PORTS OF ENTRY:
AN EXPLORATION OF INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE SOJOURNERS’
FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

by

Brad L. Van Den Elzen, M.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:
Professor Ada Demb, Adviser
Professor Leonard Baird
Professor Tatiana Suspitsyna

Approved by:

___________________________________
Adviser
College of Education and Human Ecology
ABSTRACT

A cohort of ten first-year international undergraduate student sojourners was studied during the members’ first year of enrollment at a major American research institution with an eye toward identifying themes in the profiled sojourners’ pre-arrival choice processes and post-arrival adjustment experiences. This phenomenological study sought to answer, in detail, a deceptively simple research question: what does it mean to be an new international undergraduate sojourner on an American campus? Areas of inquiry included the processes by which the participants and their families took the decision to pursue undergraduate study in the United States; the participants’ expectations surrounding their sojourns as compared to their actual experiences during their first year; and the participants’ expectations and experiences in developing friendships with fellow sojourners and members of the host culture. Reflexive photography was utilized as a means of encouraging the participants to render their experiences with greater nuance. Major findings include the early ages at which decisions to become student sojourners were taken; the degree to which undergraduate sojourning is a norm among the participants and their home country peer groups; commonalities in rationales for undergraduate sojourning; and the role of familial affluence in taking the decision to sojourn. Detailed discussions of phenomenology and what van Manen (1997) labels “human sciences” research are presented in the course of this qualitative study.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to Debra and Owen
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere appreciation to my doctoral advisor, Dr. Ada Demb, whose steady guidance and enthusiastic support never waned. I have benefited enormously from her thoughtful criticism, advice, and mentoring. Thanks, as well, to dissertation committee members Drs. Leonard Baird and Tatiana Suspitsyna for their insight, encouragement, and patience. Dr. Susan Jones, now at the University of Maryland – College Park, was before her departure from OSU a member of my dissertation committee. Her critiques and support were critical during this study’s early stages.

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Fellow doctoral students Jen Gilbride-Brown, Beth Heiser, Dr. Tammy Maltzan, and Katherine Titus-Becker each pushed me in her own unique way towards greater thoughtfulness and professionalism. I cherish our collaborations & friendships.

Naturally, none of the above should be held in any way accountable for the text's deficiencies, which are wholly my responsibility.
VITA

September 7, 1971  Born – Neenah, Wisconsin

1993  B.A. Journalism, English and History
       University of Wisconsin – Madison

1994-1995  Instructor
       Central South University of Technology
       Changsha, Hunan
       People’s Republic of China

1996-1998  Graduate Teaching Assistant
       Department of English
       Oklahoma State University

1998-2001  Instructor
       American Language Program
       The Ohio State University

1999  M.A. Teaching English as a Second Language
       Oklahoma State University

2001-2005  Graduate Administrative Associate
       American Language Program
       The Ohio State University

2003-2005  Graduate Teaching Assistant
       Educational Policy and Leadership
       The Ohio State University

2005-present  Director
       Foreign Student & English as a Second Language Programs
       University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Educational Policy and Leadership
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Those who work with foreign students have many shared tales to tell for the experience. It is not uncommon for newly-arrived non-native English speakers—particularly those from Asia—to inquire as to how they might Anglicize their names. This question puts the English-speaking interlocutor in a difficult position. We might ask ourselves whether the notion of changing one’s name is appropriate (after all, would we consider doing so if the roles were reversed?); whether the name we might recommend should be homonymic, a translation of student’s name in his or her native language, or simply pulled out of a hat; and, perhaps most importantly, what features of the host environment encourage foreign students to contemplate changing something as fundamental as their names in the first place?

Not long ago I was contacted by a former student then beginning his third year of undergraduate study. He and I had worked together during the course of his pre-matriculation English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) studies and I had no reason to doubt his future success in degree-track coursework. In the intervening years since he left the ESL program, he and I had had only glancing contact. I use the term “glancing” intentionally, for we had had a number of chance meetings at a restaurant near campus;
during these encounters we exchanged pleasantries, collected our meals, and went our respective ways. Ours was, from my perspective, an unexceptional teacher-student relationship—pleasant and productive while it lasted, but not particularly noteworthy in any other respect.

Thus I was caught up short by his question of last autumn: would I “give” him an English name? He spoke of his continued frustration with classmates’ and instructors’ unwillingness to learn and use his given name (which, it should be noted, is neither difficult to read nor pronounce) and was turning to, as he put it, someone he “really trusted” and “felt very close to” for assistance. As I listened to him describe the situation, I was struck by a painful realization: this student had been at an American institution for three years and had somehow come to the conclusion that he had no one else to whom he might appeal with this most personal of requests. This incident proved to be the “tipping point” (Gladwell, 2002) in my desire to undertake this study, for it brought into sharp relief a number of concerns I had long harbored regarding the place of foreign students in American institutions of higher education.

**Foreign Students in American Colleges and Universities – An Overview:**

Institute for International Education data (2002) reveal that the number of international students and scholars in the U.S. during academic year 2002 increased 6.4% from 2001, to a total of nearly 600,000 enrollees. While these students arrived from over 130 nations, some 44% of them emerged from just five countries: India, China, South
Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.\(^1\) Nationwide, foreign students accounted for 4% of total enrollees across institutional types, averaging 1.8% of the student body in associate’s degree granting institutions, 2.8% of those at four-year institutions, and 13.7% of enrollees in graduate institutions.

With a foreign student population of over 4,300, The Ohio State University (OSU) ranked seventh nationally in international enrollees during academic year 2002 (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2002). That some 9% of OSU’s students arrive from overseas suggests that the university might offer a rich environment in which to develop a more nuanced understanding of foreign students’ adjustment experiences. Questions as to foreign students’ expectations for and experiences during their U.S. sojourns and American stakeholders’ perceptions thereof—topics heretofore steeped in anecdote (Hayward, 2000)—might be explored systematically in this setting.

**Focus of Inquiry**

This study will consider the first-year adjustment experiences of international undergraduates at a major American research university. It will be pursued in the light of previous research undertaken on majority and historically-underrepresented student populations’ college-going/first-year adjustment experiences as well as in deference to what limited literature and commentary exists regarding international undergraduate adjustment.

Over the last three decades, the fundamental role social interaction plays in contributing to students’ success in college has received considerable attention. Much of

\(^1\) These “top five” sending countries are listed in decreasing order by number of students sent.
this work has sought to differentiate the experiences of various student constituencies, including\(^2\): traditional-age majority students (Astin, 1977, 1997; King & Kitchener, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Perry, 1970, 1999); women (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001; African-Americans (Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995); Latinos (Constantine, Robinson, & Wilton, 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Laden, 1999) Asian-Americans (McEwen, 2002; Suzuki, 2002); and gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered (Connolly, 1999; Evans, 2000; Evans & Wall, 1991; Wall & Evans, 1999). Fewer such studies have focused on the experiences of international students. Indeed, the American Council on Education recently opined that “International education at U.S. colleges and universities is a poorly documented phenomenon” (Hayward, 2000, p. 4). One goal of this study is to offer a measured response to this gap in the literature through a consideration of the unique experiences of newly enrolled international undergraduates at a major American research university.

A second, albeit related, line of inquiry emerges from the notion that the presence of a diverse student body benefits college and university learning environments, both in terms of students’ intellectual growth and lasting intercultural sensitivity (Chang, 1999; Hurtado, 1999; Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund, & Parente, 2001). The recent Supreme Court decisions in *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger* reaffirmed colleges’ and universities’ interests in and rights to purposefully shape multicultural campus communities, goals first codified in the 1978 *Bakke* decision. Writing for the majority in the 2003 *Grutter* decision, Justice O’Connor noted, “numerous studies show

\(^2\) Works cited merely as representative of various research foci. By no means is this list definitive.

Generally absent from campus diversity discussions is the role international students logically play in broadening the college and university environments. If American institutions desire to demonstrate equity in their commitment to the goal of creating campus environments in which cross-cultural learning and understanding is fostered—and inclusive of all community members—it follows that no student constituency should be disregarded. Contemplating the experiences of international enrollees “on the ground” might very well yield insights into the efficacy of campus-based diversity efforts presently in place and the degree to which the intended benefits of the presence of a diverse student population are shared across all campus constituencies.

Finally, common themes running through U.S. international education groups’ commentary include a number of non-academic benefits said to flow from the presence of international students in American institutions of higher education. These include: the significant economic impact of international students’ expenditures, estimated $12 billion annually (Oaks, 2002); the important instructional roles many international students assume in the course of their studies (typically as graduate teaching assistants in fields where there is a shortage of qualified domestic enrollees); and long-term foreign policy benefits:

The millions of people who have studied in the United States over the years constitute a remarkable reservoir of goodwill for our country, perhaps our most underrated foreign policy asset. To educate international
students is to have an opportunity to shape the future leaders who will
guide the political and economic development of their countries. Such
students gain an in-depth exposure to American values and to our
successful multicultural democracy, and they take those values back home
to support democracy and market economies (NAFSA: Association of
International Educators & Alliance for International Educational and
Cultural Exchange, 2003, p. 4)

These co-curricular benefits, taken cumulatively and in concert with the previously
discussed contentions regarding diversity and intellectual development, construct a
unique set of explicit and tacit expectations for foreign students and the multifaceted
role(s) they are to play—wittingly or unwittingly—within American higher education.
The degree to which foreign students are aware of these expectations before they arrive,
to say nothing of the processes by which they develop awareness of and begin to respond
to these expectations, are topics yet to be addressed sufficiently in the research literature.
This area thus constitutes a third thread to be followed in the course of this study.

Research Question

This phenomenological study opens with the following broadly-stated research
question: how do the experiences of first-year international undergraduates align with
their expectations regarding interactions with other members of the campus community?
In the course of its longitudinal exploration, the study will consider some of the
commonly-held assumptions regarding the college-going expectations and adjustment
experiences of foreign students against the backdrop of the profiled individuals’
experiences. These efforts will center on identifying points of convergence and divergence between the profiled individuals’ anticipated and actual adjustment experiences. Of particular interest is the nature of internationals’ interactions with co-cultural\(^3\) and American students. Related sub-questions to be addressed in the research include: how do internationals situate themselves as members of the campus community; and how do they perceive themselves as “situated” by other community members?

**Methodology**

As a researcher and practitioner, I am committed a constructivist epistemology. That is, knowledge as I see it is an ever-shifting product of collaboration. My attempts to understand the world around me place an emphasis on individual experience while seeking, validating, and reconstructing those aspects of experience which are shared (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Where interpretivists must at some point “quit the field” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 194), and deconstructivists might rather deny the existence of the field in the first place (Sipe & Constable, 1996), constructivists openly situate themselves as *in* and *part of* the field. We seek meaningful interactions with our research participants\(^4\) and in so doing reveal a commitment to community building that for me is why we researchers do what we do in the first place. Not unlike many of my peers, I pursue knowledge and understanding because I believe in its transformative power for others and myself. What’s more, like others whose life work is education, I believe that knowledge and understanding are the basis of a meaningful existence.

---

\(^3\) That is to say, compatriots.

\(^4\) Those individuals who are elsewhere designated as “research subjects.” Within this document the terms “participants” and “informants” will be used interchangeably.
Longitudinal data regarding the adjustment expectations and experiences of the research participants during their first year of college study were collected in a series of three interviews over the course of their first year of enrollment. In addition, research participants were encouraged to keep and share with the me a photographic record of their first-year experiences. The principles of phenomenological research are presented below in Chapter Three along with a detailed discussion of this study’s research methods.

**Significance of Study**

A nuanced appreciation for the experiences of newly-arrived international undergraduates on campus may very well help us to better serve the needs of this community while simultaneously benefiting other members of the campus community. An under-researched population upon whom many expectations have been foisted, international students need to be understood and incorporated if, indeed, our goal as educators is to seek equity in our work with all student constituencies.

It would be disingenuous to claim that this study was undertaken absent some reflection on the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 and their aftermath. It is something of a tautology for researchers to claim that their areas of inquiry are in flux, but in the case of the debates swirling around international education in the United States since autumn 2001, the use of the term ‘flux’ as a descriptor is decidedly apt, perhaps even understated. Seeking, as this study does, to capture the sentiments of a selection of individuals whose experiences are inextricably linked to these sometimes esoteric debates represents a grounded discussion. Owing to its ‘grounded’ perspective, this study aims to
suggest a means of reformulating the goals and practices of international education in today’s increasingly dynamic and alarming global environment.

**Author’s Relationship with Topic and Study Participants**

My work to date has been spent in service of international students seeking entry into post-secondary study. As an ESL instructor, I have had the opportunity to consult with internationals frequently regarding their experiences as students. My concern is that members of this population are poorly integrated into the campus community—for reasons both internal to the individuals themselves and external in terms of community acceptance (or lack thereof) of them—which might be taken as a severe critique of institutions that claim the importance of diversity, but instead host segregated student bodies. My connection to the population takes a number of forms: (1) a sympathetic learner who from personal experience residing abroad understands the importance of support in cross-cultural learning and living; (2) an ESL professional privy to disciplinary norms regarding our international student charges; and (3) a would-be scholar/practitioner in the area of international education in U.S. post-secondary institutions.

It goes without saying that I am inscribed by the dominant—that is to say, positivist assumptions and methodologies. Nevertheless, positivist certainties have always rung a bit hollow when brought to bear on explorations of human behavior. The great promise of post-positivist research is that, in moving beyond scientism’s superficialities, attempts to understand are openly identified for what they are: negotiated realities in which the researcher is inextricably linked to those involved with the research.
Whereas the positivists would have us “do” research “on” our subjects, post-positivists are not afraid to get their hands dirty. Much positivist work is reportage: isolating, fetishizing, and Othering the ‘object(s)’ of its scrutiny. This is unacceptable given what I would assert is the ultimate goal of education—to collaborate with individuals so to assist them to define and achieve their—and our—human potential.

**Plan of the Study**

Moustakas (1994) identifies seven stages common to phenomenological studies:

1) Discovering a topic and question rooted in autobiographical meanings and values, as well as involving social meanings of significance;

2) Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature;

3) Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate informants;

4) Providing co-participants with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement that includes obtaining informed consent, insuring confidentiality, and delineating the responsibilities of the primary researcher and research participant, consistent with ethical principles of research;

5) Developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process;

6) Conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and question;
7) Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual textural and structural descriptions, a composite textural description, a composite structural description, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences (pp. 103-104).

This chapter has sought to begin the process of satisfying the first of these requirements. Chapter Two, the Review of Literature, addresses the second. Items three, four, and five are treated in Chapter Three, Methodology. Finally, Chapter Four, Data Analysis, and Chapter Five, the Review of Findings, take up items six and seven.

**Terminology**

The following terms are defined accordingly within the context of this study:

*Adaptation* The process through which a sojourner encounters cultural barriers embedded in a new setting and works his or her way through resultant misunderstandings. Successful adaptation allows for the emergence of differential, contextualized, and situational skills appropriate to the host environment. This term is used interchangeably with *adjustment* in this document.

*Assimilation* The process by which individuals shed, or are required to shed, their original cultural identities to take on the norms and attributes of another culture. Distinguished from adaptation and adjustment on the basis of agency and totality (see Chapter 2).

*Co-culturals* Sojourners and others who share cultural backgrounds.
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<td><em>Co-nationals</em></td>
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<td><em>Host-nationals</em></td>
<td>U.S. citizens</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Non-compatriots</em></td>
<td>Fellow sojourners who share neither cultural nor national backgrounds.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Sojourners</em></td>
<td>Foreign nationals temporarily residing in the United States while pursuing post-secondary education.</td>
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CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter distinguishes between two prominent areas in the literature on research regarding college students. The first of these is grouped under a broad umbrella as *developmentalist* and includes the work of such notables as Chickering, Perry, Kohlberg, King, and Kitchener. Common themes running through developmentalist theories are discussed briefly for the purposes of illuminating the significant differences between these perspectives and those present in the second *college impact* strand. As described below, the latter perspective emerged through the work of Alexander Astin (1977; 1984; 1997), Vincent Tinto (1987; 1993), and George Kuh (1991) whose efforts are presented at some length. Next, the review delves into a consideration of more recent variations on the college impact literature with an eye to studies regarding first-year undergraduate students’ adjustment experiences. The purpose of this exploration is to situate this study in the broader research continuum of impact studies.

Two Generations of Research Regarding College Students

The rapid expansion of post-secondary education in America during the twentieth century was nothing short of remarkable. Indeed, the systemization of state college networks, the emergence of technical and community colleges, the efforts to increase
institutional access to a broader spectrum of would-be students, and the dizzying increase in spending for higher education and scientific research on the part of the federal and state governments during second and third quarters of the century led one respected commentator to label this period the “Golden Age” of American colleges and universities (Kerr, 2001). In the autumn of 1970 a significant threshold was crossed in the United States when, for the first time, some 50% of that year’s high school graduates enrolled in post-secondary institutions, up from 30% of the graduating cohort just a generation earlier (Altbach, 1999). This trend has not abated: from 1970 to the present, no fewer than 50% of any given year’s cohort of high school graduates have enrolled in post-secondary institutions (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2002). Considered from a different perspective, in 1950 a mere 6.2% of American adults over the age of 25 held baccalaureate degrees or greater; by 2002 this figure had risen to 26.7% of the over-25 population (United States Census Bureau, 2002). It should come as no surprise that as the number college students increased, so too did research concerning them.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) identify two broad avenues of research on college students, which they characterize as: (a) developmentalist and (b) college-impact models. Developmental theorists include Chickering (1969; 1993), Perry (1970; 1999), Kohlberg (1981; 1984), and King & Kitchener (1994) among others. While they carefully note that significant variations are present in these theorists’ models, Pascarella and Terenzini derive a series of commonalities, including: (1) the use of stages to describe developmental processes; (2) the contention that development is marked by an increasing awareness of those around us and our obligations and responsibilities toward them; and
the emergence of increasing personal autonomy and intellectual complexity as one moves through the models’ respective continua. In addition, these theories assert that the developmental process is cumulative in nature: movement across stages is encouraged by a recognition of the surrounding complexity and the degree of cognitive and emotional preparation to take up the challenge of making meaning of this complexity. Finally, these models are held to be universally applicable, i.e., everyone is expected to move through similar developmental processes, though variations in rate and the penultimate developmental stage one reaches are individual. 

College students have been a focus of developmental theorists for a variety of reasons, some decidedly more pragmatic than others. As a group, the developmental models tend to situate the later years of adolescence as a particularly critical period along the developmental continuum. Everyone who has made the journey recognizes that transitioning into adulthood presents significant intellectual and emotional challenges. It follows that the means used to negotiate this process makes this period an especially fertile time for developmentalists’ explorations. On a more pragmatic level, traditional college students are a captive population of potential research subjects who just happen to be young adults experiencing unprecedented degrees of autonomy in the face weighty and decidedly adult decisions. This is the most convenient of convenience samples—an observation which has brought into question the developmental models’ claims of universal applicability (Gilligan, 1993; Helms, 1990; Lagemann, 2002; McEwen, 2003).

5 Other developmentalist models, including those proposed by Cross and Helms, challenge earlier models’ universalistic claims.
While developmental models originate from psychological research traditions, college impact models emerge from sociological roots. This is a fundamental distinction. Owing to their sociological bases, impact studies actively incorporate environmental variables into their considerations of students’ experiences, marking a significant contrast to the individualized foci of the developmentalist perspectives. The inclusion of individual-environment interactions in impact models broadens their purview:

Institutional structures, policies, programs, and services (whether academic or nonacademic), as well as the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the people who occupy (and to some extent define) institutional environments, are all seen as potential sources of influence in students’ cognitive and affective changes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 57).

Studies which seek to situate students as members of dynamic institutional communities and place a particular emphasis on the interactions which take place in these environments originate from college impact theories. Before locating this study in that tradition, a detailed review of seminal college impact models is warranted.

A distillation of longitudinal data collected from 200,000 two- and four-year college students between 1961 and 1974, Astin’s *Four Critical Years* (1977), is without question the classic example of college impact studies. Under the auspices of the Cooperative Institutional Research Forum (CIRP), Astin and his collaborators collected data from first-year and graduating students at more than 300 post-secondary institutions nationwide. The questionnaires completed by first-year students contained two item types: (1) what Astin referred to as those comprising “pretests on possible outcome
measures;” and (2) questions tapping demographic information, including: age; race; educational background; and other descriptive elements (p. 15). Topics queried under the heading of outcome measures included: respondents’ attitudes, beliefs, self-concepts, patterns of behavior, and academic achievement, among others. Multiple regression analyses were conducted on both the pre- and post-test data. With the former, Astin’s goal was to obtain a predicted score for the weight of the anticipated outcome in question. With the latter, predicted and actual outcome measures were compared by institution-type, with the goal of determining whether outcomes varied by institutional environment.

Astin’s deceptively simple conclusion—that the degree to which students are involved in their campus communities is positively correlated with their prospects for successfully completing their undergraduate degrees—provides a clear rationale for the creation and support of inclusive campus environments which encourage the active participation on the part of all students. Patterns of successful student involvement, according to Astin, take a variety of forms, three of which show particular promise in support of degree completion. The first of these patterns is interpersonal involvement, evidenced by those students who regularly partake of opportunities to interact with their peers and faculty members. A second group, those Astin refers to as academically-involved students, are also more likely to complete college, though members of this group report being isolated from their peers. Finally, those involved with varsity athletics experience isolation akin to that reported by their academically-involved peers, but nevertheless tend to persist to degree completion at higher rates than non-athletes. While
intrigued by these conclusions, commentators have chided Astin for vagueness in the theoretical basis of his work (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Weick (1995) pithily declares that good theory “explains, predicts, and delights” (p. 563). While prudence suggests leaving judgments as to the last of these requirements to individual predilection, explanatory and/or predictive power are coins of the realm in discussions regarding the reciprocity between theory and research (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Sutton & Staw, 1995). Thomas (2001) captures this interactive relationship when he defines theory as, “a proposal about (a) which components or variables are important for understanding…a phenomenon…and (b) how those components interact to account for why the phenomenon turns out as it does” (p. 1). The former of these attributes alludes to theories’ predictive features, while the latter captures their explanatory potential.

Within the college impact literature, Tinto’s (1987; 1993) work is often contrasted with Astin’s owing to its more robust theoretical underpinnings. As its name implies, Tinto’s student departure model offers a glimpse into the processes by which individuals reach the decision to end their studies before completing a degree. The model falls into the college impact genre, seeking as it does to account not only for the individual characteristics of departing students but also for the attributes of college environments which either support or hinder student persistence. Furthermore, the model takes into account pre-college factors and post-admission interactions between students and the campus environment. These interactions, Tinto contends, eventually culminate in a student’s decision to stay or go. It is this longitudinal perspective which broadens the
utility of Tinto’s theory—for others have parsed the model in an effort to identify both
critical moments in students’ experiences (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora & Cabrera,
1996) and structural features in institutional environments (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-
Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Watson, Terrell, Wright, & Associates, 2002; Willie, 2003)
which impede and/or facilitate student success.

