phenomenology.

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology encompasses individuals who have experienced a phenomenon or similar experiences and the method of multiple interviews with the same individuals. In the present study, seven subjects conveyed their experiences relative to acculturation stress and its negative impact on their experiences as part of the 2016 cohort. Their accounts could serve as the basis for developing strategies to aid the transition process for international students in the future and for campus-wide collaboration as the model must be consistent throughout the institution.

Background and Justification

The surge of international students pursuing postsecondary education in American colleges and universities has increased steadily over the past several years. As adult learning and higher education continue to grow and establish themselves as the paths to financial security, the number of international students interested in global education has continued to increase. These international students have shifted their educational emphasis towards the promise of an American education, one that will assist in their

fulfilling aspirations of security and success. According to a study conducted by the Institute of International Education (2014), as higher education continues to offer the promise of upward mobility and financial security, more and more international students will seek out American colleges or universities in pursuit of their goals. Although other Western nations, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, offer similar educational standards and actively compete and bid for international students, the United States has seen the highest increase in international student enrollment for postsecondary studies (Institute of International Education, 2013).

When students from different cultures come into close, long-term contact with other cultures, they experience a process known as acculturation. Acculturation is defined as changes that take place because of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences (Gibson, 2001). International students could experience social, biological, and psychological change as they experience the pressures of being removed from what is most familiar to them and of adjusting to different cultural environments in unfamiliar environments without the comfort of the support they derive from their known social components (Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, & Ku, 2007). When international students believe they are unable to handle the challenges of acculturation effectively, they begin to experience acculturative stress. According to Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, and Baden (2005), acculturative stress can have negative emotional and mental health consequences, including academic anxiety, language barriers, homesickness, anxiety, and depression.

Site Description

The regional center opened in 2011 in the business district in the heart of

Washington, D.C., an urban area with several forms of public transportation. Located on a separate floor in the building, the center includes two large classrooms, staff offices, a small library, multiple study areas, and rooms for private student use. The home campus for the school is located on more than 200 acres in New England. At the home campus, students can participate in a study-abroad program available in more than 50 countries and in a quarterly experiential learning program in which international participants work on development projects.

The inaugural class of 2011 included 28 students, one full-time faculty member, a program director, and a program administrator. The program has grown over the years to its current student and staff levels of 35 students, a program director, a senior student affairs officer, 2 full-time faculty members, 6 adjunct faculty members, a career coach, a program administrator, and a practicum specialist.

Demographic Trends

The continuous surge in international students pursuing postsecondary education in the United States has led to the establishment of additional resources, research, and associations on behalf of several receiving institutions. Internationally focused professional associations have expanded and increased, all designed to answer the diverse needs of this blossoming international student population. The field of international higher education (IHE) has also expanded and has shifted from discussions of the role of international students within universities to discussions concerning the services provided to facilitate this mobility. Although provisions and research continue to develop for student affairs, the literature has contained little concerning the application of IHE to the practice of student affairs (Roberts, 2014). Thus, the field of IHE has continued to be at a

crossroads and must be connected to higher education and student affairs.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

The difficulties many international students face, including the students of the cohort being evaluated at the institution, have been adjusting to life as a student within an unfamiliar country, to unfamiliar teaching or instructional methods, to unfamiliar customs and approaches, and to increasing social unrest on college campuses because of the tumultuous political climate. The graduate institution evaluated in this study has had an increase in student dissatisfaction (based on student evaluations and released studies within the Department of Institutional Research) and an increase in resources dedicated to ease the transition for international students. Within the past 5 years, even though the institution has dedicated an increase in funding of 2% each year for additional training and professional development for staff in the international components of the institutions, the number of international students failing courses has continued to increase, the first occurrences within the past decade.

Lei, Woodend, Nutter, Ryan, and Cairns (2015) labeled cross-cultural adjustment of international students as difficulties with language barriers, lack of support, and lack of familiarity with the American school system. Researchers have not adequately addressed ways to combat acculturation stressors after resources have been dedicated and during social instability on campuses. These challenges could result in persistent feelings of depression, isolation, anxiety, and inadequacy. In contrast to previous studies that listed numerous centers and resources available at larger schools, the present study included a comparison a comparison of the challenges international students face with the lack of a consistent and impactful orientation and of student resources accessible to the

international students.

Audience

Linking a fully developed, culturally diverse, inclusive orientation to a more fluid acculturation of international students in a small graduate program was the goal of this study. Through researching, noting, and depicting the experiences of the international students in the target program, the findings of this qualitative investigation could serve as the basis for a comprehensive training program designed to assist in the adjustment to the graduate program and the immediate Washington, D.C., area of international students in the future. In the present qualitative investigation, the subjects' first-hand accounts revealed comprehensive views of the students, acculturation issues, their fellow domestic students, staff, and other acculturation factors.

The analysis of several international students and several facets within the current orientation for international students (that includes domestic students) seemed to increase understanding of the reasons the current orientation model has been ineffective. In addition, the present research has revealed strategies that could be used to strengthen the future implementation of the developed training program. This new training program, which includes a week-long orientation exclusively for international students, could serve to ensure international students better understand their new roles in the graduate program, as visiting students, and as contributors to the area in which they live.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that contribute to acculturation stress for international students at a renowned graduate school regarded as a leader in educating students on intercultural communication, international management,

conflict transformation and peacebuilding, and teaching English for speakers of other languages (TESOL). One goal of the study was to identify factors students believe serve as acculturation stressors and the extent and intensity of these various factors. Another goal of the study was the development of a sustainable faculty and staff training program and plan that could be implemented prior to the arrival of new international students.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of the applied dissertation, the following terms have been defined:

Acculturation is a specific kind of stress in which the stressors have as their source the process of adjusting into a new culture. It includes the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group and may result in stress behaviors such as confusion, anxiety, depression, alienation, and marginality.

Cross-cultural adjustment is the feeling of confusion or disorientation that often occurs when a person leaves a familiar place and moves to an unfamiliar location. These feelings are often ushered in by the anxiety of unfamiliar signs and symbols of social interaction.

Globalization is the process of interaction and integration among individuals, governments, companies, and nations arising from international investment and trade and supported by the rise of information technology.

Inter-rater reliability is an indicator of the external consistency of a test where data are collected through ratings provided by subjects. Researchers often use this method, typically for interviews, in observational research as it offers consistent ratings when subjects provide broad answers.

Phenomenology is a philosophical study of the way in which one perceives and interprets events and one's relationship to them in contrast both to one's objective responses to stimuli and to any inferred unconscious motivation to one's behavior.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As stated in chapter 1, one of the purposes of the current study was to examine the factors impacting acculturation stress in a cross-section of international students enrolled at a small, nonprofit, American, internationally-focused graduate school. Identification of these factors through the lens of current international students was the first resolve in addressing acculturation stress and in creating a sustainable orientation program to combat these issues prior to students experiencing the wave of acculturation stress. To begin, a review of the literature and the related research was necessary to ascertain the need for the present study and for the development of a training guide for future implementation.

Theoretical Perspectives

Campbell (2015) noted the importance of phenomenological methods in an analysis of international doctoral students' descriptions of their lived experiences at a U.S. university. Based on the theoretical premise of how students acculturate to new educational settings, the study revealed the key areas of the methodology. The data revealed three broad, overlapping themes that impacted the optimism surrounding societal opportunities for studying in the United States: (a) the influence of their past experiences on the participants' desire to study in the United States, (b) interactions within academic and nonacademic settings, and (c) the role of family relationships during their studies. The subjects were 10 international doctoral students, representing the countries of India, Indonesia, Nepal, Ghana, China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. All had been in the United States for 1 to 3 years. By diversifying the participants, the researcher

gained the essence of the international doctoral students' experiences in the context in which they occurred. The data consisted of subjects' responses to both a demographic questionnaire and a semi-structure interview. After the in-person interviews, subjects provided clarifications via e-mail. The focus of the first round of questions was the participants' previous higher education experiences in their home countries; the focus of the second round was their experiences during their doctoral studies in the United States. Through the use of semi-structured interviews and open-ended inquiries, the researcher could not only probe for detailed descriptions but also allow participants to reflect on their answers.

The results of this study could serve to further the resources behind the varying reasons acculturation stressors impact many international students, irrespective of age, gender, and program of study. Because the participants all had lengthy interaction and time in the United States, the observations noted in that they revealed a rarely viewed perspective in acculturation experiences in international students. Additionally, the study showed the importance of including demographic information to provide needed resources for the field of international education. However, the study lacked detailed information on previous experiences with U.S. education and ways this may have assisted with transitioning to full-time education. Inclusion of such information could have revealed a more detailed account of possible transitional resources for graduate-level students.

International Education: Record Breaking Enrollment

As the study of acculturation experience expands, knowledge of sending nations is imperative. Altbach (2009) depicted the nations from which most of the enrollment

growth in the coming decades will come, acknowledging the importance of the sending nations and the importance of Western education for global economic growth and understanding. Altbach (2009) examined the nations of China and India and the role education has on their respective economies. China and India have accounted for nearly 25% of the postsecondary student population in the world. However, Altbach (2009) also noted that developing countries will be contributing a significant proportion to the expansion.

Both China and India have realized that higher education is paramount to development and have noted the necessity of expanding their respective higher education systems and building leading research universities. In the expansion of their higher education sectors, challenges of funding, building sustainable academic cultures, and understanding transitional issues associated with international students have become paramount. In addition, in their goals of expanding their global profiles and developing strategies for international programs, both countries must consider the importance of development services and programs aimed at creating diverse communities of learning and understanding for all parties in higher education.

Altbach (2009) depicted the historical education foundation (governance and funding) of both nations to allow readers to understand the reasons that education has become fundamental and that the field has grown tremendously in the United States. As China and India loom large on the international higher education scene and are slated to become more central in the future, the impact of increasing numbers of international students pursuing education in the United States has continued to alter campus structure and student resources. The need for graduate education and the costs of adding facilities

have continued to grow. Although the author presented a historical view into the reasons international education continues to grow in the United States, Altbach (2009) failed to address adequately ways to prepare for the influx of students. The author also failed to examine the preparatory methods each country utilizes for mass funding and selection methods employed in governmental funding. This additional information could assist universities and student services divisions in better understanding student populations and transitional planning.

As international students continue to invest in higher education in the United States, one must also note the trends associated with such growth. Altbach et al. (2009) examined the changes that have taken place since the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, examining the main engines of change and their impact on higher education. Globalization, a key reality for education in the 21st century, has impacted universities and colleges in the Western world. Modern information and communications technologies have resulted in a universal method of instantaneous contact and, consequently, in the concentration of university and college ownership of publishers, key resources, and databases, all of which are almost exclusively in the developed world. The authors noted that the United States was the first country to achieve mass higher education, with 40% of the age cohort in 1960 attending post-secondary education. Yet inequalities in access, the number of internationally mobile students by region of destination, higher education financing, and the types of institutions heavily populated with international students existed. The trends noted in the report included (a) massification, (b) the emergence of the knowledge economy, (c) demographics, (d) attitudes and policies related to access, (e) a more internationally oriented academic

profession, (f) academic mobility, (g) information and communications technology, and (h) the ideas of education as a “public good” or a “private good.” All affected higher education and its necessity to local, regional, and national interests.

Demographic shifts in higher education have resulted from the impact of the global economy as the numbers of students pursuing education in other countries increase. Altbach et al. (2009) illustrated ways in which higher education institutions have responded to the challenge of globalization, finding the globalized pursuit of education is inevitable. Greater social mobility for an increasing number of the population has resulted in new paths and sources for funding, increasingly diversified education systems in most countries, and a more comprehensive qualification system that is reflective of diverse learning modules and populations. The increasing number of students and the relatively short period in which this has occurred were illustrative of the difficulty many higher education systems had in coping with the need for expanded infrastructure. These systems also had to consider the implications of diversity in considering which subgroups to include or to serve.

