AN EXPLORATION OF THE CASE OF SAUDI STUDENTS’ ENGAGEMENT, SUCCESS, AND SELF-EFFICACY AT A MID WESTERN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE CASE OF SAUDI STUDENTS’ ENGAGEMENT, SUCCESS, AND SELF-EFFICACY AT A MID WESTERN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The number of Saudi students studying in the United States quintupled over the last five years due to a fully funded Saudi government scholarship. The presence of this growing student group on American campuses has significant implications for student affairs professionals, college professors and university administrators. Moreover, Saudi students are experiencing circumstances different from other international students due to distinctive economic, academic, psychological, social, cultural, religious, and political factors.

Therefore, the problem dealt with in this study is a three faceted issue: 1) the recruitment circumstances of the Saudi students as a different category of international students and the implications entailed once they are admitted into their programs; 2) the different accommodating mechanisms in place to help them achieve success, attain degrees, obtain expected college experiences; and 3) how effective the aforementioned mechanisms are with regard to Saudi students’ expectations, challenges, motivation, and self-efficacy beliefs.

Following a pilot study, the qualitative case study approach was determined to be best suitable for exploring the various dimensions of Saudi students’ circumstances especially those concerning cultural, psychological, and social issues. The study followed the traditional qualitative method for data collection and analysis. After conducting initial site observations and document reviews, primary data were collected
from open-ended interviews with students, administrators, and professors at the university.

Study findings revealed various implications arising from the continuous increase of Saudi students on American higher education campuses. Relevant themes emerged from the data analysis including: cultural adjustment, self-efficacy, challenges, stereotypes, persistence, success, support mechanisms, and academic integrity. Participant responses and university support systems were utilized to develop a replicable model that can be adopted to ease the cultural adjustment of new international student groups. Findings also demonstrated how various campus units developed techniques to increase Saudi students’ engagement for academic success.

The current study showed that, self-efficacy beliefs, success perceptions, and cultural aspects as relevant constructs of student academic achievement, can be utilized to increase the performance level of Saudi students. Using the New International Student Group Response Model to guide orientation programs, college success seminars, freshman year programs, student life planned activities, multicultural events, and other academic activities. When coupled with an academic awareness of the case, the informed planning of these activities can increase Saudi students’ academic persistence and enhance their college experience outcomes consequently.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the soul of Fatma Hassan, my mother, who supported my educational growth no matter what the price would be; to Mohamed Rabie, my father in law, who insisted that I would seek knowledge beyond geographical limits; and to Ghada Awad, my soul mate, who is always enthusiastic about my success at any endeavor I take.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Part of the mission of Riverside State University (RSU), a pseudonym, is to provide a variety of learning opportunities for the full spectrum of students and “create a learning environment with emphasis on a full collegiate experience for each student, leading to opportunities for cognitive, social, and personal development” ("Board of Trustees," 1998, p. 1). The recent increase of Saudi students at the University presented a challenging case for college administrators, faculty members, and Saudi students as well. In coping with such a specific case, RSU charted some measures that target these students in an effort to ease their adjustment and acculturation processes. The effectiveness of these measures has not been assessed yet due to their novelty and the specificity of the situation of Saudi students whose cultural background, academic readiness, and learning experiences at RSU have not attracted full examinations.

The Problem in Context

It is necessary for student affairs professionals to develop programs that provide students with the supportive environment that encourages the development of their personalities and cognitive abilities individually (Astin, 1992) while at the same time integrating the diverse categories of students into a harmonious learning fabric that builds their futures and shapes the institutional environment (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates,
Therefore, one can argue that higher education institutions have a responsibility towards their student bodies with their different categories and subgroups. Miller, Bender, Schuh, and Associates (2005) argued for the importance of American higher education institutions taking this responsibility to meet the expectations of various groups of students once they are admitted into their respective institutions. Previously, Astin (1992) argued that the roles of student affairs professionals in higher education institutions cover a wide realm of activities and programming. Among these programs and activities are those that stress the involvement of students through positive forms of dialogues and communication with peers, staff members, and professors as well.

Throughout history, American higher education institutions have been successful in accommodating diverse categories of students and helping them succeed in their quest for knowledge and learning (Charles & Stewart, 1991; James, 1992). Institutions have been able to deal with different kinds of student diversity that emerged from ethnic, religious, national, gender, age, and sexual differences (Thelin, 2004). However, after the World Trade Center attacks in 2001, policies and procedures differed in dealing with students coming from Muslim countries and especially with those from the Middle East (Open Doors, 2005). The Saudi students’ situation adds more to these two criteria of being Muslims and from the Middle East. They are raised in a male dominant society that is known for its strict rules and close adherence to its traditions (Prokop, 2005). The closed nature of their society of origin extremely contrasts with the openness of the American society (Al-Nusair, 2000). The religious values that are inherent in their viewpoint of various life aspects are strongly challenged with the absence of the religious role in the American educational setting (Thani, 1987). Moreover, the economic status of
these students, which from the first glance can be credited for a successful learning experience, might surprisingly work against the realization of their targeted academic achievement.

In 2008, twenty four percent of higher education institutions reported increase of Saudi students’ enrollment on American campuses due to a Saudi government scholarship program in the last three academic years (See Figure 1, Open Doors, 2008). This increase has continued to place Saudi Arabia as the 6th country of origin of international students studying in the United States in the academic year 2010/2011 ("Fast facts," 2011). The increase has its implications for various aspects of American higher education policy and practice. Like other international students, Saudi students come to the United States with a high level of expectations of the promised high academic standards and the prestigious American degrees (Altbach & Knight, 2006). However, some of these hopes and expectations are not always realized (J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Saudi students face many obstacles and challenges once they start the first steps of their American experience (Thani, 1987). The cultural, religious, linguistic and academic aspects are among a group of active factors that influence not only the academic performance of these students but also their acculturation patterns, college survival skills, collegial engagement, and self-efficacy perceptions of academic performance (Al-Nusair, 2000).
Astin (1992) argued for the influence of college environment as a direct factor towards the realization of desired student learning outcomes. Kuh et al. (1991) asserted the influence of the collegial engagement on college success and survival skills. As an effort to increase the motivation of college students, Miller et al. (2005) stressed the importance of assessing students’ expectations and making every effort to honor these expectations as part of higher education institutions’ mission in the 21st century. Therefore, the collegial engagement within the college environment has its positive impact on achievement of Saudi students’ expectations and their success in college and degree attainment.

From a motivational perspective, self-efficacy and its motivational processes cannot be neglected as influencing and influenced constructs in the Saudi students’ case.
Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as “a belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Individuals’ perceived self-efficacy is believed to influence their choices of related tasks, their performance levels on chosen tasks, the amount of effort they put into accomplishment of the tasks, and the amount of perseverance they show on task pursuit (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, self-efficacy helps to estimate the amount of success Saudi students expect to achieve as compared to their actual abilities that may be maximized through increasing their self-efficacy beliefs with measures that address their adjustment problems and the psychological alienation created by their presence outside their zones of comfort. Cognitive, motivational, affective and selective are the four major processes that influence the Saudi students efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1993).

Statement of the Problem

The presence of Saudi students at RSU presents a unique phenomenon with booming numbers that changed the rank of Saudi Arabia as a country of origin of international students from the twenty first with 5,273 students studying in the U.S. in 2001 to the sixth country of origin with 22,704 students studying in the U.S. in 2010 (Open Doors, 2011). Currently at RSU, the number of Saudi students accounts for almost 13% of the total international student body present on campus with a sudden increase that escalated from 30 students in 2005 to 271 students in 2010 (See Figure 2, Office of International Programs, 2011). Although this sudden increase did not allow RSU to plan in advance, both faculty members and administrators at various levels developed techniques to adjust procedures and performance to accommodate the new growing category. Therefore, an exploratory study of the case of Saudi students and its
related factors may help administrators at RSU understand and learn about the characteristics and circumstances of Saudi students and assist an informed planning process for the retention, involvement, and success of these students.

Figure 2: Saudi Students at RSU

Saudi students, like other international students studying in the U.S., leave the familiar surroundings of their country where they were successful students and become immersed in a new culture, communicate in a new language, and study in a new academic system (Al-Nusair, 2000). In their home country, Saudi students have been accustomed to the behavioral instructional approach, which is different from the American approach that is student centered. Student autonomy is not the focus of the Saudi education system (Prokop, 2005). This shift in focus alone represents a great challenge for these students. Coupled with other differences in the American system and culture, Saudi students enter an unfamiliar college environment for which they may not be well prepared.
Moreover, the different recruitment situation of these students, their economic status, their cultural background, and their academic readiness for studying at an American institution differentiated them from other international students (Redden, 2007). Most Saudi students who arrived in the United States after 2005 applied under a scholarship program that has been charted by an agreement between President George W. Bush and King Abdullah, the king of Saudi Arabia. The agreement aimed to quintuple the number of Saudi students studying at American colleges and universities based on funding from the Saudi government (Redden, 2007). Both Saudi students and American institutions seized the opportunity for the benefits of both parties; a prestigious college education for Saudi students and fully funded students for American institutions. Saudi students arrived by the hundreds at the beginning of the fall semester of 2006. However, many of them lacked the English proficiency requirement enforced by all American institutions (Redden, 2007). Most of these students, enrolled in English Language Institutes affiliated with or annexed to their prospective universities (Bollag, 2006). Coming from a highly collectivist society that is apparently male dominant to the highly individualistic American society, many of these students experience culture shocks and have to face challenges acculturating to the new society they are placed in given the fact that many of them left their parents’ houses for the first time in their lives to study in the United States (Redden, 2007; Triandis, 1994).

Therefore, the problem dealt with in this study is a three faceted issue. The first is the recruitment circumstances of the Saudi students as a different category of international students on campus and the implications entailed once they are admitted into their programs. The second is the different accommodating mechanisms in place to
help them achieve success, attain degrees, obtain expected college experiences. The third is how effective the aforementioned mechanisms are with regard to Saudi students’ expectations, motivation, and self-efficacy.

**Purpose of the Study**

Although the surge in the numbers of Saudi students attending American higher education institutions presents a unique phenomenon due to the different recruitment situation of these students, their economic status, their cultural background, and their academic readiness for studying at an American institution, a thorough review of the literature yielded a deficiency in research studies that focused on Saudi students in American higher education institutions in particular. Based on the limited number of studies that either dealt with international students in general (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Dipeolu, Jinhee, & Cooper, 2007; Galloway & Jenkins, 2005; Grey, 2002; Heggies III & Jackson, 2003; James, 1992; Lacina, 2002; J. Lee, 2008; J. Lee & Rice, 2007; McClure, 2007; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007) or tackled the case of Saudi students as part of the larger international student population on American campuses (Al-Nusair, 2000; Thani, 1987), the current study aims at exploring the various aspects connected with the enrollment of Saudi students at RSU. The study also examines the support systems that RSU administration has employed to ease the Saudi students’ adjustment process and help them overcome their challenges. Through a close examination of institutional initiatives targeting these students and their perceptions of these initiatives, the study findings helped to assess the effectiveness of such initiatives. The current study may also reveal procedures that need modifications or improvements to
achieve the desired outcomes of providing an inclusive quality educational services, retaining these students, and motivating them to complete their degrees at RSU.

Building on the findings of Wang (2004) that collectivistic cultures have their influence on international students in creating stressors and challenges for achievement, the current study examines the case of Saudi students building upon the study of Lee and Rice (2007) which explored the experiences of international students at an American research university. While partially replicating Heggins III and Jackson’s study on Asian international students’ social experience at an American research institution in the Mid West (2003), the approach of the current study resonates with Lacina’s (2002) conclusions about the several levels of support mechanisms needed for international students.

Although the qualitative methods of the current study follow the example of previous key studies on international students, it differs in its focus. Instead of focusing on international students in general as were the approach of Lee and Rice (2007) and Wang (2004), the current study focuses specifically on Saudi students who are pursuing degrees as a growing category of international students at RSU. Justification for choosing Saudi students originated in the novelty of their case the peculiarity of their enrollment circumstances.

**Significance to Higher Education Institutions**

With more than 9,873 students enrolling in American higher education institutions in 2008 ("Fast facts," 2008), Saudi students represented a phenomenon on its own that far exceeded precedents of international students’ waves into the United States. Although Saudi students are visible as a different group on campus, knowledge of the
case of Saudi students at RSU is still immature and has no firm grounds because of the novelty of the situation locally and nationally as well. Studying the case of Saudi students at RSU reveals the complex aspects of their case within an academically agreed upon research framework. Academically, faculty and academic departments at RSU may utilize the study findings to assess their present practice of instructional techniques and tailor their planning to include the Saudi students as a growing visible group in their classes and programs. From an administrative perspective, the various facets of the Saudi students’ case at RSU, once revealed, will help RSU administrators working in admission, recruitment, multicultural affairs, student leadership programs, student life and housing, international programs, judicial affairs, advising, counseling, and student government to plan their events and activities and make sure their services are inclusive of Saudi students as a new group on campus.

Therefore, due to the limited literature examining Saudi students studying at American universities, a study examining their case is timely. Consequently, the current study aims are two folds. First, it aims at investigating the social, economic, academic, and cultural status of Saudi students at RSU to inform academic and administrative staff at RSU to support decision making. Second, it aims at examining support systems charted by the administration at RSU either for international students in general or specifically for Saudi students to assess the effectiveness of these measures in the case of Saudi students and how they perceive these accommodations as suitable for them.

**Methods**

Due to the complexity of the issue and the numerous variables that are in action in the phenomenon, this study took the qualitative approach in an effort to explain the
intricate relationships that shape the situation of Saudi students at RSU. It also endeavors to examine the impact of campus environment, recruitment circumstances, administrative procedures, and academic practices on their motivation to persist. The self-efficacy beliefs of the Saudi students and the motivational processes they experience are examined as both agents and results of their educational experience at RSU. In-depth interviews, event observations and document reviews constitute the data sources for this study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Although the choice of the qualitative approach may be criticized as lacking the compelling power of the quantitative approach with its large sample sizes and usually generalizable findings, the number of Saudi students at RSU and the complexity of the variables associated with their case yield themselves to the qualitative approach that may be able to reveal more in-depth findings that can help explain the complex perspectives of the case (Yin, 2003).

The study follows three sampling strategies to ensure the objectivity of research findings: typical case, snowball, and information rich case (Patton, 1987). RSU is a typical mid-sized Mid-western university with an average body of international students around 1,000 students during the academic year of 2008-2009 (Office of International Programs, 2011) which accounts for almost 4% of its total student population (Institutional Research, 2009). Such percentage provides a variety of circumstances, factors and, influences that provide richness to the case studied. The choice of key participants and observation sites are guided by nominations of particular participants, instructors, and staff members during the pilot study.
Key participants

The current study included 13 key participants: one campus administrator working in student affairs, one professor teaching Saudi students, and 11 Saudi students. Except for the 11 Saudi students, other participants were involved directly in teaching or coordinating educational services targeting Saudi students. The 11 Saudi students were recruited through recommendations of professors and administrators as active and reflective students. In addition to the key participants, various individuals who contributed in supportive ways to ease the adjustment problems and helped Saudi students on campus were briefly interviewed to clarify procedural mechanisms in the college experience of Saudi students at RSU.

Data Collection and Analysis

Field observations and document reviews are instrumental to the study. Primary data source for this study originated in open-ended interviews with each of the 13 key participants. Participants responded to a topical interview protocol eliciting their feelings, emotions, and experiences at RSU during the academic year 2010/2011. The responses were recorded and transcribed (Gall et al., 2005). Data generated by the aforementioned techniques were coded and categorized within an emergent framework of relevant themes to examine the intricate relationships that shape the situation of Saudi students at RSU and the impact of campus environment, recruitment circumstances, administrative procedures, and academic practices on their motivation and persistence (Gall et al., 2005). The self-efficacy of the Saudi students and the motivational processes they go through were also examined to reveal how they contribute to the Saudi students’
choices and any introduced support systems at RSU that would increase their motivations and self-efficacy beliefs about academic and social abilities.

**Main Interview Questions**

The interview questions for Saudi students focused mainly on participants’ original expectations and self-efficacy beliefs of potential academic and social performance, how these beliefs influenced their choices, whether their beliefs have changed due to their experience at RSU or not, their perceptions of their experiences at RSU, the degree of friendliness of campus, support services they receive, challenges they meet, and the degree of their adjustment. Interviews with faculty took a different form to explore the impressions of the faculty about these students’ abilities, perceptions about capabilities, academic needs, language proficiency, socializing habits, in class participation, degree of persistence on tasks, and their abilities to change their beliefs. Administrator’s interview focused on the degree of awareness they have about the uniqueness of Saudi students as an unprecedented group, the measures they employ to provide these students with the support they need, and the administrators’ perceptions of how effective these measures are. The questions are broadly crafted to allow the participants to include a wide realm of topics in their responses to reflect the depth of their experiences.

**Researcher Stance**

Not different from other qualitative studies, the subjective elements on the researcher’s side may be present throughout the various steps of the current study. Qualitative researchers always have a passion for their research, which usually benefits the research on the one hand while posing threats on the other hand. It enriches the study
yet might influence data analysis and conclusions. However, there cannot be a clear cutting line between the study and the researcher. According to Gall et al. (2005), the researcher should make every effort to explain any possible biases that may exist. Patton (2002) encouraged researchers to frankly disclose any personal influences that the researcher as a person might bring into the study. Thus, readers can estimate the amount of influence the researcher biases changed the collected data, findings, or conclusions. Earlier, Maxwell (1992) argued that researchers should exert sincere efforts to investigate their own biases and disclose any information or personal biases that might influence the research. Such information should be clearly explained to the readers when reporting the study to facilitate a comprehensive depiction of the topic studied (Maxwell, 1992).

Although every international student is a different case, international students usually have some experiences commonly known among them. Some of these commonalities are high expectations, romantic illusions, culture shock, alienation, adjustment problems, and discrimination practices. I have been an international student at five American higher education institutions for more than eight years. During these years and in these multiple experiences, I have always experienced the same feelings and emotions passing through immigration offices at airports, renting an apartment, going to school, shopping, or even choosing food items while having a meal in a restaurant. However, helpful hands, encouraging individuals, and supportive mechanisms always provided me with the courage, energy, and the help I needed to accomplish my academic goals and realize my professional aspirations. All of these experiences provided me with an in-depth vision of what international students may go through for pursuing their dreams of obtaining a college degree from America and how can they seek help and
perceive the assistance of supportive individuals, systems, mechanisms, and community organizations to achieve their goals. Being a part of the international student body at these institutions, I was always on the recipient end of services and support systems.

As many aspects differentiate me from Saudi students, some identify me as one of their group from various perspectives. I had various exposure to American higher education institutions, I am Egyptian, and I work while pursuing my degree. However, I share Saudi students’ linguistic, regional, and religious background. Aware of the aforementioned biases that might skew my data collection of the efforts exerted by RSU administration, faculty, and student services to accommodate international students in general and Saudi students in specific, I tried to keep reminding myself of them throughout the study.

Moreover, as a qualitative study, the current study takes into consideration the true world of complex relationships, vague feelings, conflicting perceptions, powerful challenges, arising anxieties, romantic hopes, unrealistic expectations, and ambitious aspirations. This takes the current study to the actual, complex, and possible rather than the idealistic, objective, and generalizable imaginary world. All findings and conclusions are not generalizable to represent international students, Muslims, Arabs, Saudi students, or even a category of Saudi students. The findings should be viewed as specific to the study participants at the point of data collection given the circumstances they have been experiencing. If any generalization is made, it should be done with caution so as not to impose the findings and circumstances of the study at hand on another party that might not be experiencing the same circumstances.
Research Questions

The current study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What are the challenges facing Saudi students pursuing college degrees at RSU?

(2) How do academic and social self-efficacy perceptions of Saudi students at RSU influence their academic performance, social reactions, and college engagement?

(3) How effective were the support systems employed by RSU to ease the adjustment of Saudi students and provide them with the necessary college survival skills?

(4) How can RSU maximize the positive impact of the support systems to provide the desired learning experience for Saudi students?

(5) How does the presence of Saudi students at RSU influence the practices of student affairs professionals, instructors, and college administrators?

Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on three main theoretical frameworks. The first is developed from the psychology literature dealing with the self-efficacy of Saudi students at RSU. The second emerges from the literature of student services, higher education policies and accountability theories charted to help students overcome transition challenges, succeed in college, and obtain the maximum benefits of their college experience. The third builds upon existing literature that deals with international college students in general or one nationality of them in particular. It is also noteworthy to mention that due to the novelty of Saudi students’ case, a dearth in literature dealing with Saudi students studying in American colleges exists.
Definition of Terms

International college student: This category includes students who are studying in an American university, college, or institution in pursuit of an undergraduate or a graduate degree. It excludes American born student descending from foreign parents. The distinction is meant to differentiate between students who have the temporary visa status, required to study full time, and tracked by SEVIS numbers, and experience the pressure of the necessity of success on one side and other students who are able to study part time, drop out of their programs, transfer to other institutions, and not supposed to fulfill visa requirements to stay legally in the country.

Saudi students: For the purpose of this study, the term Saudi students will refer to students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia who are pursuing a college degree at RSU at the time of the study and are interviewed as key participants in this study.

Acculturative stress: Acculturative stress is handled in the study as the group of stressors and challenges the host culture imposes on international students including adapting to a foreign country, culture shock, vague perceptions about role expectations in the United States, homesickness, financial burdens, educational system adjustments, absence of family and social support, individual or institutional discriminatory behaviors, and linguistic barriers (Mori, 2000; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007) where culture is the group of shared beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices that vitalize shared meanings and the frame of references of a certain human group or race (Deifelt, 2007; Emde, 2006).
**Collectivism**: Collectivism is dealt with as a group of conceptions, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and values tied toward one’s own specific group of people linking one’s bonds to a range of social concerns specific to that group (Darwish & Huber, 2003; Hui & Triandis, 1986).

**Individualism**: Individualism within this study is viewed as the state when people are motivated by their personal goals and gains and only care about themselves and the close members of their families (Darwish & Huber, 2003; Hofstede, 1980; Ma & Schoeneman, 1997).

**Student success**: In the context of this study, student success is viewed as students’ academic achievement paired with their engagement in educationally purposeful activities in consideration of their satisfaction, persistence, and gained outcomes as evidence of acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies towards the achievement of educational objectives (Astin, 1992; Braxton, 2003).

**Support systems**: For the purpose of this study, support systems will refer to special arrangement made to suit the conditions of Saudi students in particular or international students in general as distinguished groups in comparison to other groups of American students present at RSU (Dipeolu et al., 2007). Support systems represent deliberate procedures established to help Saudi students overcome their culture shock, transition challenges and alienation threats. Within the higher education setting, these mechanisms fall into three levels: classroom, departmental, and institutional.

**Involvement**: Involvement is considered as the amount of energy students devote to their learning experience whether in the classroom or outside of the classroom towards
the achievement of maximum learning outcomes. Through involvement, students assume new responsibilities, discover new abilities and take charge of their own personal, social, and academic development (Astin, 1992; Kuh et al., 1991; T. Miller et al., 2005).

**Self-efficacy:** Self-efficacy refers to the belief in one’s abilities to pursue and accomplish certain achievements. The self-efficacy individuals’ perceptions influence their choices of related tasks, their performance levels on chosen tasks, the amount of effort they put into accomplishment of the tasks, and the amount of perseverance they show on task pursuit (Bandura, 1997; Finney & Schraw, 2003).

**The American institution:** For the purpose of this study, the term ‘the American institution’ will refer to Riverside State University, a public mid Western research institution with an international student body of around one thousand students at the time of the proposed study.

**Previous Research Approaches**

Many previous research studies targeted international college students in general. According to Ramos-Sánchez, and Nichols (2007), studying college students in general showed that high self-efficacy beliefs of academic and social abilities is related to better college adjustment. Niiya, Crocker and Bartmess (2004) proposed that adopting a learning orientation raises self-efficacy beliefs and reduces the vulnerability of self esteem to failure. The aspect of self-efficacy may be a particularly vital factor as related to the case of international students’ acculturation and adjustment experiences in their host countries. These will help in explaining and clarifying the multifaceted dimensions of the case. Related to their academic achievement, patterns of motivational processes
influencing these students while pursuing their degrees will also shed some lights on rarely visited areas of their specific case.

In respect to individuals’ willingness to start behavioral patterns in social situations, Sherer and Adams (1983) found that self-efficacy beliefs about academic abilities are exposed to possible threats in the experiences of foreign college students. They found that different cultural frame of values and communication obstacles are the basis of these threats. The fact that the countries of origin of foreign students are mainly communal or collectivistic cultures that value interpersonal relationships has its own influence in creating stressors and challenges for achievement. They are also distinguished for high senses of connectedness to family members. Therefore, it is natural that foreign students who experience difficulties interacting with Americans may experience some form of psychological or social distress. Constantine, Okazaki and Utsey (2004) examined social self-efficacy as a mediator in the relationship between acculturative stress and depression. They found that international college students from Africa appeared to be feeling worse with regard to their self-efficacy about academic abilities than international students from Asia and Latin America. Different researchers have found a strong relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and high academic performance (Pajares & Johnson, 1996; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

Adams (2004) studied the influence of peer modeling on international graduate students’ self-efficacy of academic abilities and found that peer modeling can enhance their perceptions of competence for academic presentations. Johnson (2004) conducted a phenomenological inquiry that studied the socialization experiences involved in adjusting to life in America. These were generally defined as academic and professional, including
A limited number of studies endeavored to examine aspects associated with the presence of Saudi students in American higher learning institutions. Al-Nusair (2000) conducted a quantitative study to assess the perceptions of college experience, college environment and educational gains by Saudi students studying at American colleges and universities and to explore the relationship between perceptions of the college experience, satisfaction with college and educational gains. The study revealed that Saudi college students were less involved in writing, interpersonal and social activities than the national comparison group. The results showed that Saudi students were less satisfied with their college experiences and reported lower scores in the educational gains constructs.

Shabeeb (1996) conducted a quantitative study that showed that Saudi and Arabian Gulf students viewed the English language as the most difficult adjustment area, followed by social-personal, living-dining, academic records, orientation services, admission, placement services, student activities, religious services, health services, and financial aid, in respective order. Shabeeb (1996) also found that female students encountered more problems and that undergraduate students encountered more problems than did graduate students. Al-Shehry (1989) studied the academic problems facing Saudi Students in America and found that the problem areas of most concern to Saudi graduate students were English language, and academic records. The problems of least concern to them were in the areas of admission-selection and health services. Al-Shehry (1989) also found that students living in the U.S. less than three years had more problems
with academic records and English language and those who did not attend pre-orientation and those who had their English training after coming to the United States indicated more problems in the areas of admission-selection, English language and academic records.