The theoretical means by which Tinto captures the interaction of individuals and
their environments results from a close reading of Dutch anthropologist Arnold Van
Gennep’s work on rites of passage in tribal societies. Van Gennep (1960) held that
individuals’ movements across life’s stages (from adolescence to adulthood, for instance)
are marked by a three-stage sequence of positions vis-à-vis community memberships.
The first of these stages Van Gennep labeled separation, wherein the individual in
question restricts his or her interactions with earlier associates. By so doing, he or she
initiates the process of removing him- or herself from membership in this group.
Transition, the second stage, is marked by feelings of weakness and uncertainty. The
individual in this stage finds him- or herself between two communities—separated from
earlier connections but as of yet not sufficiently knowledgeable to enter into full
membership within the new, target community. The final stage, incorporation, is marked
by the individual’s competence with and adoption of the norms and behavioral patterns of
the community which he or she has newly entered.

Lest his reading of students’ movements from one community (pre-college) to
another (within-college) be viewed as too narrowly bounded, Tinto shies from the use of
the term “integration” to describe this process. Doing so allows him to avoid reducing
campus milieus to single-culture entities demanding of conformity. Tinto instead deploys a notion of *community membership* to acknowledge the presence of numerous campus subcultures as well as to afford transitioning individuals any number of options as to the groups with which they might align themselves. The processes by which students leave behind earlier associations, search for and establish connections in the newly-encountered college environment, and ultimately partake of membership in newfound groups are in many ways, according to Tinto, akin to the critical ritualistic passages described by Van Gennep.

Tinto also utilizes Durkheim’s (1897/1951) study of suicide in developing his college student departure model. He focuses in particular on Durkheim’s notion of *egoistic suicide* in attempting to identify structural features of college environments which encourage or fail to discourage students from departing prematurely. Briefly, Durkheim posited four types of suicide: fatalistic, anomic, altruistic, and egoistic. Fatalistic suicides are those who simply see no alternative in the face of oppression and/or excessive regulation. A society experiencing a period of authoritarian rule is likely, according to Durkheim, to witness increased rates of fatalistic suicide. Anomic suicides, in contrast, occur during periods of societal and/or regulatory breakdown. Just as interpersonal norms collapse in such circumstances, so too do intrapersonal ones; individuals experiencing extreme anomie may therefore elect to remove themselves from having to face this loss of one’s sense of self. Altruistic suicide differs from fatalistic and anomic suicide in that it emerges not from hopelessness, but rather from a curious

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6 Jones (1986) was also consulted in preparing this brief overview of Durkheim.
blending of hope and self-sacrifice. Committing suicide in the desire for reconciliation with a recently-deceased loved one is an example of altruistic suicide. Durkheim’s contention is that these suicides come to view life as a hurdle to some meaningful post-mortem duty, role, or event and therefore choose to hasten the inevitable. A number of societies place a high ritualistic value on this brand of altruistic behavior.

Egoistic suicide may be attributed to an individual’s loss of a sense of community. Durkheim held that religion, family, and even active political affiliation were traditional bulwarks against what he characterized as the destructive excesses of individualism. Modernity, Durkheim contended, witnessed the diminution of these (and other) institutions, consequently weakening societal supports. It is one’s membership in a community (or communities) that Durkheim suggests is fundamental to individuals’ *raisons d’être*. In casting off tradition’s vestiges, societies likewise dispense with normative protections against and sanctions regarding suicidal behavior. Confronted by the isolation inherent to extreme individualism (egoism), suicide becomes an increasingly plausible response.

It bears repeating that Durkheim was not looking to describe individual instances of suicide, but rather seeking to elaborate the societal features which might increase rates of suicide in comparison to other societies. This distinction—between a focus on individuals and a focus on social milieu—Tinto carries forth in his work:

Specifically, one has to inquire as to the social and intellectual character of an institution and the student and faculty communities that comprise it and the mechanisms which enable individuals to become integrated as
competent members of those communities. As in the case of societies, one would expect institutions with low rates of departure to be those which are able to more fully integrate their students into their social and intellectual life (p. 104).

Tinto asserts that voluntary college departure decisions may be likened to Durkheim’s egoistic suicides: students who fail to achieve a sense of fit with at least one community within the campus milieu will find it increasingly difficult, perhaps even meaningless, to attempt to ‘go it alone.’ Attrition, says Tinto, becomes an inevitability: “some form of integration—that is, some type of social and/or intellectual membership in at least one college community—is a minimum condition for continued persistence” (p. 121). It follows that institutions are responsible for fostering environments which support a wealth of opportunities for students to interact meaningfully with those around them, including faculty, administrators, staff, and fellow students. Other researchers have attempted to capture qualities of institutions that have accepted this charge. We turn to a consideration of this work next.

Kuh et al. (1991) utilized interviews, document analyses and quasi-ethnographic observations to explore the common and unique features of fourteen involving colleges. They contend that traditionally-deployed metrics of academic outcomes (such as grade point averages, persistence to degree, or the correlations between college-entrance exam scores and these measures) capture essential, albeit incomplete, images of environments which foster student success. Their definition of student success is broader and includes considerations of both learning and personal development – a whole-person perspective
not unlike the view which undergirds the profession of student affairs (Young, 2003).

Learning, according to Kuh et al., is “the acquisition by students of any lasting knowledge or skill consistent with the educational purposes of the institution” (p. 6). This definition takes their focus away from measures of cognitive and/or intellectual aspects while simultaneously widening the consideration of fora in which learning takes place. By broadening the educative field-of-view, Kuh and his collaborators move beyond classrooms in their search for environmental features which enhance both the quantity and the quality of student-involvement opportunities, noting that “both student effort and institutional effort are required to promote student involvement” (p. 16). It follows that their informants—numbering over 1000—represent a variety of institutional stakeholders. In addition to students, Kuh and his collaborators interviewed presidents, administrators, faculty, and student-affairs professionals in the course of their study.

Following Astin (1984), Kuh et al. characterize meaningful involvement as the interaction of (1) psychological commitment to a particular effort; and (2) the amount of time devoted to said effort. By scrutinizing the aforementioned stakeholders’ multiple perspectives, Kuh and his co-authors tease out the attributes of campuses notably supportive of involved student constituencies. They find a number of features in common amongst the schools studied, including (1) institutional missions and philosophies which explicitly state a commitment to the educative value of student involvement; (2) the existence of and on-going efforts to maintain a campus culture which reflects said missions and philosophies; (3) environments which create physical and mental spaces for both interaction and individual reflection; (4) policies and practices which consistently
recapitulate the importance of student involvement while simultaneously granting students a substantial degree of responsibility for the planning, execution, and maintenance of involvement opportunities; and (5) an ethos of communication running from the top of the organizational chart down and through the institution so as maintain conversations on the importance of student involvement for the betterment of the institutional community as a whole.

Kuh et al. do not waver in emphasizing the importance of every campus stakeholder having a voice. This is perhaps *de rigueur*. What makes their work compelling is this proposition’s correlate: maintaining a campus ethos which sees to it that these voices are consistently heard, acknowledged, and perhaps even acted upon. Something akin to a mosaic is formed in such contexts, where the sum of the constituents is woven together to form a strong and vibrant tapestry:

When all members of a college or university community, including faculty, administrators, trustees, staff, and students believe that all aspects of the institution’s environment contribute to student learning and personal development, the institution can take another step toward realizing its potential and fulfilling its obligation to be a community committed to learning in all forms and forums (Kuh et al., 1991, p. 374).

As has been discussed, college impact models have utilized a number of lenses to explore the interactions of students, institutional actors, and institutions. Astin’s inquiry focused on student attributes in particular, noting that those individuals who sought out and participated in on-campus involvement opportunities tended to perform better
academically than their less-involved peers. Tinto proposed that scrutiny of
student/institution social and academic interaction has the potential to provide a more
robust explanation for student decisions to persist or depart. Tinto’s model is often
praised for its strong theoretical basis, but has proved difficult to substantiate empirically
(Braxton & Lien, 2000). Kuh et al.’s purview is wide. He and his collaborators consider
the perspectives of a range of institutional actors before concluding that the press for
meaningful involvement is one best characterized as an ethos that permeates institutions.
The maintenance of these involving atmospheres is a shared responsibility of all who
partake. Each theorist’s work is informed by a mounting body of evidence as to the lively
nature of student/institution interaction.

Taken as a group, these works provide a compelling warrant for further inquiry
into the nature, content, and implications of student/institution interaction. This study
follows this path, seeking as it does to document the experiences of members of one
student subculture—first-year international undergraduates. We turn next to a working
definition of the term student sojourner and studies regarding members of this group.

**Student Sojourners: An Expanded Definition**

Following the approach of Thomas & Harrell (1994), newly-arrived
undergraduate student sojourners are defined as foreign-born nationals temporarily
residing in the United States for the purposes of pursuing undergraduate post-secondary
education. Newly-arrived undergraduate student sojourners include those who have
gained lawful entry to the United States on government-issued F-1, J-1, Q-1, or M-1
student visas *for the first time.* To put a finer point on it, these individuals are
indisputably ‘newly arrived’ in terms of residence and study experience in the U.S.; that is, they have neither previously resided in the United States nor pursued any primary, elementary, middle school, secondary, or post-secondary study within our borders.

**Assimilation, Adjustment & Adaptation: A Continuum of Sorts**

Many studies on international educational exchange and cross-cultural education in the United States trace their lineage to the work of Edward T. Hall, who conducted research under the auspices of the Foreign Services Institute in the early 1940s. His, just as much of the work in this area over the next forty years, was predicated on assimilationist models (Martin, 1994). Assimilation is the process by which individuals shed, or are required to shed, their original cultural identities to take on the norms and attributes of another culture. The time-worn metaphor of the American melting pot is one predicated on the notion of assimilation, one troubled by more recent efforts to celebrate diversity in contexts which embrace multiple cultural groups.

As previously defined, student sojourners are temporary visitors. This reality, taken in concert with the fact that no monolithic culture does (nor should) predominate on our college campuses, makes assimilation in these settings a fallacious goal. In recognition of this, others have offered the terms ‘sojourner adjustment’ and ‘sojourner adaptation’ in describing the experiences of foreign students. We turn to a consideration of these notions next.

The use of stages in describing student sojourner adjustment is storied. While he did not employ the now ubiquitous U-curve graphic in describing the process, Lysgaard (1955) originated the use of stages in descriptions of sojourner adjustment. As
demonstrated in Figure 2.1, his model contends that, in the early period following arrival, sojourners experience a phase of initial adjustment marked by euphoric eagerness in and about the new setting. Over time this euphoria gives way to crisis, during which the sojourner struggles to maintain his or her bearings in an environment perceived as alien, perhaps even hostile. Later a level of understanding with the new environment is achieved and the sojourner’s outlook on the host environment again turns positive. The buoyancy of this regained adjustment stage differs from that of initial adjustment in that individuals in the throes of the earliest position are in a swoon: everything about the new environment is worthy of uncritical celebration. By the time the sojourner has reached the third stage, he or she has developed a more tempered outlook.

Figure 2.1: Lysgard’s U-Curve Adjustment Hypothesis.

Oberg (1960) expanded Lysgaard’s model to incorporate four stages. What Lysgaard had referred to as the period of initial adjustment Oberg characterized as the ‘honeymoon’ stage. Next comes ‘crisis,’ followed by ‘recovery’ and, finally, ‘adjustment.’ Oberg’s
addition of the recovery stage encouraged closer scrutiny of individuals’ resolutions of sojourn crises while allowing for the resulting adjustment to be more, less, or equally as positive as the honeymoon stage. Oberg’s most notable contribution to sojourner adjustment stage theories is his coining of a new phrase to describe the crisis experience: culture shock. The U-curve is similarly deployed by other adjustment stage theorists, including Adler (1975) and Jacobson (1963).

Critiques of curvilinear student sojourner adjustment models are numerous, although a number of essential themes are evident. Church’s (1982) expansive review of U-curve studies revealed that there was a lack of empirical support for them. Furnham & Bochner (1986) echoed Church, while also taking U-curve studies to task for inadequately defining adjustment as a construct. This is potentially a fatal flaw, for the failure to operationalize constructs renders attempts to measure them impossible (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Thomas and Harrell (1994) note that curvilinear models are unidimensional:

Despite the fact that it often ‘makes sense’ to sojourners in discussion of their adjustment processes, the U-curve as a theoretical construct fails to take into account the multiple aspects of personality and environment that interact to give a complete explanation of the process (p. 94).

This assessment brings to mind similar criticisms regarding the atheoretical nature of Astin’s work. Studies of student involvement writ large, like U-curve models, set the stage for decidedly more nuanced work to follow in a number of disciplines.
Torbiörn’s (1994) sojourner adaptation model combines social learning and social
cognition in seeking to capture foreign students’ responses to and meaning-making in
new environments. According to this model, adaptation is a balancing effort: sojourners
maintain existing cultural norms while developing an appreciation for and a level of
comfort with the deployment of other cultural patterns when circumstances and/or
environments dictate doing so. Social learnings are the behavioral lessons a sojourner
takes away from interactions with members and elements of the host culture. In effect,
sojourners “learn by doing,” observing and mimicking what they perceive as occurring
around them (p. 42). Doing so is not without risk, for the sojourner may be judged as
having behaved inappropriately if he or she manifests a previously-observed behavior
without a sufficient understanding of the target culture’s embedded rationale(s) for the act
in question. Social cognition is the means by which the sojourner develops a reflective
appreciation for the new culture’s embedded rationales or norms by adjusting his or her
cultural frame of reference to accommodate attributes of the host culture. This
appreciation, in turn, helps the sojourner to respond to the new environment with
increasing levels of success.

Over time, social learning and social cognition reinforce one another by way of a
continuous-feedback loop. Cognitive complexity increases, but surely not without
dissonance along the way. This cognitive dissonance is particularly intense, Torbiörn
asserts, when sojourners find themselves at the bottom of the affective U-curve. This is a
time of struggle, for the sojourner is at once ‘unlearning’ accustomed views of what
constitutes normalcy (that is, norms and behaviors such as they are in the original
culture/frame of reference) while concurrently attempting to make meaning within the new context. That the ‘honeymoon’s’ first blush has by this point passed makes the work of adjustment even more onerous, for the new setting (temporarily at least) has lost much of its appeal. Later, when the sojourner has had more experience with (social learning) and more time to reflect on (social cognition) elements of the host culture, then he or she may be characterized as adapting to the host environment.

At this point, the distinction between *adaptation*\(^7\) and *assimilation* bears reiteration. First, adaptation is held to be less totalizing than assimilation: the sojourner encounters cultural barriers embedded in the new frame of reference and works his or her way through resultant misunderstandings. Former learnings remain intact but are enhanced by additional knowledge derived from the negotiation of these barriers. As Torbiönn puts it, “old files are saved”—where assimilationist models would see them deleted—and new learnings accrue (p. 52). Unlike assimilationist models, the adaptation model also allows for the emergence of differential, contextualized, and situational skills in the host environment. A foreign student may, for instance, be well-adapted to the experiences and demands encountered in a college chemistry laboratory while at the same time being wholly unprepared to face the challenges of informal socialization in a party with American peers (cf. Althen, 1989).

Torbiönn’s contribution to the literature on student sojourner adjustment parallels, to a certain degree, Tinto’s work regarding interaction: theoretical models are offered in

\(^7\) The terms *adaptation* and *adjustment* will be used interchangeably from this point forward.
which constructs are identified and delimited. The potential for more rigorous study of
the phenomena in question follows.

Despite a concerted effort to identify more recent theoretical work regarding
foreign student adjustment/adaptation models, little more on the topic appears to have
been published in the last half-decade. In circumstances where a lacuna is identified, it is
appropriate to look for analogues in the literature of other disciplines (Galvan, 1999).
Recent work human resource management offers one avenue for consideration.

Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou (1991) seek to integrate the literature on
international and domestic adjustment\(^8\) in the course of developing a model of the
adjustment experiences of transnational corporations’ expatriate managers. Like
Torbiörn’s, their sojourner adjustment model breaks away from the one-dimensional U-
curve, and instead offers a multi-faceted perspective on adaptation. They assert that
bringing inquiry on international and domestic adjustment together is appropriate due to
the fact that domestic adjustment models (to date) enjoyed more robust theoretical
underpinnings and supportive research findings than did models of international
adjustment. In their review of the domestic adjustment literature, Black, Mendenhall, &
Oddou conclude that work in the area has tended to focus more heavily on workplace
issues such as work role transitions and socialization within the new employment setting.
One’s new workplace in an international posting is undoubtedly a domain of critical
importance, but other areas have the potential to be equally as important in terms of a
sojourner’s prospects for success. These include interactions with host nationals as well

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\(^8\) An area of Human Resources Management dealing with the relocation of employees and their significant others.
as what the authors refer to as “adjusting to the general environment” (p. 304). The former of these elements brings to mind social learning, for the success of interactions with host nationals is predicated, to a certain degree at least, on the appropriateness of one’s behavior. The latter construct, adjustment to the general environment, is less-well defined by the authors—a fact they acknowledge explicitly in the text. Nevertheless, both this and Torbiörn’s work make an effort to tease out the variety of threads woven together into the heretofore abstract notion of adjustment. This sets the stage for others to begin the process of testing these threads and (potentially) darning them into more nuanced and robust models of their own.

Research—be it qualitative or quantitative in nature—incorporates the purposeful collection of and thoughtful reflection upon what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) characterize as “empirical materials” (p. 3). This collecting of and reflecting on data is not done in a vacuum, of course, for theory both directs and emerges from the research process while practice is likewise informed and referenced. In effect, a reciprocal relationship is established; an on-going dialogue is maintained. van Manen (1997) tantalizingly asserts that pedagogy is located not in the practical outcomes of educational research and theory; rather it is evident in the ever-shifting intersections of the three. We will return to the work of phenomenologist van Manen in some detail later. For the purposes of this literature review, what is important is the bridging of theory and research. Toward these ends, a number of more recent studies which capture the multifaceted nature of sojourner adjustment experiences are presented next.
Aspects of Sojourner Adjustment: Piecing Together Disparate Threads

The mid- to late-1990s witnessed a significant shift in student sojourners’ countries of origin. By the end of the decade, Asian students constituted nearly 60% of all international students enrolled in American colleges and universities, up from a third just a decade before (Institute for International Education, 2002; Zikopouos, 1986; Zikoules, 1990). Along with their increased representation on American campuses came an echo effect in research on this population: studies on Asian international students’ experiences in North American institutions of higher learning increased dramatically in the latter half of the 1990s. The recent numerical dominance of this group as well as the notion that students from this region are more culturally distant from the host culture than students from other areas (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) contributed to the focus on members of this group. Changes may be afoot. If predictions as to future international student enrollments at American colleges and universities prove accurate, we can expect that research into the needs of Asian learners will plateau, while those concerning the needs of Central and South American students will increase (Davis, 2001). For the moment, however, the richest pool of current research into international students remains centered on Asian student populations broadly and narrowly defined. A number of themes run through the literature regarding this demographic. The most common of these have to do with variations in sojourners’ fluency in English and concerns regarding the financing of their educational pursuits. Due to the ubiquity of these matters we might just

9 That is to say, on students from specific countries (and thus narrowly defined), or on students drawn from Asia as a whole (thus broadly defined).
as well characterize them as—for lack of a better term—constants. In so doing we can set them aside temporarily to delve more deeply into other issues.

Chronological Approaches to the Study of Sojourner Adjustment Experiences

A focus on the durational aspect of student adjustment—doubtlessly a vestige of the U-curve hypothesis—is present in two recent studies. Zhang & Rentz (1996) identify a number challenges faced by students from the People’s Republic of China in their attempts to adjust to studying in the United States. These include differences between Chinese and U.S. social norms and mores; political differences between China and the United States as manifested in their respective educational systems; previous experience with curricula in China in which negative perceptions of the U.S. were officially sanctioned; and conflicts between group-based and individual decision making, the former—the authors assert—a norm in Chinese culture, the latter a norm of American culture. As their data suggest that the passage of time lessens the impact of these issues, Zhang & Rentz assert that student affairs professionals should be most concerned with the early post-arrival experiences of students from the People’s Republic of China. They recommend that more information regarding cultural differences and adaptation be provided on a pre-arrival basis and that the first year after a Chinese student’s arrival marks the period most critical for the provision of support services. Finally, they note that Chinese students with more experience in American culture should be tapped to act as unofficial counselors for less-experienced Chinese sojourners so as to aid them through the adjustment process.
Lin and Yi (1997) place a similar emphasis on sojourners’ first year in the American host environment. Following the W-curve adjustment model first proposed by Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963), Lin and Yi divide the Asian international student experience into four periods: pre-arrival; initial adjustment; on-going adjustment; and return-home adjustment. Beyond language difficulties, the early post-arrival issues identified by these authors parallel those highlighted by Zhang & Rentz – namely, differing notions of academic culture and a lack of familiarity with American cultural and behavioral norms. While the student population they reference is broader, Lin & Yi likewise concur with Zhang & Rentz: the provision of information and support is most critical for Asian international students during the immediate post-arrival period. In both studies it is the first year of study in the host culture which is deemed of paramount importance.

*Sojourner/Host-Culture Interaction Studies*

Modeling an alternative to chronology-based approaches, Dee and Henkin (1999) identify four broad adjustment categories incorporating sojourner and host culture interaction. These include (1) communicative; (2) social-cultural; (3) personal-psychological; and (4) loss of social status. They queried one segment of the Asian international student population—students from the Republic of Korea—to determine whether or not these difficulties were encountered by members of this group. Their findings suggest the efficacy of these categories in capturing challenges inherent to the sojourner experience. Social-cultural aspects include not only the loss of contact with

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10 This last item constitutes the change the adjustment model’s shape from a U to a W.
existing support structures, e.g. family and friends at home, but also difficulties faced in attempting to forge new relationships in the host environment. Just as with linguistic concerns, this category is similar to those identified by previously-mentioned studies. The personal-psychological category includes notions of mental well-being or discomfort engendered by the stress of adapting to a new cultural frame. With this in mind, Dee and Henkin characterize Korean student sojourner’s experiences as marked by extended periods of homesickness and loneliness. Their identification of the potential for a student’s loss of status to play a role in adjustment difficulties is novel. The authors’ contention regarding this concept is that international students studying in U.S. institutions of higher education not only are often members of their nations’ academic elite, but also are quite likely to be socio-economically advantaged in their home cultures. That such distinctions may not be evident to American classmates, faculty, or university staff might, Dee and Henkin suggest, cause declines in students’ levels of self-confidence. Unfortunately, the authors say little more about this assertion. Nevertheless, it may bear further consideration in light of work regarding the manifestations of socio-economic privilege or disadvantage in campus environments (Andersen & Collins, 2004; hooks, 2000; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996) On a different note—and one I view as particularly disheartening—is the fact that two-thirds of those the authors queried reported interacting regularly only with fellow Koreans, while a mere 10% reported participating in “extensive social interaction” with Americans (p. 61).