Given the continuing permeation of globalization in the world, Altbach et al. (2009) also discussed future trends in the report. These included the need to prepare resources and communities properly and to understand the international student body. These consumers of education utilized several approaches in determining the most suitable locations and institutions. They also discussed the importance of international validation and rankings in understanding the reasons students select institutions. However, although the report contained extensive details on the impact of massive numbers of international students pursuing education in Western countries, the study was

limited to the years 2000–2008. Thus, the information might not reflect the current needs of students. With the United States currently experiencing the largest number of international students ever, the need for updated information concerning trends, institutional growth, country-specific investments, and the current needs of the masses is imperative yet lacking from this report.

As noted previously, the increase in international students over the past decade has led to the implementation of additional studies and research, all designed to understand better the needs of international students. Previous assessments have shown the various impacts the growth of international students has had on college campuses. In states with the most international schools (i.e., California, New York, and Texas), some communities have become financially dependent on out-of-state and international students to boost their enrollments (Hu, 2011). As state funding for institutions continues to decrease, institutions must employ additional recruiting measures to obtain economic stability and school viability. Thus, increasing the number of international students pursuing education in the United States has become a necessity for many institutions to remain financially stable.

Telbis, Helgeson, and Kingsbury (2014) noted the growth in international student populations has not led to the expansion of knowledge concerning the difficulties incoming students have about social adaptability, language barriers, financial need, and academic ability. They conducted a study to determine if a correlation existed between a sense of self-efficacy and acculturative experiences. Choosing to solicit the entire international student body of a university with an overall enrollment of approximately 14,000 students, Telbis et al. (2014) sent a survey to each of 957 international students

(713 males and 244 females) representing 55 countries. Their response rate was 14%.

Analysis of the responses of the 137 study participants revealed significant differences between the participants' confidence levels in the areas of community acceptance, language ability, academic ability, and financial ability and their overall confidence in completing their programs of study (Telbis et al., 2014). Results showed those completing their programs of study had higher confidence in their community acceptance; those with low confidence in completing their programs displayed lower confidence in community acceptance. The impacts of language ability, academic ability, and financial stability on student confidence were all noted. The results indicated the four issues identified as factors of concern prior to the study were valid difficulties for international students. The authors also found each issue measured was significant enough to impact students' academic success and program completion negatively.

Although the study was quite informational and necessary to further the field of international students' acculturation experiences, the authors failed to offer innovative avenues to assist with transitional issues. The avenues suggested included (a) community support (e.g., peer-to-peer programs), (b) community access and support, and (c) language services; however, all of these sources had been included in past studies. Given the lack of innovation and new discoveries, one of the goals of the present study was to identify additional ways to offer transitional services that include collaboration with divisions such as Academic Affairs. Another goal of this study was to further the dialogue concerning ways to improve and services to provide international students in the future to assist them in their acculturation experiences. By providing innovation through international student transitional services, the student development experiences can

develop additional resources – including international student intercultural needs, all in the pursuit of services reflective of the graduate student needs.

Adaptation to Changing Needs

Research and past studies on acculturation stressors for international students at smaller graduate programs designed for international training and intercultural communication were scarce. However, Leong (2015) conducted a similar study of a smaller pool of international students. The author interviewed 11 international students (8 males, 3 females) from countries including China, Sweden, Nepal, Cote d'Ivoire, and Afghanistan. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 35 years old. Leong (2015) compared their experiences at an American university and the acculturation issues they encountered. The international students who participated assessed their experiences, both positive and negative, and their perceptions of the American way of doing things. Differentiating this study from others was the inclusion of notes from the Chinese student participants. Participants in other studies were usually African. By focusing on Chinese students, the author could develop the reasons concerning the causes of acculturation stressors. Stressors included (a) language difficulties, (b) cultural misunderstandings (e.g., local colloquialisms, food, pedagogical differences), (c) social concerns (e.g., roommates, dating, self-segregation), and (d) financial difficulties. Additionally, Leong (2015) found that students from China face more difficulties, both socially and academically, than other international students, regardless of students' self-segregation.

Leong (2015) also discovered environmental factors may be more important in shaping the experiences of international students, establishing a more substantial foundation for the acculturation stressors being researched. The study showed students

from China, the top-sending country, face considerably more difficulties in transitioning to American education and social constructs, especially given the formidable language and cultural barriers. These challenges often remained despite institutional resources devoted to transition or whether students self-segregated either with other Chinese students or primarily with Americans. Another difference between this study and others was the author's noting not only the impact of individual-level factors such as language fluency and personal coping ability but also the importance of environmental factors such as culture and the reception of the host in developing the experiences of international students. The range of areas observed, from cultural differences and misunderstandings in faculty–student interactions to culinary offerings, could all be important in understanding the vast opportunities for future research, one that includes the necessary preparations international students must undertake prior to arrival, adjustments they must make, and extension of additional assistance by American students.

The emergence of interest in IHE has resulted in propelling international students, study abroad, and the policies and legislation associated with it to the forefront of higher education. In her assessment of the field, Roberts (2014) proposed that IHE is the result of the intersection of international comparative education and higher education, given their shared historical roots. The author argued that the practice of student affairs must keep pace with IHE. Through an overview of the emergence of IHE in the 1990s and its current state, Roberts (2014) provided a clearer view of the role student affairs should have in providing the resources international students need to transition into their American institutions and culture. The growth of IHE has allowed the field to expand to include issues of governance, sociocultural impacts, policy, quality assurance, and the

analysis of broader activities via social theory. The application of IHE to the practice of student affairs has been noticeably lacking in the literature, as evidenced in Roberts's (2014) and the present study of acculturation stressors for international students. By examining the historical foundation of ICE and higher education, researchers might better understand their parallel histories. Roberts (2014) noted this and detailed these shared historical roots, which are based on John Dewey's theory of pragmatism and his education work with schools and governments in other countries.

Most of the growth in IHE has occurred in the last 20 years. Literature reflective of higher education in an international context emerged in the early 1990s, creating a need for additional research and resources devoted to the needs of the field. Just as Roberts (2014) used this need to create additional theoretical approaches and resources to reflect the burgeoning field as the cornerstone for his research, this need also served as the basis for the current study to improve the field and add to the collective.

To comprehend the processes of acculturation, one must consider the field and the assumptions that one can make. Gibson (2001) discussed this and the processes of immigrant cultural transition in a study on the acculturation process of nonnative residents and their adaptation to a new environment and people. Gibson (2001) also examined the nature of the acculturation process based on where individuals settled in the United States. Even though the focus of this study was the acculturation process as experienced by immigrants, Gibson (2001) provided a broader view of other factors, such as the ethnic and social class compositions of the communities in which individuals settle:

To understand the acculturation experience, we must also, as Bhatia and Ram

note, have knowledge of the immigrants' situation in their homelands prior to emigration—including such factors as their social standing back home, their educational levels, occupational skills, and even their previous exposure to urban and Western cultures and the reasons that led them to leave their homelands. (Gibson, 2001).

Gibson (2001) found that the process of acculturation is dependent on where immigrants settle in the United States, what the ethnic and social class compositions of the communities in which they settle are, and whether they are surrounded by co-ethnics or are more isolated from their native culture. Additional structural and contextual factors, such as their social standings in their native countries and their understanding of American culture prior to their arrival in the United States, also impacted their acculturation experiences. These factors, along with the modes of acculturation (i.e., linear and assimilation acculturation, accommodation and acculturation without assimilation, and downward assimilation) were useful in determining the forces contributing to these individuals' experiences and to developing a better comprehension of those experiences.

Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, and Baden (2005), explored the cultural adjustment experiences of 15 Asian Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese international college women. They collected data through semi-structured interviews. Noted within the research was the large number of male Asian students. (Students from Asia constitute over half the total number of international college students in the country, with China and India being the largest two contributors.) The research revealed cultural differences and disparities in several (previously mentioned) areas, including social

separation, homesickness, and difficulty adjusting to the academic rigors of higher education. Based on the research, the authors also introduced the factor of underused resources, such as mental health services, in combatting acculturation experiences. Individuals underused mental health resources in dealing with several kinds of issues, including individuals' perceived sense of stigma or shame, strong levels of commitment to their culture or family, and cultural differences in beliefs about mental health services and because they were unfamiliar with such services or lacked information about them. The authors identified subjects' adjustment experiences via data analysis, providing a reflection of the students' feelings and thoughts surrounding their host nation and the differences they perceived between their native and host countries. The research revealed negative experiences that included prejudicial or discriminatory practices they experienced while in the United States. The study showed that the nature and degree of acculturative stress or difficulties with cultural adjustment international students experienced varied as functions of many different factors. Data analysis indicated language difficulties, social relations, cultural value conflicts affecting both academic and personal adjustment, lack of peer and family networks, and strategies for coping with cultural adjustment problems were all acculturative stressors.

Constantine et al. (2005) observed the importance of a historical framework for international students as understanding their circumstances prior to their arrival offered crucial clues to difficulty they had in adjusting to American culture and academic pursuits. Additionally, perceptions others had of these students' native countries were imperative in understanding their acculturation experiences. Although the study revealed additional areas to consider and understand, the researchers failed to offer additional

resources and processes for institutions with higher than average international student populations for preparing services for international students' arrival and transition. In addition, although the study revealed foundational evidence on international students and on additional areas that impact transition to college campuses, the researchers failed to note students' suggestions on ways to prepare campuses and to alter areas to service this population better.

Acculturation Stressors: Evolving Impact

The psychological impacts of acculturation experiences are important to understanding many of the areas with which international students have trouble in transitioning to U.S.-based education. Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, and Ku (2012) examined the association between a culturally relevant coping strategy, forbearance coping, and lower levels of psychological distress for individuals with weaker-versus-stronger identification with their heritage cultures. Forbearance coping is a common Chinese strategy described as the minimization or concealment of problems or concerns to maintain harmony. These authors also sought to identify situations in which this strategy might be employed. The subjects in this study were 188 Chinese international students, representing China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, who were invited from a list obtained from the appropriate campus department. The data were their responses to a survey administered online. Based on Berry's theoretical framework on acculturation, this study was an examination of the ability of acculturation modes and acculturative stress to modify the outcomes of forbearance coping for Chinese international students experiencing cross-cultural adjustment in a predominantly White university environment.

In collectivistic cultures such as the Chinese culture, individuals may be reluctant

to bring their personal problems to others in pursuit of assistance. Coupling these predetermined hindrances with Berry's theoretical approaches, Wei et al. (2012) hypothesized a three-way interaction among forbearance coping, identification with one's heritage culture, and acculturative stress in predicting psychological distress. As hypothesized, the results revealed a significant three-way interaction. The study also indicated that frequent utilization of forbearance coping can result in placing Chinese international students who hold a weaker identification with their heritage culture at risk for psychological distress when they face higher levels of acculturative stress. The authors also identified additional resources needed to further research of the causes of acculturative stressors, including mental ones. The findings were also further proof of the need for additional resources to be made available for international students arriving on college campuses and of the many areas involved in ensuring healthier transitions to full-time studies. Although the focus of the study was the psychological factors of acculturation, Wei et al. (2012) failed to address meaningful ways to combat these issues, particularly with larger populations from collectivistic communities such as Chinese. However, the findings indicated clearly the need both for additional resources to adapt campus centers and for strategizing those resources.