However, the aforementioned studies were conducted before the World Trade Center attacks of 2001 whose political and social consequences ranged from tightening visa procedures and personalized scrutiny and tracking of certain international students for security purposes to negative representations of Saudi culture in the media and news coverage. This change in policies is enough to alter the perceptions, attitudes, and reactions of international students studying in United States after 2001 especially those from a Middle Eastern or Muslim background. Such dearth in the literature about Saudi students studying in the United States after 2001 constitutes a logical cause of the current study.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This chapter has provided an overview of the problem examined in the dissertation, the purpose of the study. It has also established operational definition of terms used throughout the dissertation. In the next chapter, I present a review of the literature relevant to self-efficacy, challenges, and support mechanisms for international students on American universities. In Chapter III, I detailed the methods used to collect the data, organize responses in meaningful categories, and analyze the collected data under a list of emergent themes. In Chapter IV, I presented the participant responses organized under their relevant themes. In Chapter V, I utilized the participant responses related to the units that dealt with Saudi students to develop a model of suggested communication patterns among the various units to deal with a new international group
on campus. In Chapter VI, I draw conclusions about the insights presented by the findings in light of existing literature, present the implications for the various divisions when dealing with Saudi students, and suggest recommended approaches for future studies.

Summary

As Saudi students’ number increased surprisingly at RSU and nationwide, the current study endeavors to qualitatively investigate the various aspects with the presence of this growing group of international students at RSU. Utilizing document reviews, field observations, and in-depth interviews, the study aims to explore aspects like self-efficacy beliefs, expectations, recruitment, acculturation, adjustment, challenges, support systems, involvement, retention, success, and degree attainment of these students. Findings of the study, though specific to the key participants, may inform instructors and higher education administrators working in admission; recruitment; multicultural affairs; student leadership programs; student life; international programs; judicial affairs; advising; counseling; and student government to plan their events and activities making sure their services are inclusive of Saudi students as a new group on campus.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing presence of Saudi students at RSU and in the United States is very recent. The novelty of the case has not attracted researchers and has not yet captured the attention of publishers as well. Drawing upon the available literature that can in one way or another shed some light on the case of Saudi students at RSU, I endeavored to review literature that targeted college students in general and international students in particular. It is also noteworthy that the literature on international students is not rich either due to the fact that international students comprise only four percent of the total student body at American higher education institutions ("Fast facts," 2008).

This chapter starts with reviewing the literature that dealt with college student success and persistence at American higher education institutions. After reviewing the development of the student success perceptions over the history of higher education, I will present different approaches measuring student success introduced in the literature before reviewing prominent studies that examined aspects of student success in higher education. The second part of the chapter contains a review the theory of self-efficacy and its motivational processes. The chapter will also include studies that dealt with college students in general, minority studies, and the few studies available about international students. The third part of the chapter deals with collectivistic and
collectivistic cultures as influencing student performance in college. A review of the studies that examined collectivist students when placed in individualistic cultural settings will then follow. The next part will include a review of the literature associated with the recruitment process of international students, the challenges they face to succeed in college, and the support mechanisms in place for them to overcome challenges like alienation, loneliness, adjustment, and acculturation. Then, I will review studies that addressed academic misconduct with its various types, reasons, and suggested prevention techniques. A discussion of studies that targeted these issues concerning certain groups of international students in particular or of international students in general will conclude the review.

Student Success and Persistence

Since the early years of higher education, college administrators and professors aimed at providing their students with the skills needed to achieve success (Thelin, 2004). However, definitions of success and the tools for its accomplishment varied and developed over the years. Such changes happened to suit the goals of students, purposes of the institutions, needs of the society, or trends of the respective era (Perkin, 1997).

Historical Background

Perception of student success has evolved over history, for example, in the colonial era the aim of higher education was the maintenance of high culture in the upper class of an emerging American social system. Later, during the university transformation era (1870–1944), vocational training was the primary goal of higher education to suit the changing American economy. In the contemporary era, academics, students and professionals has had to develop an understanding of how to consume and utilize
information and to develop meta-learning to function effectively in the ever changing society in which they exist (Cohen, 1996; Perkin, 1997). However, efforts by policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to improve student success are hampered by the absence of a clear, consistent, and comprehensive definition of such success because little is known about the relative effectiveness of the different approaches or the ways that policies and practices interact to influence student success (Perna & Thomas, 2008).

Over the history, scholars have attempted to define college success through different approaches and with regard to different aspects of college life, goals, institutional policies and academic practices. However, these definitions differed by case according to the diversity of the student body and the different types of institutions (Braxton, 2003; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Other endeavors tried to define responsibilities where students would be responsible for achieving the stated level of performance in each area, faculty would be responsible for developing teaching strategies that would give students the opportunity to acquire the requisite skills as they progressed through the general education curriculum, and the college would be responsible for providing every reasonable means for the student to acquire the necessary skills and support faculty in the teaching process (Passaro, Lapovsky, Feroe, & Metzger, 2003). Therefore, student success can be viewed as students’ academic achievement paired with their engagement in educationally purposeful activities in consideration of their satisfaction, persistence, and gained outcomes as evidence of acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies towards the achievement of educational objectives.
Approaches to Measuring Success

Scholars have attempted to measure student success using various quantifiable indicators that varied from grades, persistence to the sophomore year, length of time to degree, degree attainment, graduation rates, and two-year-college transfers (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007; Venezia & Associates, 2005). Due to the essential role of student success as a component of college outcomes, many researchers, over the last thirty years, have conducted studies that examined predictors and indicators of student success, its varied degrees of influence on different student groups, and its relationship with institutional policies. Scholars and researchers utilized these models to explain student persistence, student growth, and student satisfaction in college (Kuh, Race, & Vesper, 1997; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Lorang, 1982; Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Volkwein & Cabrera, 2000; Volkwein, King, & Terenzini, 1986; Volkwein & Lorang, 1996). However, other deep and abstract indicators of college student success have appeared in the literature in recent years due to a change in the general perception of what a college experience means. Such elements revolve on the social aspects of the developed human character of students as positive social beings. These aspects included: mature sense of identity, appreciation of human diversity, ability to function successfully as part of a diverse group, and the ability to utilize self-reflection to solve problems and make decisions in collaboration with others (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002; Baxter Magolda, 2001). Intertwined with the concept of success is the aspect of college persistence.
Many models have been developed to examine the aspects of student success and persistence, the following section touches upon only three models central to the present study: the preparedness model, the student-institution fit model and the campus climate model. Traditionally, the parity in student achievement has been associated with students’ preparedness for college and their academic goals in addition to their social background (Astin, 1992; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Stark & Associates, 1989). Later, a second perspective of student success was established within the framework of student-institution fit model which claimed that a suitable match between a student and institutional features, practices and programs could be the most predictive of that student’s academic achievement and desirable college outcome (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Some researchers adopted the fit model which argues that the integration of students into their institutional curricular and extracurricular structures is a great predictor of student persistence, growth, and success (Spady, 1970, 1971; Tinto, 1993). Scholars have addressed variations of the fit models like the significance of student engagement and amount of effort exerted toward achievement in college (Astin, 1984; Pace, 1984). Other scholars targeted college adjustment challenges and the social support aspects that facilitate student transition into college life especially through family members and peers (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; Nora, 1987; Nora, Attinasi, & Matonack, 1990). The friendliness of campus climate and the welcoming gestures to all students have been established as an important factor in easing student adjustment and consequently supporting optimal student development and positive college outcomes (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Advocating for safe college environment, Reynolds (1999) asserted that maximizing student outcomes and increasing
their levels of success depends on the elimination of fear, oppression and stereotype threats.

Prominent Studies of Students Success

The academic force and energy gained by students in their first year of college can clarify the amount of the differences in students’ college persistence and success (Adelman, 1999, 2006; Chen, 2005) Utilizing national data to define a national perspective on how student experiences and campus programs affect academic and cognitive outcomes of the first year of college, Keup (2006) found that professors, academic advisors, and staff members should plan an informed design of first-year programs and freshman classroom techniques and activities. The design should encourage students to take an active role in class, facilitate their participation with the material used, and improve their sense of satisfaction with regard to their academic experiences in college, particularly those related to classroom instruction and relevancy of the coursework in their effort to help students achieve college success. Keup (2006) also concluded that student affairs professionals should endeavor to create a campus environment that is loaded with meaningful as well as inspirational content in the curriculum dedicating resources to improve students’ satisfaction with the college facilities, to set high expectations of student performances and to initiate structures that help students study, and to encourage their collaboration and discussion of academic knowledge outside of the classroom.

Assessment of student experiences should be dealt with as a “feedback channel” for college administrators and decision makers to benefit from student responses and utilizing them as a guide for improvements that aim at establishing a foundation for
students’ future development and providing a better education for them while at the same time ensuring their satisfaction (Keup, 2006). Among the factors that influence students’ satisfaction are classroom experiences, friendships, and social activities which increase students’ sense of belonging and willingness to persist in college (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Many other studies asserted the importance of the social relationships and activities for the success of college students. Gloria and Ho (2003) argued that the strength of the social support elements like comfort in the college environment, social and peer support, and students’ self-beliefs as a predictor of student success, college satisfaction and academic persistence (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Hawken, Duran, & Kelly, 1991) claimed that communication competence and roommate rapport positively influence academic achievement. Bank, Slavings, and Biddle (1990) found that peers were more influential on college students than were faculty members and parents.

Therefore, a large body of research and theories support the existence of a positive relationship between student success and persistence on the one side and student engagement on the other side (Astin, 1984; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Moreover, colleges and institutions should establish expectations for high performance inside and outside the classroom appropriate to students’ abilities and aspirations (Kuh et al., 2007). Therefore, institutions have to identify the prospective students, what their capabilities are, how well they are academically prepared, and what they expect from the college and from themselves (T. Miller et al., 2005). This asserted the argument that colleges should make sure that their students are well informed about successful academic behaviors reinforced through institutional structures that build
student “academic momentum” and at the same time rule out aspects that would diminish that momentum (Adelman, 1999, 2006).

Various researchers asserted that utilization of an institutionalized combination of effective academic practices increases the academic quality of student outcomes (Forest, 1985; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; H. Wang & Grimes, 2001). Among these practices are the early warning systems, redundant safety nets, supplemental instruction, and peer tutoring and mentoring (Kuh et al., 2007). However, they argued that for these programs to be effective, institutional practices should demonstrate quality, be tailored to satisfy the targeted student needs, and based mainly on the aspects of student success (Kuh et al., 2005).

Finally to conclude, it is positive that students once supported by the social environment of families, friends, peers, and college personnel, utilize their preparedness for college and entry characteristics to gain momentum that pushes them forward to persist in college and successfully achieve goals through engagement and integration in academic and social activities. The responsibility for the achievement of goals cannot be attributed to one party alone. Instead, all of the stakeholders, including students, families, community organizations, schools, friends, college administrators, professors, and peers in college, have their share of the responsibility, the rewards, and the credit for student success.

**Processes of Self-Efficacy**

Essential to this section are the works of Bandura (1986; 1993; 1995; 1997) explaining the cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes as regulatory of human efficacy beliefs. A brief review of the self-efficacy theory will be provided
followed by a review of relative works of scholars and researchers concerning college students and self-efficacy as an influential factor (Bandura, 1993) in their quest for learning and their pathways to achievement in the higher learning institutions.

**The Self-Efficacy Theory**

Self-efficacy is “a belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Individuals’ perceived self-efficacy is believed to influence their choices of related tasks, their performance levels on chosen tasks, the amount of effort they put into accomplishment of the tasks, and the amount of perseverance they show on task pursuit (Bandura, 1997). Individuals’ self-efficacies vary according to the specific tasks handled where, an individual can have high self-efficacy in one situation and low self-efficacy in another because self-efficacy is task-specific (Bandura, 1997; Finney and Schraw, 2003). Self-efficacy functions through four major processes: cognitive, motivational, affective and selective (Bandura, 1993).

**Cognitive Processes**

Including conception of ability, social comparison influences, framing of feedback, perceived controllability, and casual structure, cognitive processes influence the ability of individuals to choose and figure out options, to estimate predictive factors, and to reconsider their decisions based on the consequences of their choices (Bandura, 1997; P. H. Miller, 2002). Students who construe their capabilities as acquirable skills seek tasks that expand their competencies and regard errors as a natural part of their learning quest (Bandura, 1993; Shim & Ryan, 2005). Students with the inherent capacity perception look at their performances as direct indicators of capabilities, a
perception that directs their choices towards easy achievable tasks that minimize their risk of failure (Bandura, 1993; Shim & Ryan, 2005). When reasonable and objective performance standards are not present, students tend to judge their competencies in comparison to those of others around them, a fact that greatly influence their perception of the value of their accomplishments (Bandura, 1995). Students’ set goals for academic tasks have a major function in shaping their decoding of feedback which mostly dictates their reactions to feedback, draws the plan of their future academic endeavors, and influences their performance in class (Bandura, 1995).

Depending on many factors, students make choices based upon their perceived controllability, which is highly influenced by the casual structure. The individuals’ perceived controllability refers to how individuals view their environment as within their control. Perceived controllability is influenced by the strength of the individuals self-efficacy together with the contextual obstacles and opportunities (Bandura, 1993). Casual structure refers to these interactive processes of changing self-efficacy beliefs within the frame of current experiences (Bandura, 1995).

**Motivational Processes**

Efficacy beliefs attribute to motivation through helping individuals decide the type of goals to set for themselves, the length of their perseverance to meet the goals, the amount of effort they will exert to achieve their goals and the amount of resilience they will show in reaction to failures in meeting their goals (Bandura, 1995, p. 8). Individuals generate their self regulation of motivation through knowledge and forethought about future possibilities and consequences through which they set their goals through “reactions to their performance, perceived self-efficacy for goal attainment, and
readjustment of personal goals based on one’s progress” (Dweck, 1999). While setting their achievement goals the students’ perception of their performance is shaped as well as their casual attributions for failures, successes, errors and effort (Bandura, 1993).

Casual attributions refer to the fact that people with high self-efficacy attribute failures to insufficient effort while those with low self-efficacy attribute their failures to lack of abilities. Outcome expectancies refer to the fact that people act based on their expectations of the outcomes of their actions which, in turn, is controlled by beliefs of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Present cognized goals, not future unrealized ones, motivate and guide behavior giving individuals the power to have self-influence by personal challenge and evaluative judgments and decisions to one's own attainments that provide major cognitive mechanisms for motivation (Bandura, 1993; Dweck, 2007).

Affective and Selective Processes

Affective processes act as the emotional mediators of self-efficacy beliefs. They control stressors and potentially influence levels of anxiety arousal in facing threats or possible failures. Students with low self-efficacy would experience high level of anxiety arousal, concentrate on their coping deficits, and feel threatened by their environment and worry about rarely materializing fears (Bandura, 1993). Therefore, the choices they make are reflective of the skills and abilities they believe they have combined with their interests and shaped by social interactions (Klassen, 2004a, 2004b; Zimmerman, 2000).

Self-Efficacy and Academic Achievement

A fair amount of studies targeted self-efficacy within the educational settings (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; Zimmerman, 1989). Self-efficacy social and academic beliefs were claimed to be positively connected to students’
persistence and academic achievement (Stevens & Gist, 1997; R. Wood & Bandura, 1989). Theorists attributed students’ educational decisions to their respective self-efficacy (Chemers et al., 2001; J. Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2004; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Researchers found a positive connection between high social self-efficacy and high academic performance and showed that students who had high self-efficacy utilize their abilities to overcome challenges and succeed in their current endeavors (Bandura, 1986; Buyukselcuk, 2006; Houston, 1995; Schunk, 1984; Silver, Mitchell, & Gist, 1995).

Students with high social and academic self-efficacy have stronger beliefs in their abilities in achieving success because they always attribute their success to their abilities, and attribute failures to temporary situations (Buyukselcuk, 2006; Houston, 1995). Researchers also argued that success in academic tasks is usually connected with high self-efficacy beliefs while students experiencing failures usually demonstrate low self-efficacy as a predictor of an attribution style for failure (Camgoz, Tektas, & Metin, 2008; Hirschy & Morris, 2002). Although some researchers could not assert the positive relationship between self-efficacious individuals and academic success, they were not able to negate it (Bandura, 1986; Carroll & Garavalia, 2004; Rittman, 1999). Others have been able to prove the existence of such a positive relationship between self-efficacy as a psychological factor and students’ achievement (Klomegah, 2007; Rittman, 1999).

Psychological factors like self-efficacy are essential to understand student academic achievements and should be utilized as a guide in establishing programs for first year of college (Devonport & Lane, 2006; Pajares, 1996). Moreover, the sources of self-efficacy, once identified, could guide planning profitable interventions that would improve academic achievement through increasing self-efficacy (Ramos-Sánchez &
Nichols, 2007). Studying college students in general showed that high self-efficacy is related to better college adjustment (Niiya et al., 2004). When students adopt a learning orientation, the vulnerability of their self-esteem to failure is reduced. Moreover, many researchers argued that it raises their self-efficacy beliefs (A. M. Lane, Devonport, & Horrell, 2004; A. M. Lane, Hall, & Lane, 2004).

**Self-Efficacy Coping Strategies**

Together with coping strategies, self-efficacy is empirically linked with college academic performance which is necessary to overcome stressors associated with a college experience toward degree completion (A. M. Lane, R. Hall et al., 2004; A. M. Lane, Jones, & Stevens, 2002). Moreover, high self-efficacy is associated with active and adaptive coping strategies of students in college (Bandura, 1997; Devonport & Lane, 2006). Self-efficacy expectations are positively related to initiating behavior, the amount of effort exerted to attain goals, and the degree of persistence on task after facing a hardship (Devonport & Lane, 2006).

Group interaction and the social factors play an essential role in increasing self-efficacy. Therefore, seeking social support, students may explicitly gain high levels of self-efficacy through watching peers perform tasks successfully, through gaining verbal persuasion of peers, and through developing social interaction with colleagues (Dinter, 2000). Moreover, students with strong senses of belonging and social interests exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy (J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Although many of these factors might be missing from international students who are placed in an unfamiliar context with many challenges and barriers that hinder their social interactions with colleagues, a little amount of research has targeted this category of college students.
Self-Efficacy and International Students

Like their domestic peers, international students need to succeed in their academic endeavors but they need more adaptive skills to adjust to their new cultural, social, educational and psychological contexts (Sherer & Adams, 1983). Very little research investigated the aspect of self-efficacy as a particularly vital factor in the case of international students’ acculturation and adjustment experiences in their host countries. In respect to individuals’ willingness to develop behavioral patterns in social situations, self-efficacy is exposed to possible threats in the experiences of foreign college students where different cultural frame of values and communication obstacles may be the basis of these threats (Adams, 2004). The fact that the countries of origin of foreign students are mainly communal or collectivistic cultures that value interpersonal relationships has its own influence in creating stressors and challenges for achievement as they are also distinguished for high senses of connectedness to family members (Constantine et al., 2004). Therefore, it is natural that foreign students may experience some form of psychological or social distress. When their social self-efficacy is examined as a mediator in the relationship between acculturative stress and depression, international college students from Africa appeared to be feeling worse with regard to their self-efficacy than international students from Asia and Latin America (Adams, 2004). Peer modeling can enhance international graduate students’ self-efficacy and increase their perceptions of competence for academic presentations (Emde, 2006).

Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures

With a variety of definitions and interpretation, culture plays an important role in shaping students’ perceptions, efforts, aspirations, and expectations. It also influences
the communication patterns they establish with their peers and professors. When there is a huge gap between the student’s own culture and the host culture, the student is required to adapt and develop certain strategies to navigate the path to success in the host culture. Moreover, collectivist students in individualistic cultures face much more challenges than their individualist peers when placed in collectivistic settings. Therefore, institutional support systems, societal accommodations, and positive peer relationships are among the several factors that affect students’ performance in such situations.

**Culture**

Culture refers to a group of shared beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices that bring to life shared meanings and the frame of references of a certain human group (Deifelt, 2007). However, this definition may restrict the concept by ignoring the changing dimensions of culture. As human beings, people’s identities are formed by culture but also are influencing and transforming culture through daily interactions, differentiated emotions, and acquired perceptions (Cukur, De Guzman, & Carlo, 2004). Different cultures were often classified under the collectivistic or the individualistic category. The history of individualism-collectivism as a construct trace the differences and similarities across cultures has influenced the educational research in the last three decades (Kagitcibasi, 1997; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1994). Researchers often used the construct to conduct cross-cultural studies focusing on individual perceptions of self, roles in society, importance of goals, individual and collective identity, measures of success, and individual gains (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Waterman, 1984).
Collectivism

Scholars endeavored to define collectivism (Hui & Triandis, 1986). However, for the purpose of this review, the definition of Triandis (1994) would be suitable where collectivism is a group of conceptions, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and values tied toward one’s own specific group of people linking one’s bonds to a range of social concerns specific to that group. Personal norms in collectivistic societies assert submission and conformity with the group norms and beliefs (Darwish & Huber, 2003). Such norms and beliefs also emphasize individual emotional dependability on the group which limits personal privacy and ranks the group decisions higher than those of individuals (Sampson, 1977). Individuals from collectivist cultures usually identify their identity by maintaining their place in their social structure and understanding of the overall goals of the group rather than their individual goals (Baron & Byrne, 1997; Darwish & Huber, 2003). Interdependence and concerns of other group members’ needs and interests are the norm that is not usually forced on individual but stemming from a belief that the individual primarily gains through group gains (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006).

Although collectivism puts too much pressure on the individual to satisfy group goals, obligations, and expectations, it ensures the presence of a strong social support and intensify senses of belonging (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). While behaving according to the norms and expectations of the family, social group, and clan, each individual strives to support group relations even if there is a great conflict between regulations and group gains (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997).

Collectivistic individuals share the feelings and concerns of the group and care for the needs of other in-group members which increases their sense of sameness and
similarity even if they do not share the same situations or drives (Iyengar, Lepper, & Ross, 1999). Such sharing and concern is intensified by the way collectivistic individuals are often raised to consider themselves as similar to other members of the group in order to fit within the fabric of the groups (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006). The aforementioned considerations fortify the boundaries they set between themselves as a group and members of other groups as well as increase the in-group bonding (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Hui & Triandis, 1986). As collectivistic cultures reinforce the social bonds among the individual members of the group, these individuals may neglect their individual needs for the sake of those of the group and usually set goals that do not challenge the established social bonds if not conforming to the group ones (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Triandis & Trafimow, 2001). When aiming to achieve self reliance as a goal, collectivists do not see it as a way to achieve independence but primarily as tool of not being a burden on the group (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997)

**Individualism**

Individualistic cultures are centered on promoting independence, personalized visions, and self reliance in the individuals (Darwish & Huber, 2003; Hofstede, 1980). These cultures emphasize personal autonomy, independence, self-realization, individual initiative, privacy, and individual decision making (Darwish & Huber, 2003). Thus, the conception of identity revolves around the group of attributes of the individual persons not around those of their group or society (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Individualism can be viewed as the state when people only care about themselves and the close members of their families (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Hofstede, 1980). Therefore, as autonomous units in themselves, individuals from individualistic cultures
view themselves as motivated by their personal goals and gains (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). Their interactions with others are governed by clear exchange relationships that are built on equity and allow emotional detachment (Waterman, 1984). Causing such detachment, individualistic cultures raise the individual on the basis of rights more than on the basis of responsibilities to create what is known as a universal social contract based on equality and comparable advantages (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Oyserman et al., 2002).

Placement of Collectivist Saudi

According to Triandis (1994), the degree of industrialization classifies countries as individualistic or collectivistic. Very often, researchers have classified industrialized countries as highly individualistic while unindustrialized countries are considered collectivistic (Triandis, 1994). However, this classification is misleading when looking at many countries like China, Japan, and Taiwan, which are considered industrialized but highly collectivistic as well. Another way of classification is the degree of clinging to traditional customs and social values where countries that demonstrate high degree of these are considered collectivistic (Long, 2005). Following the latter model, Saudi Arabia ranks highly in the collectivistic category (Bowen, 2008; Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Long, 2005). Therefore, Saudi Students who are raised in Saudi Arabia are expected to demonstrate high collectivistic behaviors that shape their conceptualization of the relationship with others both within their own group and outside of their group (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006). Such conceptualization may influence their understanding, feelings, and reactions towards their situation in the United States as highly collectivist individuals placed in a very individualistic society.
Possessing an orientation that is incongruent with societal values may represent a risk factor for individuals (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006). Differences between the individuals’ type and the society they live in can produce various influences on those individuals with dependent personalities especially their norms of behaviors like, social anxiety, obsessive–compulsive disorder and various types of depression (Darwish & Huber, 2003). Moreover, students from collectivistic cultures lack the variety of skills to make new friends outside of their group (Katz, 1988; Pak & Sands, 1996; Pratt, 1992).

**Students in Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures**

Due to the amount of behavioral pattern restrictions which the society places on its individuals, the learning styles of college students differ according to their culture of origin (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). In collectivistic societies, the older generations often represent wisdom of experience which others should endeavor to acquire through listening to them which gives the teachers the role of potential sages (Pak & Sands, 1996). Therefore, the students should receive knowledge from the teachers as experts while students’ individual insights and unique interpretations are not valued because learning and teaching is a responsibility for the good of the collective (Pak & Sands, 1996). On the other hand, students in individualistic societies are responsible for their own learning. Some instructors act as guides to knowledge rather than experts in the discipline. Where institutions provide the learning environment where students can self initiate learning and get personally engaged in a self directed quest (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). Therefore, the emphasis is on the personal relevance of knowledge rather than on its collective values (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997; Pak & Sands, 1996; Shkodriani & Gibbons, 1995).
Although some researchers have tried to assess the characteristics of cultures by studying college students (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Youn, 2000), there is a scarcity in the literature of studies that examine international college students’ cultural implications (Youn, 2000). International students arrive in the United States with a group of presumed perception of what an effective learning process look like which shape their approach toward student teacher interaction as well as student-student interaction patterns (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006). When placed in a culture that is on the far end of the individualistic-collectivistic continuum as opposed to their culture of origin, college students with collectivistic characteristics showed depression, anxiety, obsessive–compulsive disorder and dependent personality traits (Youn, 2000). Reflecting their collectivistic cultures, Korean college students displayed a consistency of their culture in their epistemological beliefs as compared to their American counterparts (Pak & Sands, 1996). Likewise, students from Hong Kong and Taiwan have proven to be more abstract and reflective than Australian students, as reflecting their individualistic cultures, who exhibited more concrete and active learning styles (Wit, 2002).