While incorporating discussions of international students’ interactions with members of the host culture, studies by Abe, Geelhoed & Talbot (1998) and Shigaki &
Smith (1997) go further by evaluating programs designed to ease foreign students’ transitions into U.S. institutions. Abe et al. were interested in assessing the effects of a peer-mentoring program on international students’ adjustment experiences. They compared two groups of international students in terms of their respective members’ utilization of a number of campus services and facilities. The two groups differed in that those in the experimental group had been paired with American student peers during their first semester at the institution while members of the control group had not. At the close of their first semester of study, members of the experimental group scored significantly higher on a standardized measure of social adjustment than did those in the control group. Claiming success in assisting foreign students’ adjustment to life on an American campus via these partnerships, the authors assert that such efforts could be expanded to provide support for other critical adjustment areas, most notably academic. Other suggestions include mandating service-learning experiences for international students so as to broaden their exposure to and interactions surrounding communities. The authors note that “involvement in this type of activity could help international students recognize their impact on the campus community as well as facilitate a sense of belonging” (p. 546).

Shigaki and Smith also considered the outcomes of American- and foreign-student partnerships, though their study employed a qualitative lens. Eight foreign students were paired with eight American “buddies”; the foreign and American students alike were asked to keep weekly journal entries as to the partnerships over a period of six

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11 Including the student counseling center, the student employment office, student volunteer/service organizations, the student health center, and the student recreation center.
semesters. Analysis of the foreign students’ journal entries identified a number of themes as to the benefits they perceived for having collaborated with American partners, including increased academic support; the development of informed and positive perspectives on cultural differences; reductions in isolation; and increased English competency. Both studies affirm commonly-held anecdotal beliefs as to the beneficial aspects of foreign and domestic student interaction.

Not unlike involvement studies that focus on various domestic student populations, the preceding four studies place a particular emphasis on students’ needs during the immediate post-arrival period. A number of the foreign student adjustment studies promote a mentoring component: Zhang & Rentz encourage support through a network of seasoned co-nationals, while Abe et al. and Shigaki & Smith advocate cross-cultural pairings. Each of the pairing relationships proposed might be characterized as intentional (that is, institutionally-organized) and integrative (seeking to ease participants’ transition into the broader campus community). With their startling findings as to the paucity of substantive interactions between Korean students and Americans, Dee & Henkin highlight the need for such intentional and integrative programming.

*Friendship Network Studies*

Student sojourners’ social interactions\(^\text{12}\) with members of various campus constituencies are the focus of a number of studies. Bochner, McLeod, & Lin’s (1977) exploration of the interpersonal networks of student sojourners opened this avenue of research and differentiated three communities with whom sojourners interact with equally

\(^{12}\) i.e., interactions not resultant from formal, institutionally-sponsored programming.
distinct reasons for doing so. According to Bochner et al, sojourners find both respite and affirmation of shared values for having sought out and partaking of the company of fellow compatriots. Involvements with host nationals are, according to the friendship network model, generally instrumental in nature. Sojourners turn to host culture classmates, instructors, advisors, and university administrators in an effort to satisfy their academic and professional aims. What is distinctive about these sojourner ⇨ host culture interactions is their formality. While studies have shown a desire on the part of sojourners to interact more meaningfully with members of the host culture, these studies likewise reveal that efforts to establish and maintain such relationships are fraught with difficulty (Bochner, Hutnik, & Furnham, 1985; Gareis, 1995; Wiseman, 1997). Nevertheless, such friendships do bring both academic and social benefits (Pruitt, 1978; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Zimmerman, 1995) Lastly, and unquestionably the least-researched of sojourners’ friendship networks, are those forged with other, non-compatriot foreign students. Intercultural relationships with other foreigners have been shown to offer those who partake mutual support on the basis on their shared experience of foreignness within the host culture (Pruitt, 1978; Ward & Searle, 1991).

Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) seek to determine why newly-arrived international students often develop close ties with students of shared cultural backgrounds rather than with Americans. These co-cultural relationships, the authors hypothesize, help new arrivals to maintain their cultural identities while simultaneously garnering insights into how to navigate the myriad difficulties they face as sojourners. Furthermore, the establishment of connections with co-culturals soon after arrival, Al-Sharideh and Goe
note, “serve to buffer students from the effects of problems associated with a lack of assimilation of American culture and an inability to effectively interact with Americans” (p. 700). Al-Sharideh and Goe’s focus on these co-cultural relationships follows Tierney’s (1992a) admonition that the adjustment of non-majority students to life on predominately white campuses may not be adequately captured by traditional, assimilationist adjustment models. A potential disadvantage—at least from the assimilationist perspective—of internationals establishing “primary ties” first with those of similar cultural backgrounds is that they may be short-circuiting their prospects for meaningful interactions with Americans. Al-Sharideh and Goe’s research suggests, in contrast, that early interactions with members of co-cultural enclaves may help new arrivals through the adjustment process. Furthermore, these early relationships with those of similar backgrounds may serve as bridges to involvement with the larger campus community (Heiser, Van Den Elzen, & Yao, 2003).

Toyokawa & Toyokawa (2002) utilize the social learning/social cognition model in exploring sojourner & host national students’ interactions in institutionally-sponsored extracurricular activities. They posit that sojourners’ psychological and social adjustment as well as their active use of leisure time are reinforced by participation in co-curricular offerings. While the authors’ review of foreign student involvement studies incorporates considerations of sojourners’ memberships in multiple communities (following Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977), Toyokawa and Toyokawa do not return to this issue in discussing their findings. Nevertheless, their conclusions as to the importance of extra-curricular activities in effecting adjustment—that involvements outside the classroom are equally as
critical to adjustment as interactions within the classroom—are well-taken. Interestingly, Toyokawa and Toyokawa suggest that other research approaches might be better suited to looking into sojourners’ perceptions regarding and experiences with members of other campus communities:

Studies in international sojourners’ social interactions would provide more useful information if the content and the process of international students’ interactions, students’ perceived importance of the interactions, and contexts in which effective social interactions occur are investigated” (p. 375).

With its inherent focus on individual’s meaning-making, the phenomenological lens deployed in this study is well-suited to capturing these aspects of sojourners’ perspectives and experiences. This topic will be taken up in Chapter Three.

**First-Year Students: Origins of a Research Strand**

The preceding section sought to make a distinction between international student sojourners and other college-student constituencies. With its focus on newly-arrived undergraduate foreign students, this study looks to further differentiate groups within the international student sojourner community. Research regarding this demographic is limited—a verity which presents both difficulty and opportunity.

Given the definition of the term *student sojourner* offered above, undergraduates within this group are *ipso facto* first-year students. With this in mind, a review of the literature regarding first-year students is warranted so as to provide a backdrop upon which this study’s more focused consideration on international students may be
projected. Like the section above, this discussion opens broadly, exploring the emergence within the last two decades of research interest regarding first-year students and their experiences. Next, a number of studies which inquire on first-year students’ co-curricular interactions are profiled. A consensus exists regarding the fundamental importance of these co-curricular interactions in new students’ adjustment to membership within the campus community. Support for non-traditional domestic students in this context is of critical importance and this topic is taken up briefly before the focus returns to sojourners.

A number of internal and external developments gave rise to institutions’ increasingly coordinated efforts on behalf of newly-arrived first-year undergraduate students. Furthermore, as campus communities became increasingly diverse during the 1990s (Hurtado et al., 1999), so too did the imperatives for and attributes of first-year programming. While we have reason to be heartened by recent efforts on many of our campuses to build upon the assets offered by increasingly diverse student populations, it must also be acknowledged that American colleges and universities will continue to grapple with equity in community-building for the foreseeable future.

Upcraft, Gardner, and Associates (1990) draw upon Astin’s college student involvement model in making the case for targeted first-year programming. According to Upcraft et al., first-year student success is a multi-faceted construct. Areas to be addressed include the: (1) development of academic and intellectual competence; (2) establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships; (3) development and exploration of identity; (4) thoughtful consideration of and planning for careers and
lifestyles; (5) maintenance of health and wellness; and (6) development of an integrated philosophy of life (pp. 2-4). Upcraft et al. assert that institutions must be proactive in creating environments in which first-year students are supported in their explorations of these areas. Student affairs (SA) professionals play a vital role here, drawing upon their expertise in student development to collaborate with faculty and others in the deployment of appropriate interventions.

Dwyer (1990) details the historical imperatives during the mid- to late-1980s that contributed to increased concern for first-year students’ experiences. A number of pressures in support of first-year programming during this period were present, including growing numbers of first-generation enrollees; the significant broadening of curricular offerings oriented toward students’ vocational pursuits; and the definitive break on the part of institutions away from earlier *in loco parentis* responsibilities.

Kerr’s (2001) perspective differs slightly. His characterization of higher education in the 1980s is one marked by pessimism regarding students in sharp contrast to what he views as other, unexpectedly high points of the era. Kerr notes that the early 1980s witnessed concern on the part of institutions in response to dire forecasts about decreases in the number of enrollees. He is pleased to write that these shortfalls did not materialize. Likewise, he demonstrates that federal funding for higher education increased during the period. What concerns him however, is the shift in student attitudes, away from what he characterizes as an earlier desire for “liberal knowledge” toward a preference for highly-specialized career training (p. 144). As part of this change, a tension developed wherein
institutions found themselves cast as service providers by an ever more savvy and demanding student-as-customer clientele.

The demographic shifts to which Dwyer alludes make a marketplace metaphor even more apropos, for the 1980s also witnessed significant growth in the number of adult-student enrollees. While few institutions could afford to turn away the tuition dollars these enrollees brought with them, colleges and universities likewise could not ignore the reality that this student population brought decidedly different needs to the table. Other demographic shifts brought further challenges. The enrollment rates of women students and students of color grew steadily through the 1980s. While students of color remain proportionally under-represented (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Tierney, 1992b), their growing presence has changed the faces of college campuses significantly during the last two decades.

The confluence of changing enrollment demographics, increasing vocational orientation, and a more demanding student clientele left Kerr to wonder aloud about the prospect of multiversities remaining intact as institutions despite their ever more disparate natures. By the late 1980s it was also clear to many higher education observers that the boom years of government support were drawing to a close. Competition for scarce resources appeared to many to be the order of the day as institutions contemplated the 1990s (Readings, 1996), and first-year programming became one way for colleges and universities to distinguish themselves in the institutional marketplace.

The changing nature of research on college students during this period provides another perspective on how newly-arrived undergraduates and their needs had become a
subject of added concern. Astin’s research into student involvement demonstrated that students who (1) participated in academically related (co-curricular) activities and/or (2) interacted frequently with faculty outside the classroom tended to do better academically than their less-involved peers. Tinto’s interactionalist theory (1993) expands Astin’s work, delving more deeply into the nature of student involvement while simultaneously offering suggestions as to what institutions might do to foster contexts in which more of their students are meaningfully involved. As indicated above, Kuh’s work has taken this institutional focus even further. The importance of students’ sense of community membership, particularly during the first year of study, cannot be overstated.

Others (Berger, 1997; Gaff & Ratcliff, 1997; Maisto & Tammi, 1991) have shown the failure to achieve a sense of fit early in one’s college career can lead to academic and social isolation, both precursors to attrition. The student-based research of the day, then, was pointing to the importance of institutions actively taking students’ needs into account when planning curricular and co-curricular programming. As Dey and Hurtado (1999) put it more recently:

Service to special populations has become a central mission of some colleges, while changes in the types of student attending traditional four-year institutions reflect new needs and create new demands for institutional change…Although many of these changes represent responses to recognized problems and come about with pressure from external constituencies, they represent an attempt on the part of institutions to improve the educational process for students (p. 319).
First-year undergraduates, of course, constitute but one of these special populations. While more recent interpretations of Tinto’s interactionalist model have been critical of its focus on traditional students during a period marked by significant changes in enrollee demographics (Braxton, 2000; Tierney, 1992b), the overall thrust of these arguments has been to place an emphasis on student success. We turn now to a consideration of some of the more common patterns of curricular and co-curricular first-year programming.

First-Year Students: Programming Exemplars

Ninety-four percent of American institutions report offering specialized first-year programming (Barefoot, 2002). These efforts take a seemingly innumerable variety of forms. Pre-matriculation orientation, on-going academic advising, academic and co-curricular mentoring, residential living and learning centers, co-curricular programming, and first-year seminars are just a few examples of such offerings. Intentionality in these efforts is of critical importance, particularly because effective first-year programming is inherently cross-functional, witnessing the collaboration of student- and academic-affairs (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996).

First-year learning communities exemplify this cross-functional collaboration. Goodsell Love (1999) describes learning communities as the arrangement of curricular offerings and programming around a common theme. While courses within these communities reflect disciplinary boundaries, each reflects this shared theme. Learning community student participants might, therefore, register for a typical set of first-year courses—say, English composition, economics, and biology—but the courses are designed and presented so that their topics and activities overlap. Likewise, learning
community enrollees form cohorts, taking their linked courses with a fixed group of classmates. These cohorts constitute both academic and social networks for student participants.

Faculty members’ roles also change markedly for their involvement in learning communities. Because course offerings are organized around a centralized theme, curriculum development is undertaken across disciplines. This means that new channels of communication are opened across departments. Similarly, the experience of looking at a “known” topic—one an individual has taught repeatedly—through the eyes of a colleague with a different discipline-based perspective has the potential to reinvigorate teaching. Finally, close and regular interaction with learning community student cohort members also provides faculty with a new type of academic and social network on campus. One appealing outcome of these new networks is that prospective student research assistants may be more readily identified as a result of these close interactions.

Sidle & McReynolds (1999) compared two groups of first-year students as to retention between academic years 1 and 2; cumulative GPA; and number of credit hours successfully completed. The groups (n=431 per group) were differentiated by members having either participated in or opted out of a First Year Experience (FYE) course. A number of variables were controlled, including: ACT composite scores; high school class rank; high school GPA; counties of origin; ethnicity; university remedial course placement; college-track high school coursework in writing, algebra, and reading; and gender. Those students who participated in the FYE course were retained from year 1 to year 2 at higher rates than those who did not. Likewise, participants had higher
cumulative GPAs and had completed more credit hours at the end of their first year of enrollment than those who had not participated. The authors conclude that findings such as these are particularly important for SA professionals to have at-hand when making the case for FYE interventions with other campus stakeholders. This, of course, harkens back to the point made by Terenzini et al.

Starke, Harth & Sirianni (2001) also assessed the retention rates and academic performance of students enrolled in a first-year seminar. Their findings demonstrate that seminar enrollees were retained at higher levels than students not enrolled. Using multiple regression techniques, Starke et al. found that (1) enrollment in and (2) the grade earned in the first-year seminar course accounted for a considerable portion of variation in students’ grade point averages; again, those enrolled in the seminar course ended their first year of study with higher GPAs than those who hadn’t participated. Starke et al. also provide frequency data as to students’ interactions with faculty in co-curricular settings and students’ involvement in co-curricular activities. First-year seminar students report higher levels of both. Such involvement levels bode well not only for individual student’s success, but also for the overall quality of campus life (Kuh et al., 1991)

Crissman (2001) utilized a phenomenological lens to explore first-year students’ perceptions of their participation in what the author refers to as clustered and nonclustered first-year courses. Clustered courses (labeled elsewhere in the literature as First-Year Interest Groups [FIGS] or linked courses) are marked by a cohort’s concurrent enrollment in multiple courses. That is, fixed groups of students take—for example—both a first-year composition course and a history class together. Tinto & Goodsell
(1993) and Tinto & Goodsell Love (1995) report that FIGs offer academic and social support as well as a sense of stability/community for first-year students. Crissman’s focus groups with clustered students echoed these findings while revealing that clustering “enhances the development and usage of study groups…provides a circle of familiar people for social, athletic, and cultural activities…and connects students to one another, to their instructors, and to their university” (p. 22). Again we have evidence of the efficacy of such programming regarding both academic learning outcomes and the fostering of supportive student-to-student and student-to-faculty social networks.

**First-Year Adjustment and Diverse Student Populations: Analogues and Departures**

While Astin and Tinto are the forbearers in the area of as involvement studies, they have been criticized for failing to take into account differentiation in students’ involvement prospects on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, and class. Tierney (1992b) remarks:

> Although Tinto and other like-minded researchers should be applauded … essentially models of integration have the effect of merely inserting minorities into a dominant cultural frame of reference that is transmitted in dominant cultural forms, leaving invisible cultural hierarchies intact (p. 50).

A number of researchers have sought to address this shortcoming, 13 including Belenky et al (1997) on women; Fleming (1984), Howard-Hamilton (2000), and Willie (2003) on

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13 This list is by no means definitive. Rather, it seeks to reflect the range of constituencies studied in recent considerations of student involvement.
African-Americans; Hurtado & Carter (1997) and Constantine, Robinson & Wilton (2002) on Hispanic students; Wall & Evans (1999) and Howard & Stevens (2000) on gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered; and hooks (2000) on class. Taken collectively, studies on the experiences of historically under-represented domestic student populations reveal that members of these groups tend to suffer feelings of isolation from fellow students, interact less frequently with faculty, and, ultimately, fail to persist at rates comparable to their majority-student peers. Finally, initial interactions are foregrounded as critical in their adjustment to the campus milieu.

It is a mistake to assert that the assets, needs, and capacities of international students and students who are members of non-dominant domestic groups are one in the same (Malaney & Shively, 1995). We have already established that significant changes have occurred in international student demographics over the last decade. Funding sources, for example, have shifted radically from times past. Financial sponsorship on the part of the U.S. government for students from less-developed regions and/or countries waned with the end of the Cold War, while rapid economic growth in other areas has since led to an explosion in the number of privately-supported student sojourners (Institute for International Education, 2003a). Where international education in the United States formerly benefited from directly serving the needs of American foreign policy, it is now very much a service industry, competing with other nations in the transnational higher education marketplace (Davis, 2003). International student sojourners are increasingly affluent and may be characterized as members of a global elite who have

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14 Most notably along the Pacific Rim.
benefited from access to educational, social, and cultural resources and expect similar levels of privilege while here. Furthermore, racial or ethnic identifications and classifications are culturally embedded. International students’ home cultures may categorize and treat diversity quite differently than does ours. Add in the pernicious effects of an American media whose often inaccurate or incomplete portrayals of racial and ethnic realities here at home are shared via satellite and other means with a global audience, and the end result is a proliferation of misapprehensions quite literally and all to easily overlooked by those who would tend to essentialize individuals on the basis of their skin color or region of origin.

The salience of social networks for students of color and/or ethnically diverse students are the focus of a number of recent studies. Kenny & Stryker (1996) compared the perceptions of white students and students of color regarding the support various social networks offered them during their first year of college enrollment at a selective, private college in the urban Northeast. The authors contend that notions of cooperation/competition and interdependence/independence are culturally-embedded, with minority groups exhibiting more within-group cooperation and interdependence than is evidenced by European Americans. It is on this point that Kenny & Stryker criticize Pascarella & Terenzini’s (1991) comprehensive review of literature regarding racially-and ethically-diverse students’ integration into campus life for failing to take into account differing notions of social networks as well as variations in perceptions of these networks’ salience. Kenny & Stryker’s comparative analysis of majority- and minority-students’ self-reports as to social network support in terms of social adjustment, academic
adjustment, and institutional attachment showed differences between the groups. European American student respondents overwhelmingly cited fellow students as those from whom they drew support when faced with adjustment difficulties. In contrast, when confronted by challenges in these areas, minority student respondents\textsuperscript{15} reported turning to off-campus networks, including family and friends. Interestingly, white students who reported high levels of contact with friends at home reported significantly lower levels of social adjustment and institutional attachment than their more campus-focused majority-population peers. The authors conclude that as predominantly white institutions seek to enroll increasing numbers of racially and ethnically diverse students, these institutions would be well-advised to recognize the differential organization and importance of social networks on students’ adjustment experiences, both on- and off-campus. Efforts on the part of institutions to assist non-majority students to maintain these off-campus support networks may very well contribute to fewer adjustment difficulties and—by extension—higher levels of persistence.

Diverse community-building and the development of supportive social networks \textit{on campus} has also been shown to be of critical importance for students of color on predominantly white campuses (Davis, 1991; Turner, 1994). One small example such initiatives is the encouragement of recently-arrived minority students in the form of “validating experiences” with faculty within and outside the classroom (Terenzini et al., 1994). This is not to suggest that minority students are at risk solely during the early stages of enrollment, nor that faculty/student interactions are the only points of difficulty

\textsuperscript{15}Who at this institution cumulatively total approximately 20\% of enrollees and self-identify as African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans.
minority students face on campus (Watson et al., 2002). In order to be effective, community-building across difference must span students’ periods of enrollment while simultaneously encompassing all members of the campus community (Hurtado et al., 1999). This is no small undertaking:

What many campus administrators do not recognize is that in order for such a relationship to be as constructive as possible, it must be preceded by the work of consensus building, where explicit discussions take place among representatives from every facet of the organization about its mission…This is time consuming, uncomfortable, and yet rewarding work that is best undertaken by all members of the university community, including administrators and faculty (Willie, 2003, p. 159).

Education across difference—in the above case, race education—remains problematic due to historical and structural factors deeply imbedded in American society (Giroux, 1997; Helms, Henze, & Malone, 2003; Rothschild, 2003). The issue is systemic, and race is but one of numerous dimensions of diversity (El-Khawas, 2003). Unfortunately, these factors have been reproduced on campuses, with little in the way of respect or mutuality in evidence between those whose primary mission is to serve historically-underrepresented domestic populations and others whose focus is on international education. Noronha (1992) bears witness to this troubling disjuncture, noting that internationalists often perceive multiculturalists as “professional victims, exclusionary, and theoretically soft,” while multiculturalists in turn view internationalists as “elitists,” in pursuit of “esoteric agendas” (p. 56). When we speak of prospective
collaboration between internationalists and multiculturalists, caution is warranted so as to avoid essentializing very real differences between the students they serve. It is time, however, that professionals in both areas begin the hard, introspective work of unpacking how institutional policies and practices have and do treat members of these groups differently. What internationalists describe as the intercultural communication approach to international education rests on respect for cultural difference as well as an openness to exploring these differences in mutually-supportive ways (Althen, 1994; Bennett & Bennett, 1994). This foundation is likewise evident in many multicultural education initiatives (Helms et al., 2003; Hurtado et al., 1999). Campus diversity plans may very well achieve greater success if multiculturalist and internationalist synergies were acknowledged and leveraged. Building such collaborative efforts takes on particular importance at a time when our institutions of higher education are welcoming increasingly diverse student bodies.

**Summary of Major Concepts in this Review of Literature**

The last 50 years have witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of people availing themselves of post-secondary study in the United States. At present, more than 50% of Americans who complete high school in a given spring matriculate to undergraduate study that autumn. Non-traditional students—be they from historically-under-represented backgrounds, international students, or those returning to post-secondary study after a period in the adult workforce—represent a significant (and growing) proportion of total enrollees. It should come as no surprise that, as college and university enrollees have increased in number and diversity, research on students and
their experiences has expanded apace. A major strand in the literature on college students inquires after the nature, content, and implications of student/institution interaction.

This *impact* strand began broadly. Over time it became clear that approaching students as a monolithic community failed to capture appreciable differences in their academic and co-curricular experiences based upon their disparate backgrounds. The 1990s witnessed a move in the literature to identify and disaggregate student communities to better understand them and their experiences. The image that comes to mind as I contemplate this development is an ever-expanding star. At the center are college and university students grouped into a whole. Discrete student sub-populations—along with the clusters of studies which focus on these groups—form arrays of points which emerge from the center.