Bierwiazzonek and Waldzus (2016) found the phenomenon of international mobility to be quite common, the inclusion of transitioning to a new culture as a requirement of adaptation for individuals living abroad, and the resulting outcomes influenced by various sociocultural factors. The authors reviewed studies on adaptation in various groups of cross-cultural travelers to identify social and cultural contextual antecedents overlooked in each of the specialized areas.

Bierwiazzonek and Waldzus (2016) examined three distinct fields of literature, each representing a different manner of adaptation: (a) expatriates and their spouses, (b) international students, and (c) first-generation migrants. Literature on the expatriates revealed a pragmatic, work-oriented approach to sociocultural adjustment in which work-related antecedents served to promote the adjustment. The focus in the literature on migrants was the psychological outcomes of adaptation related to the overall efficacy of migrants' abilities to function within the host society. The authors noted the literature regarding international students was diverse and eclectic, providing a large quantity of information about the topic. In discussing the differences among the literature groups, the researchers presented a vast array of evidence regarding international living. However, they failed both to include concrete information concerning what dictated these differences and to address the psychological differences associated with sociocultural differences and the ways in which each area could assist the others.

The purpose of Bang and Montgomery's (2013) study was to understand the phenomenon of international graduate students' acculturation by investigating students' intrapersonal factors from the perspective of the research subjects. The subjects were 21 international graduate students (12 females; 9 males) attending a large land-grant university in the central region of the United States. The students represented the countries of Korea, China, India, Mexico, Brazil, El Salvador, Germany and Eritrea and ranged in age from 22 to 42.

Bang and Montgomery (2013) utilized several theories of personal adaptability (social, cultural, emotional, communication) in the study and employed Q-methodology, designed to measure human subjectivity using statistical applications of correlation and

factor analysis. The Q-sort consisted of 47 cards, each card containing one Q statement. Given the set of Q statements, each participant sorted them into three piles. The results revealed three types of social adaptability, all appearing to be related to factors such as the students' previous experience in their native countries, length of stay, gender, beliefs, and language competencies. Results indicated five of the students were confident optimists, seven were appreciative optimists, and five were apprehensive optimists. The findings also indicated the external issues of friendships, networking, and length of stay, cultural discrepancies between the native and host countries, racism, financial security, and job security were all important in understanding international graduate students' experiences in the social adaptation process. As noted in several other studies, international students with strong social support systems (external issues) were more likely to adjust to life in the United States.

By depicting these and additional correlation factors of country of origin, gender, and age, Bang and Montgomery (2013) also revealed communicative competence, social adaptability types, and their impact not only on students' social and academic success but also on their emotional well-being. Although the study was illustrative of social adaptive types and the importance of students' beliefs and competencies, the researchers limited the development of the discourse; therefore, the study was significantly different from previous studies. The findings indicated that although the correlation was unknown, neither age nor type of studies in which the student was participating was a contributing factor.

Although the focus in previous studies was immigrants, the focus of more recent research has been the growing field of international education, further distinguishing the

separate populations. Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) investigated the relationship between acculturative stress, social support, and acculturation modes for undergraduate and graduate international students within larger confines. The subjects were 104 international students representing 44 countries, with the majority (58.8%) coming from Asian countries. In terms of gender, 64% of the subjects were women. Although the students represented a wide range of majors, 46% were majoring in business.

In addition to the relationship between different acculturation modes and levels of acculturative stress, Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) examined the relationship between social support and acculturative stress. The researchers hypothesized that (a) international students with an integration acculturation mode would have the lowest level of acculturative stress, (b) those with a marginalization acculturation mode would have highest level of acculturative stress, and (c) those with broad-based sources of support would report lower levels of acculturative stress and identify with an acculturation mode corresponding to their source of support. They also included information on the relationship status of participants. The measures taken included participant demographics, acculturative stress, acculturation orientation, and social support.

Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) informed their examination of the relationship between international students' levels of acculturative stress and acculturation modes, based on Berry's acculturation model. The researchers hypothesized that students in the integration mode would report lower levels of acculturative stress than those in the separation and marginalization modes. They also hypothesized that broad-based social support would be associated with lower levels of acculturative stress and that acculturation modes would be associated with specific sources of support. The

findings indicated that students could address the difficulties of their acculturation process by developing more diverse social networks, by adapting to local academic norms and expectations, and by developing additional ties and connections to their campuses and local communities. Encouraging students to expand their social networks beyond students from their countries of origin (and actively assisting them in doing so) could also result in limiting the negative impacts of acculturative stress. In addition, the study revealed a comparatively large number of students in the marginalization mode, something rarely found in other studies.

Although the study contained detailed results needed to further understanding of acculturation stressors for international students, Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) noted that the low response rate limited the findings of the study. Because of the recurring problem of low response rates, researchers might wish to consider additional methods to maximize participation. By increasing participation, researchers could better ensure that they receive the best information and the representation of more students from all corners of the world, resulting in the broad yet detailed information needed for future implementation and for case studies.

Prior to arrival in the United States, international students pursuing higher education have developed perceptions and beliefs about academic conduct. Shafaei, Nejati, Quazi, and von der Heide (2015) explored international students' attitudes towards acculturation and the impact of these attitudes on students' academic practices. Social identity theory served as the theoretical foundation for the study. The researchers examined the orientation of the students through two constructs: attachment centrality and adjustment centrality. They espoused six hypotheses based on the state of students'

ethical behavior in tasks requiring ethical academic conduct in three constructs (examination, assessment, and assignment assessment) and in research-related work.

Shafaie et al. (2015) employed a quantitative approach to collect data from 178 participants. The demographic data revealed that 60.7% of the respondents were male and were studying at a postgraduate level and that 68% were between the ages of 20 and 30 years old. The findings revealed that the acculturation attitudes of international students significantly affected their behavior towards plagiarism and constituted a crucial factor in performing certain behaviors in either academic or nonacademic contexts. The significantly positive attitudes toward ethical academic conduct of adjustment-oriented students reflected their adaptation-orientation values. On the other hand, adjustment-centric students seemed to embrace the reality that when in another country, students need to comply with the norms and values of the host country.

When students showed a higher tendency to adapt to the academic rules and regulations in the host environment, they demonstrated more awareness about their ethical academic conduct in assignments, examinations, and research. The absence of a statistically significant relationship between attachment-centric acculturation and ethical academic conduct suggested that students upholding an attachment-centric acculturation approach are not likely to adapt to the ethical academic norms of the educational system of the host country. Shafaie et al. (2015) noted this as a critical issue because of its potential to undermine student learning. The strategies identified in the study that one could employ to boost the acculturation and academic integrity of international students included information sessions, training programs, in-class demonstrations and activities, and seminars focused on policies concerning academic integrity and the impact of

acculturation on academic integrity. As in other studies, one limitation of this study was the relatively small number of respondents. Further, these researchers failed to explore acculturation to the university culture and norms, limiting the scope of information received.

Preparation Reform: Investing in Additional Resources

The emotional and physical toll of acculturative stress on international students is quite high. Students who pursue graduate studies require additional support as these programs require them to develop better time management skills because of the increased academic requirements and pressures involved. International students must also combat specific stressors, including cross-cultural adjustment, lack of familiarity with the environment, and distance from their loved ones.

Bai (2016) designed a quantitative study to measure the acculturative stress of international students and to investigate predictors of acculturative stress. In contrast to previous studies, predictors included school-related elements such as academic achievement and students' perceptions of the support they received from their schools. The author compared the stress levels of students from diverse places of origin. In addition to expanding the available information on stressors for international students, the study revealed significant implications for educators and service providers of international students.

Bai's (2016) study was an examination of the following stressors: insufficient English proficiency, academic burden, lack of social support, and barriers to seeking professional help. One hundred fifty-two students, consisting of an equal number of men and women, participated in the study. The subjects ranged in age from 17 to 40, with the

average age being 25. Bai (2016) employed various scales of measurement to determine subjects' levels of acculturative stress, including an acculturative stress scale for international students and a 9-item scale for perception of school support. Analysis of the data indicated high levels of acculturative stress, with students from the Middle East experiencing the highest levels. The results also revealed the importance of institutional support in the form not only of culturally friendly environments but also of moral sustenance from the people with whom international students interact. Additionally, the findings indicated support from classmates, faculty, and staff members is imperative for the development and transition of international students. Through the study, Bai (2016) emphasized the following: (a) the imperative of developing culturally competent assessment tools to measure acculturative stress among international students, (b) the importance of identifying political, historical and institutional reasons contributing to high levels of acculturative stress, and (c) the importance of removing institutional barriers that prevent students from approaching mental health services.

Baba and Hosoda (2014) also examined adjustment difficulties for international students but did so by exploring the mechanisms through which social support functions in the context of stressful events in predicting cross-cultural adjustment among students. The researchers followed Barrera's three models of social support (the direct effects model, the stress buffering model, and the social support deterioration model) to investigate the relationships among stress factors, social support, and cross-cultural adjustment. Stress factors include academic pressure, financial stress, homesickness, social disconnectedness, perceived discrimination, and culture shock. The authors tested three hypotheses: (a) that international students with higher levels of social support would

be less likely to have cross-cultural adjustment; (b) that in controlling stress factors, social support would serve to moderate the relationship between stress factors and cross-cultural adjustment; and (c) that international students who experience higher levels of stress factors would be less likely to perceive social support, which, in turn, would relate to lower levels of cross-cultural adjustment. Subjects were 197 international students from a large state university in California, ranging in age from 18 to 49. Although most of these students were from Asia, participants also represented Europe, Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, Canada, and Russia.

Analysis of the data collected from several measurement instruments, Baba and Hosoda (2014) found that social support was positively related to cross-cultural adjustment, after controlling for each of the stress factors except culture shock. However, the study indicated social support did not function as a buffer against the detrimental effects of stressful events among international students. The researchers attributed this finding to the social support measure not being closely matched to the needs elicited by the stress factors. In terms of the third hypothesis, the results showed that although social support did not fully mediate the relationship between many of the stress factors and cross-cultural adjustment, it did partially mediate such a relationship.

Through this study, Baba and Hosoda (2014) emphasized the need for institutions to educate international students on American culture and to train them in culture-specific social skills. These proposed education workshops and training could make international students more comfortable interacting with host students. The researchers emphasized the need to develop more opportunities for social contact between international students and host students as well. By increasing the frequency of their social contacts with native

students, international students could lower their feelings of alienation as one develops a sense of belonging through social contact. By building culture-specific social skills, interactional students could have more effective cross-cultural interactions with host students.

Finally, Baba and Hosoda (2014) illustrated the important roles professors, instructors, mental health workers, and other staff play in aiding international students and emphasized the need for education for all parties, distinguishing this study from previous research. The authors noted that professors and instructors need to understand the diverse learning and communication styles of their international students and might learn to appreciate the cultural practices and experiences that international students bring to their classes. Because mental health counselors play an important role in aiding international students, institutions should ensure they have cross-cultural training, which is imperative in ensuring international students can seek effective resources. Sensitivity training for staff and faculty would also be beneficial in reducing potential discrimination and prejudice against international students as well as against any who are racially and culturally different.

Baba and Hosoda (2014) also argued that physical activity amongst students, specifically international students, is imperative as it allows additional resources for interaction with peers and cultural adjustment to occur more seamlessly. According to Yan and Cardinal (2013), research has shown that levels of physical activity levels for international students is lower than those of domestic students. These authors identified multiple factors that contribute to the lower levels of physical activity for international students, including being disconnected from their social support networks (i.e., family,

friends, and familiar social surroundings). In addition, because study visas are granted on the basis of academic aptitude, depending on their country of origin, these students could have little knowledge of the benefits of physical activity or limited or no access to the type and variety of exercise facilities available in the United States. Some countries have deemed physical activity as masculine in nature, resulting in gender-role stereotypes that serve as barriers to physical activity for women.