**Stereotype Threat**

According to Steele and Aronson (1995), stereotype threat refers to the individual as exposed to the risk of acting personally or being stamped with a negative stereotype about one’s larger group. Stereotype threat has its negative impact on academic achievement (M. J. Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt, & Carlson, 2009). Among other mass communication theories, the Cultivation Theory highlight the role of television depicted images in creating stereotypes about minority cultural groups (Gerbner, 1998). In an endeavor to explore the link between common stereotypes and media portrayals,
researchers found that these stereotypes are highly influential when direct and sufficient interaction with the depicted group is lacking (Fujioka, 1999; Gerbner, 1998). Stereotype threat is counterbalanced by a cognitive imbalance between one’s group and the larger dominant group identified by the individual’s experiences (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). Usually the differences between these two identities elicits negative emotional reactions such as social anxiety (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and performance related worries (Beilock, Rydell, & McConnell, 2007). These affective consequences can jeopardize successful task completion (Picho & Brown, 2011). In its mildest forms, stereotype threat may require individuals of a diverse group to exert more effort to accomplish normal tasks. Researchers argued that stereotype threat can be minimized by exposure to in-group models that challenge the stereotype conception about the group (Elizaga & Markman, 2008).

Exposure to counter stereotype models has shown positive influence on both in-group members and out of group members (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Elizaga & Markman, 2008; Marx & Roman, 2002; Marx, Stapel, & Muller, 2005; McIntyre, Paulson, & Lord, 2003; Viswanath, 1988; Ya-Chen, 2011). Researchers found that dominant group members were influenced by positive models that contradicted stereotypes associated with a minority group in the studies of Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) and Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001). Studies on influencing in-group members showed that exposure to role models that defy known stereotypes improved in-group members’ performance, self esteem, and self-efficacy beliefs about task accomplishment (Elizaga & Markman, 2008; Marx & Roman, 2002; Marx et al., 2005; McIntyre et al., 2003). Moreover, according to the Social Cognitive Theory, individuals’
perceptions form through vicarious learning through observing others. Therefore, Tan, Fujioka, and Lucht (1997) found that observing members of the minority or different group may lead to lessening the spread of stereotypes among the dominant group members. Likewise, Ya-Chen (2011) found that college students exposure to a different culture than their own decreased the amount of negative stereotypes and provided more opportunities for rational processing of information about individuals from that culture.

Viswanath (1988) argued that foreign students are likely to feel frustrated after exposure to U.S. media when handling international news that is related to their countries of origin. Examining stereotype influences on Japanese college students at an American University, Bonazzo and Wong (2007) found that international students face mass media propagated stereotypes which leads to forms of discrimination on college campuses. The participants were found to use the avoidance strategy to respond to stereotypes imposed on them by American peers (Bonazzo & Wong, 2007). In a comparative study, Schmader (2002) found that in-group members with a strong self perception were less vulnerable to the stereotype threat.

Therefore, stereotypes created by the mass media may pose a threat for Saudi students on American campuses. These threats can influence academic achievement, self-esteem, and persistence towards goal realization. Negative influences of stereotypes in the case of international students can be minimized through exposing the in-group members to successful role models and through acquainting the American students with the minority student group.
Challenges and Support Mechanisms of International Students

Throughout history, recruitment of international students has been attracting the attention of college administrators all over the world for various benefits. When placed in their foreign educational institution, international students usually face challenge due to transition, the difference in academic practices, and the new social life that is usually unfamiliar to them (Choi, 2006; Constantine et al., 2005; Kagan & Cohen, 1990). Aware of these challenges, college administrators and academic departments usually initiate support systems to help these students adjust to their new context and achieve their desired educational goals as well (Hayes & Lin, 1994).

Internationalization and American Higher Education

The history of internationalization in the Western civilization can be traced back to the third century B.C. when the Sophists, representing the international scholars nowadays, used to travel to various places to teach the youth. Another example could be found again during the middle ages when the Intellectual Sojourns were involved in a quest for knowledge that took them away from their homelands to various places of the known world (Bruch & Barty, 1998). Since then the “wandering scholar” has been a part of a university education in Europe for centuries (Wit, 2002). These incidents of moving scholars and students witnessed an end towards the beginning of the Renaissance when most young men were satisfied to study within their regions (Knight, 2006; Open Doors, 2007). Nowadays, this trend has resumed its existence in a more powerful presence with international students and scholars traveling to almost every part of the world either to teach or to learn (Institute of International Education, 2007a; J. Lee, 2008).
The United States is no exception from other countries to being a country of origin for these sojourns. However, when looking at the countries of destination that attract international students, the United States shows a significant record of being the number one destination of international students where international student access has become one of the major concerns due to visa restrictions, political circumstances, and security procedures (Institute of International Education, 2004; J. Lee, 2008; J. Lee & Rice, 2007; NAFSA, 2004).

However, this trend of attracting the highest numbers of international students may not continue. Many scholars have predicted an expected decline in international student numbers in the United States due to various reasons including: discrimination perceptions, costly and complicated visa procedures, rising cost of living in the United States, appearance of alternative recruiters, attractive measures in other host countries, and international resentment to the foreign policies of the United States (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005; Ping, 1999). This expectation brings a set of responsibilities for institutions, student affairs professionals, departments, and faculty to provide accommodating services for international students (Cudmore, 2005; Currie & Newson, 1998; Knight, 1997; Walker, 1999). However, American institutions willingly accept these responsibilities due to various benefits and advantages that international students bring with them to the community, their host institution, and the country at large.

**Benefits of International Recruitment**

Recruitment of international students is largely motivated by the economic drive to boost revenue compensating a decrease in government funding (Knight, 2006; Knight & de Wit, 1999; J. Lee, 2008). However, it brings a number of academic, cultural, and
political benefits to the host countries other than the apparent financial benefits (Cudmore, 2005; Knight, 2006; J. Lee, 2008). These include appreciation of diversity, cultural exchange, broadening of students and faculty perspectives through introducing an international dimension to teaching and research, and prospective global friendliness due to the expectation that most international students would assume leadership roles once they return to their home countries (Knight, 2006). However, it is noteworthy that there are many cross sectional relationships due to the changing and ever-growing global scene in respect to political, social, economic, labor, knowledge production, and educational trends (Constantine et al., 2005; Wilton & Constantine, 2003).

Transition

Researchers investigated the challenges facing international students while studying in the United States and the possible effects of these challenges on the international students’ academic achievement, psychological status, and the effectiveness of the institutional educational service (J. Lee, 2008; J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Escalating after 9/11 terrorist attacks, these transition challenges fall into the following three categories listed from easiest to the most difficult: 1) finding accommodation and day to day life necessities, 2) acquiring academic skills and learning techniques, and 3) familiarizing and engaging themselves with college social aspects (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002). Frequently, international students accompanied by their families have reported facing higher level of hardships in finding a decent lodging, transportation, medical care, schools (Altbach, 2002; J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Experiencing greater difficulties than their American domestic peers, international students need tailored academic help
and face specific social and psychological distress while settling in the United States for the first time (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Linguistic difficulties have been highlighted by various scholars as important factor influencing the adjustment of international students during their early years (Channell, 1990; Elsey, 1990; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002).

**Academic Life**

The previous academic experiences of some international students in educational systems that enforce more control than the Western educational systems make these students feel lost, insecure and helpless once they start their programs in the host institutions (McClure, 2007; Olsen & Kunhart, 1958). International students expect a high level of guidance and closeness from mentors, advisors and supervisors (Y. Wang, 2004). Difficulties with classroom participation are major factors in the academic experience of international students (Y. Wang, 2004). These included oral participation, completion of class assigned reading, and their ability to take notes and to follow class lectures (Adams, 2004). Moreover, their observation of model presentation by native English speakers shakes their confidence in performing at the expected academic level (Jochems, Snippe, Smid, & Verweij, 1996). International students’ test behaviors are noticeably different than domestic students showing lower averages, more attempts and late scheduling when given the option to do so (Jochems et al., 1996). Academic, linguistic, and social pre arrival selection procedures enforced for some international students showed an improvement in their academic performances on tests (Adams, 2004; Jochems et al., 1996; Y. Wang, 2004).
Many aspects contribute to these difficulties facing international students in advising, classroom participation, and test-taking results. These aspects can be classified into three categories: different host culture, background of classroom practices, and second language proficiency (Grey, 2002; McClure, 2007; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Y. Wang, 2004). International students are unfamiliar with the educational culture of the host country. They lack essential background knowledge of classroom practices that is needed for successful learning process. They are usually suffering from insufficient second language proficiency, which hinders their communication skills, comprehension of instructions, and articulation of needs.

**Social Life**

Not only are international students required to satisfy the demands of their academic new environment, they are required to overcome the social barriers facing them as well. They encounter confusion and disorientation that leads to alienation and social marginalization intensified by their academic anxiety and difficulty in developing friendships with American students (Constantine et al., 2004; McClure, 2007). Because many international students come from largely collectivist cultures, the loss of connectedness to important family members and the lack of community support increase their psychological or social distress (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Olsen & Kunhart, 1958; Y. Wang, 2004). These students usually demonstrate little understanding of the rules and regulations governing student conduct, social interactions, and communication norms enhanced by the inadequacy of planned activities for them and poor advising and counseling services on many campuses (Kher, Juneau, & Molstad, 2003). For instance, students life programs usually do not cater for international students despite their greater
needs to support services (J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Y. Wang, 2004). Discriminatory behaviors are often reported by international students not only as community originated behaviors but also manifested in prejudiced attitudes encountered when dealing with native students, professors, and administrators (Constantine et al., 2004).

**Coping and Support Mechanisms**

Prior to their arrival to the United States, international students usually develop high expectations (Constantine et al., 2004; Leong & Chou, 1996; Oei & Notowidjojo, 1990; Winkelman, 1994). Very often when these expectations are not realized, they may experience interpersonal stress, low self-esteem, racial or ethnic discrimination, disappointment, resentment, anger, sadness, physical illness or other social crises or psychological dysfunctions which characterize their culture shock (Constantine et al., 2004; McClure, 2007). Therefore, many international students may experience profound levels of acculturative stress except for those who develop effective coping strategies such as self-determination, collegial support and examination strategies (Chung, Bemak, & Wong, 2000; Constantine et al., 2004; Inman, Ladany, Constantine, & Morano, 2001).

Although different factors influence international students’ coping strategies like age of arrival to the United States, educational level, and English language proficiency, only the presence of support mechanisms lies within the control of the American host institutions (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Y. Wang, 2004).

Support mechanisms fall into three levels, classroom, departmental, and institutional. On the classroom level, the instructors’ understanding and encouragement together with the application of cooperative learning strategies have been found to help in easing their adjustment problems (Y. Wang, 2004). Departmental awareness of the
problems facing international students is one of different levels of support mechanisms that have been proven to help in the academic and social adaptation of international students (Jochems et al., 1996; Olsen & Kunhart, 1958). On the institutional level, a system of mentors providing intensive coaching for international students during their first year would be helpful together with programming that targets the inclusion of international students and improve their interpersonal relationships with domestic students (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Lacina, 2002; J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Institutions also should articulate the guidelines concerning working with international students in a way that raises the awareness of all persons involved in the educational setting (Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003). Increasing the effectiveness of orientation programs to address the variety of the aforementioned challenges has been suggested as one of the techniques to help these students cope with the new environment.

**Academic Misconduct**

Over the last two decades, academic dishonesty has become an alarming phenomenon on college campuses (Carter & Punyanunt-Carter, 2006; Fishbein, 1993). Davis, Grover, Becker, and McGregor’s (1992) study on 6000 college students showed that between 46% and 79% of students reported that they have cheated at least once. Several forms of academic dishonesty can take place in the college classroom with its larger meaning. These forms may vary in their degree of severity and seriousness from copying from a nearby student answer sheet during a quiz to plagiarizing a paper from an internet website or collaborating on homework and inappropriate utilization of tutoring services (Levy & Rakovski, 2006). Faculty perceptions about cheating always varied from those of the students who usually denied the severity of the different forms of
cheating (Graham, Monday, O'Brien, & Steffen, 1994). Moreover, students consider some forms of academic dishonesty more serious than others. Consequently, students are more frequently engaged in behaviors that they consider less serious than other forms of cheating (Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003).

**Types and Reasons of Academic Misconduct**

Types of academic dishonesty can be classified according to several dimensions in regard to intentionality, seriousness of the misconduct from students’ point of view, and the degree of student awareness of types and consequences of academic misconduct. Levy and Rakovvski (2006) found that student regarded the following categories of misconduct as severe: stealing an exam, submitting another student’s paper, knowingly allowing another student to use one’s paper, copying an exam with or without the other student’s knowledge, copying a paper, and using a cheat sheet. Students categorized copying homework; giving or receiving help on graded work; and plagiarizing from the internet as the least serious and the most frequently practiced (Levy & Rakovski, 2006).

According to Callahan (2004), shifting values from idealism to materialism caused the increases in cheating incidents among students. According to the study conducted by Smith, Nolan, and Dai (1998), faculty believed that student cheating is more encouraged when students encounter a “moral dilemma.” Researchers argue that one of the main reasons of today students’ academic dishonesty is the social pressure demanding them to demonstrate productivity, performance, and speed (Blum, 2009; Rabi, Patton, Fjortoft, & Zgarrick, 2006). Likewise, Wowra (2007) argued that college students who choose to cheat in some form have higher value for their social impression than they attribute to maintaining their integrity. Anxiety about grades, compulsory
achievements, and economic conditions may lead students towards sacrificing their integrity especially when the risk of being caught is foreseen to be minimal (Wowra, 2007).

Students who reported incidents of academic dishonesty blamed their college professors for failing to respond efficiently to cheating incidents that were obvious (McCabe & Trevino, 2002). Hard, Conway, and Moran (2006) found that professors underestimating the amount of student academic dishonesty fail to integrate challenging measures to stop student academic misconduct. They also argued that tolerance of academic misconduct might increase the number of incidents in their classes.

**Preventing Academic Misconduct**

The intentional academic misconduct performed by the students on papers and written assignments falls under Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior. According to Ajzen (2002), a certain behavior is controlled by three main aspects. First, individuals decide to engage in certain behaviors based on their attitude toward that specific behavior. Second, perceptions of social pressures may decide whether individuals will perform a certain behavior or not. Third, individuals’ control over the conditions of performing the behavior and its consequences is a determinant factor in the decision to engage in that behavior (Ajzen, 2002; Passow, Mayhew, Finelli, Harding, & Carpenter, 2006). Therefore, the prevention of academic misconduct needs to include these three dimensions. College administrators need to raise the ethical commitment of their students to decrease the frequency of cheating. To accomplish that, colleges choose different ways ranging from notifying students upon admission of the university honor code to more concrete techniques like requiring students to sign an honor contract.
(McCabe & Trevino, 2002) or write an essay pledging to uphold to the honor code (Gomez, 2001).

Modifying the learning process to focus more on acquiring knowledge and skills more than accumulating grades may be another factor that alleviates the pressure on students to perform acts of academic misconduct. Hard et al. (2006) suggested raising the faculty members awareness of the dimensions of academic misconduct and its expected frequency as a way to prevent academic misconduct through increasing faculty numbers who work against it. Raising faculty awareness of the matter may urge faculty to take active measures to prevent academic misconduct. One of the most important in such measures is articulating their policy towards cheating and the consequences that students may face due to academic misconduct. Scholars also argued in favor of improving student learning and asserting its precedence over grades while accepting feedback about assignments in a non-intimidating learning environment (Gallant, 2008; Rabi et al., 2006).

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed research dealing with college student success, the challenges international students face to succeed in college, and the support mechanisms in place for them to overcome these challenges. It also dealt with the individualistic and collectivistic cultures as influencing international students’ performance in college and reviewed the theory of self-efficacy and its motivational processes as influential factors in the case of international students.

Several studies asserted that when supported by the social environment of families, friends, peers and college personnel, students utilize their preparedness for
college and entry characteristics to gain momentum that pushes them forward to persist in
college and successfully achieve goals through engagement and integration in academic
and social activities (Astin, 1984; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Hawken et al., 1991; Pace, 1984;
Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

It is acceptable to conclude that students handle academic tasks and persist
towards goal achievement utilizing the processes of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995;
Chemers et al., 2001; Dweck, 1999; Multon et al., 1991; Zimmerman, 1989). Likewise,
when supported by positive feedback and social support of peers and instructors,
international students can raise their self-efficacy to develop coping strategies during
their transition phase (Adams, 2004; Constantine et al., 2004; Niiya et al., 2004; Sherer &
Adams, 1983).

The influence of individuals’ background cultural values have been studied by
researchers and proved as innate qualities of individuals’ growth that cannot be
undermined with their various influences on behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, and
reactions (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Katz, 1988; Ma & Schoeneman, 1997; Pak
& Sands, 1996; Pratt, 1992). Therefore, the collectivistic culture of Saudi students
cannot pass without due examination especially when they are placed outside of their
original cultural context to study in the United States (Al-Nusair, 2000; Thani, 1987).

The review also showed that various benefits are behind the fact that American
higher education institutions recruit international students (Knight, 2006; J. Lee, 2008; J.
Lee & Rice, 2007; NAFSA, 2004; Wit, 2002). During their transition phase, these
students encounter various challenges in their academic and social life in the United
States. Classroom, departmental and institutional support systems can help these students
develop coping strategies to accomplish their aspired goals (Adams, 2004; Constantine et al., 2004; Jochems et al., 1996; Ladd & Ruby, 1999; McClure, 2007; Olsen & Kunhart, 1958; Y. Wang, 2004).

Academic dishonesty is prevalent on American college campuses. Students choose to cheat due to social pressure and higher appreciation of grades over the importance of conformity to the ethical framework guided by personal integrity (Ajzen, 2002; Passow et al., 2006). Students who choose to cheat rationalize their behavior according to the perceived severity of different forms of academic dishonesty (Kidwell et al., 2003). Their behavior is also influenced by their knowledge of the consequences they may face if caught by the instructor (Callahan, 2004; Wowra, 2007). Articulation of the university honor code and actively informing students of university policies in response to academic misconduct may help reduce the frequency of student violations of the code (Gomez, 2001; McCabe & Trevino, 2002). In the classroom, instructors asserting their measures responding to cheating incidents may minimize the frequency of student academic misconduct (Hard et al., 2006; McCabe & Trevino, 2002). Moreover, shifting the goal of the educational process from accumulating high grades to acquiring knowledge and skills may lessen pressure on students and encourage them to abstain from cheating (Gallant, 2008; Rabi et al., 2006).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The current study utilizes the qualitative case study research techniques to explore the case of Saudi students at RSU including their original self-efficacy, college expectations, challenges, acculturation process, adjustment problems, cultural shock, and success in college. It also utilizes the qualitative techniques to explore the support systems initiated by administrators, academic departments, and instructors to ease the adjustment process of these students and help them achieve their educational goals. Central to the study is the Saudi students’ perceived degree of effectiveness of the support systems provided by RSU students, faculty, staff, and community.

It is essential to explore a phenomenon in its occurring setting for optimal comprehension of the various aspects associated with it (Patton, 2002). Conducting qualitative research, a researcher is oriented towards exploration and discovery where the research instruments like interview protocols, code books, and structured field observations are shaped by the researcher’s skills, competence, and rigor. In these studies, a researcher’s immersion in the studied group and their circumstances, though in some way threatening the objectivity of findings, enriches the data collection process and adds more value to the findings (Gall et al., 2005).
This section includes the main research questions steering the research in the current study, a primary list of the documents reviewed, and the observation sites chosen to examine Saudi students’ participation in campus life and events. It also includes a description of key participants’ selection criteria, data collection procedures, the research design, and the primary interview protocols. Assumptions, validity of findings, trustworthiness of the research process, authenticity of data, objectivity of analysis, and possible issues of generalizability are also included.

The Pilot Study

Based on the results of a pilot study and a review of the literature of international college students, self-efficacy, success of college students, and student engagements, a pilot study was designed to explore the constructs influencing the case of Saudi students at the American institution and how they interact with the challenges and opportunities that are associated with their situation. The study targeted four participants: one college administrator, one instructor, a female Saudi students and a male Saudi student. The pilot study findings yielded valuable information about Saudi students’ college expectations, motivation, self-efficacy beliefs about ability to succeed, academic challenges, cultural challenges, and coping strategies. The study also showed a variety of supporting mechanisms in place to help Saudi students achieve their aspired college experience at RSU.

Changes Based on the Pilot Study

During the pilot study, a richness of information about aspects of self-efficacy, challenges, support systems, and success of Saudi students appeared to be available with more deliberate research efforts. The findings of the pilot study provided little
information about the recruitment efforts targeting the Saudi students. It also showed
dearth of information about degree attainment for Saudi students. Therefore, this study
focused more on the constructs of the Saudi students’ self-efficacy beliefs about
academic and social abilities, academic and social challenges facing them, institutional
and individual support systems available to help them, and the constructs influencing the
success of Saudi students as perceived by administrators, faculty members, or the Saudi
students themselves. The study did not examine the achievement of Saudi students or
their degree attainment. It also examined possible causes for the parity between
classroom performance vs. take home assignment and paper performance. The key
informants of the study were expanded to include 13 key informants including one
campus student affairs administrators, an instructor who is currently teaching Saudi
students, six male Saudi students, and four female Saudi students.

**Background**

The presence of Saudi students at RSU presents a unique phenomenon with
booming numbers. Currently at RSU, the number of Saudi students accounts for almost
18% of the total international student body present on campus with a sudden increase that
escalated from 30 students in 2005 to 271 students in 2010 (Office of International
Programs, 2011). Although this sudden increase did not allow RSU to plan in advance,
both faculty members and administrators at various levels developed techniques to adjust
procedures and performance to accommodate the new growing category. Therefore, an
exploratory study of the case of Saudi students and its related factors was conducted to
help administrators at RSU understand and learn about the characteristics and
circumstances of Saudi students and assist an informed planning process for the retention, engagement, and success of these students.

Like other international students studying in the U.S., Saudi students leave the familiar surroundings of their country where they were successful students and become immersed in a new culture, communicate in a new language, and study in a new academic system (Al-Nusair, 2000). This transition represents a great challenge for these students. Coupled with other differences in the American system and culture, Saudi students enter an unfamiliar college environment for which they may not be well prepared. Moreover, the different recruitment situation of these students, their economic status, their cultural background, and their academic readiness for studying at an American institution differentiated them from other international students (Redden, 2007). Funded by a governmental scholarship that aimed to quintuple the number of Saudi students studying at American colleges and universities, most of these students, enrolled in English Language Institutes affiliated with or annexed to their prospective universities due to a lack of the English language proficiency requirement (Bollag, 2006). Coming from a highly collectivist society to the highly individualistic American society, many of these students left their parents’ houses for the first time in their lives to study in the United States where they have to take the responsibility of their own educational and social choices (Redden, 2007; Triandis, 1994).

Therefore, the problem dealt with in this study is three faceted. The first is the recruitment circumstances and performance levels of the Saudi students as a different category of international students on campus. The second is the transition phase of these students and the challenges associated with it. The third is the support systems and
strategies that can help them achieve success, attain degrees, and obtain the expected college experience.

The study was based on three main theoretical frameworks. The first is developed from the psychology literature dealing with the self-efficacy of Saudi students at RSU. The second emerges from the literature of student services, higher education policies and accountability theories charted to help students overcome transition challenges, succeed in college, and obtain the maximum benefits of their college experience. The third builds upon existing literature that deals with international college students in general or one nationality of them in particular. It is also noteworthy to mention that there is a limited literature that deals with Saudi students studying in American colleges due to the novelty of their case.

The study followed the qualitative approach because of the complexity of the issue and the numerous variables that are in action in the phenomenon. Qualitative research tools including observations, document reviews and interviews were utilized in an effort to explain the intricate relationships that shape the situation of Saudi students at RSU (Gall et al., 2005). It endeavored to examine the impact of recruitment circumstances, administrative procedures, and academic practices on their academic achievements. The self-efficacy beliefs of the Saudi students and the motivational processes they experience were examined as both agents and results of their educational experience at RSU. The main four key participants of the pilot study were a male undergraduate Saudi student, a female graduate Saudi student, a faculty member who taught a group of Saudi students over the last two years, and a college administrator with a firsthand experience with Saudi students.
Analyzing the interviews of the study yielded insightful findings for higher education institutions. The self-efficacy perceptions are both influenced and influencing aspects in the case of Saudi students. Factors including conception of ability, social comparison influences, framing of feedback, perceived controllability, and casual structure influence the ability of Saudi students to choose and figure out options, to estimate predictive factors, and to reconsider their decisions based on the consequences of their choices (Bandura, 1997; P. H. Miller, 2002). Awareness of these factors among college administrators, academic advisors, student affairs professionals, and faculty members may help them understand the motivational drives behind Saudi students’ attitudes, perceptions and performance. Such factors when utilized purposefully will increase the academic and collegial achievement of these students.

Admission requirements and student life programming are two main issues that fall in the realm of university administrators and student affairs professionals. More selective admission requirements when dealing with international students as well as tailored international students orientation activities are suggested. Including a statement of purpose or a letter of intent in the admission process for Saudi students will help them set goals for their studies. Early educational practices that target the activation of their analytical thinking skills during orientation or initial advising meetings should target guiding their goal setting and classroom interaction techniques and group dynamics. The findings also suggested various techniques for academic departments and instructors. Academic instructors may try to modify their instructional techniques, handling of group and pair work, and assessment strategies to include the need of these students. Frequent feedback helped Saudi students understand the expected academic performance of
scholarly writing and professional way of submitting assignments and presenting in class as well. Maximizing the role of cooperative and collaborative learning was also highlighted as among the most beneficial techniques for Saudi students.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guide the data collection process, help keep the analysis process focused, and provide the framework for reporting findings. The current study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges facing Saudi students pursuing college degrees at RSU?
2. How do academic and social self-efficacy perceptions of Saudi students at RSU influence their academic performance, social reactions, and college engagement?
3. How effective were the support systems employed by RSU to ease the adjustment of Saudi students and provide them with the necessary college survival skills?
4. How can RSU maximize the positive impact of the support systems to provide the desired learning experience for Saudi students?
5. How does the presence of Saudi students at RSU influence the practices of student affairs professionals, instructors, and college administrators?

**Qualitative Choice**

Due to the complexity of the issue and the numerous variables that are in action in the phenomenon, the current study takes the qualitative approach in an effort to explain the intricate relationships that shape the situation of Saudi students at RSU. It also
endeavors to examine the impact of campus environment, recruitment circumstances, administrative procedures, and academic practices on their motivation to persist. The self-efficacy of the Saudi students and the motivational processes they experience are examined as both agents and results of their educational experience at RSU. In-depth interviews are the primary data source for this study while event observations and document reviews are the secondary data sources providing the broad guidelines for designing the interviews (Gall et al., 2005).

The choice of a qualitative approach may be criticized as lacking the compelling power of the quantitative approach, which is characterized, by large sample sizes and usually generalizable findings. However, the number of Saudi students at RSU and the complexity of the variables yield themselves to the qualitative approach that may be able to reveal more in-depth findings that can help explain the complex perspectives of the case (Yin, 2003).