The essential themes of the impact literature are as follows. Students are most successful in environments which offer opportunities for positive, supportive interaction not only with peers, but also faculty and staff. College and university leaders can foster such environments through vigilance toward and responsiveness to students’ needs, demographics, and experiences. As we come to appreciate differences in our students’ and their experiences, we might likewise offer targeted support and encouragement. Similarly, in inquiring after, reflecting upon, and learning about our students, we can be more effective in meeting our charges ‘where they are.’ This in turn means we can assist them to better define and achieve their goals while in our midst and to develop the capacity to continue to do so independently after they have completed tertiary education.
Studies on international student sojourners emerge from the observation that crossing borders for an extended stay in a foreign culture is an experience with unique experiential peaks and valleys. Early work in this vein led to the U-curve adjustment hypothesis. As a descriptive device, the U-curve model of sojourner adjustment has some utility. To wit, practitioners in the field of international education continue to make frequent use of it in training materials for prospective and newly-arrived sojourners (Education USA, 2004). In the research literature, however, there has been a movement away from such unitary models toward multidimensional considerations of sojourner adjustment. It follows that notions of adjustment are therefore broadened and no longer conceptualized solely as a psychological construct. This parallels a trend toward observed in the broader literature on student involvement and development. As the diverse nature of the sojourner studies discussed here suggests, such focused conceptualizations of adjustment allows for increased detail in not only the questions we pose about international students’ experiences, but also in what we anticipate learning for having asked. The sojourner literature time and again reminds us of the ‘big three’ challenges faced by international students: (1) dissonance arising as a result of diffuse, culturally-embedded notions of and approaches to teaching and learning; (2) the challenges sojourners face in developing and maintaining friendships with host culture peers; and (3) difficulties with the English language. Each of these items is explored in some detail in the course of this study.
Conclusion

Tanaka (2002) issues a challenge to those who would study student and institution interaction in this increasingly diverse context. He contends that it is imperative we acknowledge students’ belonging to multiple communities on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, immigrant status, nationality, physical ability, and intersections thereof. Similarly, he advises we be mindful of the fact that membership in these communities is dynamic, “There is…great variation and shifting within categories, so that the act of knowing each student’s social location is a search for an evolving, negotiated, multilayered cultural perspective” (p. 267). Tanaka, following Tierney (1992a), asserts that scrutinizing points of cultural contact—part of a research perspective he refers to as “interculturalism”—celebrates this dynamism, embracing the “creative tension between cultural voices as they interact” (p. 282). One approach to intercultural research is to encourage students’ intersubjectivity –that is, to foster contexts in which the research participants explore of their own voices and stories. Researchers who follow this approach must likewise investigate their own positionalities.16 Together, researcher and those researched construct new understandings together. Such efforts are integral to phenomenological approaches to meaning-making, in which collaboration, interdependence, and complementarity are manifest (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

This review of literature evinces both fracture and fecundity in the college impact literature. As has been demonstrated, the early impact models represent an alternative to the individualistic foci of developmentalist stage theories. Turning to explorations of the

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16 This is the self-reflexive turn to which Tanaka alludes in his title.
intersections of student experiences and institutional structures, the models proffered by Astin, Tinto, and Kuh do not adequately account for differential impacts on the basis of unequal power gradients across student constituencies. Throughout the 1990s researchers began to examine these differential impacts. Among the results of these undertakings are more nuanced appreciations of the unique assets and needs diverse students bring to the proverbial table. The proliferation of work in this vein constitutes, at present, a cacophony. We need not shy from this clamorous state of affairs, for opportunity for increased understanding abounds. This work is reconstitutive and on-going:

Finally, the increasing student diversity is likely to strain severely the notion that any one dominant or traditional approach to inquiry will be sufficient to portray accurately the impact of college. As student diversity increases, understanding the experience of college and its various impacts will undoubtedly become much more complex. Research approaches that try to isolate the influence of a few variables for all students will simply miss the point and probably provide little in the way of useful, practice- or policy-relevant evidence. If there was ever a time when we needed a broad repertoire of approaches to inquiry in research on the impact of college, it is now (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998, p. 155).
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Two essential features of qualitative research initiatives are their emergence from open-ended research questions and their embrace of evolving research designs. Qualitative researchers follow an inductive path, moving from highly focused interaction with those with whom their research is undertaken toward “thick descriptions” thereof (Geertz, 1973). Sustained engagement typifies such efforts with the goal of achieving detailed understandings of the phenomena in question (Jones, 2002). In contrast to their quantitative brethren, qualitative research questions evolve as the data emerge, becoming increasingly refined as nuances are revealed. Creswell (1998) captures these attributes when he notes “Our questions change during the process of research to reflect and increased understanding of the problem” (p. 19).

Constructivist qualitative research is predicated on the notion that data are not ‘out there’ to be discovered, collected, and interpreted, but rather grounded in researcher and research participants’ interactions (Charmaz, 2000). Evaluations as to the “goodness” of such research are achievable only when researchers have unpacked their epistemological knapsacks\(^\text{17}\) (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). In the process of so doing we

\(^{17}\) The knapsack metaphor comes by way of McIntosh (2004).
reveal the coupling of our research question(s) and methodology (Kezar, 2004); provide
detail as to the methods we deploy in data collection; grapple with our relationships with
research participants; endeavor to interpret the fruit of our interactions with the research
participants; and, finally, share the practical outcomes of our work. This chapter initiates
this multi-step process, describing the epistemologically-contingent methodology,
methods, and ethical considerations which buttress this study. Analysis and interpretation
of the research findings, as well as suggestions for practice, are taken up in later chapters.

**Epistemology and Research Questions: An Inseparable Link**

Constructivists posit that realities are an amalgam of interactions between
individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The use of the plural noun ‘realities’ here is
intentional, for the constructivist frame is transactional: reality is assembled by way of
interaction and bounded temporally—later interactions result in newly negotiated
realities. Epistemologically, then, the constructivist frame defines knowledge as intensely
personal, context-dependent, and shifting (Schwandt, 2000). Each of us is held to
represent him or herself symbolically, and constructivist methodologies emphasize
communication and collaborative meaning-making so as generate what Richardson
(1994) and Janesick (2000) have characterized as “crystallized” co-representations.

For positivists such viewpoints are nothing less than scandalous if for no other
reason than the way in which the constructivist perspective co-opts and reinterprets the
time-honored positivist notion of *ceteris paribus* (Charters, 1992). Within the
constructivist frame ‘all other things being equal’ does not mean that all of these other
things are pushed into the background to be overshadowed by some definitive,
generalizable truth. Rather all of these other things are held to be equally important in contributing to (constructing) our efforts to make meaning of the world around us. A caveat is warranted here, for constructivists surely cannot claim to apprehend every component of their interactions with research participants. We are not Bentham’s Panopticon personified. Instead, what Longino (1993, cited in Schwandt, 2000) characterizes as “contextual empiricism” is in play: value is accorded to researchers’ observations but not without a respectful acknowledgement of researcher/research participant intersubjectivity; a mutuality, if you will (Rhoads, 1997).

In practice, then, research question generation is a continuous process for the qualitative researcher: not only grounding one’s project in the rolling discourse of theory and previous research, but also simultaneously identifying and referencing the needs of those with whom one is working. Initial research questions emerge as a consequence of the researcher’s delving into the literature. They are modified as we engage the participants, thereby allowing for grounded understandings to come to the fore. The literature review therefore might be referred to as the first of a study’s two quiet periods. Engaging the research participants in preliminary discussions, however, tempers this quiet period and sets the stage for the collaboration to follow.

The Phenomenological Lens

Phenomenology as a philosophy is best described as a school of thought with multiple—and at times wildly divergent—orientations (Moran, 2000). van Manen advises those who pursue the human sciences to embrace a praxis-oriented eclecticism in drawing from phenomenology’s philosophical origins. Nevertheless, it is wise for us to grapple
with the philosophical debates and assumptions which undergird our inquiry, if for no other reason than to ground our efforts in the history of ideas (Kezar, 2004). What follows is a brief overview of three strands of phenomenological thought. The first of the schools of thought I’ll discuss is Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, the foundation of all twentieth century phenomenological perspectives (Creswell, 1998; Macann, 1994). Heidegger departed from his instructor Husserl when he inaugurated hermeneutic phenomenology with his *Being and Time*. This hermeneutic turn is fundamental to van Manen’s phenomenologically-based human science research (his is the orientation I take in my work), and therefore demands consideration. Finally, existential phenomenology—which likewise originated with Heidegger and was later taken-up by Merleau-Ponty—is also discussed below, for a number of this perspective’s key themes are also evident in van Manen’s more recent efforts.

Husserl’s philosophical project has been characterized as the “triumph of subjectivity,” for his fundamental questions are two: into any topic which we humans inquire, who ‘does’ the knowing and what methods and understandings does the knower bring to bear on his or her efforts to apprehend the world (Macann, 1994, p. 211)? Once we answer these questions we can strip away (or bracket) these influences and turn, instead, to considerations of the *essences* of the phenomenon in question. The focus of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is neither ultimate reality, nor truth, but rather the appearance of things in our consciousness. In his *Logical Investigations* (1970) he argues that phenomenologists must leave behind what they know of theories and/or schools of thought, while also turning away from deduction. Instead, thinkers must make
a radical turn inward, to focus on describing only what comes to them by way of
inguition. Husserl’s ‘principle of principles’ is thus:

> Enough now of absurd theories. No conceivable theory can make us err
> with respect to the principle of all principles: that every originary
> presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything
> originarily offered to us in “intuition” is to be accepted simply as what it
> is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is
> Emphases in the original).

Received methods and beliefs underlie our thought, according to Husserl, and can
artificially limit on the possible range of our inquiries. Or, as van Manen (2002c) puts it,
“The natural sciences start from a complex set of presuppositions, frameworks and
perspectives of knowledge, but these are not questioned by the sciences themselves.”18

The act of perceiving one’s cognition is critical to Husserl, for the contemplation of the
ways in which we come to view truth is nothing less than an inquiry into epistemology—
that is, the very nature knowledge:

> When we scientifically explore a domain of being, we acquire a treasure
> of knowledge, a system of judgments, about the things in question. Let us
> say that we have achieved a rather thorough understanding of a field, such
> as molecular biology or solid state physics. No matter how complete our
> knowledge of the things in question may be, we still will not have

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18 Quotation from an unpaginated web site.
explored the subjective correlative of the truths that have been achieved. The objective side may be quite completely known, but the subjective accomplishments that are correlated with the object will have been neglected: the kind of intentions that present the thing being studied, the manner of verification proper to the objects, the methods followed, the forms of intersubjective correction and confirmation, and so on…The scientific truths are left floating and unpossessed. They seem to be nobody’s truth. To round out the science, to be fully scientific, we would need to investigate the subjective structural activities at work in the science…to enter into a new, reflective stance (Sokolowski, 1999, pp. 52-53).

It is this reflective stance which allows us to identify the transcendent essences of previously unquestioned “truths.” This perspective incorporates a careful attention to the dimensions of experience. As we become increasingly deft at practicing this scrutiny, we become cognizant of what Moran (2000), following Husserl, referred to as “horizons of anticipation”:

I know I will be able to see other sides of a table if I walk around it; it will be resistant to touch, I may not be able to lift it, and so on. Subsequent perceptions either confirm these anticipations or else set up a whole new domain of anticipations. In our ordinary experience we are interested in the confirmations themselves; in phenomenology we are attempting to
delimit the nexus of expectations etc. which are enabled by the perceptual act as such (p. 162).

These limits become the objects of our scrutiny; we reveal them through nuanced descriptions of their essences.

Hermeneutical phenomenology departs from Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology owing to its overtly interpretive turn. While descriptions remain an important component of the hermeneutical approach, Heidegger asserts that all descriptions are inescapably interpretive. We as humans are always engaged in a quest to understand. This attempt to make meaning of our being in the world is context-dependent and finite.19 Most importantly for Heidegger, and here is where the hermeneutic turn occurs, our attempts to understand the world around us are bound-up in language. The hermeneutic approach is the one through which phenomenologist turns again and again to close readings and interpretations of texts so as to generate deeper and richer interpretations of ours and others’ attempts to make meaning of the world.

A hermeneutic circle is established in which the familiar is analyzed as unfamiliar while the unfamiliar is made familiar (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). This circularity would, on the surface, appear to challenge the possibility of new learning, for our ability to take in new information would appear to be mediated by our existing knowledge. In order to escape this trap of circular logic, Heidegger claims that the circle of understanding is not closed. Rather the questioner’s inquiries may exemplify a “relatedness backward or forward,” wherein prior experiences and understandings

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19 i.e.: we are situated historically and there comes a time when each of us physically ceases to be in the world.
establish an interpretive pattern of practice that is strong, but not so rigid as to disallow new understandings (Heidegger, 1996, p. 6). Hermeneutic phenomenology is characterized, then, by a thoughtful questioning of our being-in-the-world. This school of thought does not concern itself with the problem/solution dialectic, but rather aims to uncover heretofore hidden features—or essences—of ours and others’ attempts to understand the world.

In turning to the world, existential phenomenologists move away from the Husserlian focus on descriptions of cognition to inquire, instead, on detailing the world as experienced (van Manen, 2002b). This marks a concomitant shift from epistemological to ontological inquiry: we move from a focus on the self and one’s cognitions to a focus on how we (and others) make ourselves manifest in the world. Thus Heidegger orients us toward how being is revealed. The ends of existential phenomenology are, according to Merleau-Ponty, not the intuition of essences but rather:

re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status…it offers an account of space, time, and the world as we ‘live’ them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of is psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. vii)

For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is directly oriented to the world. As shall be discussed below, this perspective taken in concert with a commitment to the
aforementioned hermeneutic turn informs van Manen’s action-oriented, human sciences phenomenology.

It bears repeating that there is a considerable break between the phenomenologies of Husserl and his student, Heidegger. The fundamental point of departure between the two lie in their respective foci. Husserl’s epistemological gaze seeks transcendental essences: the pure, unfettered, and ideal beings of the objects of our intellectual scrutiny. As such, Husserl’s notion of bracketing witnesses the thinker setting aside all that is temporary and particular about a particular observation and, for having done so, perhaps succeeding—through the act of practiced cognition—in uncovering said essences. Heidegger’s project, in contrast, turns on ontological inquiry: experience and the processes by which we make meaning of it. Departing dramatically from Husserl, Heidegger’s search is not for a priori essences but rather an inquiry into our engagement with the world around us. He sought “a way of thinking about human nature that remained faithful to the historical, lived, practical nature of human experience” (Moran, 2000, p. 228). As such it is Heidegger’s brand of phenomenology which underlies this study.

Despite substantive changes in philosophers’ assertions as to the purposes, approaches and, indeed, the very definition of phenomenology over the course of the last century, it is possible to identify a number of elements which have remained consistent (Orbe, 2000). The first of these is the necessity that we collect ‘thick’ descriptions of lived experiences. In the course of collecting these descriptions we are encouraged to set aside (or bracket) our preconceptions so as to remain open to the information as given.
These descriptions next become the objects of our reflective efforts, the goal of which is to identify essential themes running through these descriptions. This second stage is widely referred to as *phenomenological reduction*. Merleau-Ponty (2002) captures the difficulty of bracketing our prior knowledge in both the collection and reduction, reminding us that we must remain vigilant—consistently questioning ourselves as closely as we question our data. Lastly, we bring our interpretive energies to bear on these themes, endeavoring to produce intense and original explications of the phenomena in question. We turn to a more detailed discussion of one approach to doing so next.

"Doing" Phenomenology

When confronted with my former student’s request for a name, I could not help but wonder as to the nature of his experiences at ‘our’ institution. Upon deeper reflection, his appeal took on a metaphoric quality, ultimately sparking my desire to delve into the lived-experiences of international students in this setting. A question I discovered myself asking was: what does it mean to be a foreign student at this university? This is a meaning question: one that “wants to find out what a certain phenomenon means and how it is experienced” (van Manen, 1997, p. 29). It is emphatically not a problem/solution question. International students are not, in my estimation, ‘broken,’ nor it is not my job (nor my desire) to ‘fix’ them.

And so I wish to seek out the interpretations—or meaning-makings—of those experiencing life as undergraduate foreign students at our institution. I wish to inquire on how these individuals ‘construct’ their position(s) as sojourners. Furthermore, I wish to participate in the exploration of whether and how these constructions shift over time; that
is, do internationals come to view themselves and their roles differently as time passes in this setting. Finally, as an ESL practitioner and emerging professional in the area of student affairs, I am intrigued by sojourners’ perceptions regarding how they are constructed as “foreign students” by others, including myself. What I seek is precisely what phenomenological inquiry can provide, “a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 41).

Max van Manen offers a detailed explication of phenomenological research in his *Researching Lived Experience*. The path he describes is the one to which I turn next, offering my emerging understandings of this approach. As discussed above, to scrutinize the world through a phenomenological lens is to look both inward and outward, to attempt to apprehend shared elements of our being. “We do not look at the direct relation between ourselves and others, but at the relation both of us, or all of us, have to the world and the things we possess in common” (Sokolowski, 1999, p. 152). The first step in this undertaking is to identify a phenomenon whose significance we wish to understand in greater detail.

*Turning to the Phenomenon*

As this study’s literature review indicates, there is a paucity of research regarding the lived experiences of undergraduate sojourners in the United States. Qualitative studies with their intrinsic orientation toward and with those with whom we seek greater understanding are essentially non-existent in this area. Thus a lacuna is evident between concerns I have regarding my students’ experiences and my desire to engage with them.

\[20\] Garies (1995) is, as far as I can determine, the single exception.
more meaningfully as an instructor and advisor. van Manen—whose research focuses on the teaching of children—charts the course of the phenomenological turn:

we adopt a phenomenological perspective in order to help us to bring to light that which presents itself as pedagogy in our lives with children. It is that kind of thinking which guides us back from theoretical abstractions to the reality of lived experiences—the lived experience of the child’s world, the lived experiences of schools, curricula, etc. Phenomenology asks the simple question, what is it like to have a certain experience… (van Manen, 1997, pp. 44-45)

In turning to the phenomenon, then, I must undertake a detailed analysis of my orientation. This self-scrutiny will clarify my positionality vis-à-vis the research participants. Through this turn I establish a new openness to an emerging appreciation of sojourners’ experiences as they make meaning of them.

*Investigating Lived Experience*

Phenomenological investigations commonly take three forms, or some combination thereof. The first of these is the deep scrutiny of the etymologies of ‘common’ terms and/or idiomatic phrases. Words and phrases, van Manen notes, emerge directly from the realm of lived experience. Neologisms are coined because existing linguistic forms do not adequately capture the fundamental nature of the phenomena being newly named. Words, phrases, metaphors, and idioms orient speakers and listeners toward the fundamentals—the *essences*—of experience. They capture underlying elements of our shared life world. While words and phrases are not the focus of this study
per se, there is little doubt that language will be a point of particular importance to many (if not all) of the research participants. The onus will be on me to attend to our collective uses of language and comment about these as a matter of course.

Another approach to delving into the life world is through the solicitation of *lived-experience descriptions*. Here research participants are asked to compose written reflections regarding the phenomenon in question. The principal researcher then mines these reflections for their essences. I do not intend to deploy this method in the course of this study. However I will take another tack in encouraging participants to capture their experiences, namely reflexive photography.

Harper (2000) contends that the use of photographs in phenomenological study can provide an alternative means for research-participants to “interpret and render” their experiences (p. 727). Through shooting photographs and participating in photo elicitation interviews a number of the African-American students profiled by Douglas (1997; 1998) offered compelling views of their marginalized status at a predominantly-White campus. Harrington & Schibik (2003) used photo elicitation in their study of the development of student perceptions during their first year on campus, concluding that “students place major importance on many aspects of their educational experience that institutions frequently overlook” (p. 36). Reflective photography has the potential to cast not only our understoods, but also things we simply overlook into a new, insightful light, a point captured by Sokolowski (1999):

> The ability of the object to be given perceptually to many viewers, hearers, tasters, smellers, and touchers takes place on a sensory level, but the
object can also be categorically articulated by many people and not just by myself. It can be thought about under many guises (p. 153).

Following Harrington & Schibik’s example, research participants will be asked to shoot photographs that will help them to describe their impressions and experiences at the university. Participants will also be asked to record the time and date of their photographs in notebooks along with any comments or additional observations. Photographing is to continue until all of one’s exposures are used, at which point the cameras will be returned for development. I will encourage the research participants to complete this procedure by the end of their first quarter of enrollment so that the photographs can be processed in advance of our second interview meetings. It is my hope that the inclusion of images taken by the research participants will lead to easier and more insightful discussions while exposing aspects of participants’ meaning-making which might otherwise have been overlooked.

The third and most common avenue of collecting phenomenological data is through interviews. This is the primary route I will take, following Seidman’s (1998) tripartite, semi-structured phenomenological interviewing model (described in detail below). Throughout these interviews I will seek “the mutual stimulation of thought” which characterizes meaningful interaction (Gadamer, 1992).

Reflecting on the Phenomenon’s Essential Themes

There is little question that those to profiled in this study will bring innumerable individual differences including (but certainly not limited to) their countries of origin,

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21 Which are to be conducted during the participants’ second quarter of enrollment, Winter 2005.
ethnicities, native languages, personal histories, and educational goals. Nevertheless, they will have one thing in common: their status as first-year international undergraduate students at a major American research university. It is the presence of this shared status which suggests the exploration of commonalities in experience:

The mixture of actual and potential is heightened when others perceivers come into play. If others are present, then I realize that when I see the object from this side, others do actually see it from some other angle, and angle that I would possess if I were to move to where they are. What is potential for me is actual for them. The object therefore takes on a greater transcendence to me: it is not only what I see and could see, but also what they see at this moment (Sokolowski, 1999, p. 153).

Patton (1990), following Husserl, refers to these commonalities as *essences*: “core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced” (p. 70). Similarities in experiences and the means by which otherwise disparate individuals make meaning of them do, in fact, suggest the presence of universal themes underlying these experiences. It is these universal themes that phenomenological research—including this study—seeks to illuminate.

Because the research participants and I will interact with one another over an extended period of time and through a number of interviews, participants will partake of our efforts to make meaning of the data we co-construct. It is my desire that these multiple meetings will create a ‘mental space’ for the give-and-take of dialogic interaction between the participants and me. In each of our meetings, I will endeavor to
share my ‘readings’ of prior engagements with the participants while soliciting their feedback on the same. Orbe (2000) asserts that such efforts can foster a uniquely productive “hermeneutic spiral,” a “checks and balance mechanism…[which] invokes a constant examination of the tacit assumptions that guide understanding” (pp. 613-614). The interrogation of tacit assumptions is, of course, the crux of phenomenological research:

Thus the distinction between the natural and the phenomenological attitude: in the natural attitude we head directly toward the object; we go right through the object’s appearances to the object itself. From the philosophically reflective stance, we make the appearances thematic. We look at what we normally look through (Sokolowski, 1999, p. 50).

Describing the Phenomenon

A phenomenological description, according to van Manen “strives for precision and exactness by aiming for interpretive descriptions that exact fullness and completeness of detail, and that explore to a degree of perfection the fundamental nature of the notion being addressed in the text” (van Manen, 1997, p. 17). The burden is on the phenomenological researcher to write and rewrite his or her interpretations for greater clarity. This is by definition a hermeneutic task, one marked by on-going interpretation and analysis (Heidegger, 1998). It is also, from my perspective, the most daunting of the challenges this research frame brings.