To counter these factors, the study indicated that creating a suitable social network while promoting physical activity could be beneficial to both domestic and international students (Baba & Hosoda, 2014). The study revealed that few colleges and universities include physical activity in their programs for international students. Providing both theoretical and practical guidance for international students, peer education initiatives (e.g., peer cooperation, peer imitation or modeling, peer counseling, and peer tutoring) could also promote motivation for physical activity through goal setting, learning skills, social support, and encouragement to promote motivation.

This study (Baba & Hosoda, 2014) was quite educational and innovative because of the introduction of additional activities to assist international students' transition into higher education in the United States. Introducing peer-led physical activity could positively impact both domestic and international students in cross-cultural understanding and transitioning to cultural diversity and inclusion. Therefore, this study could prove instrumental for modern education, given its emphasis on the importance of peer-to-peer assistance and learning from one another in addition to the importance of cultural understanding and celebration. However, the researchers could have improved the study by offering tangible examples of past activities to assist with future implementation.

Adding ways to engage and recruit participants actively could assist in developing these projects for most effective programs could also have improved the study.

Geary (2016) noted that quality interaction that has the potential to grow into authentic relationships between Americans and international students may be the bridge to impacting these outcomes. By emphasizing the importance of student interaction (in addition to the personal experiences of international students), the study could be a source of additional resources for assisting international students' transition into meaningful educational experiences in the United States. The author believed that assimilating into their new culture is imperative to the success of international students and their contentment during their studies. Geary (2016) included information on international offices and student services divisions such as those at Arizona Western College, James Madison University, and George Mason University that have implemented transitional programs (such as the one year program of the study) that could serve as models for creating programs in the future.

Included in Geary's (2016) study were suggestions to kindle interaction between international students and Americans. These included ESL courses and programs to prepare international students both culturally and academically, service learning internships that match American students with international students, fraternity or sorority groups that celebrate intercultural friendships, and international halls that match one American student with one international student. The purpose of these programs was to provide international students with extended, quality time with Americans to help them acclimate to life in the United States. The study was quite informative as it was based on the first-hand role, recollections, suggestions, and personal experiences of the author.

However, Geary (2016) did not include ways in which international students could assist the learning processes and development of their peers. Even though offering peer mentor-type groups is essential for networking and interaction, international students should also be encouraged to offer their expertise to acclimate completely and provide diverse learning experiences for all participants.

For on-campus resources to reflect accurately the needs of international students, Young (2011) argued that a comparative study of learning style preferences and the effects of accommodating these needs is imperative. As colleges and universities welcome record-breaking numbers of international students, educators must understand the anxiety associated with culture shock and diverse learning styles as these are vital to the academic success of these students. Because instructors' teaching methodologies are a vital component of student learning, Young (2011) sought to understand the extent to which anxiety and/or acculturation affect the learning styles of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean international students over an orientation semester. In addition, the author sought to understand the learning style profiles of newly arrived students that might differ from those of the research population relative to culture and gender.

The study included 86 first-time students from Korea, Japan, and China (Young, 2011). All participants had at least 8 years of English language study in their home countries by same nationality instructors. Thirty of the students had studied at the host college site for one year. By noting the correlation between anxiety and learning, the study revealed the importance of providing students with a comfort level conducive to learning. Doing so has become an evolving process as more international students pursue education in the United States. Therefore, Young (2011) argued that properly investing in

transitional areas to prepare all players is both necessary and advised.

Although the study offered additional information and resources for international educators, the author failed to give a detailed account of successful program implementations in the universities mentioned in the study (Young, 2011). Because of the emphasis in the study on the importance of innovation due to the increasing numbers of international students pursuing education in the United States, this lack of detail on what made institutions such as George Mason University successful in producing programs and initiatives for international students was disappointing. The inclusion of such information could have provided readers with a detailed overview of possible ways to implement and adjust current activities.

Jackson, Ray, and Bybell (2013) examined the roles of self-esteem, optimism, coping, acculturative stress, hope, and social support in the depressive symptoms and sociocultural adjustment of international students. The authors emphasized the lack of past research and incorporated additional variables to measure the effects of each of these factors on depressive symptoms and sociocultural adjustment in a nonclinical sample of international college students. This research resulted in a more concrete understanding of these factors in international students' outcomes in the United States and in a framework for the development and implementation of resource programs for these students prior to and after their arrival in the United States.

Jackson et al.'s (2013) research also revealed specific impact risks for poor mental health outcomes, which university counseling center staff could use to tailor resources and care for international students. The authors advanced the following hypotheses:

1. Self-esteem, hope, optimism, adaptive coping techniques, and social support were negatively related to depressive symptoms and difficulty with sociocultural adjustment.

2. Maladaptive coping techniques and acculturative stress were positively associated with symptoms of depression and issues with sociocultural adjustment.

3. Self-esteem, optimism, coping, social support, hope, and acculturative stress were predictive of participants' depressive symptoms and difficulty with sociocultural adjustment.

The subjects were 70 international students who completed an online self-report survey.

The findings indicated international students engaged in adaptive and maladaptive coping techniques at similar rates. The study also revealed an association between greater use of coping techniques, higher acculturative stress, and less social support with more depressive symptoms and greater difficulty with sociocultural adjustment. Students identifying with lower self-esteem, less hope, and less optimism experienced depressive symptoms but not sociocultural difficulty. The authors included both clinical implications and future directions as follow-up measures for international students.

Boafo-Arthur (2014) produced a study examining the unique acculturative stress of Black African students. These diverse and significant adjustment concerns included prejudice and discrimination and a lack of presence in the wealth of research dedicated to the study of international students. With the inclusion of the adjustment concerns of Black African international students and suggestions for addressing this population, the author could further resources for the field. Citing race and the experience of discrimination and its negative impacts on the transition of Black African students, the

author sought to further the field of research by including other areas of stressors for international students. Neoracism, a term used to study the experience of international students of color, reflected the many adjustment issues specific to Black African students. Other common adjustment issues included social isolation, separation from family and friends, and financial concerns. The author emphasized social isolation due to its direct impact on facing racial prejudice and discrimination and the lack of familiar support students have during these times.

Black African students from areas such as the West African countries of Ghana and Nigeria have a greater sense of pride in the darkness of black skin and wholly embrace and accept this notion (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). Given the historical differences concerning pride in darker skin complexion in the United States, international students from these regions could experience culture shock and acculturative stress because of exposure to racial discrimination. Black African students also reported discrimination from other non-Black international students. These discriminatory incidents were evidence of a lack of knowledge of African countries and culture. The perceptions of societal norms, expectations, and interpersonal relationships could also affect the transition of these students. For example, Black African students might find the idea of family in the United States to be quite different from family in their native countries.

Cross-cultural trainers, host families, international student advisors, researchers, and institutions aware of the specific adjustment processes involved for Black African students must ensure the concerns of this vulnerable population are a priority of their institutions. They must also consider and produce in diverse ways group counseling and resources to remove the stigma many international students associate with the mental

health field. According to Bofo-Arthur (2014), the stigma Black African students associate with mental health services and counseling is another voice in the need for additional resources and programs to meet the diverse needs of international students.

Research Questions

The following research questions served to guide the present study:

1. What are the contributing factors to acculturation stress for international students attending graduate school in Washington, D.C.?
2. How do these factors impact international students' social and academic experiences during their graduate programs?
3. What can assist international students in combatting acculturation stress while they are studying in Washington, D.C.?

Chapter 3: Methodology

The present study was an examination of the factors that contribute to acculturation stressors for international students enrolled in a small graduate school at a regional campus over the span of a 1-year graduate program (2016–2017).

Phenomenology was the theory employed to ground the study. Derived from the discipline of philosophy, phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology used to seek understanding of the essential nature of the lived human experience (Hasselkus, 1995). Through this theory, researchers may develop inventive and new understandings of lived experiences, relying on first-person accounts generally obtained through participant interviews. Creswell (2013) found that using this method authors have developed many diverse analytic approaches reflect the philosophical premises of the historically influential originators on whose ideas this research approached was founded. Employing this methodology allowed detailed first-hand accounts of international students' experiences first hand.

The focus of qualitative phenomenological research is on a lived experience of a phenomenon. Therefore, one could consider phenomenology to be a philosophical perspective as well as an approach to qualitative methodology because of the focus on participants' subjective experiences and interpretations of events or the world. The present study was an attempt to understand how the world or an event appears to others. Because the study concerned the experiences of international students during their graduate program in a fast-paced environment, the methods used to analyze the data differed from more traditional methods of research. Moreover, the interviews conducted to gather students' descriptions of their experiences and the way in which participants

detailed and described their lived phenomenal experiences were crucial to the present research.

By choosing as participants for the study nine international students, all of whom were members of the 2017 graduate cohort and focusing on their experiences with stressors based on acculturation, the resulting accounts could serve as the basis for creating a training model for faculty and staff at this regional center to create a more substantive transition to full-time graduate student for future international students. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology encompasses individuals who have experienced a phenomenon or similar experiences. The goal of employing the method of multiple interviews with the same individuals (in this case, the seven international students) was to highlight their experiences involving acculturation stress and its negative impact on their experiences as part of the 2017 cohort.

Participants

Nine international students from the countries of Liberia, Nigeria, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Sudan, received invitations to participate in the present study. Only seven of these students responded. Their careers ranged from entry-level to mid-level professionals. Many of these international students were blossoming evaluators in their home countries, seeking graduate degrees to offer more practical and experiential approaches to assist them in furthering career ambitions and professional networking goals.

All participants had extensive experience working or living extensively with Americans. However, this was the first time any of these students had lived extensively in the United States while simultaneously pursuing education as a full-time option.

Participants range in age from 25 to 38 years old.

Instruments

Researchers have used interrater reliability in many phenomenological studies, although it is perceived as being less scientific and its findings are perceived as being deciphering of the findings. However, interrater reliability also yields consistent observational ratings. Because the focus of the present research was on the described experiences and stated emotions of the participants during their time in the graduate program, interrater reliability was appropriate for deciphering the notes and statements of the participants. Researchers could use one of two major ways to estimate interrater reliability. Given the number of participants for this study (seven) and the topic of personal assessment of transitional resources for avoiding acculturation stressors, the better method was to estimate reliability as a continuous measure. Following study procedures, the correlations between all participants' responses were calculated. The correlation rates served as an estimate of reliability or consistency between participants. Interrater reliability also allowed the calculation of other abilities identified in participants' responses, resulting in ways to improve the intended goal of international student transitional services.

Procedures

Grounding the present study in phenomenology allowed the use of a variety of methods to gather data, including interviews, conversation, participant observations, focus meetings, and analysis of written documents (e.g., emails, personal texts). Establishing a good level of rapport and empathy was also imperative to gaining the depth of information needed when participants have a strong personal stake and

experience as participants did in this study of transitional issues.

Each of the seven subjects agreed to participate in two interviews and class and informal group discussion. The first formal interview included a series of three questions aimed at gauging their experiences for factors related to acculturation stress. Through these questions, the subjects had the opportunity to express their experiences and to recount tangible incidents, allowing development of a better understanding of the transitional issues faced by international students at an institution known for expanding educational development in international communities. The researcher took notes during the interviews and audio recorded the interviews. Following the initial interviews, the researcher compared the responses from participants. The second interviews consisted of questions aimed at general assessments and suggestions for alterations to future orientation weeks. The final formal assessment was a focus group session during which all members of the international student cohort had the opportunity to document their experiences and discuss suggestions for the training program and ways to implement suggested alterations.