**Documents and Observation Sites**

Prior to conducting field observations, I examined formal communication documents, newsletters and press releases that are connected with the international student body at RSU in general or the growing presence of Saudi students at RSU in particular. Reports of the Office of International Programs and the International Programs Advisory Committee also informed the process of data collection. Information gathered from the document review process helped structure the observations that followed. Observation sites included Fusion group meetings, International Programs Advisory Committee meetings, Office of International Programs meetings, Cross
Cultural Dialogue sessions, International Education Week events, and international student orientation program.

**Key Participants**

The study key participants fell under three categories: Saudi students studying at RSU, one college administrator, and one instructor. The 11 Saudi students were recruited through recommendations of professors and administrators as active and reflective students. The chosen student participants included female students as well as male students. I exerted a deliberate effort to include Saudi students with different marital statuses, from both sexes, and in different levels of educational programs. The college administrator was chosen based upon being involved with programming that targets international students in general. The participation of the instructor was solicited based on her current and previous teaching experiences with Saudi students at RSU.

First, Salwa, 25 years old and mother of two children, studies for a master degree in educational instructional technology. She is accompanied in the U.S. by her brother. Her husband joined her later to pursue a graduate degree in political science. Formerly an ELI student at a university in a southern state, she currently takes three graduate classes per semester. Second, Feras, 26 years old and a father of one daughter, arrived at RSU in August 2007 accompanied by his wife who is currently a student at ELI. He studied at the ELI for a year and then began the course work for the masters in civil engineering taking four graduate classes per semester. Third, Jehad, 28 years old and a father of three children, is an undergraduate student of business administration. He first arrived intending to be an information technology major but changed his major during his first year in ELI. Currently, he takes four undergraduate classes per semester. Fourth,
Zeyad, 20 years old and accompanied by his spouse, is a junior majoring in communication technology. He works on campus and is a very active community member of the international student body and an officer in the Association of Muslim Students (AMS). Originally arriving in Pennsylvania for English language classes, he currently takes five undergraduate classes per semester at RSU. Fifth, Ahmed, 21 years old and a father of two girls, is a sophomore majoring in technology. He studied at the ELI upon arrival and passed the TOEFL IBT by the end of his first semester. He takes five undergraduate classes per semester. Sixth, Hanan, a 20 years old veiled single accompanied by her brother, is a freshman after a year in Virginia studying ELI. She aspires to major in information technology and takes four undergraduate classes per semester. Seventh, Rabie, 37 years old and a father of three children, is a doctoral political science student. He first arrived in the US in 1997 to obtain his masters in 1999. He came back accompanying his spouse to study for a master in education, applied for a doctorate degree and obtained sponsorship with the new cohort. He is very active in the community and fluent in both English and Arabic. Eighth, Fadila, unsarped 24 years old and mother of two children, is a graduate student pursuing masters in public administration. She arrived two years ago to study ELI and currently taking three classes per semester. Her spouse is not in the U.S.; however, he holds a doctoral degree from an American university. Ninth is Malik, 21 years old and accompanied in the U.S. by his spouse. He is a senior majoring in communication technology. He is an active community member of the Saudi Student Association and an officer in the Association of Muslim Students (AMS). Originally arriving in Maryland for English language classes, he currently takes five undergraduate classes per semester at RSU. The tenth interview
was with Akram, 27 years old and a father of 2 children. He is an undergraduate student of business administration. Originally, he intended to major in electrical engineering but changed his major during the first year in college due to academic hardship. Eleventh is MaryAnn, a College of Education professor who taught three Saudi students last year, started her academic career in New Jersey and joined RSU three years ago. Twelve is Theresa, a university administrator, is very involved with programming, coordination and advising for international students. She started her profession four years ago in California as an advisor for international students. The thirteenth participant was Waseela, a 19 years old single. She is veiled and accompanied by her brother who started his English language classes in 2011. She is a freshman after a year in Florida studying for English proficiency requirement. She aspires to major in computer engineering and takes four undergraduate classes per semester. In addition to the key participants, various individuals who contribute in supportive ways to ease the Saudi students’ adjustment and help them on campus were briefly interviewed to clarify procedural mechanisms and several important details related to the college experience of Saudi students at RSU.

**Interview Protocols**

During interviews, I had the responsibility to listen, record, observe, document, and guide the topics discussed. Recording participants’ body language and their different tones in regard to different topics is an essential role as well. Prior information about the purpose of the study and the purpose of each session of an interview series were clearly communicated to the participants. The use of open-ended, qualitative interviews in the proposed study was also coupled with informal interviews and on-going discussion with
several participants throughout the RSU campus, which helped in understanding Saudi students’ experiences, perspectives, and their cross-cultural learning processes.

The two preliminary data collection processes, document reviews and observation, helped in developing the interview protocols. Interview questions were developed to probe into the Saudi experience at RSU to understand the social, emotional, cultural, academic aspects of the case. In general, the questions were broadly crafted to allow the participants to include a wide realm of topics in their responses to reflect the depth of their experiences. Saudi students’ interviews focused on the Saudi students’ expectations, experiences, and perceptions of RSU practices. They included original expectations and self-efficacy beliefs of the participants, how these beliefs influenced their choices, whether their beliefs have changed due to their experience at RSU or not, their perceptions of their experiences at RSU, the degree of friendliness of campus, support services they receive, challenges they meet, and the degree of their adjustment. Administrators’ interviews focused on the degree of awareness they have about the peculiarity of the case of Saudi students, the measures they employ to provide these students with the support they need to adjust to the American culture, get involved in the college life, and gain the desired college experience associated with holding an American college degree. The questions also examined the administrators’ perceptions of how effective these measures are. Interviews with faculty members took a different form to explore the impressions of the faculty about these students’ abilities, perceptions about capabilities, academic needs, language proficiency, socializing habits, in class participation, patterns of classroom interactions, degree of persistence on tasks, and their
abilities to change their beliefs. Probes were utilized to encourage participants to expand and reflect on their experiences.

**Apriory vs. Emergent Themes**

The current study started with an *apriory* list of major themes that included: expectations, self-efficacy beliefs, adjustment challenges, support systems, discriminatory behaviors, acculturative stress, welcoming gestures, language barriers, motivating processes, fear and stereotyping. The aforementioned list of *apriory* themes were meant to be flexible to expand and include other themes that may emerge during the data collection process. By adopting a flexible paradigm, I kept the research agenda open to include issues that surfaced which were not revealed during the pilot study.

The emergent list of themes included five main themes: self-efficacy, challenges, support systems, engagement, and success. Each theme had a number of codes associated with it. Self-efficacy had perceived controllability, casual structure, framing feedback, social comparison influences, and conception of ability. Challenges included linguistic, academic, cultural, religious, and political challenges. Support systems had institutional policies and programs, departmental and instructional techniques, American peers, and Saudi peers. Engagement included campus life, social activities, and classroom interaction. Success had three codes: academic help, advising service, and linguistic abilities. During the data collection process, the initial list of themes was changed to include academic dishonesty with its causes, types, and uses for Saudi participants. The cultural codes included a subtheme about media created stereotypes about Saudi Arabia. The media created stereotypes theme included three codes: types, influences, and coping mechanisms.
Participants’ Selection Strategies

The study followed three sampling strategies to ensure the objectivity of research findings: typical case, snowball, and information rich case (Patton, 1987). RSU is a typical mid-sized Mid-western university with an average body of international students around 1,000 students during the academic year of 2008-2009 (Office of International Programs, 2011) which accounts for almost 4% of its total student population (Institutional Research, 2009). Such percentage provides a variety of circumstances, constructs and, influences that provide richness to the case studied. The researchers’ choice of key participants and observation sites was guided by nominations of particular participants, instructors, and staff members during the pilot study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Field observations and document reviews was instrumental to this study. It is also worth mentioning that the researcher’s current as well as previous roles as an international student at different institutions facilitated access and full exposure to the realm of activities and measures targeting international students that might be available on a university setting. Primary data source for this study originated in open-ended interviews with each of the 13 key participants. Participants responded to a topical interview protocol eliciting their feelings, emotions, and experiences at RSU during the academic year 2009/2010. Using a pseudonym list of participant names, the responses were recorded and transcribed. Data generated by the aforementioned techniques were coded and categorized within an emergent framework of relevant themes to examine the intricate relationships that shape the situation of Saudi students at RSU and the impact of campus environment, recruitment circumstances, administrative procedures, and
academic practices on their motivation and college persistence. The self-efficacy of Saudi students and the motivational processes they go through were also examined to reveal how they contribute to the Saudi students’ choices and any introduced support systems at RSU that would increase their motivations and self-efficacy beliefs.

**Interview Language**

I conducted the interviews in English and asked the participants to respond in English. However, most of the participants fluctuated in their responses between English and Arabic, their mother tongue, due to their level of English language proficiency. I transcribed the English responses verbatim although they included some grammatical errors. I purposefully left the transcriptions as is to reflect the participants’ style and language level. Although the tradition of qualitative research suggests using “[sic]” to indicate a linguistic error in a participant response, I did not use it because it would distort the meaning of the responses due to the frequency of the errors.

Most of the participants inquired if they can use Arabic instead of English. My suggestion was to use Arabic if they feel more comfortable in using it than English. As a native speaker of Arabic, I translated the interviewees’ Arabic responses to English. Through conducting an introductory conversation in English with the participants, I made every effort to convey the style of each participant in their respective response translation. Speech fillers were integrated in the translation to reflect similar corresponding fillers used in their Arabic responses.

**Procedures**

The appearance of a different group of international students enrolled both in undergraduate and graduate programs attracted my academic and professional attention to
the different circumstances and implications the case might entail. Although the 
literature of the profession of student affairs or higher education administration did not 
speak to the phenomenon, a quick review of the 2007 media reports and national 
databases revealed a surge in total numbers of enrollment of Saudi students due to a 
Saudi government sponsorship aiming to increase the numbers of Saudi students studying 
in American universities (Bollag, 2006; Institute of International Education, 2007b; 
Redden, 2007). As the peculiarity of the case was established, additional related research 
studies and books about the cultures and education of Saudi Arabia were reviewed 
(Bowen, 2008; Long, 2005; Prokop, 2005). Conducting several exploratory discussions 
with faculty about the topic, the issue proved to be worth of a deliberate and structured 
research endeavor. After obtaining an Institutional Review Board approval to observe 
students activities and to interview students, faculty members, and administrators in an 
effort to reveal the different aspects of the issue, an exploratory study involving two 
Saudi students, one administrator, and one faculty member revealed the different 
constructs central to the case of these students. The exploratory study helped structuring 
the interview protocols to explore the themes related to adjustment, success, retention, 
and self-efficacy of Saudi students pursuing degrees at RSU.

**Trustworthiness and Authenticity of Data**

During the data collection, coding, and analysis, trustworthiness was ensured 
through triangulation, contextual completeness and authenticity of data (Gall et al., 2005; 
Yin, 2003). Triangulation was achieved through varying the data collection tools 
including document reviews, observations and interviews. The full description of the role 
of the students, faculty, and administrators as key participants of the study and the
background of each of them helped achieve contextual completeness (Yin, 2003). Open and fair solicitation of participants understanding of the various factors influencing their involvement, success, acculturation, adjustment, and self-efficacy beliefs, roles, and reactions to the case at RSU ensured the authenticity of data (Gall et al., 2005). Member checking and participants’ feedback were also utilized to assert how the data collected are dependable and reflective of the real dimensions of the case.

**Methods in the Literature**

As a qualitative study, the current study presents a more complex world view where participants have limits, opportunities and intermingling complications they have to reconsider while shaping their reactions and perceptions (Firestone, 1987). It is the orientation of the current study to explore, discover, and interpret the meaning produced during observations and interviews. The case study approach, usually more prominent and integrative of themes, is used to allow the data to drive the outcome instead of starting with hypotheses and trying to prove them (Yin, 2003). The products of field observations and interviews are the data sources for the proposed study. Interviews, one of the most powerful research techniques for human understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), are selected as a tool because of their effectiveness in understanding feeling, emotions, and perceptions of participants regarding their complex experiences and the various factors involved with them. Each interview protocol included certain guidelines and rules for participant’s responses (Sypher, Hummert, & Williams, 1994). Interview protocols for each group of participants, though varied, were crafted to assure that the contained response of the participant is addressing the intended research questions. They also provided chances for appropriate elaboration that expanded and widened the scope
of the response to clarify ambiguities and reveal unsolicited, though valuable, aspects or experiences of the participants.

**Research Design**

The data collection process was carried on with individual interviews. The selection process of key participants other than Saudi students was based on participants’ involvement with providing educational services to Saudi students. Selection of Saudi students was based upon nomination of professors and coordinators. The researcher exerted deliberate efforts to include various categories of Saudi students not for generalization purposes but for a more inclusive exploration of the case based on the fact that participants’ subgroup affiliations influence their perceptions, experiences, performance and reactions. The categories of the key participants included:

- An RSU professor who previously taught Saudi students,
- An RSU administrator who is involved with planning, programming, or conducting activities that provide services to Saudi students, and
- Eleven Saudi students currently enrolled at RSU in a degree program.

This final category of Saudi students included: married and single students; male and female students; graduate and undergraduate students; and veiled and unveiled female students.

**Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis**

The data collection process was an interactive process progressively developing each time new major data are revealed. As the sequence of interviews progressed, new dimensions of findings emerged and paradigm shifts happened. This meant adjusting and rewording the interview questions as the main data-collection tool. This also necessitated
introducing a new piece into the research design; the part about media created stereotypes, for instance. Such evolutionary process helped identify essential elements that constituted a holistic understanding about the Saudi students learning experiences at RSU and the support systems in place to help them.

I incorporated three coding practices in the analysis process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding accounted for concepts like activities, processes, and events emerging from the interview data. Axial coding related categories to sub-categories as well as defined the relationship mode and directions of influence. Selective coding helped interpret the previous categories and integrate them into the broader Saudi students learning experience, perceptions, challenges, and support systems at RSU.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The present study explored the case of Saudi students at RSU to examine their college experience, their educational preparedness, the various challenges facing them, and the support systems in place to help them. Following the qualitative research method, the main data source of this study were interviews with four main key participants who fell into three categories: a college professor, a college administrator, and 11 Saudi students. Except for the Saudi students, other participants were involved directly in teaching or coordinating educational services targeting Saudi students.

The first part of this chapter presents the study findings related to the self-efficacy perceptions and its cognitive processes including conception of ability, social comparison influences, framing of feedback, perceived controllability, and casual structure. Relevant findings about the various stakeholders’ perceptions of the success of Saudi students and what factors influence their academic and collegial achievement are presented. Then, the findings related to the cultural values of Saudi students are discussed as influential factors essential in the process of acculturation of Saudi students within the American institution. After that, the social, cultural, and academic challenges facing Saudi students are presented. Last, a review the study findings relevant to the support systems in place to help these students succeed in their quest for learning follows.
Self-Efficacy

Saudi students in the U.S. come from a society that praises the collective aspects of individuals as representative of the whole group. The high degree of hierarchical social structure present in their society of origin forms conceptualized images of where individuals can fit. It also shapes aspirations and expectations that are associated with the individual’s expected place in that social order. “I will work as the director of women affairs in my region,” says Salwa. She continues to explain how she worked in a government department that handles women’s affairs in her city after she graduated from high school. Part of her job responsibilities was to supervise other female professionals specializing in social work, administration, psychology, and human relations. “Some of them graduated from universities in other countries,” She explains. “I already have [the job] because my success is already decided,” says Ahmed. When he applied for the scholarship in America, his family was certain that he would return with the degree from the U.S. His future job as a petroleum mechanical engineer is already secured because he had worked in the oil industry. Such hierarchy offers a framework of expected performance no matter how much effort the individual can offer to exert. The expectations are not always tied to a certain specialization. They are rather general to encompass any master’s degree from an American University. “[My family] expects me to go back with my masters. It is already decided. … There is no possibility I can return without that degree. Even if I change the field I am studying in, I will have to find another field that I can do well in,” says Salwa. Theresa raises the same point by showing how she was surprised with the flexibility of these students to change programs, specializations, and schools.
I have always advised international students, both here and at my previous institution. … I look at these students as determined individuals who have certain career and academic goals in life. These goals are usually so strong … to get them to stand the challenge of learning in away from their comfort zones… The Saudi students are somehow different… I cannot say that they do not have a goal… but they are undecided or maybe their obligation is different.

She states that they are willing to change their program at the first obstacle they meet as long as they can keep their scholarship. “I have known Saudi students who transferred to a neighboring university to a different program and the next year they here again in a third field of study,” she continues. Early in each semester after introductions as a community building activity, John gets his students to say how long they have been in the program and what they aspire to work once they graduate. “My first two Saudis were amazing… both said they are in their first semester in the program but they have been in other programs before. They also stated two different careers that our educational paths do not normally lead to,” says John. As an advisor of one of these students, John was curious to ask how a master in education would lead to an international trade career. The advisee reply explained that his career does not have to be supported by his degree specialization “but I have to hold a noticeable degree to advance in governmental career in Saudi Arabia.” On the other hand, Hanan and Fatima seemed enthusiastic about their program and so determined to graduate with their degree. “I am not changing programs like those guys do…. I come here with my husband and chose this program after we came to America. This is the field I like to study in,” says Hanan. Fatima tells a different story. “When I was in Saudi Arabia, I worked as certified nurse in the renal dialysis department. … I have seen many patients, when I start to be emotionally connected to them, they died. This is why I chose to study for a master in early childhood education.
… I think working with children in the future can be a different experience for me,” says Fatima. She did not think she was be able to change career that easily until her husband had the scholarship in the U.S. “I applied for my program from here and got the scholarship after getting admission to the program,” she continues.

Saudi student participants at RSU come to America with their predetermined conception of their academic and social ability promoted by a very centralized Saudi educational system. “I expected teaching… I mean the professor teaches us and directs our learning. I found the opposite. We ... have to read on our own and even choose topics to study by ourselves,” says Salwa. The educational system available in Saudi Arabia is constructed based upon the behavioral school of thought allowing very little space for innovation and student autonomy (Al-Shehry, 1989). “Studying to me means reading and memorizing again and again. … This is what I did in college in Saudi Arabia to succeed and get high marks,” reflects Jehad. However, not all Saudi students have the inherent capacity view of their abilities. Some aspire to learn and advance due to social and educational circumstances that are not always available for the majority of students in Saudi Arabia. “The teachers [in the United Sates] were like friends to us as students. He was talking like a colleague that he is having a chat. The college instructor in Saudi Arabia puts high barriers between him on one side and the students on the other sides,” says Ahmed. An understanding of these circumstances and their influences on Saudi students’ conceptions of ability may lead to conclusions about their motivation to work hard on their studies.

Saudi students usually compare themselves with other students around them. Such a factor might have been situationally acceptable while in their home country.
However, when they arrive in the U.S., their judgments of performance are usually
guided by the majority of American students in their classroom. “I was number one in
my class at home but when I entered the class here, I knew I cannot compete with
American students. They are fast, comfortable with the topics and know what to do,”
says Ahmed. This alone can provide a belittling evaluation of their academic
achievement when considering their limited proficiency in English, the language of
instruction. “My language is not as good as theirs. I cannot even imagine I can speak or
understand English like them. I usually hesitate to speak in class although some time I
have good ideas. But I feel other students will laugh at me”, says Zeyad. “A lot of times,
I have the content and I have good ideas that I want to contribute to the discussion but I
usually avoid that really,” says Ahmed.

Saudi students are highly motivated by the feedback systems practiced in the
American higher education settings. Their self-efficacy usually increases through
comments that focus on how much progress they made not how many tasks they
accomplished successfully. “After a few years here, I am very comfortable with
comments and remarks of my professors. Even when I make mistakes, they encourage
me and sometimes ignore my mistakes in the final comment”, says Rabie. “Although I
am not comfortable with the responsibility that I feel thrown at me, I always felt that the
notes the professors write the margins of my papers are very helpful. Actually, I often …
use them as guiding posts for my next assignments and I always learn from one class
what can help me in another,” says Salwa. Looking from another perspective, Mary Ann
says, “My two Saudi advisees usually came to me depressed and frustrated because of
their class performance and grades. … when I let them look at their grades since they
started the program, they were more satisfied and more confident.” Saudi students involved in the current study come from a relatively closed conservative society where change is not the responsibility of individuals. They do not look at changing the norms of their society as an easy or achievable task. This is also reflected on the personal level. They do not usually challenge the established system. Their attitudes towards negotiation of rules and roles are very low. They expect their surroundings to be rigidly fixed and out of their control. Salwa talks about an experience with a class project when she was assigned to a group of three men to work on a class project. The professor allocated two class sessions for work on the project and her partners chose to meet off campus. Although she was not comfortable from the beginning, she did not even complain or try to change the group decision to meet off-campus. She was surprised later when she found that some of the students managed to change their groups simply by asking the professor. However, successful Saudi students usually begin to capture ways they can control their environment through utilizing available resources and opportunities for them. “I took that as a learning experience. Now, whenever there is something that is against my religion, I go to the professor directly,” says Ahmed.

This progress in attitude towards their ability to change the environment leads to the construct of “casual structure.” Saudi students after a semester or two in the American higher learning system change their initial conception of their abilities and begin to utilize their experiences to bring about a systematic change in their beliefs about their abilities. “It is very obvious,” says Mary Ann, “they come to RSU very unconscious of their abilities. They think they will fail. But give them two semesters or three, and they
usually change that attitude. They understand the system. They sometimes try to monopolize it.”

Saudi students come to the United States with clear goals. They aim to accomplish their primary task of graduating with a college degree. However, their expectations of the amount of effort required to achieve these goals are usually unrealistic. This is reflected on both in their perseverance to achieve their goals and in their resilience while facing early challenges and failures in their programs. Richard notes,

Many of my Saudi students did not expect the amount of work we expect them to accomplish in the first year while in ELI. When we stated that their academic program will require more work, they expressed frustration and disappointment…. Actually, many of them transfer after English language completion as expecting other universities to be easier. Therefore, more realistic orientation programs and information sessions may help influence their choice of actions and motivational patterns positively.

Due to their economic status and their national professional contingency strategy, Saudi students enjoy a high level of control in facing threats of failures or academic stressors. However, such control is not usually well structured to yield positive consequences in their academic endeavors. “They are not encouraged by an innate need to excel and find a job in the States or in their home country like other internationals. They seem fully secure in regard to jobs back in their country. … They do not need to work or get involved in any form of activity other than the classes. This may be the cause of their slow social and academic blending process,” says Theresa. Richard supports that declaring, “They mainly interact with other Saudi outside of the classroom which limits the speed of their acquisition of English”.

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Saudi students build their choices depending on goals rather than self-efficacy beliefs. They have the courage to commit to tasks even if they believe they are beyond their perceived abilities and skills. “I chose the program because this is the field I work at home. I know it is difficult but I like this field. The grades are not important. It is the degree that I need,” says Ahmed. However, their skills to obtain external help and change failures into successful learning experiences are usually lacking.

**Success**

Saudi students’ perceptions of success varied depending on different factors. Some of them looked at success from the perspective that it is associated with accomplishment in degree attainment. “They expect me to go back with my masters. It is already decided. … There is no possibility I can return without that degree,” says Salwa. Others measured success by their accumulated grade point average. “But this is my way; I always drop the class when I did not do well in it in the first half. … I estimate it according to the first seven weeks of the semester. If the semester is fifteen weeks I wait until the seventh week and see if I have done well,” says Ahmed.

Fadila talks about her family’s expectations saying, “My parents raised me thinking that I am a smart girl. Although I did not have all the privileges that my brothers had, my family takes pride in me because I am studying here.” Although the goal is not the knowledge to be acquired or the job to be secured as a result of obtaining her degree, she has a valid claim of a clear goal. “The idea is not to get a job when I go back home but rather the degree that I will return to my family with. Even my husband started boasting that I will have a master from America. He teases his sisters and sisters in law with this fact”, she continues. This statement alone asserts the internal motivation for
success in degree attainment. Fadila passionately declares the importance of her degree saying, “For me I think I need the degree more than anything because my family and friends back home think I will be as successful as I was in all my studies before.”

Suspecting everything in the endeavor she decided to take, Hanan seemed unsure of her whole experience. She expresses her fear saying, “The thought of coming to America was like thinking of committing suicide to me.” She did not have a clear and well defined intention to get a degree from the U.S. She states,

I was scared of talking even about the idea with my friends and even with my close relatives in the family. When I applied, I kept the issue as a secret and asked my mother not to tell anyone in our family because I was not sure that I would have the courage to travel to America alone and to study with American students.

She expresses three fears that she thought of before starting the trip. Her first fear was an academic threat based on reasonable thinking. “I was scared because of many things. I was not sure I would be able to succeed in a study like this where I had studied all my life in schools that teach in Arabic,” she reasons. She was not even sure of the benefit of studying in the U.S. “Another thing was what will really benefit me from studying here in America,” she declares. Her second issue was a safety concern. Her dress code that reveals her religious background to everyone was the source of that fear. “I was not sure that I will be safe especially that I wear a veil whenever I am outside the house,” She states. However, Hanan declares that she only based these fears upon information from TV news stories. “I heard a lot of stories from the films and the TV about how Americans do not like Muslims. I have heard of very bad things that happened after the attacks on the World Trade Center,” she says. Hanan’s third fear was the availability of a chaperon that is required by Saudi Arabia laws. She says,
Another thing was my brother. He had to accompany me for me to be able to study here. It is the law in Saudi Arabia. He is younger than me and this made my father very hesitant at the beginning. But I had to wait for one year for him to finish his high school for my father to agree that we can come here.

Hanan’s expectations of success were blurred with no clear understanding of the effort needed to achieve it. “I was not sure if I will succeed or not. I know studying here will not be easy” she says. Her actual experience with studying in the United States showed her the real needed effort to succeed in an American college. She says, “But I did not imagine that it will require me study that hard. I was surprised with the amount of work the teachers want me to read each week. They also want me to do papers and study for quizzes and take parts in projects. I felt that I was going crazy”.

Jehad, as a sales representative and a business administration major, has clear goals and definite expectations about his performance drawing on his previous work experience. He says,

I work as a sales representative in a construction company in Saudi Arabia. I was sure that many things of what I will learn here in the States are going to be related to my work. … I was sure I will be successful because I have the hands on experience. I did not have a doubt of my success and how outstanding my grades will be.

However, Jehad did not initially apply for a major in business administration. The Saudi government scholarship does not fund students studying in business administration unless the students are already in the U.S. Jehad says, “I applied for the scholarship as an information technology major but this was just to get the scholarship.” He explains, “In Saudi Arabia they had a cap on the students who are studying business administration. But once you are in the States you can change your major and they cannot withdraw the scholarship from you”.

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However, as most of the participants in the study, Jehad’s very optimistic expectations turned out as unrealistic. He says, “It was definite that my lovely dreams were not coming true at all.” He reflects about transitioning from the English Language Institute to the university saying, “I came with all hopes that I will be very successful. But it was like a nightmare when I started to take classes in the University. It was not as easy as my English classes were”. Feras’s main problem was the amount of assigned reading, projects, and papers. He admits, “I was horrified by the tons and tons of pages I had to read and the projects and papers I was supposed to do”. The preparation Jehad had in the English Language Institute apparently was not enough for him to complete his first semester at the university successfully as planned. “It did not work in the first semester. I had to drop three classes of the five I took and got the adviser to give a reduced course load for academic hardship. I passed the two classes with C’s,” Jehad reflects.