Following our interactions with the research participants, phenomenological researchers turn to the transcripts and begin the reflective process. Considerable energy
and time is dedicated to scrutinizing the data with an eye toward identifying themes running through them. It is through writing that we reflect on the question as posed and questions we might pose. We write to make some aspect of the world intelligible: “not until we had written this down did we quite know what we knew…but it [writing] also allows us to reclaim this knowledge and make it our own in a new and more intimate manner” (van Manen, 1997, p. 127).

Maintaining a Pedagogical Orientation

Constructivist research by definition relies upon the researcher and the researched joining together in exploration of an evolving, shared reality. A review of this chapter to this point makes it abundantly clear that to label myself as a/the traditional, i.e.: “objective,” researcher would be fallacious. What’s more, as an educator whose experience and future objectives center on the desire to support the educational pursuits of international students, placing what I assert are scientism’s artificial barriers between the research participants and myself would be not only unacceptable but also irresponsible. Those operating from a positivist framework will doubtlessly criticize this study for the presence of an interaction effect between the researcher and the researched (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2000). I would counter that for one truly desirous of pedagogical outcomes for having done the research in the first place, interaction and shared learning for researcher and research participants alike are to be embraced as elemental.

Throughout his work van Manen demands that our pedagogical goals be manifest in our written explorations of the phenomenon in question. The first evidence of the pedagogy’s salience comes, he asserts, through the orientation of our text. It must be
clear to our readers that our researcher-selves and pedagogic-selves are not discrete. Rather, we view the world and its offerings from a pedagogic perspective and see in research a tool to broaden our understanding. If this lens is in place, then the strength of our pedagogic orientation should be evident. We are advised to “read” meaning into every interaction with (or about) our students. These strong readings, then, lead us to evocative writing as reflection. Just as we as pedagogues are engaged with the phenomenon, so too must we endeavor to create rich descriptions which lead others to enter the dialogue, to (re)orient themselves to the issues at hand. Finally, we must acknowledge that all descriptions, regardless of their richness, only hint at the depth of possible experience. We must not be cowed by ineffable, instead we should embrace it:

and so any text that may teach us something about the depthful character of our pedagogic nature is bound to aim for a certain hermeneutic:

reaching for something beyond, restoring a forgotten or broken wholeness by recollecting something lost, past or eroded, and by reconciling it in our experience of the present with a vision of what should be. This kind of text cannot be summarized. To present research by way of reflective text is not to present findings, but to do a reading (as a poet would) of a text that shows what it teaches. One must meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and, as well, be consumed by it (van Manen, 1997, p. 153)
Balancing Consideration of the Parts and the Whole

Because phenomenological inquiry seeks detailed descriptions of the phenomenon in question, it is natural to ask what happens to the ‘bigger picture’ when the minutiae become the objects of our scrutiny. Kincheloe and McLaren’s (2000) discussion of the hermeneutic circle\(^\text{22}\) is helpful here, for they argue for a balancing of one’s foci on both the details as captured and the explication of them. Achieving such a balance leads us toward van Manen’s pedagogic ends. My goal for this study is that it be analytic with an eye toward improving my practice in working with internationals.

The end of phenomenological reflection is the achievement of a personal, formative knowledge…[this knowledge] enhances our perceptiveness, it contributes to our sense of tact in human relations, and it provides us with pathic forms of understanding that are embodied, situational, relational and enactive (van Manen, 2002a)

Each of these attributes evinces a commitment to one’s students and their learning as well as a dedication to one’s own growth as a professional. The brand of thoughtful inquiry I advocate here becomes a catalyst for learning.

\(^{22}\) As indicated above, the notion originated with Heidegger.
Site Description


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Table 3.1: OSU Enrollee Totals by Level of Study, Academic Years 2000-2004.

During this same period, the university’s foreign-student population numbered over 4000 each year, totaling approximately 9% of total enrollments:

The focus of this study is first-year international undergraduate enrollees. As indicated in Table 2, this cohort constitutes a small sub-group of the university’s international undergraduate enrollment, ranging between a low of 1.5% (academic year 2003) and a high of 2.7 percent (academic year 2001) of new first-quarter freshmen over the last five years:

23 Data in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 aggregated from The Office of the University Registrar’s Autumn Quarter 15th Day Enrollment Reports, 2000-2004.
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Table 3.2: OSU Domestic and International New First Quarter Freshman Counts and Percentages, Academic Years 2000-2004.

Newly-Arrived Undergraduate Student Sojourners: An Expanded Definition

Following the approach of Thomas & Harrell (1994), newly-arrived undergraduate student sojourners are defined as foreign-born nationals temporarily residing in the United States for the purposes of pursuing undergraduate post-secondary education. Newly-arrived undergraduate student sojourners include those who have gained lawful entry to the United States on government-issued F-1, J-1, Q-1, or M-1 student visas. To put a finer point on it, these individuals are indisputably ‘newly arrived’ in terms of residence and degree seeking college study experience in the U.S. Student sojourners may have previously visited the U.S. for short periods of time as tourists or high school exchange students. For the sake of clarity, members of the following groups are not undergraduate student sojourners:

- Foreign-born nationals who have previously pursued post-secondary study;
- Foreign-born nationals not in possession of one of the following visa types: F-1, J-1, Q-1, or M-1;
• Permanent residents, permanent resident aliens, refugees, undocumented aliens and/or their dependents (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2003);
• U.S. citizens;
• Graduate or professional students of any origin

Each of this study’s research participants is a newly-arrived undergraduate student sojourner. At the outset of the study research participants were classified in institutional parlance as international new first-quarter freshmen.

**Research Procedures**

Kvale (1996) identifies five essential topics to be addressed in describing qualitative interview studies:

• the process by which the researcher gained access to and recruited interviewees;
• the technical means by which the interview data were recorded and archived;
• how the researcher presented himself and his work to the research participants;
• how rapport is developed and maintained over the course of data collection;
• and how the data were analyzed.

These topics inform the order and content of the following sections. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness are taken up in detail subsequent to the description of data analysis.
Access to and Recruitment of Research Participants

The process of selecting research participants follows logically from the context one plans to explore. Equipped with an emerging, literature-based understanding of the topic under exploration, the researcher encourages participants to become active contributors in terms of identifying, describing, and critiquing their situations. A seemingly innumerable variety of research methods may be employed in data collection. Regardless of the approaches taken, because the work is experientially-grounded, research participants need to be nurtured and supported in their continued contributions to the work at hand. Data collection strategies may very well have to shift as circumstances ‘on the ground’ change. In any event, the strategies must be chosen carefully so as to strike a balance between the needs of the researcher and the researched (Proweller, 1998).

The Ohio State University’s Office Undergraduate Admissions and First-Year Experience (UA/FYE) provided indispensable aid in identifying prospective research participants for this study. Six weeks prior to the study participants’ arrival and first term of enrollment at the university, the researcher met with UA/FYE staff to review data regarding the in-coming class. As the university collects detailed contact information in support of its admissions and student visa compliance procedures, each of the prospective matriculants’ regular- and electronic-mail addresses were on file and made available to the researcher. In collaboration with the Director of First-Year Experience and his advisor, the researcher prepared an email message and letter introducing the study and soliciting participation through self-nomination.

See Appendix A sample copies of these messages.
Individualized versions of the email message were forwarded to each of the 248 prospective autumn-quarter matriculants. Put differently, this initial recruitment correspondence was transmitted to the total population conforming to the research participant criteria presented above. Within 96 hours (four days) of this initial mailing, seven individuals replied to express an interest in participating in the study. Each of these respondents received a personalized follow-up message from the researcher providing additional details regarding the study. 25 Two recipient replied to the initial message to indicate their inability to participate. 26

Of the 248 original email addresses provided by UA/FYE, 10 generated error messages on the initial mailing. These addressees, along with those of the nine who had responded to the initial mailing, were excluded from the second recruitment emailing, forwarded to the remaining 229 ‘non-responsive’ recipients five days after the first email message was sent. This second electronic mailing elicited 5 additional expressions of interest from prospective participants as well as 3 demurrals. Again, respondents who indicated an interest in participating received personalized follow-up messages with additional details about the study.

Owing to my concern about the modest response rate to date, I approached the Director of First-Year Experience for additional suggestions on how to reach members of the incoming international NFQF cohort. She invited me to attend each of the three UA/FYE international student orientation sessions scheduled each Friday in the three

25 See Appendix B for a sample copy of this message.
26 One had decided to matriculate at another institution, the other—a student athlete—felt her schedule would not
weeks prior to the start of autumn quarter classes. The session schedules were adjusted to accommodate my presenting a brief overview of the research project and a plea for participants. In addition, each orientation session attendee received a recruitment message on university letterhead as part of the information packet distributed by UA/FYE staff. Some 225 letters were distributed over the three weekly sessions.  

Six additional individuals expressed an interest in participating in the study by the conclusion of the UA/FYE orientation series.

Ten newly-arrived undergraduate student sojourners self-selected to voluntarily participate in this study. Each began his or her first foray into degree-track post-secondary study in the United States in autumn 2004. The attentive reader will note the slippage between the number of individuals who expressed an interest in the study and the final number of research participants. Three factors account for this difference. As noted above, 16 prospective participants responded to my recruitment messages and/or recruitment presentations. One respondent did not matriculate at OSU, choosing instead to enroll elsewhere. Four others scheduled appointments to review and sign the study’s consent form only to fail to appear at the arranged times. In each of these cases the individuals in question were offered opportunities to reschedule. None of these initial “no shows” chose to do so.

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27 Orientation session attendees were both international NFQFs and international transfer students. There was no practical way to separate recipients, thus the large number of letters distributed and the unfortunate wastage of materials which followed.
Table 3.3 offers a chronology of the participant recruitment process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 18 August 2004      | Initial recruitment email message sent                                    | • 248 total addressees  
• 10 failed messages  
• 7 recipients express an interest in participating (by day five)  
• 2 recipients indicate an inability to participate (by day five) |
| 23 August 2004      | Recruitment email message re-sent to culled addressee list               | • 229 total addressees  
• 0 failed messages  
• 5 recipients express an interest in participating (by day five)  
• 3 recipients indicate an inability to participate (by day five) |
| 3, 10 & 17 September 2004 | Researcher presents brief project overview at UA/FYE international student orientation session. Recruitment message on letterhead distributed to attendees | • ~75 letters distributed per session  
• 6 recipients express an interest in participating (by day five following final session) |

Table 3.3: Participant Recruitment Chronology

Research Participant Demographic and Background Information

Basic demographic and background information about the research participants is presented in Tables 3.4 and 3.5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>♂/♀</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyrus</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>South Korean</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugh</td>
<td>Hong Kong Chinese</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markus</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleksia</td>
<td>Western European</td>
<td>♀</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>♀</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>South Korean</td>
<td>♀</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Hong Kong Chinese</td>
<td>♀</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Participant Demographic Information

Intended major: biology. Father a physician, mother an accountant. Both earned their degrees in country of origin. Two siblings: younger brother and sister, both of whom attend an elite English language international high school following an American-style curriculum. She differs from her siblings in this respect, having graduated from a “traditional” private high school in country of origin. Three prior visits to the U.S., each < 1 month in duration. Extensive travel in Asia, Oceana, and Europe. Resides with a first-year American student in a university residence hall.

Intended major: aeronautical engineering. Father earned Master’s degree at a major American research institution prior to marrying & starting family. Mother earned Master’s degree in home country. Eldest of two children, his younger brother presently does not intend to pursue higher education in the U.S. Graduated from an elite English language international high school following an American-style curriculum. Visited U.S.

28 Owing to Aleksia’s status as a student athlete, revealing her country of origin risks breaching her anonymity. For this same reason, details as to her sport are withheld and family history has been left intentionally vague.
eight times prior to matriculating OSU, some visits were extended stays with family in the Northeast while others were short family vacations (< 1 month). Considerable travel experience in Asia and Europe, with multiple extended stays in UK owing to relatives residing there. Resides with a first-year American student in a university residence hall.

Intended major: international relations. Father a businessman involved in international trade, earned his degree in the U.S. as a non-traditional student while in his 40s. Mother currently earning a degree in western United States. Elder brother on track to graduate Ohio State in June 2005. Studied in a East Coast suburb as an exchange student during her junior year of high school. Reports “too many” prior trips to U.S. and Canada to recollect number accurately. Extensive travel in Asia, Oceana, and Europe. Resides in an off-campus apartment.

Intended major: business. Both parents graduates of home country universities. Two younger siblings, both of whom plan to attend Ohio State after high school. Arrived in U.S. two months prior to matriculating OSU, enrolled in an intensive English program in a nearby state during that period. Spent summer 2002 enrolled in a U.S. college-prep program for internationals. No other international travel prior to matriculating OSU. Resides with a first-year American student in a university residence hall. Family has plans to purchase a private residence in area in expectation of younger siblings’ future arrivals.

Intended major: industrial design. Both parents graduates of a prestigious home country university, father a psychologist, mother a businesswoman. One sibling: a younger brother who plans to pursue post-secondary education in the U.K. Attended an elite English language international high school following an American-style curriculum. Two prior trips with family to the U.S. as a tourist; extensive European travel. Shared a room with a first-year American student in a university residence hall during first quarter of enrollment, moved to an off-campus apartment during break between autumn and winter quarters where he resides alone.

Intended major: computer science. Father a physician, mother a pharmacist. Both graduates of home country universities, with extended study abroad in European institutions. One sibling: elder sister completing degrees in computer science and Japanese at a major research university in the western U.S. Two previous trips to the United States, < 1 month in duration. Resides in an off-campus apartment with an compatriot in his third year of undergraduate study and an Asian medical student.

Intended major: aeronautical engineering. First generation college student. Father studied in a home country postsecondary institute, went on to become an industrial arts teacher, and later a successful entrepreneur. Mother earned high school degree. No siblings. Traveled frequently to Europe, spent summer 2003 studying in an intensive English program in the western U.S.. Resides with a first-year American student in a university residence hall.
Intended major: health sciences. Recruited student athlete. Father a high school graduate and small business owner. Mother a healthcare worker with post-secondary polytechnic training (akin to a U.S. associate’s degree). One sibling: younger sister presently in high school in home country, sister has not expressed desire to pursue higher education in the U.S. Aleksia studied as an exchange student in the U.S. during her third year of high school. Frequent European travel owing to her participation in athletic competitions. Resides with a first-year non-athlete American student in a university residence hall.

Intended major: electrical engineering. Father a university professor who earned his Ph.D. in the U.S. Mother earned a bachelor’s degree in home country. No siblings. Resided in the United States from age of two to seven, returned for summer exchange program during junior high school. No other international travel prior to matriculating OSU. Resides with a first-year American student in a university residence hall.

Intended major: business. Both parents graduates of home country universities. Two siblings: elder sister on track to graduate a Central Ohio institution in May 2005; younger sister to arrive Columbus summer 2005 and enroll in an area high school as a junior in autumn 2005. Frequent travel to U.S. and Canada; extensive travel in Asia and Oceania. Spent summer 2003 enrolled in a college-prep program for internationals in the western U.S. Lived in a campus residence hall in a private room for first quarter of enrollment. Moved with sister to a private residence purchased by family during second quarter of enrollment.

Table 3.5: Overview of Participant Background Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With one exception, the distribution of the participants’ regions of origin aligns closely with those of the total international undergraduate population. This was not by design, but rather a coincidence in terms of those individuals who self-nominated and later agreed to participate in the study. In autumn 2004, some 1,360 international undergraduates were enrolled at Ohio State (Office of the University Registrar, 2004b). Of these, 633 were from East Asia (China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan), representing 47% of all international undergraduate enrollees. Five of this study’s participants (50%) are from East Asia. Twenty percent (274) of undergraduate international enrollees hailed from...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
from Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore). Similarly, of the 10 individuals profiled here, 2 originate from this region. Students from the India constitute 12% of international undergraduate enrollees and 10% of the participants here. As a percentage of participants, the single Western European in the study drastically exceed the ratio of EU and British citizens in the undergraduate population: of the 1,360 international undergraduates at Ohio State in autumn quarter 2004, 61 (4%) arrived from these nations. Missing from the participant sample are individuals from Canada (4%), the Middle East (3%), Central and South America (2%), Africa (2%) as well as other regions sending less than 2% of enrollees per area.

**Data Collection & Management**

As the data begin to emerge, it is essential that the qualitative researcher allow time to evaluate what has been learned thus far, to consider whether the initial research questions are tapping what one is seeking, and to take the opportunity to recast questions or deploy other research strategies. Similarly, as the researcher begins to identify themes spanning the data, additional literature review may be advisable so as to hone new questions or to put a finer point on future data collection efforts. This is the stage Lather refers to as “progressive focusing” (Dr. Patricia Lather, personal communication, November 13, 2001).

*Interviews*

Approaches to interviewing might be plotted along a continuum with the left and right bounds designated *highly structured* and *open-ended*, respectively. As its name clearly implies, the highly-structured interview enforces a strict regime in an effort to
standardize not only the questions posed, but also the interviewers themselves. Advocates of the highly-structured interview format grudgingly balance their quest for “objective” data against the threat of bias inherent to this most interpersonal of procedures, doing their utmost to “control…and reduce interviewer effects on data and increase overall accuracy” (Fowler, 2002, p. 135). One might be forgiven for coming away from descriptions of structured interview methods with the sense that researchers who subscribe to this approach would be thrilled by the prospect of dispensing with the interviewer altogether were it possible to do so. In stark contrast to structured approaches, open-ended interviews (also referred to as unstructured interviews) are predicated on the notion that interactions between interviewer and interviewee should be solely dialogic.

This study follows a middle path, deploying Seidman’s (1998) tripartite, semi-structured phenomenological interviewing model. The advantages of this approach are three. First, multiple interviews are conducted longitudinally, allowing the researcher to document changes in participants’ meaning-making over time. Second, these interview frames are semi-structured, meaning they are flexible. Interviewee-nominated topics may be followed as they are offered. Third, the multiple-interview approach seamlessly incorporates member checks as one data-verification technique (Talburt, 2002). This elaborated dialogic interaction also reflects Lather’s (2001) constitutive validity, where the researcher/research-participant collaboration further warrants legitimacy claims. Through the use of these interviews, I will seek a “human-to-human relation with the respondent and…to understand rather than explain” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 654, emphasis in original text).
Interview sessions were recorded on an Olympus DM-1 digital audio recorder equipped with an omnidirectional boundary microphone. Digital audio recorders eliminate the need for unreliable audio-cassette tapes while easing the transcription and storage of recorded data. In contrast to conventional magnetic audio-cassette tape recordings, digital recordings are saved in PC-compatible Digital Speech Standard (DSS) format and stored on reusable flash-memory (SD) cards. DSS files may then be transferred to a computer via a USB connection or an external flash-memory card reader. Following this procedure, interview recordings were archived on a computer by participant pseudonym and interview date. Audio file and transcription duplicates were also stored on CD-ROM media so as to secure these data in the event of a hard drive or other equipment failure.

Transcription Procedure

The transcription process is both interpretive and constructive, and the onus is on the researcher to present the transcripts in trustworthy ways. In effect, transcripts constitute dual representations. First, they are written records of an audio-taped event. In this case, interview recordings were transcribed in full by the researcher using a USB transcription foot pedal linked to a PC along with companion transcription software and a standard word-processing program. As the interviews were undertaken with non-native speakers of English, the transcripts are full of false starts and other linguistic errors. For the sake of authenticity, neither these nor my own miscues were corrected. In reviewing the transcripts, however, it soon becomes clear how pale an imitation the printed word is in comparison to the spoken phrase. Not surprisingly, hesitations, pauses and other
paralinguistic features are difficult to transfer from an audio to a written form. This is an
issue all transcribers face.

The process of transcribing an audio-recording is an interpretative act. As Lapadat
& Lindsay (1999) note:

Researchers across disciplines for many years have found transcription to be an important component of the analysis process. We want to emphasize that it is not just the transcription product—those verbatim words written down—that is important; it is also the process that is valuable. Analysis takes place and understandings are derived through the process of constructing a transcript by listening and re-listening, viewing and re-viewing. We think that transcription facilitates the close attention and the interpretive thinking that is needed to make sense of the data (p. 82).

We are reminded of van Manen’s (1997) contention regarding the hermeneutic component of phenomenological research. Transcription may be characterized as the first of numerous close readings of the data undertaken by both the researcher and the researched. The interviews conducted during this study yielded some 276 single-spaced pages of transcription.

Data Reduction

In order that these multiple readings might be conducted efficiently and with an eye toward the identification and exploration of shared themes, each transcript was uploaded into NUD*IST N6 (QSR Software Products, 2003). This qualitative research software enables the researcher to collect and organize excerpts from multiple transcripts into
thematic categories known as nodes. Each of these nodes is further sub-divided into groups of like elements known as tree nodes. Thus, for example, if the topic friendship was an area of interest in this study (which, of course, it was), transcripts were read with an eye toward participant comments in this vein. All such comments were highlighted in NUDIST as falling under the broad ‘friendship’ node. This friendship node was then further divided into trees by such content descriptors as “compatriot friendships,” “non-compatriot friendships,” “host-culture friendships,” “expectations for friendships” and so on. Analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in the identification of 35 nodes which were further divided into 105 tree nodes.

It is through multiple interactions with the data that new interpretations emerge. These emergent texts play a number of roles. On one hand, they can inform what van Manen refers to as “collaborative hermeneutic conversations,” that is, transcripts (and themes tentatively derived from them) may be deployed in subsequent interviews to spark research participants’ memories and reignite reflective thinking (p. 99). Similarly, the researcher returns to the transcripts as a basis for reflection and interpretation. Just as we would expect from a hermeneutic process, multiple readings flow from these efforts, ultimately yielding fresh insights into not only the lived experience of the research participants, but also that of the researcher himself.

Reflexive Photography

It was my hope that the inclusion of images taken by this study’s research participants in our interviews would lead to easier and more insightful discussion while exposing aspects of participants’ meaning-making that might otherwise have been
overlooked. Early in the course of the study, research participants were issued Fuji Film QuickSnap disposable 35mm cameras capable of recording 27 exposures as well as pocketsize notebooks and small pens. Following Harrington & Schibik’s example, the participants were asked to shoot photographs that would help them to describe their impressions of and experiences at the university. Participants were also asked to record the time and date of their photographs in their notebooks along with any comments or additional observations.

Picture-taking was to continue until all the exposures were used, at which point the cameras were to be returned to me for development. The research participants were encouraged to complete this procedure by the end of their first quarter of enrollment so that the photographs could be processed in advance of our second interview meetings.\textsuperscript{29} The research participants’ photographs were processed at a local photo shop, printed as 4x6 inch duplicates, and archived as PC-compatible .jpeg files on CD-ROM media by participant pseudonym and exposure date.

As indicated in the second interview protocol,\textsuperscript{30} the resulting images were utilized in what Harrington and Schibik refer to as photo elicitation interviews. Research participants were asked to describe not only the images they captured, but also to reflect on what these images represented in terms of their experiences as recently-arrived sojourners. See Chapters 4 and 5 for detailed discussions regarding this effort.