Data Analysis

Discovering the structure of a phenomenon is the major goal of any descriptive phenomenological inquiry. Based upon the essential meanings evident in the details of the participants, researchers determine structure both through employing the interrater reliability tool and by the themes and trends noted in the participants' responses.

Kleinman (2004) noted the imperative of following the instructions dictated in previous research and past experiments. Processes employed in other types of qualitative research have included (a) reading the interview transcript to develop an understanding of

participants' responses; (b) rereading the entire interview transcript more methodically and deliberately an additional time to divide the data into detailed sections; (c) integrating and dividing sections based on similar trends or foci; (d) creating headers for integrated sections for a free, imaginative variation; (e) elaborating on findings to ensure that the descriptions are detailed and discovered through the free imaginative variation; and (f) reviewing the raw data descriptions to justify interpretations that include the essential purpose and general structure.

After the completion of the data analysis, a critical analysis of the work within the research study is paramount. In the present study, this critical analysis included (a) verifying the concrete, detailed descriptions gathered from all the participants, (b) maintaining phenomenological reduction (i.e., a state created by suspending all judgments and biases involving non-evident matters) throughout the analysis, (c) detailing an established structure, and (d) verifying the results with the raw data and discovering essential meanings. Given the small participant pool of seven individuals, looking across themes between the individuals was easily accomplished with the physical documents.

Limitations

The phenomenological approach can result in a rich, detailed description of human experiences and in interpretations and findings that can transpire and not be imposed by the surveyor. However, the method is dependent on the articulate skills of the participants providing the information. Given that the participants were from international communities and the English language was not the native tongue for some of them, language limitations could have affected the responses received. The language

and terms utilized in phenomenological philosophy could have been obtuse or difficult. In addition, because the results and conclusions were dependent on the participants selected for the study, the method could result in missed information surrounding broader areas concerning the development of an experience.

Furthermore, focusing on a rich description from participants could result in missing the information concerning the actions or causes that led up to the experience being studied and the subsequent outcomes or consequences. The subjectivity of the data could lead to difficulties in establishing the validity and reliability of both the approaches employed and the information gathered. In turn, this could lead to difficulty in ensuring pure bracketing and to interference in interpreting the data. Because of their highly qualitative nature, presenting the results in a generalized manner for future study or other practitioners could be difficult because the general sample sizes for this method are generally small and the experiences difficult to determine as being typical. The methods implemented to combat the limitations of this approach in the present study included ensuring that detailed notes and recordings were taken and transcribed and employing the interrater reliability tool. Doing so resulted in a detailed understanding of the participants' understanding, of their experiences throughout the year, and of their experiences with graduate education within an institution with an international focus.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter contains the results of the data analysis and the answers to the main research question: What are the acculturation stressors for international students studying in Washington, D.C.? This applied dissertation had two purposes. The first purpose was to collect information from international students concerning acculturation stressors and to engage participants with the goal of obtaining a better understanding of those stressors for students attending a graduate program renowned for its history in international development and the training of diverse cultures and communities. Participants candidly evaluated this laudable history through responding to the research questions. The second purpose was to utilize the information received from participants to alter the current framework of the international student orientation. The recommendations of the participants provided an opportunity to develop an orientation reflective of the evolving needs of international students. The updated international student orientation was to be implemented, with recommendations and critiques of the students employed to update international student services continuously and to provide appropriate services for international students in the future. This study was confined to the international student orientation as it was a factor within the control of the researcher.

With the number of international students pursuing higher education in the United States projected to increase each year (Altbach et al., 2009), research and studies reflecting the various needs of this burgeoning population are imperative. The intent of the study was to explore the phenomenon of acculturation stressors for international students investing in a graduate program in Washington, D.C. The cross-cultural needs of international students are unique and continue to evolve based on multiple factors that

include personal needs, home country political and social stability, host country and local community adjustability, and their reception by peers. Because international students experience cultural and language adjustments, this study served to explore these areas of diversity and to find emerging themes that could be of assistance to future graduate students pursuing education at smaller institutions. Guiding this study were these foundational questions:

1. What are the contributing factors to acculturation stress for international students attending graduate school in Washington, D.C.?
2. How do these factors impact international students' social and academic experiences during their graduate program?
3. What can assist international students in combatting acculturation stress while they are studying in Washington, D.C.?

The focus of the study was on assisting institutions with historical foundations of multicultural and international student engagement to improve their services.

The study began with e-mail invitations being sent to all students to seek their voluntary participation. Seven students agreed to participate in the study, three females and four males. All were from the continent of Africa: Two male students were from Liberia. Two female students were from Malawi. One female student was from Sudan. One male student was from Nigeria. One male student was from Cameroon. All seven were current program participants and were considered international students. All returned signed consents for participation in the study per International Review Board protocol and agreed to share their thoughts on their experiences.

Each participant engaged in two face-to-face interviews conducted at the regional

site throughout the month of June 2017. After each interview, the researcher transcribed the questions and participant responses. Participants then each confirmed the accuracy of the information provided. Students expressed several adjustment difficulties that included linguistic, academically isolating, socially limiting, and politically challenging difficulties. Emerging from their responses was the theme of isolationism due to the disinterest of their U.S. peers in diversifying the social norms carried through both academic and social experiences. In addition, the researcher and the students met to discuss acculturation stressors during the participants' graduate program in Washington, D.C. The purpose of including quotations in this chapter was to emphasize the sentiments of the student participants in their exact words.

Eligibility to Participate and Response Rate

As the number of international students pursuing higher education in the United States continues to rise, research has continued to reveal the evolving emotional, academic, and transitional needs of these students studying at institutions across the nation (Institute of International Education, 2013). For research to reflect the evolving needs of an increasingly diverse student population, a concentrated effort to produce resources that emphasize these needs is imperative. The emphasis in the present study was the trend of student globalization; and its goal was to identify ways to assist international students who have unique needs and various cross-cultural perspectives of their graduate programs in transitioning into the United States. Therefore, to be eligible to participate in the study potential subjects had to meet the following criteria:

1. Each participant was born in a country outside of the United States of America and was considered a resident of that country.

2. Each participant was in the United States to pursue a graduate degree from the target institution.

3. Each participant was a full-time student pursuing a graduate degree in Washington, D.C.

4. Each participant could offer personal observations on the individual's experiences as an international student pursuing a full-time graduate program in Washington, D.C.

E-mail invitations to participate in the study were sent to the nine international individuals, seven of whom responded and agreed to participate. All the students were current program participants and were considered international students. Each participant engaged in two face-to-face interviews conducted at the regional site throughout the month of June 2017. After each interview, the researcher transcribed the questions and responses from the participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Study Participants

Identifier	Gender ^a	Country of origin
IP1	M	Cameroon
IP2	F	Malawi
IP3	M	Nigeria
IP4	M	Liberia
IP5	M	Liberia
IP6	F	Sudan
IP7	F	Malawi

^a M = male; F = female

Table 2

Length of Time in U.S. Prior to Graduate Programs

Identifier	Months	Country of origin
IP1	19	Cameroon
IP2	13	Malawi
IP3	8	Nigeria
IP4	2	Liberia
IP5	11	Liberia
IP6	1	Sudan
IP7	9	Malawi

Descriptive Results of the Student Interviews and Focus Group

In the two face-to-face interviews, each participant was interviewed individually. The interviewer posed each of the research questions in consecutive order and asked the participants for their candor in responding. Following the individual interviews, all seven participants took part in a focus group to allow retrieval of their final thoughts, general assessments, and suggestions for future alterations to the orientation and for ways to assist the transition of international students into the program.

Delivering the information gleaned from the individual interviews and the focus group was deemed best accomplished through thematic form. Four themes emerged from the data with many of the participants' individual responses and observations reflective of overlapping themes. Themes identified in the individual interviews have been presented first, with those drawn from the focus group session presented next.

Themes: Individual Interviews

The following themes emerged from analysis of the data collected from the

individual interviews: (a) academic experience, (b) collaboration with peers, (c) race, and (d) resources. The next sections contain elaboration of each.

Academic experience. The academic rigors of the program, although aligned with information provided throughout the admission process, were culturally different from the students' countries of origin. Expectations concerning class attendance, group participation, and academic writing, coupled with the perception of the international students' lack of academic prowess and English language ability, were all areas of difficulty for the participants. Each spoke on these areas as being factors that contributed to stress. When detailing these areas, participants spoke of the academic pursuits as barriers to transition. IP6 noted this and stated, "I am fluent in English but the amount of reading each night, and this was difficult. It is difficult to have so much work, talk in English all day, read in English, 40-50 pages. It was so much and it made me feel like my knowledge wasn't good."

As full-time graduate students pursuing a program grounded in experiential learning, with several theories borrowed from adult learning, the expectation of class attendance seemed foreign to many participants. Although the program did not follow formalized participation standards, the expectation was for students to attend all classes unless they had submitted notification. IP4 explained the academic rigors were foreign because in his home country, attendance and participation were not mandatory: "Many times students would only attend a few classes here and there. You could visit the class on the last day to sit for the exam and be done with class."

As with many graduate programs, writing was an essential function of the expectations in each course. Students were provided introductory guidelines, policies,

and expectations in a variety of ways prior to the program. The academic director and faculty sent all accepted students' correspondence on ways to prepare and copies of the academic policies. This information was reiterated both during orientation and in an introductory program course. IP5 reiterated the impact of preparation but noted,

You know it is going to be a lot because you are told this and the information is sent to us before we arrive. It was still really hard because we are taking so many classes at the same time. You have to read so many pages for each class, many times during the same night. It is not the in my country [Liberia].

Even though institution leadership and faculty guided these resources and preparatory areas, the consistency of delivery within each class varied.

The expectation to remain engaged and to function at the graduate education level was noted as a foundational requirement for entrance into the program. Although all the students had met the criteria for entrance and all had pursued and successfully received (at minimum) the equivalent of a U.S. bachelor's degree, these degrees had been conferred by foreign institutions, many times in the participants' native country. Given the difficulty in balancing an intense graduate program while adjusting to the culture of both Washington, D.C., and the various characteristics of their cohort, these academic rigors were quite strenuous. IP1 stated,

In my country [Cameroon] I was a trained veterinarian. I received multiple degrees for this. I thought I was prepared for graduate school in the United States, but it is harder. The content is fine, but the timeline is difficult. Everything has to be done so fast.

Participants also emphasized the need to understand better that international

students were not seeking special treatment or that they were not prepared to be challenged intellectually. These international students were well-educated and had experiences that supported their participation in the program. IP7 stated,

Sometimes it seems that if you say you need additional time to read a certain number of pages or if there is too much work, the professors may think it is because I am not American. This isn't true. I have written many papers and I worked for a long time as a teacher. It is just hard when you are trying to understand the Metro [public transit system] and also read 55 pages in 1 day.

Collaboration with peers. The participants formed strong working collaborations with many of their international colleagues, relationships were developed through their mutual understanding and difficulty in transitioning to U.S.-based education. These relationships were helpful in the students' development of academic understanding and skill building. However, collaboration with American cohort members was more difficult. The diversity of culture in the forms of political and social issues, body language, colloquialisms, and time management were all noted as difficult to overcome. Many of the participants stated their difficulty in creating working relationships was due to misunderstood sentiments shared in class and their inability to explain acutely the complexity of their feelings in larger gatherings as they were expected to do in the course. IP2 stated,

Trying to adapt to the nuances of American language is difficult. Many times [in class] there will be a statement made and while it seems to mean one thing on the surface, I later learn that it was sarcasm or has a deeper meaning. This is usually only after I have misunderstood and asked for clarification. It can be mentally

exhausting and very frustrating.