Feras poses another perspective defining his mission to be an exceptional student with high grades on his transcript for the ultimate goal of finding a nice job given the competitive job market for mechanical engineering in Saudi Arabia. Feras declares, “Success is not always the target. I have many hopes for a nice job when I go back to Saudi Arabia. I need high grades in my courses because my field is very popular in Saudi Arabia.” Looking forward to the future when he goes back, “It is one of the specializations that are well supported by the scholarship from the government. So many Saudi students are studying in that field all over the U.S.” The sense of family as an active player in defining Feras’s success appears when he mentions the advice of his father. “My father told me that the degree in itself is not that important because by the time I will go back many will have it. He says that the most important is the high grades
that will secure a nice job for me”, Feras reflects. Then, he puts it simple in a challenge statement. “The challenge was not to get the degree but how to be super successful in my classes to get high grades,” he states.

Rabie’s goal is very different, as he did not intend to apply for the study at RSU. He says,

My cousin was applying for an American university to study in America. I always wished to visit America but after the bombings they said I would never be able to visit because the American Embassy will never give a Saudi a visa to go to the U.S. again. … My father came to me one day to tell me that he applied for me for studying in an American university. I did not know anything about Akron and I do not think my father knew about it. He said he attended a meeting about it in Riyadh. … He completed an application for me. I did not think about I can succeed in America or not. I was very happy about coming to America that I always saw on TV.

Excited with the opportunity visit the U.S., Rabie did not have any fears or concerns about studying in an American university. He says, “I did not feel afraid until before coming here. I remember all my friends were excited about the trip. We used to talk about my trip a lot.” Only a few thoughts about fear occurred to Rabie prior to travel, “Before the time of travel, I started to think about the language and how I will manage to live in America.” However, Rabie did not expect any academic obstacles based on his achievement at school in Saudi Arabia. He reflects, “I did not think of any problem with the subjects. I was an excellent student in all my school years. I also was a good student in learning English.” Rabie’s spots his challenge as mainly linguistic due to difference in accent. He says, “But I will tell you the English we studied was totally different than that they speak here. They speak faster, and change the sound of the words and letters so even if you know the word you cannot understand it when you hear it”.

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Saudi participants expressed their perception of their success in a very similar way except for one participant who had the goal of securing job in a competitive job market. Fadila says, “My success in my studies is not far away. I have one year of my two year program. My grades are not bad” She explains how she maintains this status saying, “I usually register for five classes at the beginning of the semester to end with three that I complete.” However, she does not have a certain focus of what to do with the degree she was going to obtain. She wonders, “Sometimes, I ask myself what will I do with what I will learn but I say to myself it does not matter as long as I will get the degree.”

Likewise, Hanan is not very excited about her achievement but not depressed either. She says, “I am not sure of my success in my degree to the extent that I expected. But I am sure I am not going to fail either.” She expresses her dissatisfaction with her grades saying “I will definitely graduate but not with an “A” in every class. I will have some A’s, some C’s and probably many B’s which I am getting in most of my classes. I did not expect that I will be ever satisfied with a B before.” She remembers her grades in Saudi Arabia saying, “When I was in Saudi Arabia, my grades were very high. I finished my high school final year with a 97 percent.” But the transition had its shock on her in the form of lower grades. She says,

Here I had the shock in my first year. I got accustomed to getting less than I expected during the English Language Institute. But when I started here at the University, it was the big shock I got a C in one class and almost a D in another. … I managed to drop the D class before it would damage my grades. But later, I know that it is normal for even American students to get D’s and sometimes F’s.
However, Hanan cannot have that luxury. She states the restrictions on her by both the scholarship and the visa regulation saying, “But I cannot have D’s in my transcript. I cannot continue my degree with D’s in my transcript. I would lose my visa status and of course the scholarship. It would be a scandal if I returned home without completing my degree”. Jehad expresses the same meaning highlighting the value of an American college degree in Saudi Arabia. He says, “My success to me means two things. I need to have good grades. These must be C’s or above to continue the scholarship. I also need to have my degree with me when I finish my study. It means a lot to have an American college degree in Saudi Arabia.”

Rabie’s expectations were not far from the group. He did not expect the subjects and classes to be as demanding as they were. He also expected a different approach to teaching from the approach he found in the U.S. His expectations about help that he might have received from his American classmates were not realized. He says, “I also expected that a lot of help will come from my American friends in my classes but I did not receive that.” However, Rabie tells a positive experience he had with his advisor. He says,

I did not know anything about an advisor but found this to be very helpful when the advisor solves many of the problems I face whether in the classroom or in the offices of the University. She also helped me with other things that I think is not her responsibility. I will tell you a story. When we arrived, I did not have a driving license, … I told her about that during one of our meeting…. She asked how do I get to the university and I told her that I usually take a taxi. After three days, I was surprised when she sent me an email to tell me that she found a student who would like to give me a ride to the university … but I have to arrange with him to suit his schedule. I did not use this offer because I had no problem taking taxis but it meant many things to me. It was a very good sign of how she is really … welcoming and is doing these things even beyond her duties and without asking I mean I did not ask her for this service.
Different than other participants, Feras expresses what is really important for him, “My insistence on getting good grades is what makes me successful. Sometimes it is not my work that really matters but how important is the grades to me.” He reflects on his negotiation of rules as strategies he uses with his instructors saying,

When the professors give me bad grades in any assignment I go and argue with and I usually get some points of the discussion. … Only a few times I had to redo the papers to get the better grades but this is OK with me as long as I get the grades that I want. … I only drop the classes when I feel that the professor is really hard or strict that I feel my way will not be OK with him.

A few of the Saudi participants looked at their success as the sum of their American experience as a whole. Another Saudi student looks at success from a family oriented perspective as the different experience made available for his daughters and his wife to experience the American lifestyle. The perspective of the faculty member differed when looking at the Saudi students’ case. She measured success according to the goals stated in each student’s program as opposed to the different attitude or perception that students may have. “If the students accomplish these objectives by acquiring the knowledge and the skills stated in the syllabus, you can say they have succeeded,” says Mary Ann. “It is the college responsibility to try to achieve the satisfaction of the students by meeting their expectations. But I do not think this is applicable here,” she continues.

From the student affairs point of view, Saudi students’ success should be measured based on both their academic program as enhanced by their college experience and their international experience being in a foreign country, which gives them the opportunity to experience a culture different from their own. “Their college experience is
a shared responsibility between the university and themselves because I noticed during my years of work with international students that international students and Saudi students in particular shy away from voluntarily participating in student life programming,” says Theresa. Their presence in the United States should not be undermined as only introducing the American culture to them but also offering them a variety of cultural tastes through meeting other individuals from different countries. “We should introduce them to our culture as an American college. They also have the opportunity to know other cultures which is something that distinguishes our country as a melting pot,” continues Theresa.

Saudi students face with different cultural, linguistic, and academic obstacles. The Saudi students’ culture of origin constitutes a very important part of their personalities and shapes their reaction towards social, cultural, and academic norms while in the United States. “Many of the activities here on campus are not suitable for me as a woman to take part in. … They usually include activities that are [coeducational] which is not a problem for the American students but not for me as from Saudi Arabia,” says Salwa. Ahmed has the other view when agreeing that he has no issue to mix with the other sex. However, in his case is the family and concentrating on the goal behind being here that are keeping him from participating in campus activities. He says, “I usually come to the university just for the classes because we are here to study. Other than that, I am at home studying or with my family.” The linguistic factor plays an important role in helping Saudi students achieve success in the academic arena as well as in encouraging them to participate in campus wide activities and take an active part in their learning process. Looking at in class participation, Ahmed says, “Often times I waited and
someone else say the same idea I had in mind. … My language was always the problem because my vocabulary was very small and even if I knew the words for the idea, I sometimes cannot really put them in the right words.” Though a very influential construct in the success of college students, academic preparedness is not influential in the case of Saudi students. “I can tell you about many incidents where I was sure these students did not have the correct prior knowledge required for my classes,” says Mary Ann. However, frequently reported academic low competency is usually due to different learning habits on the part of the students and new instructional techniques introduced by college instructors. Ahmed responds,

I always have a problem when completing the reading before classes …. but I am privileged over the other classmates. … Most of them have to work and study, instead I usually have nothing to do after classes. I am at home reading with the dictionary in my hands. I understand the reading but it is difficult for me to report it again in English.

The responsibility for the Saudi students’ success falls to three distinctive parties: the administrative staff of the university, the faculty members in their academic programs, and the Saudi students themselves. Student affairs administrators as represented in the office staff of the Admission, International Programs, Orientation, Student Life, and Advising are the first to meet Saudi students in their first days at RSU. The impressions that these personnel create when dealing with the Saudi students last for a long period of time that sometimes outlive the presence in their respective programs. “I still cannot forget the advisor’s welcoming words during orientation. I was afraid as a male coming from Saudi Arabia. But her words made me assured that I can be safe as long as I mean no harm,” says Ahmed. Likewise, Salwa had a similar experience, “the admission office staff helped me a lot… they were very helpful …. When I sent my
documents over the email, they sent me all the needed forms quickly. I did not expect them to respond so fast.”

Program instructors and academic advisors constitute the main fabric of the educational programs of Saudi students. Academic advisors have the opportunity to provide personalized advice to Saudi students regarding their program requirements, choice of classes, and academic performance. “I have a lot of help from her. …She always has a lot to offer for me. If I achieved any progress in the University, I owe this to her … she always chose the classes that are suitable for me,” says Ahmed. On the other hand, some students in the graduate level expect more than they get. “I felt he did not want to take any responsibility of my choices by not telling me what to do. Actually, I do not think I …. had enough help from him,” says Salwa.

Program instructors, on the other hand, meet with students on a regular basis during class sessions. Through various instructional techniques, faculty and instructors help Saudi students achieve success. One of the most helpful techniques, which Saudi students refer to, is frequent feedback. Students assert that feedback help them understand the expected academic performance through accepted standards of scholarly writing and professional way of submitting assignments and presenting in class as well. “The professor is evaluating my work since day one to the end of the semester. In the first assignment, I get the feedback what the professor wants and from there, I understand what to do in the next assignments. In every assignment, I am better than the one before,” says Ahmed. Group and pair work are also highlighted as two of the most beneficial techniques that students talk about.
Saudi students have a responsibility to achieve success by exerting the needed effort in acquiring knowledge, completing their assigned reading, and engaging in learning activities. However, perceptions of their roles vary from one student to another. “Of course the responsibility is mine. I have to do the best I can to be in the same level like my classmates,” says Ahmed. Salwa has a different perspective. She explains,

I would like to participate in the class but sometimes students do not like to form groups with me and I think I know why. … The scarf tells it all. I look weird to the ladies and too conservative for the men. … So, I think both of them have the reason to keep away from me. I know I am responsible to take the first step but I can’t.

Therefore, the preparedness of Saudi students influences their success and academic achievement. The lack of selection criteria for the Saudi Government scholarship and the participants’ reported low English language proficiency appear as two major constructs that contribute to their success. The fit between students and the institution is another construct that has a direct impact on the participants. Saudi participants expect a welcoming campus environment that may motivate them to excel and persist toward their aspired goals. Engagement activities and programs should welcome and integrate Saudi students as an integral part of the student body, which may assist them in their transition phase into the university community and the American society in general.

Culture

As collectivist individuals, Saudi students consider carefully what the entire student body, professors, and professionals at RSU think about them. They do not view it on a personal basis but as something that will speak about their group in the United States, their country, and their religion. Ahmed says, “When we are here in the States, I
care a lot about how Americans would look at me. We have the responsibility for our country and religion. If I do something wrong, they will say Saudi are bad or Muslims are not good. I think we represent Islam while we are here.” Mary Ann senses that feeling while advising some of her female students. “I felt so much pressure from their culture and religion. Not imposed on them… but I felt that they chose this pressure. They always feel they are the ambassadors of their country and religion,” she says.

When it comes to offering help to other group members, Saudi students think of their responsibility to serve and support as something that is essential in their lives. It is not imposed on them as a Saudi or as Muslims, but rather an inherent responsibility that they carry since the early years of their lives. “I tried to help any Saudi students and I asked the secretary of the ELI to give my name and phone number to any other Saudi student that she thinks might need help,” says Ahmed. “I also try to help other Saudi women in the program by passing my notes from the previous semester to them. Sometimes, these notes are helpful,” says Salwa. While these responsibilities would appear as extra pressure on Saudi students while studying in a foreign country, they pay off because at the same time they insure a strong support system that is always there for any group member who might need help. “And you know, sometimes another person will help me as well,” says Salwa. Some students state that they actually enjoy these responsibilities and take pride in helping others as something encouraged by their religious values. Likewise, Fadila speaks being a recipient of that group support as part of the group cycle. She says,

For me the most help came from other Saudi students. They helped me put my feet on the right road. I did not know many things around me when I started. … It took them like a week or ten days until the word was
spread of me studying here. … I got several binders and books of other Saudi students who took the same program in previous years.

When asked if she would feel grateful for other Saudi who helped her, she responds,

“This is our duty. We have to help each other especially when we are away from family. Other Saudi students are my family now. I also do the same with others who are taking the same classes that I took.” Feras also states the same value saying,

We look at each other as family. It is not good to hear that another Saudi is in trouble and you do not extend a hand to help him. … It is not nice for all of us here. We have to keep our country’s picture good here in the States. … In engineering, some of the theories and projects are really hard. We usually ask each other for help with these. Some of us would have the theory right but not the language and sometimes we are not sure what the professor wants in the final project. … This is where we share previous projects with each other.

The collectivistic thinking of Saudi students causes them to think of themselves as a group rather than a number of individuals. Such consideration, though positive in nature, increases the boundaries between the Saudi students as a group and the rest of the student body at RSU. Ahmed states, “If I hang with other students, they are usually Saudi. They are a lot here now. I did not expect to see many of them and they were not as much when I arrived. I feel more comfortable with them than with American friends. We speak the same language and talk about the same things.” Another challenge that faces Saudi students is making new friends with American students. The degree of connectedness of Saudi students sometimes hinders their ability to socialize and build new social relationships outside of their group.

The same collectivistic culture of Saudi students has a great influence on their reactions to the educational system at RSU. It also shapes the process of their decision making when trying to find the correct path through their college experience. Salwa says,
“We ... have to read on our own and even choose topics to study by ourselves. There so much responsibility placed on us. I did not have this experience before.” Saudi students often voice that fact throughout their talks in their advising appointments or with American peers. Mary Ann discovers that and says, “It is very interesting how these students as graduate students cannot choose for themselves when it comes to choice of classes, assignment topic choices, or roles in a group project. They usually want somebody else to choose for them which is not expected at that level, these are graduate students.” Hanan explains her decision making process which may explain what astonishes Mary Ann. Hanan says,

In fact, we are always in touch with our family. I don’t make any decision without consulting with my parents and my sister in Saudi Arabia. This is how we were raised. … I really like my mom’s ideas and how … she gives me the reasons of her advice. I like my father’s decisions also because they lessen my responsibility. If something goes wrong, he will need to take care of it without blaming me.

Jehad offers another aspect of the collectivist culture. He mentions the psychological support provided by the group members’ presence when dealing with out of group individuals. He says,

I have a lot of American friends at the university. They are all OK. They do not treat me bad or anything. I think it is me who always keep myself away from them. I only feel comfortable talking to American when ... I have other Saudi friends with me. I feel they back me up even if they did not say a word. I do not know why I feel like that but this how I feel.

Although the placement of Saudi students as collectivists in a highly individualistic society like that of the United States seems very challenging and presents difficult obstacles for these students, some students find it beneficial. They enjoy the freedom it provides them. “I haven’t seen anything that can upset me [here]. I feel more
freedom here than in Saudi Arabia. Yes, I live a better life with servants and drivers but here I can … I have been driving since the second month I came here. There is no obligation for me to wear my veil,” says Salwa.

**Challenges and Support Systems**

Saudi students at the American institution face different challenges connected with their transition from their original educational system to the new educational environment. Such transition challenges are always coupled with several difficulties they encounter in taking parts in the social life inside and outside the institution. However, many more challenges face them while participating in their academic life with all its related educational activities. In facing these challenges, Saudi students may develop strategies to cope with different psychological influences they encounter while in their new situation to achieve their goals. The American institution offers various support systems at many levels to help Saudi students achieve their educational goals.

**Transition**

Saudi students express a large number of transitional experiences connected with their study in the American institution. The degree to which this transition experience may influence the performance, adaptation, and success vary from a student to another depending on the context and the individual experience of each one of them. Some of these center around cultural shocks and others originate mainly in stereotypes. “I was totally frightened from what may come my way in America. You know the wars are still going on in the Middle East and things happen,” says Ahmed. Salwa expresses the same situation, “when I finished the first class, I went to my husband and I was strongly shaking. I said this was not my imagination about the American students. It was a fear to
the extent that I said I am done. I will go back.” Rabie does not have that original fear but rather has an in class example from a different perspective. When he talks about his religion or national origin he does not feel comfortable in the classes. Such an aspect drives him to stop referring to his religious beliefs or national origins unnecessarily. He says, “After a while, I started to limit my talk about both Islam and Saudi Arabia unless it is really a necessary talk that is needed for the discussion.” But positive transition experiences were also apparent. Ahmed says,

I still cannot forget the advisor’s welcoming words during orientation. I was afraid as a male coming from Saudi Arabia. … But her words made me assured that I can be safe as long as I mean no harm. I felt even more than welcome as if I was a guest … not a student studying in a foreign country.

Gender, as one of the many influential constructs, is included among the various elements responsible for these differences where Ahmed’s experience differs from Salwa’s reaction to the same situation.

In a much different situation, the change in the method of instruction has its own influences. Hanan explains how the different style of instruction had shocked her in comparison to what she expected classes in the American institution to be like. She says,

I imagined the college classroom will be full of professor’s talk and real lectures where the professors give me a real opportunity to get from their science. This was the experience I was looking for when I thought of starting my studies here in the States.... when I attended college in Saudi Arabia, the professors used to give us long lectures about the topics of the class. They talked for more than an hour explaining the details of the topic... then we had to go home and study our notes from the lectures together with the professor’s book that we buy specially for the class.

Feras also explains how different the idea of a textbook was new and disturbing to his perception of efforts expected from him. He says,
back there, we buy the book that the professor writes ... so the book is usually is the same as the lectures ... but here the professor teaches something and the books may say something different... this gives me a lot of work to do because now I have to study the books and keep track of what the professor says in the lectures... double the work.

Zeyad has another point of concern. He complains about the amount of assignments that are due in one class as compared to class assignments in Saudi Arabia. Zeyad explains,

When in the lecture you have to listen to the professor and take notes of his teaching and the ideas he explains. You should go home and study these notes and read the chapters about the lecture from the book. ... Actually, you have to study the chapter... I mean like outlining the important points and sometimes memorize them as well because you will see them again in the final test.

He continues to explain how different the tasks he had in Saudi Arabia were when compared to those he has to put up with at the American institution. Zeyad says,

When I came here, I thought it will be easy like that. ... I asked where to get the book and actually bought them just before going to the lecture. The professor gave us a quiz even before she taught us anything. I knew then that I need to read the book before going to the lecture. Since the second week and we started to have assignments or quizzes in the lecture. ... I feel it is very difficult to keep up with the amount of work needed for the class if you would compare it with our college in Saudi Arabia. ... It took me a really really long time to know and learn how to succeed in the classes here.

John has an observation with students from Saudi Arabia in his classes.

I do not have a lot to say against their study habits because I do not know how they study. Sure, they write marvelous in depth papers but I can speak to their performance in class. ... I had these two graduate students in one of my classes and they looked puzzled when faced with the assignments and projects they were expected to turn in. ... They both talked to me on how this style is not the way they used to in their home university. But, I would say they picked it quite fast. They did very well on the papers and the individual projects.... They really did a great job on these.
Continuing to support how Saudi students developed learning habits in her classes, MaryAnn expresses her astonishment with her first two female students. She says, “They used to complain a lot to me about their limited abilities to study from their long textbooks because they were accustomed to studying from class notes that their professors in Saudi Arabia used to provide them.” She expresses to them that once they are admitted into the program with other students they will be treated equally with the same expectations and standards. “After I expressed that this is a required standard and there is no exception that can be made for them, they stopped complaining and I would say the quality of their work differed dramatically. They started improving exceptionally fast. You can tell from their papers,” MaryAnn reflects.

The social aspect represents another construct in the Saudi students’ transition. Their induction into the American life is usually marked with differences and similarities. Differences are apparent when they distinguish their life in the American society from the one they used to lead in their home country. On the other hand, similarities stem from their expectations of their life in the U.S. before setting foot on American soil.

Salwa explains how her life routine changed completely from what she used to do in Saudi Arabia. She says, “I did not use to go out without my husband or at least without someone from the family accompanying me. Here, I could not take my brother with me to class. He drives me and leaves and then I am responsible for myself. Now, I learned to drive and have my driving license. I do not need him to drive me anymore. I come to class alone.” Ahmed expresses how he was not responsible for anything in the household before coming to study in the United States. “I did not have to buy anything for the family. I was merely enjoying my life. Here, I have to buy food and take care of
utilities and even my car’s maintenance.” Fadila has a different perspective as a metropolitan woman. I did not expect the neighborhood to be that quiet every evening. This is not how I am comfortable with in Riyadh. I feel safe when the streets are busy but here, I live in a neighborhood that is too quiet. I am always afraid that something wrong may happen to me.”

Jehad, as someone who lived in a Western country before, does not have many differences about the behaviors of people. I expected life to be like this... in Germany (a pseudonym), I used to go to school with friends from different religions and different cultures... it is only the geography that was astonishing to me. Distances and spaces are immense here if compared to Germany.” Rabie who worked in an American company in Saudi Arabia is not surprised either. “I lived on site at work and known how Americans are concerned about their own business and usually friendly. I knew also how to deal with them in various occasions,” he said. MaryAnn expresses her experience with two different students, “One student was very moved by the differences between the American and the Saudi cultures. However, the other Saudi I dealt with was very understanding of our culture and always mentioned the fact that he saw things like this in movies, or was told about that by a friend.” Theresa states the difference among Saudi students that she dealt with saying, “Many of them are not well prepared for the kind of life they are supposed to live here in the U.S. In a few cases, I can tell that these students are well equipped with needed orientation before arriving at the university... usually because of a sibling or a friend who has been to the U.S. before.”
Academic Life

Saudi students are not always underprepared academically for their program of study at RSU. In fact, the Saudi higher education system offers them a good opportunity to master their field of study during their early college years because they start taking classes in their specialization from the first year of college. Feras reflects on the amount of studying he had to go through in his college in Saudi Arabia as compared to his graduate studies in the U.S. saying, “I had to study a tremendous number of theories and books of various authors during college. ... We had to memorize these theories and their related problems ... we had only two tests in the whole academic year to be evaluated and to be ready for your test you have to master all these theories and their applications and be able to show this during the test.” Rabie asserts the same value stating that his college preparation before arriving in the U.S. was more than enough to assure his success at the American institution. He says, “I studied international commerce in college. All of our studies focused on the Western systems as the current leading economic structure.... We studied four classes in English each year, which made me understand many things when I came here to America. Many of the topics I studied in college were there in the text books with slightly different language but I was familiar with most of the topics.” MaryAnn says, “If you look at the amount of achievement in their writing, these students have definitely got the fact and the knowledge, I mean the book knowledge. But with better communicative skills preparation, they would show exemplary practices. They would really be outstanding students.” Therefore, some of these students may be prepared for their academic experience at the American institution depending on their field of specialization in Saudi Arabia.
However, their academic preparedness is always questioned by their professors. Hanan expresses how difficult it was to read and study in English when she first arrived in the United States. She says, “I came here after the secondary school … I always had English as a school subject but the English we studied is different than the one we see spoken here. The books are also very difficult and have lots of words and abbreviations that I am not used to read. I always find it very difficult.” Jehad also expresses how his studies differed here and in Saudi Arabia. He says, “I studied for one year in college… but I studied business in Arabic. … Now, I am learning it in English, which makes it a problem for me. I am also not comfortable to write papers in English. … This is always my biggest problem. I did not even use to write papers in Arabic. We usually study and then have tests at the end of the year.” Zeyad also expresses how his expectations of his college study were far from reasonable. “I did not imagine the amount of reading that professors want us to read. I have to read more than four hundred pages each week to prepare for my classes. At the beginning of the semester, I thought I can read that much. Now, I usually try to read the major points and get the class notes of other students who took the class before,” he says. Therefore, one major transition challenge for Saudi students is their language proficiency. At RSU, like any other American institutions, Saudi students deal with textbooks written in English as the language of classroom instruction. If their language proficiency level is low, then it is logical that their academic performance reflects that deficiency.

The opinions of Saudi students themselves vary concerning their academic preparedness for their study at RSU. Some thought that the amount of English language training should be extended for more than two semesters to better prepare them for their
academic study and especially the amount of reading required for each class session. “I usually have nothing to do after classes. I am at home reading with the dictionary in my hands. I understand the reading but it is difficult for me to report it again in English. ... I always have a problem when completing the reading before classes,” says Ahmed. Their linguistic communication abilities hinder the amount of their active participation in the classroom and their ability to engage in class discussions. Mary Ann says, “Once I started getting their written assignment, I reconsidered their participation grades because I understood that they might have a problem as a group in participating orally in the class. From the quality of their written assignments you can say that they have the content perfectly well but they lack the oral or the social skills.” as working in the Language Institute, Richard speaks from a different viewpoint regarding student participation and turning in assignments. He says, “Often, I detect that the style of the paper is not the style of the student because after two or three weeks, I start to become familiar with their way of writing and expressing themselves.” He has developed his own strategy to deal with the issue before referring the student to Judicial Affairs. He continues,

I usually call them to my office and start discussing the consequences that may result from academic misconduct or plagiarism in college. ... In most times, students’ defense is that they are not accustomed to this amount of work or that they do not possess the abilities to write a full paper in English is not enough.

Social Life

Saudi students’ participation in the American social life is very limited due to different reasons. Among these reasons, religion, alienation, gender, and dietary restrictions are the most prominent. “I cannot go to any place without my husband or brother. ...I cannot usually accept social invitations ... because I do not know what
might be happening there. I do not drink too. It is against my religion,” says Salwa.