\textsuperscript{29} Which were conducted during the participants’ second quarter of enrollment, Winter 2005.
\textsuperscript{30} See Appendix C.
There can be little doubt that the process by which the researcher presents himself and his project to research participants is conflated with both the development of initial trust and long-term rapport with them. Richardson (1997) cogently argues that the adoption of one’s researcher persona begins well in advance of efforts to solicit research participants and should be described from that point forward.

Following this line of thinking, I was particularly concerned about creating an immediate distance between the research participants and me early in our interactions by introducing the fact that I had advanced training and extensive work experience in teaching English to non-native speakers. It has been my experience that non-native English speaking interlocutors tend to become wary in the company of those they perceive as having a heightened awareness of the English language—namely, English teachers. In an effort to sidestep the threat of this hesitation coming between the research participants and me at the outset of our extended work together, I chose to emphasize my status as a student while downplaying this aspect of my professional background. The goal here was not to mislead the participants—if any of them had asked about my professional background I certainly would not have left out my years of experience in teaching English to non-native speakers—but rather to deemphasize an area of my background that I know to be a potential, albeit unwarranted, stumbling block with non-native speakers of English.

As to the presentation of the study, it was my desire to be as explicit as possible with the participants regarding the co-constructed nature of phenomenological research
(van Manen, 1997). I thus attempted to cast the project as a joint-undertaking: inviting the participants to think of themselves as collaborators with me in building the project out of our shared experience.

**Maintaining Rapport with Research Participants**

It should come as no surprise that my interactions with the research participants were as varied as the individuals in question. From our first meetings, during which I explained the study’s procedures in detail, responded the (prospective) participants’ questions, and finally asked them to sign IRB approved *Consent to Participate* waivers,\(^{31}\) to our third and final interviews, the participants and I joked, challenged each other, and even got misty-eyed once or twice.

Not wanting to tax the participants any more than minimally necessary, I limited communication between interviews. A week following each interview I emailed personalized thank you messages, making reference to comments made during our talks and offering assistance (when appropriate) with issues raised therein. At the beginning of the winter and spring 2005 quarters I accessed—with permission—each participant’s class schedule in order to identify potential interview times so as to avoid offering invitations to meet in conflict with the participants’ classes (this was a learning that emerged from scheduling difficulties encountered prior to the first round of interviews). After compiling their class schedules, I emailed each participant a variety of potential meeting times, encouraging them to select the most convenient block (or, in the event that none was acceptable, to offer suggestions as to better times). I sent meeting reminder

\(^{31}\) See Appendix D
email messages three days prior to each interview, again offering interviewees the options of changing their appointments if necessary. The participants proved startlingly responsive and responsible: of the 29 interview sessions scheduled over the course of the study, only one was missed (and very quickly and apologetically rescheduled) owing to forgetfulness.

Throughout our times together I made every effort to be a close and patient listener. I opened each meeting with an overview of the items to be addressed in the session. Similarly, participants were reminded at each meeting that our interactions were intended to be dialogic: that is, they were encouraged to question not only me but also the questions I posed. In preparing for these meetings, I took pains to read and reread previous transcripts so that my queries (particularly those for follow-up) were personalized and empathetic, clearly referencing the participant’s previous comments and sensitive to the sometimes difficult issues raised. Many of the participants appeared genuinely and pleasantly surprised when my comments reflected the fact that I was paying such close attention. I attribute no small importance to this, for in a number of instances during the second and third interview the participants made reference to my recollecting topics they felt were important and how my doing so offered them a new perspective. Each session was closed with two invitations: (1) encouraging the participants to contact me with any questions (related to the study or otherwise) or requests for assistance they might have; and (2) with a statement to the effect that my office door was always be open to them.
While not every participant took me up on these offers, a number of them did make time to come by my office for informal chats over the course of the year. I was pleasantly surprised when six of the nine participants forwarded Winter Break/New Year’s Greetings along with more than a few of what I’ll characterize as “thrilled to be home” messages when they had the chance to visit their home countries over breaks. I took these participant initiated visits and communications as evidence that we were developing relationships perceived as mutually-beneficial. I was and remain humbled by each of my participant’s willingness to freely volunteer his or her time and effort on behalf of this study.

**Ethical Considerations**

At the minimum, researcher satisfaction of Institutional Review Board (IRB) criteria affords research participants the following protections: (1) the right not to be deceived by the researcher; (2) the maintenance of their confidentiality; (3) the right to consent to participate; (4) the ability to withdraw said consent at any time; and (5) the right to expect that data collected will remain confidential and secure.

Every reasonable effort has been made to satisfy these basic protections in the course of this study. Participant confidentiality, as detailed in the *Consent to Participate* form, was maintained by assigning each participant a non-identifiable—albeit gender and nationality-appropriate—pseudonym at the outset of the study. These pseudonyms were deployed on all written and electronic records of researcher/research participant interactions (transcripts and the like) as well as in the presentation and analysis of the
The Consent to Participate form also explained that participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

The secure maintenance of collected data proceeded as follows. Written records and hard-copy photographic images produced during the course of the study were archived by research participant pseudonym in a locked file cabinet. Word-processed documents and other computer files (including interview audio recordings and digital images) were archived, again by pseudonym, to CD-ROM media as they were generated. Working copies of these items were removed from the researcher’s computer(s) upon storage on the CD-ROMs so as to render them inaccessible to others who might have access to the machines in question. These CD-ROMs were likewise stored in a locked file cabinet when not in use by the researcher. There is no evidence to suggest that participant confidentiality was compromised during the course of this study.

**Trustworthiness**

The traditional goal of research in the human sciences has been that of generalizability. This end is purportedly to be achieved through the deployment of ‘objective’ research designs and methodologies couched in the correspondence theory of reality; that is, the assertion that there is a reality which can be accurately captured by neutral observers and later transmitted by these observers to—typically—an audience of like-minded/methoded peers. Fundamental to positivist ontology is the Researcher/researched dichotomy that witnesses the Researcher visiting his or her techniques ‘on’ the researched for the purposes of ‘scientific’ reportage. The Scientific

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32 The capitalization here is intentional, a reflection of traditional assumptions vis-à-vis the power relations between researchers and the ‘subjects’ of their inquiries.
Method is the benchmark of the positivist approach to the collection of these facts and their later codification as knowledge: (1) theories are asserted *a priori*; (2) hypotheses are derived from these pre-stated theories; (3) means of testing hypotheses are operationalized; and (4) the results of the inquiry are reported following a standardized format, the scientific report. The Scientific Method is thus said to produce objective, value-free results which define, quantify, and explain the varieties of human experience. Evaluation of research conducted under this theoretical framework is based in the notion of reproducibility. A procedurally “clean” study—or one said to be valid—must be operationalized so that others who wish to study the phenomenon in question should derive like results provided comparable procedural regimes are undertaken. Validity warrants a study’s trustworthiness in methodology and findings (Kerlinger, 2000).

Reproducibility as a validity criterion is dispensed with by those engaged in post-positivist research. The classic definition of post-positivist trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) coalesces around four concepts: (1) credibility; (2) transferability; (3) confirmability; and (4) reflexive journaling. These criteria have been repeatedly ‘troubled’ by more recent commentators (Scheurich, 1996; Smith, 1993). Furthermore, that the research process is overtly grounded and posited as a negotiated environment brings certain procedural burdens not contemplated by those who work in the positivist frame. Lather (2001) reports Lincoln and Guba themselves have moved away from such criteria in their later writings and follows on with her description of what she refers to “constitutive” validity in which elaborated dialogic interaction with the researched creates a warrant for the researcher’s claim of a data set’s legitimacy. She also asserts the
value of “transgressive” validities that “theorize, historicize, situate, and interrogate inquiry as a cultural practice.” Just as qualitative data are “collected” through interaction with others, so too do we deploy collaborative methods in the course of interpreting our data. Four parties collaborated with the author in reviewing, challenging, and ultimately enhancing the trustworthiness of the finding presented below.

Inquiry auditors serve a number of vital support functions for any researcher, doubly so for those with limited research experience, for they assist researchers in analyzing their data and critiquing interpretations. Typically professionals in the area under consideration, inquiry auditors’ participation on research projects yields an important brand of face validity to such efforts. In this case, my inquiry auditor has nearly three decades of experience in international education. The interview transcripts generated in the course of this study were reviewed by my inquiry auditor so that he might confirm their accuracy, assess my analyses of them, and offer alternative readings. His wisdom, insight, patience, and good humor proved critical to this project.

Peer debriefers play a slightly less formal role in assisting one’s interpretive work, serving as sounding boards and trusted advisors over the course of a research project. In many instances (including this study), peer debriefers are fellow doctoral candidates also grappling with their dissertation projects. Three of my doctoral student peers served as peer debriefers over the course my write up. Their contributions were considerable, often pushing me to provide additional detail and explanation: encouraging me to move away from field-specific parlance and instead incorporate more accessible language. These
partnerships were critical to my analysis and I strongly urge dissertators to establish similar support networks for themselves.

Additionally, another set of “peers”—in this case akin to the study’s research participants—a focus group comprised of four third- and fourth-year international undergraduate collaborated with me in a review of the themes I identified from the participants’ interview transcripts. My rationale here was to invite the comments of these sojourners as to whether or not the themes offered resonated with their earlier adjustment experiences. Details on the contributions of this focus group are discussed below.

Lastly, this project’s multiple, dialogic interviews with the research participants allowed for the deployment of member-checks with an eye toward the goodness of the data elicited as well as my interpretations thereof (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). As a result, the participants were without question the most important contributors to the trustworthiness of this project. Opening and maintaining a productive and collaborative relationship with each of them was vital to its success. Torres and Magolda (2002) offer important reminders as to the challenges and responsibilities which flow from the sustained engagement we undertake with research participants. Indeed, Torres’s33 candor in sharing that she “must continually work on being a constructivist,” is nothing short of revelatory for it captures an implicit tension in qualitative work (p. 480). Researchers and the researched alike enter into a relationship that must be built upon trust in one another.

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33 While collaborating on the article as a whole, Torres and Magolda authored discrete, self-identified sections within the piece.
Limitations

Every study is hampered by factors within and beyond the researcher’s control. This is emphatically so when the sources of data are human beings and their constantly shifting lives. While constructivist research locates its promise dead center in these fertile and often ‘messy’ intersections of context and experience, there are nevertheless practical demands in play which necessitate the negotiation and observation of boundaries vis-à-vis our research participants.\(^{34}\) Thus—in my estimation—this study’s most significant limitation: the need for the sake of the volunteer participants (as well as progress of this study) to limit the frequency of scheduled interactions to three over the course of an academic year. To be sure, upwards of 30 hours of interviews represents no small undertaking on the part of the participants and the researcher. Our meetings yielded a wealth of data. More time and interactions may have borne additional fruit.

A further limitation emerges from focus of the study. The voices presented here represent only one group in an environment where interaction is a desired outcome. Put differently, the study captures the voices of international students alone. There is little doubt that the inclusion of others who interact with international student sojourners (their American peers, faculty and university staff) would provide a more complete perspective of international student sojourners’ experiences. In my estimation, research in this area undertaken with a broader focus is essential to developing a more comprehensive understanding of international student sojourners and their various networks. As indicated earlier, the relatively small number of participants also impacted national

\(^{34}\) e.g. conducting and bringing a study to a close within a reasonable timeframe.
representation in this study and therefore, does not parallel international student enrollments at the institution.

A discussion of the unique challenges posed by the photographic portion of this study is taken up in the conclusion.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis begins with data reduction. This study’s 10 participants—nine of whom maintained involvement for the duration of the study—spent a total of 28.5 hours in recorded conversation with the researcher. These interactions yielded some 276 single-spaced pages of transcription. Suffice to say, it is my “job,” as it were, to sift and winnow these data into a plausible tale of the research participants’ aspirations toward and experiences as first year international undergraduates.

The reader is reminded of two of points made earlier in this text. First, the “stories” told below are co-constructed narratives. By the end of the eight months we had worked together, each participant and I enjoyed a unique relationship. Not surprisingly, the forms of our interactions differed considerably. Despite my best efforts to the contrary, a few of the participants persisted in treating our meetings as little more than question and response exchanges. The others enthusiastically embraced our conversations as opportunities to speak with a keen listener. It will come as no surprise that the latter interactions were decidedly more intriguing and satisfying to me, but even those participants who defaulted to the ‘standard’ unidirectional interview pattern time and again displayed considerable thoughtfulness and detail in their contributions. Second, phenomenological researchers endeavor to provide rich descriptions of lived experience.
but in so doing readily acknowledge that other experiences are possible. To put a finer point on it: all phenomenological descriptions, regardless of their richness, only hint at the depth of possible experience.

Two broad areas of analysis are taken up in this chapter: (1) explorations of participant-nominated subject matter and; (2) a comparison of these to topics the literature identifies as potentially salient in respect to international undergraduate sojourners. The former are examples of grounded themes, emerging as they do from the participants’ reflections upon and reportage of their experiences planning for and undertaking their first year of study at an American university. The latter are, to a degree, a priori. The aforementioned paucity of research regarding international undergraduate sojourners provides little more than anecdote regarding their experiences. By undertaking systematic inquiry with a view toward a variety of international education’s disciplinary “understoods,” it was my hope to identify points of convergence and divergence between issues the participants identified as meaningful to them as newly-arrived sojourners and the topics we might otherwise have anticipated as relevant to their experiences based on the literature.

Imag(ining) the Sojourner Experience: An Alternative Introduction

As discussed in Chapter Three, the use of photographic imagery to open an alternative view on research participants’ experiences is gaining currency in the human sciences. It is my intention to utilize a select set of images from this study’s participants as bookends (or, more appropriately, “frames”) to preface and conclude the data analysis

\[35\] See Chapter Two.
portion of the study. These vignettes will open with the participants’ own remarks regarding the images in question, followed by my “viewings” of the same images. My remarks pertaining to the images at this stage emerge from my researcher log and were generated soon after the second-round interviews. These opening remarks offer us an initial glimpse into the profiled sojourners’ experiences—identifying topics of inquiry that will be taken up in greater detail in this chapter, I will return to a second “reading” of these images and others as the chapter comes to a close with an eye making visible certain salient themes explored herein.

*Photo 3/4* by participant Hugh...

Those two guys are both international students. And the yellow t-shirt guy is from Argentina and this guy, the other one is a Japanese guy. And he is one of my closest friends. And we took this picture at the beginning of the autumn quarter just for a memory (Hugh, ii: 281-283).

![Image 4.1: Photograph 3/4 by Participant Hugh](image)

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36 The research participants and I discussed their photos during the round two interviews. My first “write up” regarding the photos and our discussions of them followed soon thereafter.

37 A note regarding image numbering conventions: the first number assigned to a photo corresponds to the participant identifier assigned to the participant in question; the second number denotes the exposure number of the image within the photos collected by the individual research participant. Thus, *Hugh 3/4* indicates that Hugh was participant #3 and this image is the fourth exposure in the series of images he captured.
When I first saw this photograph a wave of *déjà vu* swept over me. Opening a dusty photo album and turning to the pages where images of my initial days as an undergraduate are collected, I find a startlingly similar snapshot: my first-year roommate and a newly-met ‘hall-mate’ posing happily for the camera. I suspect the same is true for many others who enjoyed the good fortune of taking up campus lodgings at the outset of their undergraduate careers. I find myself unconsciously grinning as I look at Hugh’s photo, for the eagerness, confidence, and camaraderie on display is as infectious as it is endearing. This image captures the photographer’s appreciation that his friends and he will recollect this moment with fondness, an instant when nearly anything seemed possible. As such, it is a fitting opening to this chapter, for nearly all that follows is a tale of accomplishment, promise, and hopefulness.

38 Note: The faces of the individuals in this photograph have been digitally obscured so as to protect their identities.
But this picture, here, is pointing at this man who is standing on the Oval. I didn't know who he was when I took this, but I just found out last week. My English teacher told me that this man is “Brother John” or something like that. He is this guy who stands there on the Oval and he, I don't know, gives sermons. But in a very interesting way because he is like, “You bitches, convert!” Something like that. Trying to make people listen to the sermon or whatever. But then I had never seen this kind of thing in my life. Because if you do this in Indonesia people will stone you to death. I mean, like, it was very interesting and very shocking to me. To see how he was so open. It was so, I don't know how to say it, but it was a pretty weird feeling for me to see this guy. He was shouting “Repent, Repent!” And he was pointing to us...he actually pointed to people who were passing by. I was there, too, and he was looking and me but I moved away and took his picture. And I just found it very interesting. It is not normal in my country. You will get in big trouble for doing such kind of thing. So this is a picture of him from afar. Because I was not brave enough to take his picture from nearby. So I just took it from far away (Ahmad, ii: 240-253).

Ahmad’s photo of “Brother John,” a campus fixture with a flair for the profane in his sermons, is intriguing for a number of reasons. In listening to Ahmad’s response to
this encounter and his desire to capture it, I am reminded not only of the audacious journeys undertaken by each international student sojourner but also the potential their presence represents in terms of broadening our own horizons. As to the former, I’ve deployed this phrase before to describe student sojourners’ undertakings but here it is, to my mind, made concrete. How utterly remarkable it is that we might find on our campus students whose backgrounds, expectations, senses of propriety, and notions of “normalcy” are so incredibly varied. In spite of my years of experience in working with international students, when I hear comments such as Ahmad’s in response to a situation like the one he captured in his photograph I cannot help but be awestruck by the young adults who 39 eagerly leave behind kith and kin, culture and comfort, to become student sojourners. Ahmad’s concern about taking this photo aside, he and his fellow student sojourners are an extraordinarily brave lot. As Ahmad’s reaction to Brother John’s unique homily attests, even something as simple as a walk in the campus’s public spaces can lead to encounters so foreign as to lead one to draw remarkable cross-cultural comparisons.

39 With familial encouragement and support, to be sure.
Those of us who enjoy the privilege of having been on campuses not only for our student years, but also as our careers have progressed will certainly appreciate Yoon’s
observation pertaining to the ubiquity of college apparel on and around the “quad.”

Regardless of the time of year, the institution’s colors are on frequent display in one form of personal adornment or another. This practice is perhaps most notable during the first few weeks of classes, as newly-arrived students seek the means to demonstrate their allegiance to and membership in the institutional community.

Yoon’s remarks about this image—as well as my questions—capture the pervasive institutional branding exemplified by such products. Yoon notes a pattern as she acquaints herself with the campus and her fellow students. She makes the decision to demonstrate her belonging by following the crowd. From a strictly utilitarian perspective the purchase of this sweatshirt is unnecessary, for Yoon reports having other such items in her wardrobe. Nevertheless, this particular piece of clothing carries a larger meaning: it informs her peers that she, too, is a member of the tribe.40

And yet Yoon finds that she is uneasy in this new environment: uncertain as to her sense of place and belonging. As many of the participants’ comments below suggest, she is not alone. The student sojourners who shared their experiences in the course of this study struggled mightily over their first year of study to find community. Furthermore, and for nearly all, the communities in which they would ultimately claim membership at the close of their first year as undergraduate student sojourners varied greatly from those they had anticipated joining before and soon after matriculation. Before exploring this disjuncture between the sojourners’ expectations and realities, it is important we consider

40 And perhaps for much the same reason, her other sweatshirts are emblazoned with a fashionable brand’s logo.
the rationales and means by which the profiled students came to be international undergraduates in the U.S. This discussion is taken up next.

**Sojourners’ Backgrounds & College Choice Processes**

I am unaware of any recent studies regarding international undergraduates’ backgrounds and/or reasons why members of this cohort (in consultation with their families and other trusted advisors, to be sure) take the weighty decision to pursue post-secondary study in the U.S. In listening to the participants discuss their college choice processes it became evident that a variety of factors contributed to their opting to undertake these remarkably audacious journeys.

Four points in particular had the most resonance with this study’s participants: (1) affluence; (2) disillusionment with the efficacy of home-country educational systems; (3) concomitant beliefs that the “American” approach to education would prove to be a better fit for their learning styles while also better preparing them for future employment; and (4) high levels of what I will refer to as “academic self-confidence” owing to success in earlier educational endeavors in combination with the eager support of parents and other trusted advisors. I will explore each of these in turn.

Academic year 2004-2005 tuition, fees, and living expenses for international undergraduates at The Ohio State University totaled approximately USD $30,500 for three quarters (or one academic year) of full-time study (International Undergraduate Admissions, 2004). Ohio State offers international undergraduates no financial aid. With

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41 Within the last 20 years.
the exception of one study participant, Aleksia42, each of the profiled students and their families were bearing the full cost of attendance; that is, none were receiving support from home governments nor other sponsoring organizations. This fact, taken in combination with the professions of the participants’ parents and other elements of the participants’ life experiences (see table 3.5, chapter 3), suggests that affluence is a common thread linking these participants.

Beyond the influences of their social and financial milieus, what factors contributed to the participants making the decision to pursue post-secondary study in the United States? As indicated earlier, three points recurred in the participants’ comments. Two of these circled around related notions: weaknesses identified by participants in their home countries’ secondary and post-secondary educational systems; and expectations as to characteristics perceived by the participants as unique to the American educational setting which would ameliorate these issues. Included here are both affective responses to home country pedagogical norms and practices as well as perceptions regarding the lack of and/or inadequacy of certain fields of study in home country universities. May, Yoon, and Ann spoke to the former of these issues, while Seth, Hugh, and Lee took up the latter.

I: I am wondering when you began thinking about coming to the U.S. as a student?
May: About two years ago. When I was very tense with the homework and all the exams in Hong Kong. Because it is quite a tense system there. Even if you study you may not be able to get good results. So it's really very intense. And I cannot stand that psychologically or physically. So I decided maybe, and I saw my brother and sister studying very relaxing in a

42 Who received a partial tuition and fee waiver as well as housing assistance owing to her status as a student athlete.
I: Can you take me back to how, exactly, you made the decision, “Okay, I am doing U.S.” Or did you also get ready for admission to Hong Kong universities?

May: Yeah. I actually, for myself, I nearly 100% decided to come to the U.S. But my father and mother, my father especially, did not want me to come. He wanted me to stay in Hong Kong. But it’s, yeah, well in Hong Kong system we need to go through 6 years of primary school, and then another 5 years of secondary school, and two years of pre-university, something like that, the A-level. And then university. So in form 6, which is the last year of the lower six class, I decided to come. And I asked my parents, “I want to go to U.S. I want to go out to study, I don’t want to stay in the Hong Kong system. I don’t want to experience that A-level exam to go into the university in Hong Kong.” Then my mother and father said, “No, you need to finish your Matriculation degree before you can go to university.” So I’ve applied for university in UK, U.S. and also Hong Kong. So I took all the examinations (laughs) It was terrible! And so after that, so, we were looking for the university and some of them accepted me and some didn’t. And my father still wanted me to stay in Hong Kong although I had been accepted by some universities abroad. So I stayed after the examinations and waited for the result. And after the result I was accepted into one of the Hong Kong universities and he said, “maybe you can stay here” and so on. But I believed I needed to go. I didn’t want to stay, I really didn’t want to stay. So I told my mom and my mom helped me to convince my father. So here I am. (i: 34-61)

I: You said that you always wanted to study in the U.S. Why?