The participants echoed these sentiments in a variety of ways, always noting the same result: a deflating frustration.

The target graduate program in the present study was lauded for its learning approach based on David Kolb's experiential learning model, which provides learning opportunities through intercultural communication tools and exercises, multicultural teams, and extensive peer collaboration. Students in the program were encouraged to collaborate through assignments and group projects. However, many of these groups were self-assigned, which allowed students to join others with whom they were more familiar and comfortable. When facilitators did not assign students, and allowed them to self-select their groups, diversification was less likely. IP1 stated,

I expected more collaboration, both socially and professionally with the American students. I am happy I met the African students because we all understand one another. The American students are more secluded from us. We talk and also enjoy a little working together but not enough.

The graduate program was noted for its intense format and its experiential learning methodology, which emphasized learning through previous and current career experiences, effective intercultural communication, intercultural experiences, multicultural teams, community investments, a diverse scope of students based on social identities, and a passion for development. Prior to the program, all students participate in a variety of activities – initiated during New Student Orientation, designed to develop understanding of the program, introduce cohort, develop strategies for peer engagement, and provide the pathway to student resources. While these strategies are supplied to

students to provide opportunities for peer engagement, it is not provided nor developed with faculty and staff. IP6 stated,

I am a friendly person, so I try to talk to everyone. Many of my cohort members are inviting of this and they support me in many ways due to the struggles I had with the English language and American culture. I feel the professors could do more to help us engage more with the American students. We are international students, but we are human. If there were more groupings together, really putting two Americans and two international students together more, I could collaborate more. It would help.

Race. The target institution was also lauded for its inclusionary practices, one of which was the development of a large population of international students. Although the Washington, D.C., regional campus was home to students from around the world, all the international students in the target class came from Africa, specifically from Sub-Saharan Africa. The students arrived in the United States during a politically tumultuous period in which the question of racism was at a generational high (Bacon, 2016). The presidential election of 2016 had begun; and emerging Republican candidate Donald J. Trump proved quite successful in garnering media attention with his nationalistic message and provocative statements surrounding immigration. As the presidential election season continued, the country watched via multiple media outlets as the campaign rallies for Trump became more violent. Anger towards Latinos, Muslims, African Americans, the media, and the overall politically progressive agenda had been placed on full display. IP5 noted,

When I first arrived in the United States, I knew about the history of slavery. I

expected people to be working hard and black Americans to be in more positions of power. I saw that, but I saw more of the anger, the killings of black people on camera, the protests and marches. I didn't know that racism was still such a big problem here and it is really hard to not hear it or see it. It makes me so sad and a little scared.

Although the institution offered programs and events to provide a cultural introduction to current American themes, including race relations, the reality many international students echoed concerned the emotional tensions in the country and the increase of violence against minorities. Compounding these rising racial tensions was the increased attention placed on police violence towards African Americans, which became a staple in the social current of the country. Organized protests against police violence on communities of color and increased numbers of hate crimes against minority groups prompted many international students to discuss their fear of being Black in America. As the program depicted issues concerning economic development, race, class and education, the current realities in America affected the social lives of international students. IP7 stated,

You don't think about being black so much but here [United States] you can't watch television or just not hear it. I don't understand a lot but there is a lot of killing and the police always go free. I try to turn it off but I am here so I can't.

IP3 stated,

I never knew I was a minority, specifically did I look at myself as black until I arrived in the United States. It is hard because I have been stared at, I now worry about the police because of the videos. I never had this fear until I arrived here.

Many of the participants echoed these sentiments of uneasiness surrounding race relations and being Black during a time of racial tension, the uneasiness derived from the outside environment and not from other students in the program. The impact of the social and political climate was a resounding theme for these students, with many of them sharing anecdotes on events surrounding a protest in Washington, D.C., and the changing atmosphere following the election of Donald Trump.

The intensity of the 2016 presidential election was often more evident in Washington, D.C., than in other areas of the country. Large demonstrations and protests arose more frequently after the election of Donald Trump; and immediately following the inauguration of the 45th president, the Women's March on Washington transpired less than one mile from the campus. The march was reportedly one of the largest organized protests in U.S. history, with an estimated 470,000 individuals participating in Washington, D.C., alone (Wallace & Parlapiano, 2017). IP6 stated,

I was aware of the difficulty many people, minorities, were having after being here for a very short time. As a Muslim that wears the hijab, I see a lot of things.

It hasn't been great to be here during this time, but I also stay in the same places. I know to be safe and it is okay, but it could be better.

Resources. The target institution was a regional campus located in a more expensive area of Washington, D.C. Because of its smaller population of student services, the campus had limited resources, including offices and staffing. Students also did not have any direct connection with the home campus. In addition, the D.C. campus did not have housing or living accommodations for students. The combination of the tuition for this private institution and the cost of housing in the area resulted in this program being

more expensive than the average public institution. Although the program offered resources in many formats for students' academic and social development, the lack of housing accommodations and the limited staffing were due to the geographical location of the campus and its student enrollment number. IP4 stated,

I didn't know it was so much money, the expense of living here is hard. I have a sponsor, but I still have to ask my family for money. I am living with another student [international student] but I still don't have enough money for food sometimes. That is really stressful.

Many of the participants shared their sentiments about the limited resources and indicated the need for multiple staff members in the Student Affairs office, more full-time faculty available to students, and a dedicated resource solely for the diverse needs of international students. Given the complex needs of international students that often include cultural necessities, an opportunity to have a dedicated on-campus resource to assist students with issues related to academic challenges, homesickness, cultural adjustment, and personal lifestyle management (i.e., financial management) during their program was a notion shared by many participants. A female student from Sudan (IP6) stated,

It would be really useful to have a person or an office that is dedicated to just international students. Many times, I needed someone who could check in with me every few months because I was stressed and wanted to vent. It is hard when the school doesn't offer this.

Limited resources were a noted area of concern even though, prior to the arrival of the participants' class, the institution provided additional resources in the form of

prearrival events (i.e., webinar introducing the resources of the campus and webinar on the housing and living accommodations for the area) to all accepted students. These resources were designed to prepare students, and many of the participants noted these as helpful and supportive. However, they cited difficulty in accessing the information due to limited resources in their home countries, including blackout periods of internet access (Sudan), and last-minute final acceptance decisions, which included last minute visa approval. Even with these resources dedicated to transitional and prearrival preparation, the participants identified the need for additional resources in the form of a full-time dedicated staff member for international students.

Themes: Focus Group

After completing the individual interviews, all seven of the participants met for a focus group session to elaborate on their transitional experiences in this Washington, D.C., graduate program. In this setting, participants had the opportunity to speak candidly and collaboratively on their personal and combined experiences during the program. Although the questions posed to them were the same as the research questions, the group members were asked to elaborate further on their experiences and to use the group setting as an inspirational resource. Three themes emerged from this session: academic experience, collaboration with peers, and race.

Academic experience. The group echoed the transformational academic experiences and the quality of the education received. Many of the participants noted the expectations concerning academic writing: the lack of formal training due to the diversity of the international students; the stresses of heavy reading assignments given weekly; the group assignments with limited intercultural communication training, which led to

emotional stress; and the cultural differences surrounding time management and group contributions on work assignment. As the group discussed their academic experiences, they depicted the sentiment of not reporting the difficulties in various but similar ways. The participants overwhelmingly viewed seeking additional assistance either from a professor or from the other group members as a sign of personal struggle, an area that resulted in embarrassment and shame. IP3 stated,

There were any of us that worked together during the program, we discussed the difficulty in remaining alert and engaged. It was so much work given to us during the first few weeks, we all noticed the other [international student] person struggling. Since many of us are not accustomed to American education, we all supported one another. The number of readings per day, the amount of papers we had to write, we supported one another because it was like a joint struggle.

The international students' cultural differences—many of which concerned their academic experiences, lack of exposure to U.S. graduate education, and English language acquisition—were contributors to their acculturation stress. The group discussed the importance of additional faculty support in the form of faculty who understand the various stressors international students experience in conjunction with the program, noting such support would prove beneficial. According to IP3, “System support from faculty would be great, the collaboration we have with peers would grow and integrating with the program would be easier.” These sentiments were echoed by IP1: “The group assignments are multicultural when professors assign members. This helps as then we know what is expected of us all. The groupings by professors stop a few weeks after class and then we become isolated.”

Although working together as international students proved to be a coping mechanism for them, when limited by their knowledge of more “American” approaches to cases or situations posed in assignments, they yearned for more information or context from their instructors. To ask for support in the form of academic assistance proved to be a cultural barrier for many of the participants. IP5 stated,

It is hard to ask for more contexts after the professor took 15 minutes to explain and it seemed that no American students had issues. You don't want to be the person that never understands or takes too much time to get the information. Then you struggle because you don't understand and the professor thinks you are not as quick as others.

Because the coursework dictated the need to have descending opinion that could be social issues and political influences – such as the polarizing and divisive U.S. presidential election of 2016, international students wanted their instructors to provide foundational information. However, they often did not ask for that information because they believed doing so would be perceived as academic deficiency. This proved to be difficult as many cases were based in areas not familiar to these individuals who lacked either background information or the nuances of the issues involved.

Collaboration with peers. Collaboration with American students was a recurring concern (in various capacities) for all participants, and the group discussed the desire to establish more collaborative relationships that included more extensive rapport with American students. Participants also detailed the importance of additional opportunities for collaboration through academic and prearrival projects but indicated that both instructors and Student Affairs personnel should include more strategies for collaboration

in those opportunities. IP1 stated,

I feel that we came to the program to learn more and develop our skills. I want to hear more of the American voice and when it isn't in class, it seems it doesn't happen. We really want to connect more but it can be difficult when the situations are not created for us. If additional spaces were created by the professors and staff, we could do more collaborating and understanding.

The participants further elaborated that additional peer information made available prior to their arrival, such as a fact sheet on the incoming cohort or engagement activities set up before orientation, would provide additional avenues for engagement. The students also discussed the intent of their instructors in including multiple engagement opportunities as, unfortunately, these only resulted in individuals grouping into "Americans and others." IP4 stated,

There are a few ways we do receive information about our peers before we arrive and it is good. Perhaps if the international students were allowed the chance to have more structured virtual meetups. We are not here until it is time to start but we would love the chance to talk to our cohort members at least a month before we arrive but the staff should engage us first. It helps.

Given that the courses in the program ranged from issues in international development to practitioner inquiry, collaborative opportunities often involved interests and issues shared by both the international students and their American counterparts. However, participants noted that collaborating with the American students in these opportunities was unlikely to occur due to the lack of avenues for solicitation, as IP5 stated:

The issue isn't how we (international students) could build relationships, we have an interest in development because we are all here. The issue is segregation.

Many of our peers seem to find it easier to only collaborate inside and outside of the classroom with other Americans.

Race. All the participants in this study were African, coming from countries south of the Sahara. Because of their dark skin tones, their physical appearance was more that of Black Americans than of individuals born and raised in African countries. As a result, their physical appearance was an additional stressor for these students. The participants were attending this program during and immediately following the period of the U.S. presidential election of 2016, a time when the United States experienced increased tension. The frequency of police violence, often followed by the death of Black men and women, and the availability of both traditional and social media coverage of these incidents resulted in straining race relations in the United States further. States. Beginning their program in August 2016, the participants bore witness to many of these events, including demonstrations and protests held in Washington, D.C.; and class discussions included the topics of equity and governmental restrictions.