“You know the issue I have … I am not comfortable with American youth outside of the classroom. … I do not get all their comments … I do not always have something to respond back,” says Ahmed. Fadila expresses how her religious outfit prevents her participation in many events. She says, “It is not suitable for me to be in a party with my scarf. … I always feel too different with other girls around me wearing short skirts and fancy showing clothes …. I think that everyone will reject me.” Fadila tells her logic for not participating in these social activities saying,

I do not have any American friends … In the university, I rarely go to any of the events because of the food and I think that I am not welcome by other students. My husband usually goes with his friends but it is different with me. … He tried to get me to go to some of the events but I did not like to go. I go to the classes because I have to go. Then, why should I go by my choice to a place where I do not feel welcome.

Likewise, Hanan admits the same inclination to avoid university events, “I do not enjoy participating in events in the University here. I do not feel comfortable being with other American students in general university events.” However, she reflects on a different university event that connected to her in some way. She says,

Last year, I participated in the International Education week where we had a day for Saudi Arabia. I was very happy to talk about my country to American students. I had a different feeling on that day. It was my first time to be comfortable in the [Hub]. … I had people looking at me and even asking me questions and I did not feel shy or afraid that I may have a wrong answer. Even after that day, I went to the [Hub] to get some books and had other American students talking to me about my presentation. … This gave a nice confidence feeling. Even in the classrooms, I found that I talk more often than before. It is strange because no one from my classes attended the presentation that day. But I think this is very personal. I think something changed inside me.
Jehad also has concerns when participating in the university social life. His concerns are two folds: dietary restrictions and feeling of estrangement because of the percentage of international students’ participations in university events. He says,

I get many invitations to take part in many university events. They are mainly held in the student center or University Gymnasium. … To be honest, I participated in some of them during my first year but then I stopped. I do not see many other international students at these events. I also have some food issues. You know the pork issue. … I have to ask and find someone who can answer my questions about what type of meat used to make the food.

Zeyad has a different perspective when it comes to social events. He says, “If it is something in the day, I usually accept and enjoy it. I accepted invitations from my neighbor for a Thanksgiving meal. I tried to go to the New Year’s celebration … but I felt that I should drink and dance to fit in…. I decided after that not to participate in night or evening things.”

**Coping Strategies**

Saudi students develop coping strategies to deal with their new situation at RSU. The coping strategies mentioned by participants fall either under participants’ efforts to overcome academic hardships or under cultural strategies improvised by participants to ease their blending into the society. The cultural aspect is mainly apparent in the responses of female participants. Fadila talks about the sunglasses that save her the social stress she felt at the beginning of her studies at RSU. Fadila tells how she always wears sunglasses now,

At the very beginning, I was scared from the look of the people to me. I began avoiding their looks by looking down and not meeting their eyes until I talked with one of my friends and she advised me to use sunglasses to avoid the people knowing whether I am looking at them or not. I did not like the idea at the beginning. I even made fun of the weather saying
is there any sun in Ohio to wear sunglasses. … Later I tried her idea and it proved very comfortable for me. I wear sunglasses now all the time.

Hanan who used to wear a black veil all the time considered modifying the color of her dress to be more accepted into the new social environment she has to live in. She reflects, “I changed my veil color from the black to ones that match my dresses. This made my veil more acceptable to American students as I noticed.” Hanan also gained some confidence in talking with her classmates about her clothes. She says,

Now, when I see one of my classmates staring at my clothes, I simply try to start a conversation with him or her. … I open the topic about my dress code without them asking about it. I knew from my experiences that they will not ask me about what I wear but they will look at me and then talk about it among themselves. … Before, I understood the reason why they looked at me but did not have the power to open the topic with them or even to start the conversation.

The academic strategies utilized by participants were not different from those expected to be found on a college campus. They were mainly: seeking help from American classmates, seeking help from instructors, collaborative work when having other Saudi in one’s program, and external paid help. Intensity in seeking external help and the frequency of its use were very apparent in all of the participants’ responses except for one participant, Hanan.

**Collective work when having other Saudi in program**

Saudi participants who had the privilege of having other Saudi students in their classes formed study groups and divided the required academic tasks among themselves. Salwa says; “We usually study together. We even split the reading section of the books and then share notes. And usually when we have a class final, we divide the study guide
between us and work on it and then we share the answers.” Others may try to establish relationships with American peers and instructors to get help whenever they need it.

**Seeking help from classmates**

Some try to seek help that is within their group of acquaintances whether including other Saudi students or American students. Ahmed says, “First, I used to go for other American classmates for help. … Some of them would help, others would not. But I usually found someone to help me.” Hanan seeks the help of her classmates who offer her some reasonable help within context. She says,

> When I have problem understanding an assignment, I usually ask one of my classmates first. Sometimes, they can help me. … They are nice to me but I think they have a lot of things on their plates. They do not have the time to sit with me and help me. I also do not hang out with them. But they help when they can. Yes, I can say so.

When Feras does not have other Saudi students in a class, he asks American classmates for help on class instructions or directions for doing assignments.

> When I do not have any Saudi in one of my classes, I usually find someone to be friends with. You know you feel comfortable in some classes sitting in the same place. I do not feel OK to ask these friends for anything at the beginning. … But after some sessions, I am able to ask them to explain things that I do not get in the class. … Of course not big things but things that I did not understand about a paper or about class projects.

On the contrary, Jehad stating the initiation of his classmates to offer support for him says,

> Of course, they know that I am not from the country and my language is not as good as their language. Some of them volunteer to clarify things for me. … But these are usually when we say jokes or when we are talking about what each one is going to do in a project. No serious stuff that can really help me.
Therefore, the help from American classmates that the Saudi students reported getting was not substantial in overcoming their academic or linguistic challenges.

**Seeking help from professors**

Hanan puts a great value on the instructor’s approach to present the assignments. She explains how this influences her reactions and success on these assignments and consequently the class as a whole.

My classes were always hard for me but it is the instructor who makes me continue with the class or not. … Some of the instructors have a way of making the assignments seem easier. They give you the impression that they will help me succeed while others get me to feel that they do not care about me or even about the whole class. … I stay on with these classes and try if I can do well in the assignments and quizzes. If I did well, I continue. If not, I have to drop the class because I do not want any F’s in my transcript.

Likewise, Jehad mentions how his relationship with the professors and instructor was empowering for him. He argues,

I believe that my professors were the first people who met me here. If my first experience with them was bad, I do not think I would have been able to continue. Our relationship with them is totally different from what I expected to see. … In Saudi Arabia, a professor is like a god. You cannot discuss anything with him. When they speak we have to be listening and there is no arguing with them. … You cannot talk to them that easy like here.

Some of the Saudi students try to seek the support of their instructors as the first step in getting help with their academic achievement. Feras says,

When I go and ask them [the professors], they say that I have to read and figure things out by myself. They told me to read more and get more books that can help me understand the topics. I laughed so loud. … They think I need more books to read than the class books. The reading we have is already very big I take three classes with about a hundred pages to read for each class.
**External Help and Academic Integrity**

Overwhelmed by the amount of work expected from them to keep up the good grades and accomplish their goals, some Saudi participants sought external help away from regular university resources. Hanan tells how she needed tutoring to succeed in her classes. She recollects,

> I find it very difficult for someone like me to come and study here. I think the 500 on TOEFL they required us to have before admission is not enough score. … I had a lot of troubles in my first year. I had to get a tutor from the English Institute here to help me get some skills in reading and how to organize my papers and even respond to questions in my exams.

Like Hanan, Jehad had to get a tutor to help him during his English language year. Telling how the studying at ELI got harder in his first year, he says, “Studying was not that hard at the beginning of the year because they think that we do not know any English.” However, he needed to use an extra help as the difficulty of assignments and instructional material increased. “Later in the year, things got harder and harder. I could barely pass my quizzes. I had to get a tutor that helped me with both my assignments and my studies,” He reflects.

Although the role of the tutor seemed traditional at the beginning of Jehad’s study of English, that role changed with larger assignments.

> He used to take a copy of my syllabus and the textbooks. … we met three times a week. In each meeting, he would go over the important points in the next week’s lessons. He also gave me notes about the chapters we are going to cover in class. If there were any assignments due, he would give me an outline of the assignment I should write. Then I would start writing the assignment on my own. … After that, he would revise them for me and make the paper looks really good to submit to my professor. This was what he suggested for me. But in a few large assignments, I left the whole job for him because I was not able to do them at all.
Later, when Jehad started his academic program, he utilized the service of another person who “is really easy going but he does not explain things. They say he is very busy. He gives you your papers written and if you need them summarized, he can give you that too. But he has to know in advance like three weeks before you get the paper”.

Rabie tells two incidents when he had to get help from the internet. He says,

During my second semester, I was asked to write a research paper about one of the class topics. I found a similar paper on the internet. … I used many sections of that paper in my assignment. I knew that was not right but I did not take it that serious because I did that in other classes too and still got good grades on the assignments. … She told me that she should have sent me to the Legal Affairs Department but she will forgive me as it is my first time to do it on the condition that I redo the assignment.

Although Rabie admits knowing that this was not right, he argues that it passes in other classes. His simple inference is that this should have passed in that class as well. He continues to tell his experience with the University Writing Lab, “Another professor sent me to the writing lab when I submitted my first reflection paper on the reading. But you know the Writing Lab did not offer that great help. They wanted me to submit a nearly correct paper to revise for me.” Because he did not get what he expected from the Writing Lab, he tried and found another way to satisfy his needs when it comes to writing papers,

But I did not know how to do it from the beginning. It was not until I knew that Syrian guy. He helps me a lot with my papers. … I give him the assignment, and what I want to write about and if the professor has gave me some directions and he does the paper for me. … He also gives me a summary of what is included in the paper if I have to talk about it.

Rabie’s approach was not different from other Saudi participants. Fadila, having some other Saudi students in her program, uses passed over class material to help her get
better grades. She says, “I tried to use my friends’ class material as a great help in the classes that has the same professor.” She reflects on how this helped,

   In the first classes of the master program, I had so much trouble writing the papers that was required. I got D’s and C’s on my first papers. … Then, my husband got me the folders of his friends’ wives, the ones that had the program before. I followed their assignments and papers.

   Fadila knows about university rules concerning plagiarism. She tells how she avoids getting into trouble because of using other students’ assignments. She says, “I used their papers but changed a little in each paper because my husband told me that if the professors know they can fail me the course and may be the whole program.”

   Feras talks about how he and other Saudi students in his program found a student who graduated from the same program to help them with reading, papers, and quizzes.

   The topics we study are usually new to me. … I have three Saudi who are in the same program with me. One of us knows a student who finished the program two years ago and he did not find a job. This guy helps us a lot. … He offers to write us papers… and summarize the chapters that we are quizzed in for us.

   Responding to a question about what they do when they are required to present in their classes, Feras said, “When one of us has a presentation about a paper, he gives us an outline for the presentation.” The help even was extended to quizzes. Feras declared, “He offers to... summarize the chapters that we are quizzed in for us. His summaries really helped me to pass quizzes.” Feras explains how they managed to survive classes with final exams without doing much of the reading that is required throughout the year. “In the classes that have tests, he summarizes the books for us and them we study the summary before the tests. This worked so far.” He says. John’s help extended to reach group work on class projects as well.
In class projects, we try to be together so it is easier for us to work together. … It was only one class where I had to do group work with other students in the class. But it worked OK. I discussed my role with my group. … And with the help of John, I finished my part and he told me that I can offer them to revise the paper and submit it. He is very good in MLA and he does the works cited very well.

Fadila speaks about another person that helps her doing her assignments as well.

But she uses this service only in classes that she does not have the material.

The courses that had a different professor were another problem that we were also able to solve. We had this [man] who does papers for us and takes a sum of money—not much—he takes a $100 for each paper and an extra 25 if we need him to summarize the paper for a presentation in the class. … He is very good and since the time we knew him; I have been getting A’s on all my papers.

Fadila opines the external help she is getting as an acceptable behavior in her opinion. She argues, “I know this is wrong but this will not influence me when I go back to my country. I cannot fail here. It will be a scandal if this happens. I have to get that degree no matter what. I do not need what they teach us here as I need the degree itself.”

However, she admits that she was afraid at the beginning of jeopardizing her chances of success at RSU. She says, “I know this is wrong but this will not influence me when I go back to my country. I cannot fail here. It will be a scandal if this happens. I have to get that degree no matter what. I do not need what they teach us here as I need the degree itself.”

When asked if she considers this as cheating, Fadila argues, “Not that much. I think I can do whatever I can to get my degree. …I am not copying someone’s answers on a test. … I am not going to get the grades of anybody else.” She claims that as long as she is not taking something that belongs to someone else she is not cheating, “I am not going to get the job they are supposed to get. I will have my degree and leave to my
country.” Likewise, Rabie and Feras did not admit that this could be considered cheating. They both argued about that they are not using some other student’s work to get credit. Feras argues,

It is cheating only when you take another student’s answers and copy them… I do not do that… I submit papers that are not written by other students … I know that is not right because I cannot tell the professor that I do that but I am not taking anyone’s right here.

Support Systems

The support that is available for Saudi students varies in type, degree of usefulness, degree of structuredness, and its source whether an individual, a group, a department, or the institution as a whole. Support from peers is often mentioned by Saudi students as one that was very essential for their accomplished achievements. “I also have made a few friends who are really helpful and willing to help me without asking,” says Ahmed. They also add another dimension to that kind of support beyond its apparent academic value. They consider it a signal of acceptance, friendliness, and appreciation. Ahmed continues, “I feel … Their help assures me that I am welcomed here.”

Advising was a common topic that the participants always mentioned. Jehad reflects on his advising sessions,

I like my advising meetings as well. … The advisor gave me confidence because he told me that he is not going to choose for me but he is going to explain the options for me and the choice is then mine. I told him that I am not sure if my choice will be right and he said that he will make sure that I am on the right road. … He encouraged me with very nice words. I usually go home very happy after meeting with my advisor.

When it comes to professors and departments as the source of academic support, Saudi students find themselves facing different circumstances. Some professors offer
them help explicitly while others do not seem to recognize their need for help or support.  
“I try to understand each student as a separate case. I try to suggest learning strategies for 
these students and direct them to available resources that they might not be able to know 
or reach without directions,” says Mary Ann. Assigning peers to be conversation 
partners or academic guides are sometimes introduced on individual basis by a program 
or from academic instructors. The ELI assigns conversation partners for Saudi students 
to talk with American students for an hour each week. Mary Ann tries a similar 
technique; “I entrust them to another student who would be helpful to them. I think 
when the help is coming from a student, it is easier for them to accept and a student of the 
same age can understand their needs better than I do.” Some departments and programs 
are familiar with Saudi students and have developed an awareness of their case and some 
instructional strategies to help them persist in their quest for learning. Programs that do 
not have experience with Saudi students may not have a clear idea of these students’ 
needs and challenges.

Institutional support is usually presented either in a form of procedural features or 
through programming whether individualized or inclusive. As a distinctive growing 
group of the international student body, Saudi students have the support of the Office of 
International Programs through a very individualized procedure when the director 
reviews the grades of these students with the cultural attaché each semester. Another 
procedural aspect appears when processing paperwork of Saudi students allowing them to 
submit photocopied financial documents while other international students cannot.

Although it is apparent that Saudi students do not have an articulated special 
attention neither from the top administration at RSU or from student life professionals,
some incidents like holding a special room for Saudi women and organizing a Saudi day regularly during the international education week assured that there is a chance of inclusiveness. Other programs where Saudi students were visible were fusion meetings, around the world party, and the Intercultural Dialogue. Some programs were also inclusive of Saudi students through targeting the Muslim community on campus of which the Saudi students constitute 80%. Among these were holding a day at the swimming pool for women, the Eid (feast) party, providing a room for weekly congregational prayer on campus, and having a Ramadan Iftar (dinner) on campus.

Media Created Stereotypes

Building on a review of the internet news channels about Saudi Arabia, news about the country focused on three major topics that included political situations, Saudi oil industries; and Saudi social justice issues. Among these three topics, the research participants only mentioned depiction of Saudi social justice issues as the most disturbing to them when portrayed on American TV and newspapers. Several themes emerged during the interviews. Stereotypes that are offending Saudi students at RSU included claimed Saudi discriminatory behaviors against women. Claims of injustices and unfair laws effective in Saudi Arabia was another stereotype that participants mentioned. A third stereotype was about neglecting the cultural achievements of Saudi Arabia as a modernized country. Influences on Saudi students as a result of these stereotypes varied between passive and positive ones. Participants expressed different stories depicted on TV and news coverage that they did not like. These covered many aspects in the Saudi life and culture. They mentioned stories about culture, discrimination, and punishment. They also explained some of the techniques they improvised that other Saudi students
may follow to deal with these stereotypes. Participants’ ideas about how to solve created stereotype of Saudi Arabia at RSU offered some insightful ideas that American campuses can apply.

**Culture**

Participants expressed how the culture of Saudi Arabia is always represented in the news as a country where the means of transportation is the camel. “People here like to think of Saudi Arabia as running on camels as … if the whole country is using camels for transportation”, Malik says. He continues to explain the reason for camels to be in existence nowadays in Saudi Arabia. The camel is “the most adapting animal to the environment we live in, the desert… There are some Saudi tribes that will use camels for moving in the desert but only for limited distances that has no roads or trails”. Malik asserts that Saudi citizens in the most deserted places “will still have cars and 4wd Jeeps and GMCs that can move across trails in the desert or the mountains but camels can travel on anyplace on the desert”.

Malik refers to the clothes factor as one that usually creates an image of primitivism in the western eye. “Americans think that we are deteriorated because we wear *toab* and *Shemakh,*” he continues, “They think that this is a primitive country because we wear our national dress to work”. Malik later negates the reality of this image by proving it to be a symbol of pride rather than shame. He says, “This is our culture and tradition that we like and love to hold on to… no matter what they think of it”.

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Discrimination

One participant talked about presenting Saudi Arabia as a discriminating country especially with respect to women rights. Malik states that because of “women’s abaya and niqab … they think that we make women our slaves and force them to do things against their will”. The same idea was repeated when Waseela talks about the first negative image that is created about Saudi Arabia as “discrimination against woman and how … the men treat us very bad and force us to wear our hijab …. and the niqab [without] our satisfaction”. The idea of discrimination is so widespread about the Islamic and Middle Eastern cultures due to several constructs that the research participants explained.

Another image that participants highlighted was marriage and the men’s lawful rights to a second wife while a woman is denied the same right. “My father never married more than once”, Akram denies the men’s right stating, “…. We know that this is a license but … it is not a right for every man… during times of need …like wars this turns into something useful but not that every man marries many women”. Waseela, who rejects that her husband would marry another woman, supports this same idea stating that her mother refused that her husband takes care of his brother’s widow but rather prefers if he marries her as a second wife. “This is hard for a woman to agree to … but yes, my mom did not like or agree that Papa goes to … my late uncle’s wife… she preferred that they marry”.

Many incidents of different treatment among men and women were the focus of Saudi students’ defined causes for the formation of gender discrimination stereotypes. For example, Waseela mentions the woman’s denied right to obtain a driver’s license in
Saudi Arabia. She says, “One more idea that is very common is how … in Saudi Arabia we are not allowed to travel alone and also drive cars…. It is banned by law that we drive cars”. However, when talking about rape later, she mentions how far the distances of travel in the country are and how deserted the roads are so it is not safe for women to drive alone. She says,

The geography of our land is very difficult… you travel for hours without seeing a single house. …. The roads are not safe for us to travel alone… think if the car breaks… or if some gang stopped the car … on a desert road… what can a woman do?

One might argue that a woman may use her cell phone to call for help if a car breaks down in a deserted road. But Waseela asserted a different situation in the case of Saudi Arabia saying, “Even when you have a cell phone and call for help, …the nearest patrol can be an hour or two away.” Then what is the use of cell phones other than taking pictures? Akram retells the story of a cell phone that brought it 20-year-old owner 90 lashes and two months in prison. The CNN reported that “the girl was 13 years old and was sentenced to prison and 90 lashes because she had a cell phone which is not allowed in the school” in Saudi Arabia. He explains how the ban is not on cell phones but rather on the cameras in them because at “girls’ schools … they do not wear their outdoors abaya …. If you have a cell phone with a camera, … you can take many pictures …. of those around you. You can post these pictures online, or give it to friends who are not supposed to see what is in the pictures”. Akram moves on to explain how the proportion between the act and its punishment may seem harsh from the American point of view. However, it is a violation of privacy that he compares to rape from a Saudi perspective. “The girl was tried because of the photos on the phone and not only because of having it
or hitting the teacher”. He continues, “This … crime in Saudi Arabia is something like rape here. Can you tolerate rape crimes? … I do not think so.”

**Punishment**

Participants brought up the theme of unfair or unreasonable justice system during three different incidents. The first was when Akram mentioned the case of the cell phone girl. The second time was when Waseela brought up the stereotype of the punishment for adultery, which is death for a married man or woman. Waseela expressed how unimportant that law is because it is rarely applied to normal Saudi men or women. She says, “they make it look like a… like a very big problem for Saudi women. Like they are all having sex outside of their marriages”. She continues to claim that the issue “is not an important thing in Saudi Arabia… we have other thing that is important to us as women than the adultery *hadd* (law)”.

The punishment for theft is another topic that was raised during interviews with Saudi participants. According to the Saudi law, the punishment for thieves is amputation of the right hand. He states, “It looked very brutal to many of my friends and American classmates…. When something like this came in the class… They did not even believe that this could happen in this century” he expresses how his classmates were astonished when he affirmed that it is true. “They felt it is primitive and brutal to do to people.” He even remembers a sarcastic comment of one of his classmates making fun of that law. He says, “One of them [American classmates] said to me, ‘then after a while you turn a large piece of the country into a man-made disability section that you can brag that your religion created’ and he laughed at me and left.”
Influences

When Saudi students talked about the influence of the stereotypes created about Saudi Arabia on the American TV and newspaper, they highlighted three constructs: depressive frustration, anger, and stereotype threat. Waseela tells how she feels after one of these stories appears on TV. She does not want to attend her classes at RSU for fear of getting into the discussion about these incidents. She says,

I suffer from these conversation even after they end because for two …or three and may be the whole week I would feel that I do not want to go to class again… and even do not want to come to the university for my other classes as a whole because I meet my classmates in other classes as well. … I sometimes meet them at the library or the Student Union.

She continues to express her feelings towards the conversations that these stereotypes create saying, “I feel that I am totally embarrassed because I start to defend my country and the role of women in it”. Engaging in conversations about these stereotypes does not bring Waseela any good. She feels stressed because of them. Waseela explains,

This conversation is not always good for me because I find myself responsible to correct all the bad ideas and wrong understanding created in their mind by the TV and the news that were mainly charging the whole nation to engage in the war on terror … against Muslim countries.

Likewise, Akram reflects upon times when these pictures appear in one of the major programs of the American TV. He says, “When I see these scenes or stories on the television or on the internet,… I always feel that I need to smack the reporter the director and all who worked on the show”. He clarifies why he feel that angry arguing that the professional staff who work on TV production are better informed than the public. This fact alone makes him more aggressive because, in his opinion, they deceive the public instead. He says,
The people who work in the television or the news sections of the internet are the most knowledgeable and have the information they need to make good judgment on what to focus on or what not to focus on… but they choose the most different aspects of life that can stir the American people and then they display it.

He continues to discuss his opinion about what the TV and internet news professional staff does. “This is why I do not like it when these people betray their audience and citizens and lead them … to believe a lie,” he says. Although Akram does not fear that all American will believe these lies, he express his worries that, “most of them will be influenced by it because not everyone will go and read more about the topic”. Akram also hints to discrimination that he feels because of these stereotypes and their influence on his university life. “I also feel that I am under discrimination …against me because of my country …because I am from a different country”, he says.

Malik, on the other hand, feels differently when some stereotypes about Saudi Arabia are represented in a story on TV. He says, “I feel insulted very much …these stories make me feel so wronged because they are not true. … and also because I will be asked to explain and defend my country in front of my friends.” He argues that the reporters and journalists, do not know anything about Saudi Arabia or its people. Let them go there and see. We have made a country out of the desert, a country with civilization and educated people a hundred years ago … there were nothing there except nomadic tribes and some historic cities around the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

His feeling of being insulted by the TV and newspapers originates from his feeling that “they are making us [Saudi] look like primitive when we are not. It looks like a lie.”
Coping with Stereotypes

Saudi participants improvised techniques to deal with the challenge of stereotype and also suggested solutions that can fit the institutional policy. Malik, as an active Saudi student, prefers to explain the cases that appear on TV to his colleagues. His explanations become an expectation of his colleagues when they watch something about Saudi Arabia in the news. He says, “They expect answers from me and now after three years here, …they understand very well that the true story is different from what is in the news when it comes to Saudi Arabia”. His explanations covered a wide range of issues that are controversial to American students. “They now can say if the story is right or wrong … but they usually wait to hear from me… they are usually are very interested in listening to the whole story”, he continues.

Although Akram follows the same method of explaining incidents to classmates, he has a concern that many of his classmates will not have sufficient information to develop a comprehensive understanding of the context. He says,

In the classroom, I find it very important to explain but no one has the time to listen and understand the whole situation… even after class, everyone has to leave quickly to their other classes and then they leave with a broken image not the whole explanation.

He also complained that he does not have enough knowledge of some issues to explain every incident to his American classmates.

Waseela tries to explain the situational contexts that surround each story to her American friends. They look forward to listening to her point of views. “With my scarf and country known as Saudi Arabia, I find myself kind of requested to talk about the accident because they look at me as someone who has inside knowledge or more
background about the accident or crime...,” she explains. Waseela voluntarily give this explanation even if she is not required to do that, “I feel that I have to give [an explanation] if the topic was opened in the class discussion or even in Star Bucks... the idea is always that I can make this group understand Saudi Arabia better”. However, Waseela does not feel well when she is doing that. “I usually do this when I am not happy... I feel my role as a Saudi woman studying in the U.S. I have to explain how we see these incidents and accident and how we understand the situation there,” she says.

Waseela tells about her larger initiative that extends to informing her classmates and friends about Saudi Arabia. She aims at educating them to, “understand ... that different countries have their own norms and laws that their people accept and live with”. Akram suggests that presentations of Saudi students can make a difference. He says, “Saudi students here can make presentation ... to reach to the American students and let them know about Saudi Arabia”. Like Waseela, he proposes to educate the college students, “that not all the TV shows are true or frank in telling the truth because they care about an interesting story more than they care about the audience or truth”. Malik talks about how the Saudi Club at RSU started a series of awareness raising sessions about Saudi Arabia. In these sessions, they cover different, “topics ... from history of Saudi Arabia to the women and how they are treated, dressed, and brought up”. Saudi students receive various questions from the audience, “around topics of discrimination, justice, freedom, conservative Islam and how ... Saudi youth look at American people ... how [they] agree with our government, [and] how [they] want to change it or not to change it”.