Yoon: My country is more, I don’t know, you have to study all day long. After school you go to different institutes for extra help. I don’t like those kinds of things. I am more like I want to study by myself and I want to study what I want to do. I don’t want to be in a “you have to do this, you have to do that” atmosphere. The system is like you have to memorize everything and there is no chance to really talk to teachers and stuff like that. (i: 34-41)

43 Unlike May, her brother and sister are enrolled in an international high school following an American curriculum. Her parents intend for her siblings to follow her and pursue post-secondary study in the U.S.
I: You mentioned that there were aspects of your friend’s experiences as a student in the U.S. that you thought were appealing. Can you be a little bit more specific? What about them?

Ann: Because they can go to make a lot of friends. And I know that in America their learning is active. But in Taiwan it’s passive. We, whenever I study in high school, I have so many quizzes and tests everyday. And why we study is just for quizzes and tests. And after you get permission to enter the university, a lot of people they don’t do any studying. They just play. And that’s why when they graduate they don’t have the ability to get a job. (i: 55-62)

While May’s and Yoon’s motivations to look abroad for post-secondary study appear to be grounded in their experiences as high school students, Ann’s comments suggest she is privy to differences in the pedagogical norms and learning opportunities between universities in her home country and those in the U.S. Other participants echoed her perspective:

I: Prior to coming how would you have explained the difference between the typical Indian university and the typical American school?

Seth: I would say application-based teaching. In a university in the U.S. I wouldn’t get as much theory taught as much as at home. But I have got over my twelfth grade, and now I plan to work after my four years here, that means I need to use my theory at work. That is, I need to know more of application than what I would if I stayed at home. I can’t only start reading my books and earn money. It’s that I have to work. I have to work with my knowledge to earn money. And to do that I need an application-based education. And that would be better taught in the U.S. than at home.

I: How did you come to this belief?

Seth: Some of my cousins have gone to universities in India and some of them have gone to universities in the UK, some in the U.S. So I know a lot about universities in India, Australia, the UK, and the U.S. I would say Australia is somewhat like the U.S. UK and Indian universities are similar. Only the facilities and the experience in the UK universities is a bit higher. A bit more in there. Whereas as education in America would be something like knowing what to do rather than knowing
“theorally” [sic] what it is. I would say if you want to do research or something, then UK education would be better because it’s a lot of theory, you know? But if I really, because I am going in for a bachelor’s in engineering and I plan to work after this, so I would say that it’s better to go into an application-based context. (i: 245-263)

I: Going back to that time before you came to the U.S....you said that you had made application to and been accepted by a university in Hong Kong. So, when you thought about American universities and Hong Kong universities, when you thought about the institutions and differences, could you compare and contrast them?

Hugh: First of all, it’s in Hong Kong and I cannot broaden my horizons. Yeah, I just go to a place at home. And I cannot improve my English and I cannot have a good engineering course of study. And because I want to continue my graduate school here. And of course I want to apply to a good university for my graduate school. Because the education system is different it is hard for Hong Kong people to apply for graduate school in the U.S. Because they [American graduate school admissions committees] don’t understand how hard it is to get an “A” at a Hong Kong examination. But in the U.S. it is very easy for us to get an “A.” So they don’t understand how hard it is to get. So, for Hong Kong people it is hard for us to apply for graduate school here. But if I study here it is easier.

I: How did you know this?

Hugh: From what somebody else told me. And I also think this is correct. Because, I mean, our whole education systems are different. I mean teachers here suggest students think. But in Hong Kong we just do, do, do and do. That’s all.

I: If I had met you two years ago, and I had said “Talk to me a little bit about the differences between the university in America and the university in Korea.” How would you have responded?

Lee: I would have said universities in Korea are playgrounds. And the meaning of playground is this: for the first year after you get accepted to university you do nothing but drinking and playing. I can tell you that. You do. You don’t really study for anything for the first year. But if you would have asked me about the university in America, I would have said “high school.” There are some words going around in Korea about the process of study. If you go to high school in Korea and go to university for undergraduate in America you have done all your study as you can. Because you may know about how
Korea students study in high school. They do nothing but study. They don’t have extracurriculars, stuff like that. They study like starting from 7 in the morning until 5 at night. They don’t really have that much time to rest or take a break. So we study all that stuff in high school. You come to America. You study a whole lot more for 4 years, 5 years, whatever. You’ve done all the study you can. That doesn’t mean that you did, really, do all the study, but it means that you have done a lot of work. So if you would have asked me all that stuff, I would have said that study in Korea would have made me a “party pooper.” Studying for me in America would make me a more intelligent person.

I: So have I heard you correctly? Did you think that study here would not be a challenge?
Lee: I saw challenges. Especially in studying. I would have said that I actually chose America because I wanted to study hard. I really didn’t have a passion about studying or playing around in high school at home. So after, I mean, in the process of deciding to come to America I was really in the mood of studying hard here. So I was looking forward to that challenge of studying and I really wanted to succeed in that challenge. (i:341-358/384-390)

With the exception of one individual, each participant offered similar comments. This highlights the ubiquity of the participants’ frustrations with home country educational norms—either as they experienced them as secondary school students or anticipated their influence as prospective post-secondary matriculants—as well as commonalities in expectations regarding the American approach to post-secondary education. Notable is the perception that U.S. universities incorporate application into their curricula to a degree above and beyond what is perceived by the participants to be presented by their home countries’ pedagogies. Intriguing, as well, is the frequently-voiced perception that students work harder in U.S. colleges and universities, and that this is an appealing aspect of study here. The lone dissenter, Aleksia, also chose to pursue higher education in the
U.S. owing to a perception of difference, though her articulation of this point was less concrete than those offered by her peers:

I: Why come to the U.S.?
Aleksia: I went on a study trip with my high school class two years ago to Boston. And I was really happy to be here and I liked Americans, so that was the time when I found out that I would go to the U.S. I have always wished that I could go somewhere and study and get some experience and stuff like that.

I: I'd like to push you a little bit on that...why?
Aleksia: I don't know, it's just something in me that tells me that I should do this, so. I think it is good for one, that you get a lot of experience. It gives you something extra, some—I don't know—some extra points.

The participants and I returned to a consideration of the reality of their perceptions later in the academic year. This line of inquiry is taken up later in the chapter.

§

May’s mention above of pursuing concurrent preparations for post-secondary study in both her home country and the U.S. brings into sharp relief the burdens implicit to making the decision to cross international boundaries and educational systems for post-secondary study. Articulating their desire to do so is often the first challenge prospective sojourners face. Early reticence on the part of parents in response to such plans is not uncommon:

I: How would you characterize your parents’ reactions to your decision to pursue U.S. higher education?
Cyrus: Okay. The initial reaction was, of course, whether I’d be able to do it. Because of my spoiled background. For one thing. My parents—the most comments I received were about my inability to take care of myself. Which was admittedly true. Because I’ve never been in a situation where I’ve had to look after myself. And, well, it’s been a month and I am doing much better than most people I know. And I guess, what’s the
term? “When the stakes are high?” You put yourself out there and do the most you can do. That was the main problem. The second problem was, of course, being away from them. You know the U.S. has a lot of aspects that are advertised in a negative way. As in the drug problem, the crime problem. And the various other problems that you know...which actually, commonly, every nation has...it’s just that in the United States it’s more advertised. And they were concerned about me, let’s say, being affected by those subcultures. And that was another concern that they had. And a third concern was “what if something goes wrong?” I don’t know anyone here except for those friends from Turkey like myself who came to study here. And that, my parents knowing that, made them concerned about it. They were also concerned about whether they would be able to maintain sending me the money and the requirements I had. But we come to the conclusion that money was not the issue. It was more like concerns about me being here by myself. (i:185-204)

I: Do you have any idea why your father was hesitant?
May: There are two sides. He wanted me to stay in Hong Kong and he wanted me to study business. He didn't want me to study biology. So maybe he just wanted to keep me company with him. He wanted to keep me at home. He thought that maybe I don't have the ability to go abroad. Yeah. So I will now prove to him that I have!

I: So you’re determined?
May: Yeah! (i: 62-68)

Not surprisingly, those participants whose parents had studied internationally themselves were more eager. Markus’s parents undertook graduate study in Europe, and his eldest sister is nearing completion of her bachelor’s degree at a university in the western United States. His parents appear to have anticipated his announcement:

Markus: Actually, actually, I think it’s easy. It’s not that hard for them because they also studied abroad—they studied in [Western Europe]—so they already feel the same experience. And, you know, they know what it feels like to leave your parents and to leave to go to another country. To face the difference. I think that’s one of, maybe, one of those reasons why my parents sent me out here. Because they already, they also, went to other countries to study (i: 426-430)
Similarly, Seth reported that his siblings and he are the third generation in his family to pursue their college educations abroad. In his case, it would have been an aberration for him not to have “gone out” on an academic sojourn. Lee, who resided in the U.S. from the age of two to seven while his father pursued graduate study at a major research university in the eastern United States, made his intentions clear early:

Lee: During those years [while his father was a doctoral student] I really liked, I mean, I really loved America. So when it was time that I had to go back to Korea I really didn’t want to. How bad I didn’t really want to was the day we left the U.S. I sang the American, what is it, the American...

I: Anthem?
Lee: Yeah, the anthem. In a very sad tone. (laughs) And starting from then I really wanted to come back to America. It was kind of a dream or stuff. America is like my born country rather than my real born country. So that was the start (i:11-18)

Articulating a decision to follow the student sojourner path is but the first step in lengthy journeys—literal and figurative—to our campus. First, most of the participants chose to err on the side of caution in terms of academic preparation. This meant plotting one’s secondary school course of study with an eye toward satisfying two sets of admissions criteria: those of the target institution(s) abroad as well as universities at home. As May intimates above, this meant adding English language study as well as TOEFL and SAT preparations to home country secondary school curricula which incorporate their own local university entrance requirements. Successfully balancing these competing interests is no small feat:

Ann: It was very difficult for me to prepare for the SAT and TOEFL and I also needed to get good scores on my high school
marks. And so during the second and third years of high school it was just test, test, test. Always tests.

I: Do you feel as though you sacrificed some part of your life?
Ann: Yeah, I had to find a balance. And it was difficult. (i: 121-126)

But finding this balance appears to have reinforced the participants’ confidence in their admissibility and prospects for success:

I: Great! We’ve talked about the mechanics of the applications. Now, please, could you describe your state of mind...what’s going through your head?
Markus: Well, I thought “I should be accepted in one of these universities.” I had a TOEFL score, I had already passed the SAT, and I thought, well, on the websites they also state the requirements for entry and I thought I had passed those. As long as I passed the requirement, then I think I wouldn’t have any troubles. So I was not very concerned about it at the time [laughs] I was quite confident! (i: 138-146)

I: While awaiting an admission decision from OSU were you nervous? Anxious?
May: I was sure that some school will accept me so I am sure that I would come here. But which school accepts me—that is the problem. So I am quite looking forward to some good school accepting me (laughs). I was quite, I can say “anxious” and “excited.”

I: And despite these anxieties...
May: I think I can overcome all of this. I was quite confident when I came here. Yeah. And I was actually looking forward to studying abroad. When people asked me, “what are your thoughts? Aren’t you afraid of so many uncertainties?” I said I am looking forward to these uncertainties. I think I can handle them myself. Yeah. (i: 426-433)

Combining their cosmopolitan worldliness with the rigorous academic preparation they undertook in preparation to study in the U.S., the participants were at the beginning of their sojourns both confident and eager. As shall be demonstrated below, for many this self assurance—what I will characterize as academic self confidence—proved increasingly valuable in the face of the year’s challenges. Likewise, in the best of
circumstances the participants were successfully able to leverage their practiced earnestness as a bulwark against loneliness, isolation, and homesickness—though exceptions were also evident here. I shall revisit this theme of academic self confidence through the sections which follow, exploring the paradox of how it was not only empowering but possibly also hindering as evidenced by the participants’ experiences.

**Interaction Patterns**

Yeah, it’s just difficult to make friends with Americans...well, I think it’s because I am just a freshman. And while we’re on the same level, those freshmen at this university are not very interested in our world. They are only interested about...I don’t know how to say it... football, something else. So it’s difficult to make friends. (Hugh, i: 597-599)

A long avowed rationale for welcoming international students to American campuses holds that cross-cultural interaction naturally follows owing to international students’ very presence. This interaction is said to contribute to cross-cultural learning and the development of intercultural sensitivity amongst all members of the campus community. In an unpublished pilot study (Heiser et al., 2003), my co-researchers and I queried a group of Ohio State international students regarding their interactions with co-national and American students. Our findings echoed those of previous researchers (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Dee & Henkin, 1999; Gareis, 1995). Namely, and despite their wishes to the contrary, international students had limited social interactions with their American peers. Student sojourners’ social circles were instead largely comprised of co-national and non-compatriot international students. The research literature suggests that the prospects for cross-cultural learning between international students and their

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**Footnote:** Fellow international students of the same nationality.
American counterparts are less promising than those of us with an interest in international education likely desire.

Despite the fact that this study’s participants arrived campus with the expectation that they would often interact with and soon begin to befriend/be befriended by their American counterparts, it wasn’t until the end of their first academic year that they were able to report substantive headway in this vein. A variety of factors appear to have contributed to the difficulties the participants encountered in forming relationships with their American peers. These include (1) what I’ll refer to as ‘structural’ barriers to classroom interaction; (2) the participants’ intense and purposive focus on academics early after their arrivals, to the exclusion of cross-cultural relationship building; and (3) unfamiliarity with host culture norms with regard to initiating and maintaining social interaction.

**Structural Barriers to Interaction**

Looking ahead to her experiences as an international student, Ann anticipated interactions with her American classmates to be frequent and reciprocal. Soon after her arrival, however, she came to feel that the physical structure of her classrooms as well as behavioral norms in these settings interfered with her ability to get to know her American peers:

I: When you thought about your American classmates and classes what did you anticipate?

Ann: I thought they will be very active to talk with international students. Like, “where do you come from” and things like that. But when I got here I discovered it’s wrong. Because you just go to school and you sit by yourself and listen to the professor and after class you still go back to study by yourself. (i: 286-7/292-295)
June echoes Ann’s observations:

I: You mentioned that your social group is predominantly other Koreans. It sounds as though you are a little bit frustrated with that…

June: No, no. I have a friend who is Korean. And the rest of them are from Japan, Taiwan.

I: How about Americans?

June: Um, well (hesitates) I am not really close to any of them. I just talk to them in class. But I don’t really go out with them or anything.

I: Is this…I know you studied for a year in a high school in Boston…but when you thought about college, about coming back to college in the U.S., were you interested in having American friends?

June: Yeah, I was interested. Like if I had friends who are from America I could get to know their culture and stuff. But I am not really close to them right now because I don’t really have a chance to get close to them. Because it’s just class [when I see them] and there we just talk to each other about the class. And, you know, that’s it. (ii: 36-45)

Like Ann before her, June’s first and second quarter schedules were predominantly large, lecture-format introductory courses.

Feelings of isolation in the classroom were a common strand in the participants’ comments. The unidirectional means of communication embodied in the “sage on the stage” instructional approach common to lower-level pre-major and general education courses does little to foster interaction between students. Compounding these structural barriers, insecurity about English language skills renders some international students essentially mute early in their college careers. Cyrus recounts the frustration of a fellow international student:

There is a sense of a barrier in between some of my international friends here and the Americans…Especially ones that are not very good at English. They tend to be withdrawn and disconnected. It’s because they can’t really communicate
what they want. They're afraid to say anything. Especially a very intellectual friend of mine who is, his English is not that good, and he knows that, that's why he kind of tends to not talk whenever we're talking. And I don't speak his native language, but I can understand from the things he says, in his broken English, that he is actually very good at the things...he's a knowledgeable person. It's just that he himself says “My English is not good enough to argue the way I want to, and have dominance over the conversation. Because I can't express myself I am always a recessive [sic] figure. And that makes me not want to talk.” These are his own words in different words, but this is what he wanted to say. And I understand the problem (ii: 211-224)

The configuration of a few of the participants’ courses proved to be notable exceptions, countering the isolation arising from otherwise lecture-dominated class schedules. Preliminary coursework for Cyrus’s prospective major—architecture—incorporated small, intensive studio classes from the outset. Cyrus reported spending upwards of 12 hours per week in studio with his peers, the size and duration of these classes conspiring to advance interaction opportunities with his American classmates. Similarly, many of the participants noted that recitation sections appended to large lectures courses also opened forums for interaction:

Ahmad: Well, it's definitely hard to make a friend in classes because we get there, we sit, the professor talks, the bell rings, we go out, and that's it. And we move on. That's why I don't really, (hesitates) I can't see a friendship in doing lectures. But in recitations it's easier. Because we meet more often and in smaller groups. And that's where I make friends. (i: 576-579)

A novel approach to fostering community-building in the classroom was evident in the “internationals-only” recitation sections May experienced in her biology core courses. In these sections, she reports, the biology department “groups the international students in the same survey class so that they don’t have to hesitate about their first year or saying,
asking, how to plan for the degree” (i: 371-373). While eliminating the opportunity for international and American students to interact in these early courses, her segregated recitation section did help May to make meaningful connections with others whose experiences she soon learned were similar to her own. Such cross-cultural connections with non-compatriot internationals were of considerable importance to many of the participants, a point I will return to later in the chapter.

A Question of Focus

I: In thinking about what your classroom experiences would be like, you said that you thought maybe in the classrooms you would be isolated, and that was “okay.” Why?

May: I think it’s quite okay for me. I don’t feel that bad about it. Because I always think that I am coming here to study. I am not coming here to play or do anything else. So if I don’t have any...(pauses) It’s okay for me if I can’t go out to play with people here. Because I need time to study (i: 409-419)

I: Right now, in terms of things that are at the forefront of your mind, what stands out as being important?

Lee: Mostly grades. Because I came here to study. To be challenged by the hard work. I need to succeed with that, so mostly I am always occupied with studying, getting good grades. (i: 551-555).

In my earlier discussion of the study participants’ academic preparations for post-secondary work in an American institution, I asserted that, owing to the rigor of their high school academics, we ought not be surprised by the successful academic performances exhibited by members of this cohort. To put a finer point on it: for these matriculants intensive study appears to be a familiar friend.

Confronted by the multiple challenges they face as new arrivals, it is perhaps not unreasonable that students sojourners would revert to a “default” setting…that is, turn
their focus to an activity which is at once routine and comforting. But this familiar—and
certainly laudable—activity may very well also stand in the way of their forging social
connections with host nationals early in their sojourns. Ahmad and Cyrus spoke of their
fellow residence hall dwellers deriding their studiousness. Indeed, in Cyrus’s case this
mockery took a turn toward harassment. The situation worsened to such a degree over the
course of the first quarter that Cyrus felt he had no recourse but to petition\textsuperscript{45} for a release
from his university housing contract in order that he might take up private lodgings off
campus. Ann reports that her roommate resented the fact that Ann made a habit of
studying well into the early hours of the morning. Hugh’s exasperated American
roommate asked “What is it with all of you Asians and your studying all the time?”

\textbf{May:} I can see that I am repeating life everyday. Going to school,
going back to the dorm, doing homework, and eating. And, so,
I think maybe it's stable right now, but I would like to have
more excitement. Because, right now, I feel like I am a
studying machine. Yeah. And I am not really enjoying studying
here. Because all have to do is get a good GPA, get good
grades, and do all the things I need to do [for school]. (ii:109-114)

This turning inward on the part of newly-arrived sojourners is an intensely individualistic
pattern, to the point of being isolating. Unfortunately this self-selected isolation comes at
the very same time that their American peers are establishing their own social networks.
With limited exceptions, it wasn’t until their third quarter at the university that the study
participants began to achieve the levels of comfort in their environment for them to begin
to take new risks.

\textsuperscript{45} Successfully, as it turns out.
Lee: There’s kind of like an invisible wall. I mean, I don’t know how to describe it, but, between, in the hall where I am staying right now, they don’t really give me the reaction of pushing me away, but they don’t... they (long pause)... it kind of feels like the other people who are living on the wing, in the hall, kind of, how should I explain this? They don’t really say something bad or show anything bad like that, but it’s not like they are really interested in me or try to be friendly and stuff like that. They just mind their own business and stuff.

I: Do you perceive that this is a different treatment than other people on the floor receive?

Lee: Kind of. Because between Americans and Americans they’re really like, they don’t really have any problem hanging out and stuff like that. It’s not like everybody’s acting weird to me, but there are some kids who are really interested and very friendly and stuff, but besides them they are mostly minding their own business and stuff like that.

I: According to the tone you’re using as you speak about this, this is somewhat disappointing to you?

Lee: A little. Disappointing? Yeah, kind of. A little. It is different from the way Americans came to me as they did when I was back in the second year of middle school. So I am kind of confused. (i: 488-505)

For this researcher one of the more engaging aspects of phenomenological research is the methodology’s intense focus on the modes of discourse surrounding the phenomena under scrutiny. An approach sociolinguists use when attempting to identify and demarcate language communities is to plot a purported community’s idiomatic language. Idioms are speech forms or expressions peculiar to themselves grammatically and not understandable from the individual meanings of their elements, e.g. keep tabs on (Soukhanov, 1992). Owing to their basis in ‘insider knowledge,’ idioms speak (if you will pardon the pun) to shared elements of experience. Accordingly, phenomenological researchers are wise to read idioms hermeneutically—for these turns of phrase
figuratively circle back to a given group’s members’ beings in and engagement with the world. The extended interview frame deployed in this study, in combination with its multi-interview/longitudinal approach, offered the participants and me the opportunity to not only identify but also attend to key insider words and phrases over time. Thus was the idiom “‘Hi’ and ‘Bye’ friends” revealed, naming a phenomenon which caused much bewilderment amongst the participants as well as their fellow sojourners.

From an American perspective, the people whom the study participants (and their fellow sojourners) refer to as “‘Hi’ and ‘Bye’ friends” are not friends at all. Rather, we might label them (at the very most) passing acquaintances, but more likely simply individuals we recognize from having seen (but not met) previously. We might therefore greet (and even that verb seems a bit strong relative to the nature of the interaction) said individuals with a short “hi” or take leave from them with an equally clipped “bye.”

We Americans do this so automatically that as I ponder these exchanges I encounter more than a little difficulty putting their purposes into words. Perhaps these utterances are nothing more than white noise, masking our discomfort with silence in the presence of others. Perhaps they mark a misguided sense of courtesy: politeness dictating that we acknowledge our recognition of another in a context when this recognition is not sufficiently robust to support a true conversational gambit. It may even be that it is not about the recipient of the utterance at all, rather a meek expression of some desire or hopefulness on the part of the speaker to establish something more relationship-wise with the recipient of our “hi” or our “bye.”
These brief ruminations are adequate to illustrate a few points. Considerable personal and social and cultural baggage is packed in even the simplest of utterances.\textsuperscript{46} And while any student of any language might learn the mechanics of exchanges in any basic foreign-language textbook, it is not until one has actually spent some time in a non-native language environment that it dawns upon one that something is afoot (i.e., “Why are these people constantly saying ‘X’ to me?”) and that what is being said is not explicable (i.e., “What on earth do they mean when they say ‘X’ to me?”).