As people across the country started conversations concerning the violence and the importance of Black lives, international students from Africa who shared the same skin tones and physical attributes as Black Americans of African descent found themselves caught in an unfamiliar world which saw them as individuals within this struggle. IP7 stated,

All of us are black, we are Africans. Many times, it was scary to be here because we knew the history of race in the United States but you don't know how bad it is.

It's bad. We see so many black Americans being killed by police on camera and it is so hard. I don't know what to do or say.

Results of Research Questions

The three research questions were open-ended inquiries that served as the avenue through which the participants gathered their thoughts and discussed their personal experiences during the program. The questions allowed participants to offer detailed information and their overall impressions of the graduate program and of transitioning to full-time studies in Washington, D.C., and to offer suggestions for program improvement. The questions posed and the responses received from the participants have been summarized in the following sections.

Research question 1. “What are the contributing factors to acculturation stress for international students attending graduate school in Washington, D.C.?” was the first research question. Participants’ responses concerned five main areas: academic intensity, the fast-paced culture of Washington, D.C., the language barrier, the cost of living, and the lack of resources.

Academic intensity. The graduate program was a one-year program. The coursework included a 12-week practicum, which further intensified the program. All seven participants noted academic intensity as an acculturation stressor.

Fast-paced culture of Washington, D.C. The fast pace of the Washington, D.C. culture only served to magnify the academic intensity. Four of the participants (IP2, IP3, IP5, and IP6) noted this as an acculturation stressor.

Language barrier. Although all the participants indicated either English as their official first language or professional fluency in English, they had difficulty transitioning

comfortably because of the American context and colloquialisms of the language. Three of the participants (IP2, IP3, and IP6) noted the language barrier as an acculturation stressor.

Cost of living. The Washington, D.C. campus was not a residential campus, and the cost of living in the D.C. area was significantly higher than that in most states. Adding to the cost of living here for these students were the costs of public transportation and general living expenses. Three participants (IP4, IP6, and IP7) noted cost of living as an acculturation stressor.

Lack of resources. Participants felt the program was more difficult because of the limited number of full-time faculty and staff available to offer both physical and professional support. Six of the seven participants (IP1, IP2, IP3, IP4, IP6, and IP7) noted lack of resources as an acculturation stressor.

Question 2, “How do these factors impact international students’ social and academic experiences during the graduate program?” provided the following responses from participants.

Research question 2. “How do these factors impact international students’ social and academic experiences during the graduate program?” was the second research question. Participants’ responses concerned three areas: homesickness, self-segregation and interaction with other international students, and emotional imbalance.

Homesickness. The desire to return home was quite strong for many of the participants as were their desires for familiarity in the culture and the structures surrounding language, gender roles, and overall social and political understanding. Four

participants (IP2, IP3, IP4, and IP7) noted homesickness as an impact of acculturation stress.

Self-segregation and more interactions with other international students.

Because all the participants were from Africa, connecting was easier because of the many cultural traditions, social stability, peer understanding, and student needs that they had in common. However, they did not have collaborative relationships (social and academic development) with American students. Six of the seven participants (IP1, IP2, IP3, IP4, IP5, and IP7) noted self-segregation was an impact of acculturation stress.

Emotional imbalance. Emotions varied for these international students, ranging from sadness and anxiety to fears of engaging in potential friendships because of possible misunderstanding. Sadness was sometimes so profound that it was borderline depression. Four of the participants (IP2, IP3, IP6, and IP7) noted emotional imbalance as an impact of acculturation stress.

Research question 3. “What can assist international students in combatting acculturation stress while they are studying in Washington, D.C.?” was the third research question. Participants offered a range of suggestions in their responses to this question, which concerned three main areas: additional resources, additional housing and accommodation support, and concentrated support to build international student and U.S. student collaboration.

Additional resources. Participants suggested addition of staff and faculty to provide more hours for academic and personal support. The support could be in the form of an international student advisor but should be an individual well-versed in international student needs and methodology. This person would serve as an advocate,

working with the various stakeholders concerned with international students' needs. All seven participants noted the need for additional resources to combat acculturation stressors for students in the future.

Additional housing and accommodation support. Although these international students received no expectations of housing and accommodation support from the institution, the lack of support given to students who must secure temporary living arrangements in an area of the country with a higher-than-average cost of living compared to other cities resulted in difficulties in transitioning into the program. The participants suggested several ways to provide such support, including (a) a homestay, (b) a school-sponsored list of accommodations that work directly with the institution, (c) additional time before orientation to locate housing, and (d) physical assistance in mapping out the best areas for students' needs. Three of the participants (IP1, IP6, and IP7) suggested additional housing and accommodation support to combat acculturation stress.

Concentrated support to build international student and U.S. student collaboration. The participants noted the institution needed to put forth a deliberate effort to build collaboration between international and U.S. students. They suggested that faculty members should assign students to groups for at least half of the group projects rather than allows students to self-select their groups. The participants also suggested that the institution dedicate a staff member to the various issues of international students. Again, all seven of the participants suggested concentrated support to build international student and U.S. student collaboration to combat acculturation stress and to assist with transitioning more effectively.

Chapter Summary

Data for the present study were participant responses from both individual interviews and a focus group session involving all seven participants. The individual interviews provided the opportunity to pose the research questions to the participants and to allow them to recall personal experiences surrounding their transition into the graduate program in Washington, D.C. Participants could offer candid feedback, including personal recollections that could be used to further the support and the resources needed for international students. From the interviews, four themes emerged: (a) academic intensity, (b) collaboration, (c) race, and (d) resources.

The focus group, composed of all seven participants, served as a forum for the students to provide additional information and anecdotes that were explored further during the session. Questions posed in the focus group were the same as those posed during the interviews. In focus group, the participants were more candid and forthcoming because the setting allowed them the opportunity to hear from other international students and to expound on areas that directly impacted their experiences. Three themes emerged from the participants' focus group responses: (a) academic intensity, (b) collaboration, and (c) race. The focus group did not address the theme of resources.

The data received in both participatory settings provided information on issues related to acculturation stress for the participants but also details on opportunities to provide additional support via new student orientation, information that is vital for transitional support for a vulnerable student group. The information received by the participants in both forums allowed the opportunity to develop additional research surrounding international student development and opportunities to continue strategies of

engagement and transitional support. In both forums, the participants offered candid responses, the focus group maximized this as this setting allowed the opportunity to listen to other peers and provide information based on the many anecdotes.

Chapter 5: Overview of the Applied Dissertation

Many have attributed the evolution of higher education in the United States to the diverse needs of learners, economic mobility, the cultural expectations of the society in the United States, and globalization. As our world becomes more connected with interdependent economies, the need for higher education has become a focal goal for many, including international learners. With international education has come changes in the framework of higher learning and the need to adapt the resources, structures, framework, and future of education in the United States (Altbach et al., 2009). As the world views with interest the current political and social climate in the United States, current and future international students also watch with bated breath. With the increasing numbers of international students pursuing higher education in the United States, the resources and offices dedicated to the support of their academic and social development must evolve and become more reflective of these students' diverse needs.

Trends in higher education suggest the numbers of international students pursuing their education in the United States will continue to increase. Coupled with this reality are issues of civil and social unrest, federal and state budget cuts, and the rise of global nationalism. These realities affect the perceptions of many international visitors, including the sentiments shared by the participants of this study. To combat rising international student dissatisfaction in many areas of U.S.-based higher education, understanding issues related to acculturation stressors is imperative, as is providing necessary alterations to current strategies and resources dedicated to the development of international students to improve their success.

Discussion of the Results

The factors contributing to acculturation stressors for international students in this study were various in nature, which led to the grouping of participants' responses according to emerging themes. Participants' responses concerning these contributing factors, their impact, and the assistance needed to combat acculturation stressors constituted a consistent message that, at times, revealed areas that various departments and offices of the institution may support to make the transition for international students more effective. The candidness of the participants in providing their personal experiences and anecdotes on their thoughts as they prepared to depart the program revealed valuable information to assist the institution in preparing resources consistent with prearrival, orientation, and the various stages of the students' life cycle at the institution. The consistency of their responses is indicative of the need to address these areas of concern while providing necessary support in academic achievement.

All the participants noted academic intensity as a factor contributing to stress. In doing so, they referenced the format of their 41-credit graduate program, which included the following:

- Semester 1 (September–December) consisted of 16 to 18 credits, the equivalent of up to six classes completed in 3 months and is completed in 1 year.
- Semester 2 consisted of an intensive field course (typically completed internationally within a 2-week period) and a practicum.
- The practicum lasted two to three months. While placed at their practicum

locations, students were responsible for completing reflective assignments (typically papers two to three pages in length) and for working a minimum of an 8-hour day.

- Semester 3 (May–July) was the last semester of the program. During that semester, students were to complete 16 to 18 credits.

With such requirements, the intensity of the academic expectations, and reading assignments that overlapped other courses, students found balancing their personal lives difficult.

The participants, in both the individual interviews and the focus group, echoed sentiments that the format was condensed, with too many readings and assignments (both individual and group), coupled with continued expectations to participate in the practicum and to balance outside factors. Participants found that the relatively short time for completing the 41-credit program in one year and the expectations to engage adequately to meet academic requirements were mentally depleting given that they were also juggling difficulties associated with the culture of the school, the location, language acquisition, and the reality of being full-time graduate students. Participants noted that they found the program content sufficient but that the difficulty they experienced was the quantity of their work received. This researcher not only understood the participants' sentiments about academic intensity but also expected them.

The fast-paced culture of Washington, D.C., and the cost of living were areas that at least four of the seven participants noted as contributing to acculturation stress. Although these participants had all understood and received critical information about the higher-than-average living prices for the area, but the reality was that, once they arrived

for the program, these costs were difficult to overcome. Participants also noted the culture of Washington, D.C., as being difficult to comprehend, which only added to the anxiety many of the participants felt. However, they also resoundingly acknowledged this culture added to the desirability of the location because it afforded them opportunities to remain active in events and to understand the structures of the types of organizations with which the participants strived to be a part.

International students arrive with diverse needs and, many times, must assume higher costs than their American peers. Past program participants identified the cost of living and its impact a factor for individuals arriving from countries with lower wages and living costs. This information was not surprising. Although the resources and time dedicated to transitioning students via virtual prearrival events was effective, these students still required additional support. Given the location is the home to many federal government employees and individuals with higher than average wages, the institution must thoughtfully update the information provided to international students to reflect additional resources and institutional support.

Six of the seven participants noted lack of resources as a factor affecting acculturation stress. Three of these students especially noted the limited resources for student development directly related to English language acquisition. Because of enrollment concerns, the institution has had to continue altering budgets for both the home and Washington, D.C., campuses. In turn, these budget constraints have resulted in fewer staff and faculty and have impacted support in the form of tutorial services for writing and speaking English. However, the institution has failed to communicate the reality of this issue to students effectively.

The factors of homesickness (four participants), self-segregation (six participants), and emotional imbalance (four participants) are all areas that directly affected the emotional and physical well-being of the participants. The institution tackles the range of emotions these students may experience during the international student orientation, addressing them as the various emotions students are likely to experience during their time in the graduate program. The candidness of the participants when detailing these impacts is surprising because it shows the importance of “refresher” sessions and “check-in” times to ensure the emotional needs these students are being met.

As the participants showed, international students, even those considered older due to the professional nature of the program, still require support in various forms. The impact of acculturation stress derived from programmatic concerns reveals the importance of balancing the resources and services of the institution to ensure all students can succeed. This notion is quite evident and indicates that the needs of students many times outweigh their characteristics, such as age or perceived emotional maturity.