Saudi participants mentioned the role of the university as an institution to benefit the American students through providing the venue for these sessions so that Saudi
students have a chance to talk to other students and perhaps getting some support for the presentations to ensure achievement of their desired outcomes. Akram says, “The university can also make sure that we have a chance to talk to other students and may be giving some support for that… I mean support in making the success of the talk”. Waseela expands the role of Saudi students to reach to the TV channels and website blogs. She argues that Saudi students can also post comments on these channels websites in response to their news coverage. This way the channel or website professionals understand that the audience will be aware of the truth no matter what they report. She says,

These TV channels usually have blogs where the spectators can post comments and opinions. These blogs …can serve as a way to tell the channel that we are not satisfied with the way …they covered the news and how biased they were in showing what happened.

**Conclusion**

The participants exhibited several aspects of the self-efficacy processes including their conception of ability, their motivation to persist toward goal achievement, their social comparison with American peers, the causal structure they associate with incidents, and their framing of feedback. Their determination to succeed and the importance of degree attainment were obviously explained due to their social commitment toward family and friends. Expressed cultural aspects revealed a sense of alienation from the American society. However, the presence of other Saudi students presented an easy solution that lessened the feeling of social alienation. The participants expressed a little confusion about choices and their expectations of others to make choices for them. Participants also expressed how the common stereotypes about Saudi
Arabia, especially those created by mass media, were offending for them. However, they expressed how they improvised both proactive and reactive responses to these stereotypes. Student participants delineated several challenges that faced them that included transition to their new environment at RSU, the differences in academic and social life. They also shared how they coped with these challenges and what types of help they received to overcome these challenges. The help the participant students reported and the support mechanisms reported by the faculty and administrators facilitated the creation of the New International Student Group Response Model. The model charted channels of communications among various campus units to detect any new group and to utilize campus resources to support the learning experience of any new international student group.
CHAPTER V

THE RESPONSE MODEL

In this chapter, I discuss the participant responses that suggested roles for several campus units that can have an impact in easing their adjustments. Then, I present the New International Group Response Model developed from the responses of the participants. The model details recommended communication among several units in a higher education institution responding to the appearance of a new international student group on campus.

Participant Responses

The research participants mentioned several units at RSU as contributing to the success and adjustment of Saudi students as a new student group on campus given its growing numbers and the limited awareness of relevant social and cultural backgrounds. The responses of the participants facilitated the creation of the response model presented in Figure 3. The model explains recommended communication channels among the units that have the first contact with any new international student group and other units that may play essential roles in easing the transition of the new group. These include admission, orientation, advising, international programs, student engagement, counseling services, academic departments, program directors, student organizations, faculty teaching the new group, and community organizations.
The first unit in the model is admission that has the first contact with Saudi students. Theresa expresses where communication about the new group should start. She says,

From the very beginning, the story must start from admission. Admins in admissions must have a role that exceeds checking if the application is complete and forwarding info to respective academic departments. …They can have a proactive role especially when they see a phenomenon like this large numbers of students from one country or region. They can communicate with the Multicultural Office or the Office of International Affairs to make sure that admins in these offices are aware of what is to come. …They also can communicate with these students early to make sure that any vague issues are resolved before hand. I think the proactive solution starts there.

Marry Ann follows the same line of argument and stresses the importance of the role of the staff working in new student orientation. She states that some of the activities
in orientation week need modifications to be inclusive of all cultural backgrounds of students.

I participate in new student orientation programs. I see that they are pretty good … I really really like the activities … but this is from my point of view as an American professor. … Students from other cultures may feel neglected during some of the activities because of cultural concerns.

She argues that planning the orientation week events can address any new aspect in the new student body. She also argues that these events should have a certain level of flexibility to serve different groups and categories of students as they participate in orientation week. She says,

If I were planning these activities, I would include a contingency plan for each activity to be used when I see that not all students are engaged in the activity. The variety of the activity may target different categories of students but … I think what is needed is activities that runs parallel to each other so we are not leaving any group out or putting them on hold.”

New Student Orientation programs play an essential role in preparing students for the new college experience providing them with realistic expectations of their future education. Theresa reflects saying,

Student orientation has a lion’s share here. They can get these students to understand what a college experience means what … I mean to get them to understand that college here means working hard with lots of reading assignments and the possibility to fail if you do not do the work you are expected to do.

Staff in the Office of International Affairs is the second contact point for international students establishing communication with Saudi students prior to arrival on campus. Feras discusses how highly he appreciates the help offered from the office. He enthusiastically says,

Actually, the most help I got in the university was from the international programs. The people there are always willing to offer us help when we
ask for it. … They are very understanding of our situation. I say they help when they can but I understand that it is sometimes out of their hands. They also have many students to help… I remember sometimes we were like 20 students at one time waiting for different persons to talk to us and they are like six or seven people there.

He also mentioned how staff in the office used to direct the students to several other support offices on campus when it is out of their capacities to offer the help.

Professors and instructors with their direct interaction with Saudi students from the first day of the semester have an undeniable impact on their experience at RSU.

Hanan reflects of her experience with some of her professors,

There was one instructor that was interested in Saudi women. She offered me a lot of help both in her class and in other classes as well. … She was like a personal friend – of course not an actual friend – but I did not feel ashamed or embarrassed to ask her question about my classes or anything else that I need help with concerning my personal relationships with other students and even my relationships with other Saudi student in the University.

Likewise, Jehad asserts the essential role professors play in providing venues that can build Saudi students self confidence to present and participate in the classroom. He passionately says,

In the world civilization class, the professor asked me to do a presentation about the role of Saudi Arabia in world history. It was a special assignment and she told me that not all students in the classroom are required to do this assignment. It was not hard to know the ideas because I studied them in middle and high schools. … What took me some time is putting the presentation together in English. But after I did the presentation, I felt that I was very confident to present in front of the class on other topics as well. It was not scary as I imagined.

Jehad describes the relaxed relationship between Saudi students and their professors at RSU comparing it to the one they had with their professors in Saudi Arabia. He partially attributes his success to that relationship saying,
I believe that my professors were the first people who met me here. If my first experience with them was bad, I do not think I would have been able to continue. Our relationship with them is totally different from what I expected to see. … In Saudi Arabia, a professor is like a god. You cannot discuss anything with him. When they speak we have to be listening and there is no arguing with them. … You cannot talk to them that easy like here.

Like Jehad, Ahmed compares the teaching style of his instructors at RSU to that of the professors he had in Saudi Arabia.

Here, one professor used to give us extra credit if we can find a mistake in her presentation or the information that she was providing to us do you imagine this is really very radical according to what happened in Saudi Arabia. ….The instructors used … discussion and question and answer [more] than the feeding us … the knowledge … The teachers were like friends to us as students he was talking like a colleague that he is having a chit chat.

Jehad also mentions how professors can provide valuable advice that helps increase Saudi students’ self-efficacy beliefs of goal achievement. He recollects,

One of my professors advised me to talk to another Saudi student who was two years ahead of me. He gave me his email and I emailed him and he was a great help for me. I met with him many times and he gave me all his notes and class work that he kept. … He also was a great help because he showed me that I will be able to finish my program like him. If he can do it, I can be able to do it. Right?

Theresa suggest that professors need to recognize the needs of Saudi students and to modify their method of instruction slightly to make sure the students have a clear perception of what is expected from them. She says, “But I think that the professors need to recognize that they can't just go a and teach their classes as usual they can take the time to explain things differently,… and perhaps let students know this is how they need the work to be done in the classes.” Mary Ann delineates how she deals with her students and her approach to directing them to available resources. She also describes how she
tries to pair Saudi students with other students in her classes who can provide help for them,

I try to understand each student as a separate case. I try to suggest learning strategies for these students and direct them to available resources that they might not be able to know or reach without directions. Sometimes, …I entrust them to another student who would be helpful to them. I think when the help is coming from a student, it is easier for them to accept and a student of the same age can understand their needs better than I do.

Although Rabie complains that the majority of his professors will not provide special assistance for him, he recollects an incident where his professors set aside class rules to turn a plagiarism incident to a learning experience. He says,

Some try to help when they notice something that is very clear but most will not … have the time to help me with any of my problem. I remember … when my professors really helped me apart from the rest of the students…. I was required to write a research paper about one of the class topics. I found a similar paper on the internet. I used many sections of that paper in my assignment. I knew that was not right but I did not take it that serious because I did that in other classes too and still got good grades on the assignments. She told me that she should have sent me to the Judicial Affairs Office but she will forgive me as it is my first time to do it on the condition that I redo the assignment. … She actually sat with like for half an hour and told me exactly what to do. She offered me an exception she did not give to the other students.

Fadila compares the help she used to get from instructors while studying English language and the help she gets from the professors in the master program. Although the comparison is valid, her complaints about the masters program show her lack of understanding about her role as a student in a graduate program. She says,

The help that I got from my professor in the English Institute was really great. They were very kind and encouraging. They really offered me big help. In the master program, the professors are different. When I go to them with a question about something, they just return the question to me and tell me that I have to find out for myself.
Administrators working in advising meet Saudi students upon their arrival on campus to plan their academic programs. Hanan describes her relationships with her advisors both in the general education classes and in her major. She reflects,

I can say that the most interesting relationship that surprised me was the advisor who did not even try to help me choose my classes. I explained to him that I am not from this country and I do not know anyone who had this program before. When I compare him to my first two year advisor, she was amazing.

Rabie also reports his positive experience with his general education advisor. He reflects,

I think I had the advisor puzzled with my change of major over three years. But, she is trying her best to help me and she really tries hard. Sometimes she says, “No, do not take these courses” and some other time she suggests some classes that are not even on my program because she sees them good for me. … Some of the time, I listen and sometimes I followed my own choices against her advice. She was never mad when she knew something like this she is always smiling and encouraging me to succeed. … She works in the Office of International Affairs and her work there makes her know a lot of us so I do not need to explain things each time I meet with her.

Hanan explains how busy that advisor was because of the number of her advisees,

But it was always hard to talk to her because she had many many students that she has to advise. I had to schedule a two week range appointment with her to talk to her. But according to the slots available in her schedule, I usually meet with her after the registration week. This was a problem for me in the first semester. … Later, I learned to register for more classes than I need and when I meet with her, I would drop some.

Saudi students points of views about the role of the advisor were mostly positive when they felt advising gave them confidence. Jehad expresses the relief his advising session bring to him saying,

I like my advising meetings as well. The advisor gave me confidence because he told me that he is not going to choose for me but he is going to explain the options for me and the choice is then mine. … I told him that I am not sure if my choice will be right and he said that he will make sure
that I am on the right road. He encouraged me with very nice words. I usually go home very happy after meeting with my advisor.

However, some Saudi students had unrealistic expectations of the role of the advisor. Fadila reflects, “My advisor seemed helpful at the beginning of my program. Later, she seemed very busy and responded to my requests that these are things she should not be answering and that they are for me to decide.”

Program directors utilize the observations of instructors and professors about emergent needs of students or relevant issues that arise in the classroom. Mary Ann describes the role of program directors in raising awareness of any instructional issues that appears to be specific to a certain group. She says,

More, the directors of the academic programs should be responsible for disseminating the knowledge they get from individual faculty members to all instructors in their programs. Some of this info may be very essential if it appears to be a trend or a phenomenon. … Instead of all the faculty members going through the same first time experiences with a group of students, we can avoid the hassle and get in control by pinning down the issues and sharing them.

Similarly, department chairs have the role of overseeing trends influencing Saudi students’ experience in their respective departments. Theresa describes her idea about the influence department chairs can have on engaging Saudi students through addressing their needs on the department and college levels. She says, “

Not many understand that the department chairs can have a say on the inclusion of these students. They are in the position to communicate effectively with the deans and other departments across campus. … They also have control upon part-time instructors…many of the university admins do not communicate with part-timers.

Theresa describes what she does to involve department chairs in issues that she sees as hindering the learning experience of Saudi students. She says,
I usually copy department chairs when we have any issue with a Saudi student just to get them aboard with me. Most of the time, they respond positively. But, I look at it from a different angle. … Even if they did not respond, I know that they are now aware of the issue I am dealing with.

Counseling services play an important though underutilized role in helping Saudi students especially those who experience higher stress levels due to their new educational and social experience. Fadila recollects a very personalized experience where a counselor took an extra step to ease a cultural challenge she faced,

The Counseling Center provided some really great help for me at a situation when a Saudi case was on TV. On the next day, I was not able to go to the university because of the amount of humiliation I felt when watching the show on TV. The lady from the counseling center emailed me with her phone number and I called her and talked with her for a while until I was really relaxed. … She offered to accompany me on the second day to my classes, which I liked very much. Her presence with me offered me some support and she looked like a shield that protected me from any inappropriate questions from my classmates.

Although this was a very distinctive precedent, it shows how counselors can play a positive role in easing the cultural tension that Saudi students may experience at RSU.

With its programming capacity, the Office of Engagement has an essential role in providing Saudi students with a sense of inclusion in university wide events. Rabie takes part in an annual event where he shares aspects of his culture. He says, “I usually participate in the Saudi Showcase when they are organized. I feel that I am part of the university when I participate not just a different kind of student. But there aren’t many of these events all the time.” Theresa also asserts the importance of the role of the Office of Engagement in introducing the American culture to Saudi students. She argues that,

[The office] should take care of … the engagement of these students … they are in a different culture now. We should introduce them to our culture as an American college. They also have the opportunity to know other cultures, which are something that distinguish our country as a
melting pot. Their college experience is a shared responsibility between the university and themselves because I noticed during my years of work with international students that international students and Saudi students in particular shy away from voluntarily participating in student life programming.

Student organizations play an essential role in easing the transition of Saudi students providing them with an individualized community on campus. Hanan tells how the Muslim Students Association helped her feel welcome and safe during her settling in stage. She says,

Another place where I used to get help on campus was the Muslim Student Association. The students there were very helpful to find me some older female students to talk to when I first arrived here. … They were not from Saudi Arabia and they helped me because I wanted someone to treat me like any other Muslim woman not like a Saudi who has a scholarship. They used to check how I was doing many times each week. … They also visited me at home, which made me feel welcome here.

Likewise, Rabie describes his active role in the Muslim Student Association and the Saudi Students Association. He says, “Very often, I participate in university events. I took a very good part in organizing the collective Ramadan Dinner last year. I also participated in the soccer competition for MSA members opposing the neighboring university.” He continues, “I usually come to the University during play days for the Saudi Club. I feel we are part of the college on these days.”

Community organizations played a vital role with Saudi participants that exceeded helping during their first weeks at RSU. Jehad describes how International Riverside Community helped him after he arrived at RSU.

There is an organization like a friendship thing. They offered me to stay with an American family for the first week after I arrived here. … I did not take that offer but they also gave me the names and phone numbers of the people in that family and told me they are willing to help me with anything I need. I did not contact them at the beginning
Although Jehad did not use that service, the host family reached out to him. He says, “Two days after I arrived, they called me to welcome me to the U.S. … This was really a good thing.” These organizations assert the friendly feelings that welcome Saudi students to their new experience at RSU.” Jehad continues, “I felt very happy because these are true American people that have nothing to do with me. I mean they are not paid to do this. I felt this welcome was from the heart. It had nice feelings associated with it not only the business or the job.”

**Units and Communication Patterns in the Model**

Several units at RSU seemed to contribute to the case of Saudi students as a new student group on campus especially with their growing numbers and the lack of awareness about their social and cultural backgrounds. The responses of the participants facilitated the creation of the response model (Figure 3). The model includes the units that have the first contact with any new international student group and others that may play essential roles in easing the transition of the new group. These include admission, orientation, advising, international programs, student engagement, counseling services, academic departments, program directors, student organizations, faculty teaching the new group, and community organizations.

First, administrators at the office of admission have the privilege of spotting a new group in its pre-arrival phase. Once they sense a new international group, admission staff has the responsibility to contact the staff in New Student Orientation, the academic departments, and respective program directors to make sure they are prepared with the needed knowledge about the new group. Admission staff should be able to decide whether there is any obstacle connected to the operation in the office with regard to that
specific group. If any common problem appears to be specific to students of that group, an informed resolution should be sought through an examination of the possible causes of the problem in light of university policies and followed procedures. Moreover, a major function of the Admission Office is to provide students and their families with clear information about university policies and educational offering for the ultimate goals of assisting in the development of students’ interests (Henderson, 2008). Therefore, clear communication from the admission staff may help prospective international students develop realistic expectations and clear educational goals. New Student Orientation programs play an essential role in preparing students for their new college experience and provide them with the framework of social and academic expectations concerning many facets of their new academic endeavor (M. T. Miller & Pope, 2003; Poirier, Santanello, & Gupchup, 2007). Aware of any challenging condition that may encounter a group of students on campus, the staff can integrate proactive strategies into their program that may help students avoid possible challenges. The next unit that makes the one of the primary contacts with international students is the Office of International Affairs. Integral to the purpose of the office is to ensure the smooth transition of international students into their new educational environment while providing continuous support on cultural and academic issues (M. Wood & Kia, 2000). Staff in the office is the second contact point for international students. They also establish communication with international students prior to their actual arrival on campus. International programs communicate with academic program directors, student engagement office, relevant student organizations, and community organizations (M. Wood & Kia, 2000).
Third, professors and instructors have direct interaction with international students from the first day of the semester. Professors and instructors deal with students almost on a daily basis. They are the first persons international students would turn to for help. Roper (2003) argued that the teaching responsibility include facilitating group, leading dialogue, team building, and creating positive learning environments that welcomes student from diverse groups. With their experience in instruction, professors are able to devise pedagogical strategies to ease their students’ academic hardship.

Beyond their continuous communication with their program directors, professors can also extend the realm of support by communicating any issues they notice to other units on campus including the International Programs, Counseling Services, and Engagement Office. Fourth are administrators working in advising who meet international students upon their arrival on campus. Academic advising should aim at enhancing the students’ integration into the university both socially and academically (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Hale, Graham, and Johnson (2009) argued for more congruence between the type of advising relationship and student expectations. Advisors for international students have the potential to diagnose any learning difficulty or cultural challenge that may interrupt the learning experience of their advisees. Advisors have the responsibility to communicate these issues to program directors or directly to professors and instructors.

The next level of units is of no less importance than the first level. Program directors have their role in easing international students’ adjustment and maximizing their learning experience. Upon receiving input from admission, advising, and international programs, program directors can have their share of the responsibility to utilize their expertise in understanding the circumstances that encounter the students of the new group
and the most suitable methods to help them while maintaining the learning goals of the program. Academic directors should maintain continuous communication with professors in the program, department chairs, and staff in the advising office. Department chairs as the heads of the academic departments may process the information communicated to them from the admission staff, professors, and counseling services to look for trends that can inform decision making concerning course offerings and professional development for instructors and faculty members. Student Engagement Office, with the goal of providing accessible services to promote student success, engagement and satisfaction (Bess & Dee, 2008), should be able to utilize information from program directors, admission staff, and the counseling services suggesting activities and programs. The office staff can integrate these suggestions in their programs or encourage relevant student organizations to target specific groups in their activities.

The Counseling Services, though usually under-utilized by international students (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004), can initiate communications with professors and academic advisors to encourage students to utilize the counseling services that are usually available on college campuses. Another role the counseling staff can play is raising the awareness of advisors and professors about common psychological challenges associated with international college students (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007). Similarly, community organizations can have an important role to ease the adjustment problems of international students. These organizations have the freedom to function with flexibility to suit the needs of international students especially in settling in and cultural aspects. Student organizations with their different orientations – cultural, regional, religious, and academic – aim at improving the overall student experience
(Abrahamowicz, 1988) and foster the personal development of students (Foubert & Grainger, 2006). Student organizations can add a stress-free venue for any group of international students to seek help on cultural and academic issues.

Saudi students’ utilization of the various units included in the New International Student Group Response Model varies. Some of the units have a one-time interaction with Saudi students while others witness frequent utilization from the part of Saudi students. Based on the nature of their roles, the Admission and Orientation Offices meet with new students once. Other offices and units have the capacity to provide services and support for students on a more frequent basis. Except for the professors, who meet with students regularly as part of their instructional role, other units offer their services and support depending on students requests or choice of utilization. The study participants report frequent interaction with the Office of International Affairs. They also refer to utilizing the advising services in a moderate rate. However, their participation in the Student Engagement Office programs is very limited. Moreover, participants mention their utilization of the support offered by the Counseling Center, the Student Associations, and Community Organizations as minimal. University units underutilized by student participants need to reach out to students informing them of the services offered and the support they may receive once they approach these units for help.

**Conclusion**

Participant responses related to the several units that supported the transition of Saudi students into their college life at RSU were analyzed with respect to each unit’s role on campus when dealing with international students or students from a different culture that is relatively new on campus. I utilized the result of the analysis to design the
New International Group Response Model. The model details recommended communication patterns that should exist for higher education faculty and administrators to be able to respond to the appearance of any new international group. Student participants’ utilization of the various support units at the university was minimal suggesting that university units and offices should inform and encourage students to use available services.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This study explored the case of degree pursuing Saudi students studying at Riverside State University in an effort to reveal factors influencing their success, acculturation, and self-efficacy beliefs. The study also endeavored to examine the support systems that are in place to help the Saudi students and the effectiveness of these systems as they help to reduce the linguistic, academic, and cultural challenges facing Saudi students. The findings of the study provided insight into influential constructs that college instructors, student affairs professionals, and university administrators need to be aware of to better provide a quality educational service for these students. Based on the literature reviewed, the insights of study key participants were developed to provide useful implications for higher educational institutions.

In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the various facts of the findings provided in the previous chapter in relation to the published literature discussed in Chapter Two. Then, I present implications for college administrators and faculty as driven from the findings. Then, I conclude the chapter by a summary of the study followed by recommendations for future research.

The present study, though limited, provided informative answers about the case of Saudi students at the American institution. Saudi students arrived at the American
institution with high expectations of a college education that match their perception of an ideal classroom experience paired with a welcoming classroom atmosphere supported by their American peers. Although many aspects of the educational activities may appeal to Saudi students as an improvement of the college education as they experienced it in their home country, their expectations were not often realized due to various reasons including a mismatch between their image of the ideal college education and the educational practices established at the American institution. They anticipated degree attainment as a must to be realized whether in their initial field of specialization or any other field because a degree from an American university is more important for many of them rather than the knowledge they will acquire to get that degree. They come to the American institution with perceptions of ability that are often challenged by their presence in the classroom where language constitutes an initial challenge in a series of culture, religious, and academic challenges. To help them achieve success, various stakeholders at the institution established some support systems that helped in the different stages of their education. The limited number of key participants of this study did not allow for a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of these support systems although they were highlighted by most of them as important and essential to help Saudi students succeed and develop better social and study skills and move more easily through their acculturating process. The study revealed little information about the influence of the Saudi students’ presence on classroom techniques of instruction, and student affairs practices, which might be the target of further examination.
Discussion

Many of the construct examined in the study and its findings resonates with the existing literature in many aspects. However, other points, which were specific to the case of Saudi students, did not yield themselves to echo previous studies. Aspects like success, self-efficacy beliefs, culture, stereotypes, challenges, academic misconduct, and support systems are discussed in the following section in connection to published literature.

Success

As Saudi students’ perceptions of success varied due to various factors, their efforts and college persistence also varied. Some looked at success as obtaining their respective degrees in the field they came to study. Others looked at it as simply acquiring the book knowledge from the American institution. Looking carefully at these different perspectives warrants different measures that include modifying instructional practice, organizing campus general events, and providing advising skills. Such services would include New Student Orientation, Office of Admission, Office of International Affairs, Office of Student Engagement, and the Department of Student Life (Astin, 1984; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Hawken et al., 1991; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Admission procedures can include a clear process that ensures that these students’ goals behind enrolling in their programs are clearly defined and explicitly stated. Such procedure may be introduced through requiring student applicants to submit a letter of intent or a statement of purpose. This will ensure that the Admission Office is making sure students come to the university with clear and declared goals concerning their educational endeavor (Henderson, 2008). As New Student Orientation programs play an
essential role in preparing students for their new college experience and provide them
with the a framework of social and academic expectations (M. T. Miller & Pope, 2003;
Poirier et al., 2007), orientation events should include special portions for such students
to acquaint them with their prospective majors. International programs as a provider of
academic advising service for the international undergraduate students can concentrate on
pre-enrollment communications to establish the expected efforts required from these
students once they are at the American institution. Communications should also include
the difference instructional techniques that the students will experience in their academic
programs (Lacina, 2002).

As the success perceptions of Saudi students varied, the faculty and
administration offered other perspectives. Faculty looked at their success as measured
according to their achievement of the program objectives. To help them achieve these
goals, faculty may share knowledge about these students’ needs within their departments.
Opportunities should be given to them to express their own ideas and explain their
acquired knowledge. From the student affairs perspective, the success of the Saudi
students is not limited to their respective academic programs objectives (Cohen, 1996;
Perkin, 1997). Their success achievement cannot be completed without positive college
learning experiences that integrate their acquired knowledge with social life skills.
Therefore, providing a tailored part that targets international students in each of the
various extracurricular activities can maximize the Saudi students’ college experience as
they engage with other campus groups in positive dialogues. Such engagement can
acculturate them with the college life and introduce them to the different activities
available for all students in the institution. Such parts can be planned in collaboration
with the different departments on campus (Astin, 1992; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Stark & Associates, 1989). Moreover, Saudi students’ motivation to take part in the various student life programs may need to exceed the simple encouragement of voluntary choice to an academic requirement as part of their class assignments. For example, instructor may require students to observe an event, interview personnel or faculty from their respective discipline, and report it as a class assignment. Certain activities can be integrated through student success seminars which most undergraduate Saudi students are highly encouraged to take in their first semester at the American institution.

The different departments in the institution can have a positive role in eliminating the obstacles in the way of the Saudi students strive towards success (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera et al., 1993; Nora, 1987; Nora et al., 1990). For example, giving students an opportunity to talk and showcase their culture gets them to move outside of their circle of group members and motivate them to interact with the general student population at the American institution. Engagement in these activities may also increase the Saudi students’ linguistic abilities as they practice their English in an unstructured manner using contextual vocabulary outside of their course content (Reynolds, 1999). Activities like these can be included through holding a Saudi Day and Saudi Women’s Seminar.

The responsibility for Saudi students’ success rested on three different groups: academic departments and faculty; student affairs personnel; and the Saudi students themselves (Keup, 2006). Once aware of the several constructs of the case, each of the three parties may assume their roles and perform to the expected excellence to ensure the achievement of the desired learning outcomes for Saudi students. Academic instructors may try to modify their instructional techniques; handling of group and pair work; and
assessment strategies to include these students as a growing group in their classrooms (T. Miller et al., 2005).

Administrators working in student affairs may want to increase their knowledge about the characteristics of this new group’s to include them in their planning for programs and events. The utilization of Sue’s Model of Multiple Dimensions of Cultural Competence (2001) in serving the diverse groups on campus may guide activities and services offered to international students on campus. The Saudi students, at their end, need to have certain awareness level as to what their college learning should include beyond classroom input and exam performance (T. Miller et al., 2005). Having the opportunity to offer personalized advice for these students, academic and program advisors have an essential role in setting strategies for Saudi students. As Kuh et al. (2005) argued that for these programs to be effective, institutional practices should demonstrate quality, be tailored to satisfy the targeted student needs, and based mainly on the aspects of student success.

Self-Efficacy

Saudi students come to the United States with high expectations of an elite college education that match their perception of an ideal college experience (Constantine et al., 2004; Leong & Chou, 1996; Oei & Notowidjojo, 1990; Winkelman, 1994). They anticipated degree attainment as a must to be realized whether in their initial field of specialization or any other field because the degree from an American university is more important for many of them rather than the knowledge they will acquire. They come to the United States with perceptions of ability that are often challenged by their presence in the classroom where language constitutes an initial challenge in a series of culture,
religious, and academic challenges (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera et al., 1993; Nora, 1987; Nora et al., 1990). Such conceptions of abilities can be supported through instructional techniques that focus on formative rather than summative outcome based assessment (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Frequent and varied assessment techniques can provide these students with important information about their abilities and progress starting from their early weeks in the University throughout their entire program (Kuh et al., 2007). Comparison between Saudi students and American students always shakes the former’s self confidence and their perception of ability (Bandura, 1997; P. H. Miller, 2002). Such unfair comparisons are often imposed on Saudi students by their educational background that is not based on outcomes but rather on competition. The influence of these comparisons can be eliminated or at least minimized through a consistent review of sequential academic achievements done with the help of the academic advisor or program professor. Such review will ensure an objective perception of progress with neutral effect of peer comparison (Bandura, 1995). Therefore, progress reports would be always beneficial for Saudi students’ learning experiences in the United States not only because they will deemphasize the competitive approach but also because they will offer Saudi students the opportunity to self-compare their progress on the basis of developmental guidelines.

Saudi students are highly motivated by the feedback system practiced at the institution. Their self-efficacy beliefs usually increase through positive comments briefing them on how much progress they have achieved. Such focus on positive aspects encourages them to do their best on their studies and assures them that they are on the right track (Adams, 2004; Constantine et al., 2004; Niiya et al., 2004; Sherer & Adams, 2004).
Therefore, progress reports would be beneficial for optimizing their learning experience at the institution as it de-emphasized the competitive approach, offer them the opportunity to self-monitor their progress as based on developmental guidelines. Saudi students’ culture of origin enforced the fact that normative values are fixed rather than negotiable and that the responsibility for changing these norms often lies on larger bodies of their society rather than on them as individuals (Shim & Ryan, 2005). Consequently, Saudi students accept rules and role assignments as fixed final assumption that cannot be negotiated. They expect their learning environment to be out of their control (McClure, 2007; Olsen & Kunhart, 1958). That said, orientation input, which targets compulsory versus voluntary or optional tasks can be beneficial to enable Saudi students to understand their role correctly at the American institutions. Several models of successful Saudi students can be utilized as examples for these students based on their field of study. Saudi students start to form causal structures about the system which always leads to an understanding of the several aspects of the system (Y. Wang, 2004). Early educational practices that target the activation of their analytical thinking skills during orientation or initial advising meetings should target guiding their goal setting and goal orientation to maximize their learning outcomes. An effective strategy may be to engage Saudi students in activities that activate their analytical thinking skills about their performances, goal setting, and goal orientation. Capitalizing on this factor may be very helpful to increase their affective self-efficacy through combination of goals and appreciation of the developmental aspect of learning rather than the outcome based perspective.

Due to different economic and national circumstances, the potential harm of scholarship loss or academic failures is minimal to Saudi students. Utilizing this aspect
to increase their learning experience, orientation leaders and academic advisors can use a combination of goal setting activities highlighting the developmental aspects of learning in orientation and initial advising sessions of Saudi students. Such activities will help increase their motivation to excel academically (Bandura, 1995). Developing these skills, Saudi students can maximize their experience outcomes as based on their motivational goals and understanding of the value of learning, especially when considering that some of them lack the skills and sometimes the courage to seek legitimate help through institutional approved channels.

**Culture**

As collectivistic cultures reinforce the social bonds among the individual members of the group, these individuals may neglect their individual needs for the sake of those of the group and usually set goals that support the established group ones (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Triandis & Trafimow, 2001). Culturally, Saudi students may need to better understand the mechanisms in place at American colleges and in the American society in general. Once they understand these cultural norms, their performance and resentment to participate in college life may be positively influenced. Understanding that their actions are interpreted as personally representing them as individuals rather than their collective group, Saudi students should reconsider the idea that they are representative of their whole country, religion, or region. In this respect, multicultural seminars, workshops, and classes may be helpful if integrated as part of their college programs. Introducing extracurricular multicultural programming can offer Saudi students the same concepts in a more relaxed form of medium.
Collectivistic individuals share the feelings and concerns of the group and care for the needs of other in-group members which increases their sense of sameness and similarity even if they do not share the same situations or drives (Iyengar et al., 1999). Saudi students’ tendency to help each other as a group may be invested on as one way to increase these students’ persistence for college success. However, from a different perspective they need the encouragement to engage outside their group as a way to increase their immersion in the American college life as well as maximizing their learning benefits as well. Programs such as the Intercultural Dialogues, Fusion, and the Conversation Partner should be duly introduced and have the full publicity to be known to Saudi students who should be highly encouraged to participate for their own benefits. International students usually demonstrate little understanding of the rules and regulations governing student conduct, social interactions, and communication norms enhanced by the inadequacy of planned activities for them and poor advising and counseling services on many campuses (Kher et al., 2003). Saudi students’ perceptions about their ability to choose between alternatives should be targeted during activities of the Freshman Seminars. Such activities should focus on developing their decision making techniques and improving their critical thinking skills to make the right choices based on their goals and their new learning environment. The freedom, which the American lifestyle offers to Saudi students, may be utilized as a motivating factor for them to excel in college and persist toward degree attainment at the American institution.

Stereotypes

Saudi students’ reflections and responses about various kinds of stereotypes created by TV and internet news channels about Saudi Arabia provided a clear idea of
different forms of the stereotypes they are facing during interaction with peers at the institution (Fujioka, 1999). The interviews also revealed some of the Saudi students’ feelings created by these stereotypes (J. Lee & Rice, 2007) as ranging from passive depression to rage and anger. During the interviews, Saudi participants suggested several solution to minimize the size of these stereotypes or to decrease their influence on American students (Rahman & Rollock, 2004). Saudi participants highlighted different forms of stereotypes as concerning culture, gender discrimination, forms of punishment for different crimes in the Saudi system (McGlone & Aronson, 2007). Saudi students cautioned that Saudi Arabia is not the only country that is a target of stereotyping. Other countries including the United States may be stereotyped in different TV channels for different biases and interests.

Saudi participants expressed the stress these stereotypes create and the pressure they suffer because of their roles as Saudi students at the university (Viswanath, 1988). Some also expressed how the stereotype threat becomes a problem after an incident appears on TV. The participant introduced several solutions to the problem (McGlone & Aronson, 2007). Participants affirmed the importance of their active role in explaining the contextual situation of these stereotypes to their American classmates and friends. Participants highlighted the role of the Counseling Office in helping them overcome such challenges. They also reported that they started presenting about Saudi Arabia in an awareness raising presentation series. These sessions would explain to the American student population the Saudi point of view that may negate or correct these stereotypes. They also suggested being more proactive and responding to TV channels and internet
news channels through posting comments on their websites that offers the correct point of view about Saudi Arabia.

**Challenges**

When placed in their foreign educational institution, international students usually face challenges due to transition, the difference in academic practices, and the new social life that is usually unfamiliar to them (Choi, 2006; Constantine et al., 2005; Kagan & Cohen, 1990). Likewise, Saudi students face different challenges while studying at the American institution. Their transition faces social, political, cultural, academic, and linguistic barriers. College administrators and academic departments usually initiate support systems to help these students adjust to their new context and achieve their desired educational goals as well (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Advisors and orientation leaders can play an essential role in easing these transitional obstacles. Several social and community groups can also be supportive of these students when they first arrive at the American institution. Because collectivistic individuals share the feelings and concerns of the group and care for the needs of other in-group members, utilizing other Saudi students is another successful mechanism that can be effective building on the fact that they like to offer help to other group members (Iyengar et al., 1999).

Difficulties with classroom participation are major factors in the academic experience of international students (Y. Wang, 2004). These included oral participation, completion of class assigned reading, and their ability to take notes and to follow class lectures (Adams, 2004). Academic responsibilities and assignment are sometimes challenging especially when Saudi students lack the needed mastery of the language of instruction. Increasing group and pair work in the classes is one technique for increasing
both linguistic and academic levels. Programs that encourage collaborative and cooperative learning strategies can help them acquire such skills and maximize their learning experiences.

Therefore, initiating learning communities and study groups may be other beneficial techniques that can help Saudi students through getting them to practice their language within the jargon of their academic topic because linguistic difficulties represent an important factor influencing the adjustment of international students during their early years (Channell, 1990; Elsey, 1990; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Because many international students come from largely collectivist cultures, the loss of connectedness to important family members and the lack of community support increase their psychological or social distress (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Olsen & Kunhart, 1958; Y. Wang, 2004). Saudi students are usually away from participating in social events because of dietary restrictions and ethical misconceptions about American social life. Activating the role of community organizations may change these misconceptions through introducing programs like the First Weeker program, International Speakers Services, and the Host Family program.

**Academic Misconduct**

Except for one participant, all Saudi participants reported incidents of academic dishonesty as an acceptable norm for survival in their college endeavor. The academic dishonesty incidents they reported included copying from the internet, using other students’ papers as their own, and receiving help on assignments. These practices, although rated by American students as the least serious form of cheating and therefore the most frequently practiced (Levy & Rakovski, 2006), appeared to be a common
practice among the Saudi study participants. The concept of cheating appeared to be blurred when they reported these incidents. Their first argument mainly focused on the stress they suffer because of their inevitable failure without these forms of external help. As Nolan and Dai (1998) found, the stress they suffer from lest they lose their scholarship or return home without their respective degrees places them in the shift to materialism as suggested by Callahan (2004). Saudi participants reported increased incidents of academic misconduct which may be a direct result of the collective cultural framework they belong to (Triandis & Trafimow, 2001). This cultural framework directs them to value their social impression higher than maintaining their academic integrity (Wowra, 2007). Resonating with the arguments of Gallant (2008) and Rabi et al. (2006), Saudi participants reporting incidents of academic misconduct mentioned how grades are more important for them than learning and the precedence of obtaining the degree over acquiring the knowledge and skills matching to their respective degrees. Students in the study also reported how their advisors, instructors, and most important, the scholarship administrators put high values on grades and assignment scores which correspond with their reported tendency for cheating on assignments one way or another (Blum, 2009; Wowra, 2007). In this respect, instructors and college administrators need to exert intentional efforts in asserting the value of acquiring the cognitive skills and put more weight to the learning process as an essential component of the educational process (Gallant, 2008; Rabi et al., 2006). Another technique may target the Saudi students’ attitude toward the importance of learning and the acquisition of content knowledge and work skills during orientation programs and college success seminars, which may reduce their tendency to cheat on assignments.
The Saudi participants’ other justification of cheating was about the definition of cheating. Participants reported that as long as they do not take something that belongs to another student, they do not consider themselves cheating. Educating the Saudi students upon arrival about the different forms of academic dishonesty as detailed by the university honor code may establish the common concepts of what are the accepted forms of practice and what are not. Such delineation can be asserted through different techniques like writing an essay on the university honor code (Gomez, 2001) or signing an integrity contract (McCabe & Trevino, 2002). Another strategy can target raising the faculty awareness of the increased frequency of students’ academic misconduct (Hard et al., 2006). This will encourage faculty to articulate their policies toward academic misconduct and it stated consequences for students. Faculty awareness will also increase the number of faculty working against academic misconduct.

Support Systems

Support mechanisms for international students fall into three levels, classroom, departmental, and institutional. On the classroom level, the instructors’ understanding and encouragement together with the application of cooperative learning strategies have been found to help in easing their adjustment problems (Y. Wang, 2004). Typical of the case of Saudi students, adopting active learning strategies and cooperative classroom techniques showed progress in supporting their learning achievements. Departmental awareness of the problems facing international students is one of different levels of support mechanisms that have been known to help in the academic and social adaptation of international students (Jochems et al., 1996). Such departmental awareness can be achieved through initiating faculty dialogues about the case of these students and the best
instructional practices suitable for them. On the institutional level, a system of mentors providing intensive coaching for international students during their first year would be helpful together with programming that targets the inclusion of international students and improves their interpersonal relationships with domestic students (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Lacina, 2002; J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Therefore, increasing the effectiveness of orientation programs to address the variety of the aforementioned challenges together with introducing activities that pair Saudi students with other American students or provide them with the opportunity to interact with them in a relaxed environment can help these students cope with their new environment.

**Summary**

The presence of Saudi students at RSU presents a unique phenomenon with booming numbers. Currently at RSU, the number of Saudi students accounts for almost 18% of the total international student body present on campus with a sudden increase that escalated from 30 students in 2005 to 271 students in 2010 (Office of International Programs, 2011). Although this sudden increase did not allow RSU to plan in advance, both faculty members and administrators at various levels developed techniques to adjust procedures and performance to accommodate the new growing category. Therefore, an exploratory study of the case of Saudi students and its related constructs was conducted to raise the awareness about the characteristics and circumstances of Saudi students and assist an informed planning process to increase the retention, engagement, and success of these students.

Like other international students studying in the U.S., Saudi students leave the familiar surroundings of their country where they were successful students and become
immersed in a new culture, communicate in a new language, and study in a new academic system (Al-Nusair, 2000). This transition represents a great challenge for these students. Coupled with other differences in the American system and culture, Saudi students enter an unfamiliar college environment for which they may not be well prepared. Moreover, the different recruitment situation of these students, their economic status, their cultural background, and their academic readiness for studying at an American institution differentiated them from other international students (Redden, 2007). Funded by a governmental scholarship that aimed to quintuple the number of Saudi students studying at American colleges and universities, most of these students, enrolled in English Language Institutes affiliated with or annexed to their prospective universities due to a lack of the English language proficiency requirement (Bollag, 2006). Coming from a highly collectivist society to the highly individualistic American society, many of these students left their parents’ houses for the first time in their lives to study in the United States where they have to take the responsibility of their own educational and social choices (Redden, 2007; Triandis, 1994).

Therefore, the problem dealt with in this study is three faceted. The first is the transition phase of Saudi students as a different category of international students on campus and the challenges associated with it. The second is the influence of recruitment circumstances on these students self-efficacy perceptions about success and the motivational processes associated with their case. The third is the support systems and strategies that can help them achieve success, attain degrees, and obtain the expected college experience.
The study was based on three main theoretical frameworks. The first is developed from the psychology literature dealing with the self-efficacy of Saudi students at RSU. The second emerges from the literature of student services, higher education policies and accountability theories charted to help students overcome transition challenges, succeed in college, and obtain the maximum benefits of their college experience. The third builds upon existing literature that deals with international college students in general or one nationality of them in particular. It is also noteworthy to mention that there is a dearth in literature that deals with Saudi students studying in American colleges due to the novelty of their case.

The study followed the qualitative approach because of the complexity of the issue and the numerous variables that are in action in the phenomenon. Qualitative research tools including observations, document reviews and interviews were utilized in an effort to explain the intricate relationships that shape the situation of Saudi students at RSU (Gall et al., 2005). It endeavored to examine the impact of recruitment circumstances, administrative procedures, and academic practices on their performance in college. The self-efficacy beliefs of the Saudi students and the motivational processes they experience were examined as both agents and results of their educational experience at RSU. The main twelve key participants for this study were 6 male Saudi student, 4 female Saudi students, a faculty member who taught a group of Saudi students over the last two years, and a college administrator with a firsthand experience with Saudi students.

Analyzing the interviews of the study yielded insightful findings for higher education institutions. The self-efficacy perceptions are both influenced and influencing
aspects in the case of Saudi students. Constructs including conception of ability, social comparison influences, framing of feedback, perceived controllability, and causal structure influence the ability of Saudi students to choose and figure out options, to estimate predictive factors, and to reconsider their decisions based on the consequences of their choices (Bandura, 1997; P. H. Miller, 2002). Awareness of these constructs among college administrators, academic advisors, student affairs professionals, and faculty members may help them understand the motivational drives behind Saudi students’ attitudes, perceptions, and performance. When utilized purposefully, such factors will increase the academic and collegial achievement of these students.

Admission requirements and student life programming are two main issues that fall in the realm of university administrators and student affairs professionals. More selective admission requirements when dealing with international students as well as tailored international students orientation activities are suggested. Including a statement of purpose or a letter of intent in the admission process for Saudi students will help them set goals for their studies. Early educational practices that target the activation of their analytical thinking skills during orientation or initial advising meetings should target guiding their goal setting and classroom interaction techniques and group dynamics. The findings also suggested various techniques for academic departments and instructors. Academic instructors may try to modify their instructional techniques, handling of group and pair work, and assessment strategies to include the need of these students. Frequent feedback helped Saudi students understand the expected academic performance of scholarly writing, and proper way of submitting assignments, and handle course and
classroom projects. Maximizing the role of cooperative and collaborative learning was also highlighted as among the most beneficial techniques for Saudi students.

**Future Research**

Previous studies, which dealt with self-efficacy beliefs, success perceptions, or cultural barriers of foreign students usually focused on international students as a group (Adams, 2004; Constantine et al., 2004; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Sherer & Adams, 1983). Although the results of these studies cannot be undermined, the case of the noticeable increase of Saudi students in the United States deserved a more focused attention.

The current study showed that, self-efficacy, success perceptions, and cultural aspects as relevant constructs of student academic achievement, can be utilized to increase the performance level of Saudi students at the American institution. Such utilization can be carried out through orientation programs, college success seminars, freshman year programs, student life planned activities, and multicultural events. An informed planning of these activities should guide the design of the aforementioned activities. They should also be based on engaging activities and socializing opportunities. Engaging Saudi students in planning such activities would maximize the benefits. Interactive and a collaborative learning experiences coupled with periodic evaluations against well-articulated objectives can increase their academic persistence especially when coupled with an academic awareness of their case.

The present study had three limitations that restricted its findings. First: the small sample size of key participants limited the degree of generalization of the findings. Second, the geographic location of RSU may have had its influence on the case. In other
words, Saudi students may behave, perform, and react differently if they are at an
institute located on a coastal state where the student body is usually more diverse.
Third, the qualitative approach, though revealing in-depth rich aspects of the case, is very
specific to the case studied and cannot be utilized to speak about the whole group of the
Saudi students.

Future studies may target a larger sample size of Saudi students to produce more
inclusive results. A quantitative approach may be a suitable technique to studying the
characteristics of a larger number of Saudi students. A collaborative multi institutional
study would reveal valuable findings about Saudi students as a fast growing group on
American campuses.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Date: June 30, 2008

To: Sandra Coyner
Educational Foundations and Leadership
The University of Akron
Akron, Ohio 44325-4208

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20000615
“Measures of an American University to Accommodate Saudi Students: Challenges and Opportunities”

Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects for the referenced project. Your application was approved on June 30, 2008. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☐ Exemption 2: Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3: Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4: Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5: Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6: Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

☐ Approved consent form/s enclosed

Cc: A.H. Razek - Co PI
Cc: Rosalie Hall - IRB Chair

Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Akron, OH 44325-2102
330-972-7600 • 330-972-0281 Fax

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APPENDIX B

SAUDI STUDENT STUDY INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in a study being conducted by Dr. Sandra Coyner, Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership and Abdel Nasser Abdel Razek, a doctoral student. The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges facing Saudi students while studying at Riverside State University and the University measures taken to accommodate them.

Procedures

Your participation in this study will include sitting for half an hour for an interview. After reading the consent form and being interviewed by the researchers, you may be conducted to clarify some points that have arisen during the interview.

Risks

No risks are involved with this study.

Benefits

Individual participants will not receive direct benefits from participation. However, the information gathered from the study will be used to inform and enhance future practice and research as well.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants may choose to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Refusal to participate or withdrawing from the study at any time is an option that will not impact the participants by any means.

Anonymous Data Collection

Your identifying information will not be disclosed to anyone other than the researchers, Dr. Sandra Coyner and Abdel Nasser Abdel Razek. The study findings will be reported using a pseudo name list to protect your identity.

Confidentiality of Records
To maintain confidentiality, the data will be kept in Zook Hall 301 in the locked office of Dr. Sandra Coyner until the completion of the research. Only Dr. Sandra Coyner and Abdel Nasser Abdel Razek will have access to these data which will be shredded upon the completion of this study.

Who to Contact with Questions

If you have questions about this study or the procedures, you may contact the researchers, Dr. Sandra Coyner (scoyner@uakron.edu) and Abdel Nasser Abdel Razek (aaa44@uakron.edu), at Riverside State University School Of Education, (330) 972-7300.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Riverside State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666 or 1-888-232-8790.

Acceptance

I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form for future reference.
APPENDIX C

SAUDI STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Institution: Riverside State University
Interviewee (Title and Name):
Interviewer:
Topics Discussed:
  Background
  Impressions
  Perceptions of Abilities (Academic and Social)
  Interaction with American students
  Needs
  Expected Roles of Stakeholders
Other Topics Discussed:
Documents Obtained:
Post Interview Comments or Leads:

________________________________________________________________

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been studying at Riverside State University?
2. What is your grade level?
3. When did you apply for studying in the U. S., what was the process that you followed?
4. What documents were needed? What GPA / Grades were required for you to qualify?
5. When you first arrived in Akron, who helped you with the settling in process? Housing, transportation, food, utilities and appliances?
6. Did you get any help from the University concerning these things? How?
7. Do you have any dietary restrictions? Do you think these restrictions are known to Riverside State University’s administration?
8. How did you feel in your first week of classes?
9. To what level did you feel comfortable in the classroom with other American students?
10. Did you have any concerns in regard to gender, religion or politics?
    Probe: If yes, what were they?
11. How do you think Riverside State University can accommodate you? In other words, what were some activities that are targeting you as Saudi to be involved in?

12. How many times were you invited either personally, verbally or electronically to participate in a university event?

13. How many times did you participate in such events? What were these events? What prevented you from participating in the other events?

14. Did you feel that the instructors are aware of your needs as a Saudi student? How?

15. How much help did you get from your advisor? Do you think it was sufficient? If “No”, What else did you need?

16. Did you have enough opportunity in the classes to share your experiences and ideas? If “No”, How can this be made possible?

17. Did you have any gender issues when dealing with American students? If “Yes”, What were they?

18. On a scale from one to 10 where do you rate your level of preparation for studying in an American university?

19. What was needed to raise that level?

20. Do you think Riverside State University has a role to perform to accommodate your presence on campus? What would it be?

21. Considering the roles of Saudi Government, U.S. Embassy, Saudi Educational Consulate, Riverside State University, or Saudi students, What else can be done to make your experience at Riverside State University more beneficial?

22. In your opinion, which is better; grouping Saudi students in same-gender groups or in different-gender groups? Why?

23. Do you think professors and instructors can discuss all topics freely with Saudi students? Are there any sensitive topics that you would recommend careful handling while Saudi students are in class?

24. To what level are Saudi students acculturated to the general American lifestyle and classroom mechanisms? Do they mix well with American students?
   Probe: Can you explain why?

25. What would make their acculturation faster and easier?
APPENDIX D

ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Institution: Riverside State University
Interviewee (Title and Name):
Interviewer:
Topics Discussed:
  - Interviewee Background
  - Interviewee Observations about international students
  - Observed interaction among Saudi students and American students
  - Recommendations
Other Topics Discussed:
Documents Obtained:
Post Interview Comments or Leads:

________________________________________________________________

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been involved with international programs?
2. When did Saudi students become visible on campus to the degree that they would require special attention?
3. Can you recollect how was your impression in the first time you interacted with Saudi students?
4. What were the major differences that you noticed between this/these student(s) and other international students?
5. Do you think these differences were forming challenges for their performance? How?
6. What were the major issues that you thought were needed for an effective learning experience for these students?
7. How do you rate the communication pattern between them and the other American students?
8. Did any department or instructor report to you about the performance level of these students?
   a. If yes, How well did they do in their papers, projects, tests and quizzes?
   b. How well did they function in groups and pairs?
9. Did you notice any gender issues? What were they?
10. Do you think these students represent a special case different from other international students? Why?
11. In your opinion, which is better; grouping Saudi students in same-gender groups or in heterogeneous groups? Why? (If yes) Is it feasible?
12. Do you think professors and instructors can discuss all topics freely with Saudi students? Are there any sensitive topics that you would recommend careful handling while they are in class?
13. To what level are Saudi students acculturated to the general American lifestyle and classroom mechanisms? Do they mix well with American students?
14. What would make their acculturation faster and easier?
15. Did you know of any campus activities or events that these students are involved in? What were they?
16. Do you think the Saudi Cultural and Educational Bureau have a role to play in supporting Saudi students?
   Probe: How?
17. To what degree does Riverside State University work closely with that Bureau?
   Probe: What are some examples of such collaboration?
18. What information do you think administrators who are dealing with Saudi students need to consider?
APPENDIX E

PROFESSOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Institution: Riverside State University
Interviewee (Title and Name):
Interviewer:
Topics Discussed:
  Interviewee Background
  Observed academic performance of Saudi students
  Observed interaction among Saudi students and American students
  Recommendations
Other Topics Discussed:
Documents Obtained:
Post Interview Comments or Leads:

 Interview Questions

 1. How long have you been teaching Saudi students?
 2. Can you recollect how was your impression in the first class you interacted with a Saudi student(s)?
 3. Did you notice any difference between Saudi students and other international students?
    Probe: What were the major differences?
 4. Do you think these differences were forming challenges for his/her/their performance? How?
 5. How many Saudi students did you have in your classes in the last semester?
 6. What were the major issues that you thought were needed for an effective learning experience for this/these student(s)?
 7. How do you rate the communication pattern between him/her/them and the other American students?
 8. How well did these students do in their oral and in-class activities? Can you describe their performance?
 9. How well did they do in their papers and projects?
10. How about their performance on tests and quizzes?
11. How well did they function in groups and pairs?
12. Did you notice any gender issues?
   Probe: What were they?
13. During your classes, do you assign groups or let students choose their group members?
14. In your opinion, which is better: grouping Saudi students in same-gender groups or in heterogeneous groups? Why? (If yes) Is it feasible?
15. Were you able to discuss all topics freely with Saudi students? Was there any topic that you felt uncomfortable teaching while they are in class?
16. To what level were Saudi students in your class acculturated to the general American lifestyle and classroom mechanisms?
   Probe: Can you explain more?
17. In your opinion, what would make their acculturation faster and easier?
18. Did you know of any campus activities or events that these students are involved in?
   Probe: What were they?
19. How were the patterns of interaction between these students and other American students in class?
   Probe: Were there any gender related issues?
20. What information do you think faculty members who are teaching Saudi students should consider?