The detailed suggestions provided by the participants were a welcome resource. Although the participants had trouble in adjusting to the program due to these various factors, their desire to assist in ensuring international students in the future are spared these pitfalls to ensure future international students were spared these pitfalls was evident. All the participants offered candid ways to improve the program and relieve acculturation stress, many of which were simple or small changes the institution could make, such as having a staff member serve as an advisor (with set hours) to assist in meeting the needs of international students. Three participants who cited the need for support for housing and accommodations had all struggled to fund this area of their

program. To solve this problem, the group suggested using alumni as host families and providing tours of the area, both of which Student Affairs personnel could process and develop. All participants noted the institution must make a concentrated effort (i.e., all parts and all employees of the institution) to understand the diverse needs of the international students. These included the need to collaborate more on teambuilding so that professors understand their role in socializing the students and prearrival information that reflects the time zone differences of arriving international students. They also noted the importance of the institution remaining engaged in developing innovative strategies to meet the needs of international students.

Conclusion and Summary of the Findings

Factors contributing to acculturation stress for international graduate students at a graduate school renowned for its international appeal were diverse and included areas both the realm of academia and outside the institution. Although participants' answers and observations were in alignment with previous research conducted on international students in the past, many differences existed as well. The students surveyed all graduate level and over the traditional age of undergraduate students, were all former career professionals, with 3 to 20 years of experience in their fields. The participant pool also included individuals with significant exposure to working in diverse settings with individuals from around the world. Given the attributes and experiences of these participants, their difficulty in transitioning was intriguing as their perceived preparedness did not exclude them from typical cultural differences.

The impact of the rising racial tensions in the United States during and after the 2016 presidential election was also a significant factor in these students' experience of

studying in the United States. The participants likened their experiences to Black Americans, those individuals who are direct descendants of American slaves. These experiences impacted many of the participants; and, when recounting ways, they altered their views of the United States; they often saw a bleaker future. The participants all had some previous experience with the United States, whether through distant familial ties or career collaboration. Their time in the program during the uptick of racial tension served as context to the lingering unrest in the Black American community that they had not followed or understood prior to their graduate studies.

Finally, the allure of studying in Washington, D.C., was quite exciting for many because of the access to the culture, history, and networking and to its diverse working environment. Participants noted the difficulties they experienced due to the fast-paced nature of the district, the higher than average cost of living arrangements, and the traffic congestion, all of which affected their wellbeing. Thus, the study revealed the impact a community and its culture can have on international students and their assessments of their time in a graduate-level program.

Implications of the Research

The research conducted showed the need for additional programming in the areas of social and political climate and their impact on international students. Even though many international student orientation models and international student offices extend support for common cultural adjustment and transitional issues, international students seeking an education in the future will likely face the reality of a changing landscape of social and political stability. The outcomes of future research will reveal the needs for evolving programming, methodologies of delivery, resources, and general operational

directions to address better the acculturation stress resulting from tumultuous political climates. The recent executive order (i.e., the travel ban) issued by the current administration will also affect international students from the countries listed in the ban. In addition, prearrival strategies concerning visas and pre-departures, such as optional practical training for F-1 visa students, will likely be affected. Findings from the present research revealed the initial impact of the rise of global nationalism and the need to prepare resources and offices appropriately to accommodate international students.

For international students to receive appropriate support, all facets of their institutions must understand the cultural difficulties that many of these students may face. As the world becomes more connected, education will continue to emerge as a commonality for many countries and, most importantly, for the global economy. The trends have revealed an increasing number of international students choosing to study in the Western world, with many developing countries such as India, allocating additional federal resources in this endeavor. However, the present research has shown that international students are demanding more in exchange for their tuition.

Limitations of the Study

Although subjects in the study were international students who gave candid feedback, the sample size of seven participants limited the information received. The scope was limited due to the size of the student population size. All the international students who participated in the study were members of the 2017 cohort. In addition, all the students who agreed to participate came from Africa. Although participants came from diverse countries, the sample did not include individuals from countries such as China or India, whose populations largely pursue U.S. education. Thus, although

invaluable, the information received from the participants was limited due to the term *international* encompassing the continent of Africa only. Again, the lack of individuals from other countries and areas of the world in the sample was unavoidable due to the population of students served by the target institution.

Recommendations

This purpose of the present study was to survey international students attending a specific education institution to understand the factors leading to acculturation stressors. The areas of concern found were both environmental and social. Participants noted the rising racial tensions and tumultuous social climate following the presidential election of 2016 and the eventual nomination and inauguration of the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump, in their responses to the research questions. Their responses, in turn, led the researcher to uncover factors outside the realm of academic support normally addressed in transition activities that institutions should include by providing additional opportunities for international students to understand and navigate their time in the United States during politically tumultuous periods. Therefore, a study to examine the impact of this tumultuous social and political period during the studies of African students from countries south of the Sahara or of international students of color should be conducted.

Summary

The study provided an opportunity to understand the dueling yet intersecting areas of acculturation stress for international graduate students studying in Washington, DC. The data received and transcribed illustrated academic themes that provided insight into areas of concern for the participants, themes that will be further developed as a

foundation for transitional resources for international students. The data received is quite valuable as research continues to dictate the growing and evolving needs of international students. With the numbers of international graduate students projected to increase, it is imperative that resources, including orientation, be reflective of all needs. Based off the responses and testing tool, international graduate students are yet seeking resources that range from professional development opportunities for career growth, workshops and classes to assist with intercultural communication, programs and resources for international student mental wellness, and engaging faculty and staff to assist in transitional obstacles.

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Appendix A

International Student Study Flyer

International Student Study

The study is seeking international students to be a part of a study that will examine factors that contribute to acculturation stress during their graduate studies in the United States.

By offering candid answers surrounding personal experiences in transitioning to full-time graduate studies, research can assist in better comprehending why the current international student orientation model is not as effective in preparing international graduate students for all aspects of student life in the United States.

Information received from participants will be used to strengthen international student transition resources, including future implementation of a staff and faculty training program that will be followed by a week-long orientation exclusively for international students. The newly developed training program will work to ensure that international students can better understand their new role in the graduate program, visiting student, and contributor to the area they inhabit.

This study will be conducted at [REDACTED]

If interested, please contact: Nkenge Ransom-Friday at [REDACTED]

Appendix B
Participation Letter

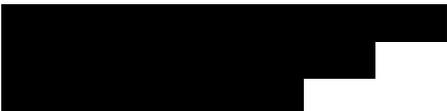
Participation Letter

Title of Study: A Study of Factors Contributing to Acculturation Stress for International Graduate Students in a Small Non-Profit Graduate School

Nkenge R. Friday, Doctor of Education


c/o Applied Research Center
 Fischler School of Education
 1750 NE 167th Street
 North Miami Beach, FL 33162
 800-986-3223, Ext. 28500

Institutional Review Board
 Nova Southeastern University
 Office of Grants and Contracts
 (954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
 IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site Information


Description of Study: Nkenge R. Friday is a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University engaged in research for the purpose of satisfying a requirement for a Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors contributing to acculturation stress for international graduate students. This study, following results of international students' report and assessment, will seek to develop comprehensive transitional orientation and engagement initiatives for faculty and staff to better combat international student cultural adjustment issues by actively preparing for students prior to arrival and throughout the duration of the program.

Participant Purpose: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to join in two discussions with the author. The first discussion will be an individual discussion, the questions will be provided to you before the session and your responses will be recorded and later transcribed for inclusion in the study. The second discussion will be an informal group discussion, the author will seek candid suggestions from participants in order to produce a training guide for staff and faculty surrounding international student orientation. The responses will help the writer identify acculturation stressors in international students during graduate studies at a small graduate institution and ways to produce the resources and guides for a more inclusive international student orientation. The data from this discussion will be used to identify these acculturation stressors and the types of training needed by faculty and staff in order to meet the needs of international students. The individual discussion will take approximately thirty minutes to complete and the informal group discussion will take approximately forty five minutes to complete.

This research project will include audio recording of the individual interview and the informal group discussion. This audio recording will be available to be heard by the researcher, the IRB, and the dissertation chair and committee. The recording will be transcribed by the author, Nkenge R. Friday. The recording will be kept securely in the private residence and secure locked file cabinet of the author, Nkenge R. Friday. The

recording will be kept for 36 months and destroyed after that time by tape erasure. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described in this paragraph.

Risks/Benefits to the Participant: There may be minimal risk involved in participating in this study. There are no direct benefits to for agreeing to be in this study. Please understand that although you may not benefit directly from participation in this study, you have the opportunity to enhance knowledge necessary to improve the services of the graduate program when assisting international students' transition to graduate studies at the selected graduate institution. If you have any concerns about the risks/benefits of participating in this study, you can contact the investigators and/or the university's human research oversight board (the Institutional Review Board or IRB) at the numbers listed above.

Cost and Payments to the Participant: There is no cost for participation in this study. Participation is completely voluntary and no payment will be provided.

Confidentiality: Information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. All data will be secured in a locked filing cabinet. Your name will not be used in the reporting of information in publications or conference presentations.

Participant's Right to Withdraw from the Study: You have the right to refuse to participate in this study and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

I have read this letter and I fully understand the contents of this document and voluntarily consent to participate. All of my questions concerning this research have been answered. If I have any questions in the future about this study they will be answered by the investigator listed above or his/her staff.

I understand that the completion of this questionnaire implies my consent to participate in this study.

How will you keep my information private?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, and the dissertation chair/adviser may review research records.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?

The subject is free to refuse to participate in, or withdraw from, the study at any time without adverse affects or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. If as a part of withdrawing from the study the participant may request that his/her data not be used if that is legally permitted, that too should be included.

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

Other Considerations:

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigators.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled “A Study of Factors Contributing to Acculturation Stress for International Graduate Students in a Small Non-Profit Graduate School”

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Nova IRB Approval Letter

MEMORANDUM

To: **Nkenge R Friday, Doctor of Education**

From: **Sidi M Lakhdar, Ed.D,
Center Representative, Institutional Review Board**

Date: **June 13, 2017**

Re: **IRB #: 2017-384; Title, “A Study of Factors Contributing to
Acculturation Stress for International Graduate Students in a Small
Non-Profit Graduate School”**

I have reviewed the above-referenced research protocol at the center level. Based on the information provided, I have determined that this study is exempt from further IRB review under **45 CFR 46.101(b) (Exempt Category 1)**. You may proceed with your study as described to the IRB. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

- 1) **CONSENT:** If recruitment procedures include consent forms, they must be obtained in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects and the process affords subjects the opportunity to ask questions, obtain detailed answers from those directly involved in the research, and have sufficient time to consider their participation after they have been provided this information. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed in a secure file separate from de-identified participant information. Record of informed consent must be retained for a minimum of three years from the conclusion of the study.
- 2) **ADVERSE EVENTS/UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS:** The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair and me (954-262-5369 and Sidi M Lakhdar, Ed.D, respectively) of any adverse reactions or unanticipated events that may develop as a result of this study. Reactions or events may include, but are not limited to, injury, depression as a result of participation in the study, life-threatening situation, death, or loss of confidentiality/anonymity of subject. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.
- 3) **AMENDMENTS:** Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, number or types of subjects, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Please be advised that changes in a study may require further review depending on the nature of the change. Please contact me with any questions regarding amendments or changes to your study.

The NSU IRB is in compliance with the requirements for the protection of human subjects prescribed in Part 46 of Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46) revised June 18, 1991.

Cc: Verona McCarthy, EdL
Ashley Russom, Ed.D.