Out of befuddlement springs analysis. First, of course, through one’s own cultural and linguistic lens. A common refrain from the study participants in interview one was, ‘why does everyone here smile all the time and say “hi”’? Such impressionistic questions are not limited to the OSU context: NAFSA’s \textit{Pre-departure orientation for Chinese Students} web page (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2003) contains an extensive comparative discussion of what is occurring in such exchanges while providing excellent examples of not only circumstances where cross-cultural communication might be expected to break down, but also approaches by which such misunderstandings may be reduced and/or resolved through a thoughtful anticipation of and preparation for their occurrence.

Early in the year participant Cyrus remarks on the prevailing atmosphere his new community:

\begin{quote}
And the interaction...there’s a constant interaction. The form of the interaction is different from what I am used to. People
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} Indeed, my choice of the word “We” to open the preceding paragraph led to a lengthy pause from writing as I contemplated the boundaries of “We-ness” in reference to the (speech) communities in which I might claim and/or posses membership.
are being friendly even though for me that friendliness seems superficial but that friendliness atmosphere creates a nice opportunity to meet people because you don’t have any problem with going up and asking someone “hey, how are you doing” because you know that out of being, for the sake of being friendly, you will be getting a response. Whereas it’s more of a coin toss in other nations that I’ve visited. (i: 97-102)

Three items are of particular note in Cyrus’s comment. First is his pleasant surprise regarding the friendliness exhibited by those around him. To a person the 10 participants in this study made the same observation during their first interviews. Second, Cyrus is canny, recognizing that this is a different form of friendliness than the one he is accustomed to in his home culture or the other cultures he has observed. This points to one of the benefits associated with the aforementioned cosmopolitanism: Cyrus’s previous experiences (and apparent attentiveness to said experiences) in his home and previously-visited foreign environments have equipped him with multiple lenses, if you will, through which to consider this new milieu. An outgoing and confident young man, Cyrus finds opportunities in the interaction modalities present around him. In effect, he turns the tables on his American peers by willfully violating the intent of their blithe utterances. He is cheered by his ability to do this, claiming later in the same interview that his “foreignness” offers him a degree of “immunity” from the locals’ rules of interaction.

Others of the participants are less successful in their efforts to make sense of the social norms of their American peers:

1: Great. You also mentioned that one of the things that you thought was attractive about coming to the U.S. to study was that you would have the opportunity to make a lot of friends.
Helen: Well, with Americans, maybe friendship is, because parties here are very common. And my parents told me that maybe I should go party with them and hang out with them. But last time my roommate's sister came here, and I think I don't like parties here. So, maybe, for me I will make friends like hanging out and studying together. But not partying. Yeah.

I: Who are you hanging out with?

Helen: Still Taiwanese.

I: When you say that I see a little grimace. Is this something you're not pleased by?

Helen: Oh no, because my parents want me to stay with Americans. They say that I should, I mean, since I study here I should study and hangout and go out and play with them. And not always stay with Taiwanese. But I think it is kind of hard for me.

I: Can you explain?

Helen: Like, their activities are so different from me. Like my roommate, she likes parties. And I don't like. And her lifestyle is also different from mine. (ii: 14-28)

Hugh reports similar difficulties while offering a hypothesis as to what may be afoot:

I: I’m wondering: did you think your closest friends would be internationals? Or did you think that your closest friends would be Americans?

Hugh: Americans. Yes. This is a change. But maybe later, I mean now undergraduate, freshman or sophomore, my closest friends are internationals, the majority of my closest friends are international students. But I think when I grow older, like when I am a junior, senior, or graduate student, I think I can have, I will have more American close friends.

I: What do you think will change?

Hugh: Because I think they are, because now at this period, freshmen they are like, they are not very interested in international students. I think when they grow older they will be more interested in internationals. Because now I think most freshmen, they are not so mature as us. So they only enjoy playing or something, you know? Yeah.

I: Just to be clear, you think that international students are more mature than their American counterparts?

Hugh: Yes. Yes. First, they travel from their country all the way here. So they see more things. I think most students in Ohio they never get out of Ohio. So maybe some freshmen this is their first time to leave their family. To leave their small towns to come to this big city. So they only enjoy playing with Americans. But when they grow older, I think, academically
they need, they may have to interact with us. So then we can
develop some kind of relationship. (ii: 92-109)

While this is not the place to argue the validity of Hugh’s opinion regarding the maturity
of his American peers, what is interesting to note is his patient hopefulness that the future
will, indeed, bring a change of circumstances.

For Hugh and his fellow study participants their American counterparts are often
enigmatic. At first blush, Ahmad saw his campus living situation as offering a
tremendous advantage in terms of interacting with members of the host culture

And the interesting thing is that my dorm is not an
international building. So it’s more like the people all around
me are from Ohio. And I am the only international student in
that building. So I was thinking this [promises to be] another
interesting experience for me. (i: 510-513)

But Ahmad likewise reports having difficulty cracking the friendship code of those
around him. His proposed resolution—voluntarily segregating himself from his American
peers—forcefully reiterates the dilemma faced by internationals who find themselves
befuddled by the host culture’s prevailing social norms:

Yes, I am thinking if I get into the building where all of them
are international students, then all of us are new people here.
We’re foreigners here and therefore I was thinking if I could
get into an international building it’ll be easier for me to have
more friends. More floor mates and everything. As we all
share the same experiences compared to Americans who meet
Americans here. And it’s hard for me to try and fit in this
group instead of all internationals. Do you understand what I
am saying? (i: 515-520)

At the moment Ahmad posed this question, “Do you understand what I am saying?” (i:
520) I made a highlighted note in my interview log to be certain to try and share with my
future readers the plaintiveness in his voice. Listening again to the audio recording of his
query, it is not difficult to conclude that the question is really not directed to me at all, but rather to all of the Americans whom he was so keen to befriend.

As I listened to the participants share their difficulties in this vein over the course of the year, I desperately wanted to be able to offer them some sort of insider’s clue as to how they might resolve the mystery of friendship-building with their American peers. I regret to admit that I found myself unable to provide them such a Rosetta stone, and so Hugh’s return to the topic at the end of the year came as something of a relief:

I: So, is your circle of friends expanding?
Hugh: Yeah. I think especially this quarter. And I am getting to know more Americans and also international students.
I: Why? What’s changed?
Hugh: I think maybe the connection is getting wider. I know this friend, he tells me about another friend. This kind of thing. And I am so glad that I can have more friends, of course. This is very important in this school.
I: I am glad to hear it...
Hugh: Still, though, international students...most of my friends are still international students.
I: That echoes or reflects what other people are telling me, too. And I am wondering how, over the course of the four years, how that friendship circle changes...
Hugh: Of course the happiest thing is that I have some American friends now. Those engineering group mates. We are still very good friends. So I am very happy of that...not just say “hi” and “bye,” so that really makes me very glad.
I: It seems to be the case. I am hearing that from a number of people. That’s something I hadn’t thought about, to be quite honest, but it’s interesting that your experience seems to be the norm. It’s only now, really, that people’s circles are beginning to expand.
Hugh: Yes, yes. I think for international students the circle expands slower than for Americans, right? Because, they are like...one more piece of advice is that people here are quite social. So it’s easier. After like one week staying in the dorm, then your circle already expands. But for us, it happens very slowly, very slowly. I think it always takes one year. One advice for international students is this: do not worry about that in your first quarter. Maybe by the end of the first year you will find
A Caveat

The reader should note that the discussion does not begin to explore the dynamics which may have limited the initiation of cross-cultural relationship forays by members of the American host culture. To be clear: American students were not the focus of this study and, as a consequence, I neither sought nor had informants from this group. That is a project for another day.

Neither do I want the preceding discussion to be misinterpreted as a backhanded brand of ‘blaming the victim,’ i.e., the international student sojourners. It would be inappropriate to lay the “blame” at their feet for failing to apprehend the host culture’s deeply embedded friendship norms or for turning to the comforts of habit in the face of a confusing foreign environment. Instead, I offer these observations as an opening gambit in what I hope will be a discussion joined by others concerned not only about the status and experiences of the international students on our campuses, but also with an eye toward the potential cross-cultural learning and understanding.

Participants’ Perceptions of Their Role(s) as Members of the OSU Community

As this study’s literature review demonstrates, it is hard to overstate the importance of involvements with peers and other campus community members in relation not only to persistence to degree, but also students’ learning outcomes, and prospects for satisfaction with their college experiences writ large. The study participants were to a person, and prior to their arrivals on campus, keenly enthusiastic about developing friendships with their American peers. This eagerness was perhaps matched only by the
participants’ zeal for “American-style” learning—anticipated pedagogies, again as detailed above, where the expectation was that approaches to teaching and study would be active, engaging and, above all else practical. While meaningful relationships with peers and classroom-based learning are not to be understated, the involvement literature defines the term involvement much more broadly.

As a term of art, involvement encompasses the seemingly boundless range of co-curricular opportunities available at and surrounding our institutions (Astin, 1999). And so the participants were invited to discuss their perceptions of and experiences with and a variety of these broader involvement initiatives. Namely, their expectations regarding and actual experiences with faculty, their anticipations of and later engagement with student organizations, and—at a more abstract level—their thoughts on the nature of their potential and actual roles as members of the campus community were topics queried repeatedly over the course of the three interviews.

I have previously argued that the nature of the sojourners’ learning environments on our campus has—with the notable exception of Cyrus’s studio classes and those few participants who found themselves enrolled in internationals-only recitation sections—seemingly played a role in frustrating the students’ desires to interact with their classmates. Listening to these participants describe their classroom comings and goings is disheartening, the attendant feelings of isolation palpable. But fellow students are not the only individuals one might encounter in the university classroom. Instructors, be they members of the professoriate or graduate teaching assistants, are—especially in the typical first-year course—literally the centers of attention. Harkening back to the
participants’ comments about the (generally) lonesome nature of their classrooms, the reader might find reason to be concerned about the participants’ utter failure to mention the instructors present in their classes, to say nothing of recollections (or lacks thereof) of interacting with them. My queries in this area were time and again rebuffed.

This is not to say that the participants lacked expectations regarding their instructors:

I: So we talked a little bit about your expectations for interactions with American students. What about your instructors? What had you heard or what did you expect about your American instructors?

Markus: Well, I heard that American instructors were helpful. Because they care about their job, they support their students. And their students really understand the material. And also the way of teaching. Yeah, I think that’s the same problem as I mentioned before, the method of teaching is different. The method of teaching...you know it’s not only theory, it’s also practical. In physics you’ll not only see the theories from the lectures, but also you can also see it from lab and seeing it in daily life, making examples, demonstrations (i: 230-238)

I: Why did you expect that you would more interaction with the teachers here? Had you seen something...

Hugh: I think people in Hong Kong know that [students in] U.S. schools are quite, how do you say, are quite free to ask questions or to do something that you want to do in class...

I: I am going to push you a little bit more...

Hugh: Okay...

I: You said “all people know this.” How do they know?

Hugh: I think all students know. From TV, like from Boston Public, from TV like that. But I think that is
mainly from TV. Of course, some of their friends or relatives have been to U.S. and they can tell you. That is a general image of U.S. (i: 327-336)

Despite media portrayals and the reported experiences of others, the sojourners as a group lacked meaningful engagement with their instructors. Exceptions to this appear to reinscribe the domestic population/sojourner segregation surfaced in the earlier discussion of cross-cultural friendship patterns. Indeed, what precious little common ground one participant claimed with his instructors was found with fellow internationals:

Hugh: Now I do, sometimes I do discuss questions with my classmates. And I have more interactions with my TAs. But the interesting point is that all my TAs are Chinese! I don't know why (laughs). And one of my professors is from India. So, and the rest, there is only one American in the lot, so I mean all my instructors are international.

I: How interesting!

Hugh: But I remember that I mentioned in the previous interview that I would like to discuss things with American students. But I think I've changed a little bit. Now I tend to ask questions to my TA. I have closer relationships with my TAs. Last quarter I wanted to discuss with my classmates. This quarter I tend to discuss with my TAs. Just directly. (ii: 111-119)

In opening this topic it is certainly not my intention to criticize faculty re the degree to which they do or do not take opportunities or create learning environments in which engagement with their students is *de rigueur*. To the instructors’ defense, the “sage on the stage” mode of presentation—indeed, the very architecture of the traditional university lecture hall—generally makes one-on-one interaction in introductory undergraduate courses untenable. In a research institution such as the one in question, graduate teaching
assistants often constitute the “front line” of instructor-student interactivity via the recitation sections associated with lecture-format courses.

It is fundamentally impossible for me to draw a characterization of the relationships that may (or may not) have formed between the study participants and their teaching assistants for a very simple reason: in the 28.5 hours I spent in discussion with the participants over the course of the academic year, Hugh’s comments (excerpted above) are the only ones to reference teaching assistants. To be fair, this silence might be “read” in a number of different ways. For example, I am not able to offer comparative data as to whether American students in similar settings are more interactive. But given what the participants shared elsewhere during our discussions regarding their keen desires for interaction, I am inclined to believe that had any of them forged what they felt to be a close relationship with a faculty member or teaching assistant\textsuperscript{47}, I likely would have heard about it.

In the defense of the countless well-intentioned faculty members and graduate teaching assistants who do the “heavy lifting” incumbent in teaching introductory university courses, there may be another critical variable in play. Student reticence about interacting with instructors is a well-documented phenomenon in the general college student population. Time and again studies of student cohorts whose members might be less familiar with academia remind us that unique practices and modes of discourse exist in these contexts and constitute barriers to community entry (Howard-Hamilton, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1999; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996).

\textsuperscript{47} Or a faculty member for that matter.
Even the participant whose western European upbringing we might reasonably have expected to be the most culturally proximate finds herself struggling with ‘standard’ American classroom behaviors:

Aleksia: Well I think I have a lot of challenges. But I am feeling better now, it’s coming. It’s because I’ve been so tired all the time. But also to, just, do well in the classes. Just to talk in them. To not be afraid of standing up and talking about something. I am trying every day to say something in my classes...(ii: 146-152)

To her credit, Aleksia diagnosed and began attending to this gap in classroom expectations. Her resolution to make daily contributions to class discussions taps her long experience with the studied discipline necessary to be the world class athlete she is.

Happily, nearly all of the participants were able to report similar responses by the end of the study.

**Student Organizations & Cocurricular Involvement**

Listening to the participants during the course of our times together and later while reviewing the transcripts of our discussions, I was and continue to be impressed by the remarkable intentionality these young people have exhibited over the course of their academic endeavors to date. We know that taking the decision to embark upon an extended academic sojourn was an intensive process that began very early in the participants’ ‘careers’ as students. With the sole exception of Aleksia, by junior high school each of these individuals had developed a clear preference to matriculate at a university in the U.S., and they were taking concrete steps to make these dreams a reality.

As discussed previously, a particularly salient rationale for making this decision lie in the belief that ‘American-style’ learning would be active and practical. These students looked
to their future instructors and learning environments as providing contexts in which learning would be both engaging and hands-on.

This stance, however, begs the question: what of the participants’ expectations for learning opportunities outside of formal classroom environments? It came as something of a surprise to me that the participants—with the exception of Markus—were stymied by my round-one interview question regarding their thoughts about, expectations for, and actual activities with co-curricular campus organizations and/or initiatives. While nearly all recognized the campus’s ubiquitous student involvement mantra, at this early stage in their sojourns the message appears to have resonated—and here only in word, not deed—with Markus:

I: In your free time...outside of your classes, how are you spending your free time?

Markus: Well I am actually just...I was thinking just the other day, maybe I will go to find some sort of organization. But until now I haven’t joined any organizations. Maybe just going out for food.

I: Okay, that’s fair [both laugh]. To rephrase that, you’re “Thinking about joining organizations.” You’re thinking about it...why thinking, not doing?

Markus: I am just thinking because I haven’t got all the information I need. Just looking for the informations...collecting data about organizations (laughs). (i: 495-502)

The discussion above regarding the intensity of the participants’ immediate post-arrival focuses on academics parallels not only the participants’ avoidance of early involvements, but is also later taken up by the participants as the reason why they are not getting involved:

48 “Do Something Great!”
I: So I was wondering, a phrase you used last time in response to my question about whether or not you were participating in any groups, you said at that time you were looking around, and you said, “I’m in data collection.” Have you found any suitable groups or organizations yet?

Markus: No, not yet.

I: Anything that’s attracting your interest?

Markus: No, I haven’t found any.

I: Why not?

Markus: Well, I don’t know. Maybe I am just too busy with my classes. So I don’t take much time to collect or assess that kind of data (laughs) (ii: 58-67)

I: Are you participating in any organizations besides your church here on campus?

Ahmad: Not on campus. No. Because I don’t think I have time plus I don’t have the Fisher [College of Business] transfer locked up yet. [That is] a really big deal [occupying my time right now]. (ii: 145-147)

In addition to an exclusive focus on academics, sojourners expressed a lack of familiarity with how to ‘properly’ interact in student activities. The result was a lack of involvement:

I: How about involvements in organizations?

Hugh: Not yet. First, I have no idea about how to get involved. And I don’t know what to get involved with. And I may join some engineering organization, yeah, and others like those [intramural] sports. I have no idea. I don’t think I am too good at that because Americans are so big and, you know, yeah, so maybe I will join some engineering organizations. (ii: 70-74)

49 Keeping in mind the participants comments about the difficulties inherent in learning how one might ‘correctly’ interact with one’s American peers.
It is not until late in the year that the participants report developments in this vein. By spring quarter June had gained a seat in the university orchestra and was volunteering with a local church in its charitable work with Columbus’s growing East African immigrant population. May had discovered a means to wed her academic interests—zoology and pre-veterinary studies—with a volunteer stint at a Central Ohio wildlife rescue organization. Even Hugh, who earlier in the year reported such difficulties in identifying groups to match his interests, was able to report that by the end of the year he had made some close friends within his first-year engineering cohort. Even more exciting for Hugh was the fact that he and his study partners were working to parlay their previous academic success into a research project to be jointly undertaken with a professor who had noted the group’s promise.

I: Last time you were excited that in one of your engineering classes that you were starting to do group work with Americans...

Hugh: Yes, yes, yes

I: How did that play out?

Hugh: Finally, I think...one thing I can say for sure is that we miss each other right now. Because every time I see those guys around on campus, we, like, you know, we're like old friends already. And we greet each other very happily. So that is very good. And I think, finally, we all got some very good grades together.

By the end of their first year as undergraduate sojourners, the participants appear to have come through the challenges confidently recommitted to their own success while establishing themselves as productive contributors to the OSU community.
Reflexivity Leads to Reciprocity: Sojourners’ Emergent Kinship with Their Peers

The participants and I developed increasing familiarity with one another as the academic year passed. Not surprisingly, this changed the tenor of our interactions. The first-round interviews—which took place within a month of the participants’ arrivals on campus—were characterized by what I would describe as rather impressionistic responses from the interviewees. This was to a degree anticipated, for I encouraged the participants in our first meetings to detail their personal histories and expectations as well as to comment on their immediate post-arrival activities and perspectives. As is shown above, these initial conversations were useful in capturing the participants’ cosmopolitanism, academic self-confidence, and early concerns about and experiences with cross-cultural interaction.

Interview rounds two and three ranged more broadly as the participants and I had by then begun to construct shared histories, if you will, based upon our thoughts about and discussions pertaining to their experiences. In the later interviews more than a few of the participants appeared nothing less than astonished by the fact that my questions and comments referenced remarks they had made during our earlier meetings. Given my position re the study and its long-term goals they might reasonably have anticipated recursion in the questions posed. So their surprise came as something of a surprise to me. To be sure, the constructivist stance demands close listening and a concomitant co-construction of dialogue. As the year passed there was little doubt that the participants came to understand that they were being attended to by a keen listener and that said listener was taking pains to reflect upon their comments and experiences.
The notion of reciprocity (Rhoads, 1997) when brought to bear on research demands that our efforts not be one-sided. To be sure, dissertators have a considerable stake in the process and outcomes of their labors. To claim otherwise would be utterly disingenuous. As student affairs scholars and practitioners, however, we are called to do our work with an ethos of care for those with whom our initiatives are undertaken and with an eye toward learning outcomes for all involved. We cannot simply plunder our participants’ experiences for personal gain. We are instead called by our profession to encourage the exploration of learning opportunities in all that we do. Longitudinal studies afford us a window through which we may collaborate with students as they draw upon their experiences and come to view themselves and the world differently as a result. Thus while preparing the interview protocols deployed across this study I incorporated questions intended to tap the participants’ self-reflections on their involvement with the project. This began quite simply in the first interview when, nearing the close of our discussions, I asked each participant to share her or his reason(s) for agreeing to join the study.

I: Two more questions and then we’re done with interview one. We made it! I would like to ask you...you got an email from me in August, right? From this total stranger, Brad Van Den Elzen...why did you decide to become involved? Why are you doing this?

Markus: Well at least if I am doing this I know one American, that’s you! Yeah, I just want to, actually if I am doing this I also learn some U.S. culture from you and also improve my English and, well, at that time I thought, well, maybe when I first got here I wouldn’t know any Americans. Maybe I won’t know anyone. At least if I am doing this I will know someone. And also, when I was in high
school, I also have to do some papers, some research, and I think it is quite nice to help some people who want to fill out some surveys.

I: Oh, so you’re sympathetic to my plight!
Markus: Okay, yeah. [both laugh] (i: 524-534)

I: Great! A final question. June, your situation was a little bit different because you didn’t get any email messages from me in August, right?
June: From you? I don’t think so.
I: So how did you hear about this study?
June: You came into orientation. I wasn’t really interested. And then you sent me an email after.
I: I was at your Friday orientation session but at that time you weren’t really interested?
June: No. I really didn’t know what you were talking about. So I didn’t do anything then.
I: But then you got an email message. And something changed...
June: You know I told you about my psychology course so maybe I could get more hours from it. So that’s why I started to get interested.
I: But I told you that you couldn’t get those hours.
June: Yeah, it doesn’t matter. I thought it was interesting to be in your study. That you want to know about international students. And I am. So I think I will tell you about my problems and my stories, and I think it’s going to be interesting. (i: 464-478)

I: We’ll finish up here. Did you get an email from me before you left home?
May: Yeah. But I didn’t reply. Because (laughs). Well, at that time I asked my mom about that. I said “this guy is doing something. Why is he doing about that?” And my mom said, “Oh, don’t answer him. Maybe he is just someone who wants to know more and I don’t know what he’ll do later on. It may be dangerous.” (laughs).
I: So when did you decide and why?
May: When? When I received your, when I replied to your email. And also I remember in the orientation, that guy, I forget his name, he talked about that “someone will send you email” or, actually, in the folder they enclosed your letter, and they said “this
is someone and he is doing something” and telling things like that...

I: And was your mother with you?

May: No. And at that time I was thinking maybe I could try that because you were doing a survey and I believe after your survey there will be more information and I will be able to help some of the other international students. Yeah. And also, it’s quite interesting to be involved in something like this.

I: Why?

May: Why? Because it is some kind of professional thing, I think because you mentioned about your professor, and I believe you may need to give some report or publish something. And I think it is something quite professional. And it is not an informal meeting. And my point of view actually may affect your results or something like that. And I think it’s quite interesting. And most of all I like to help some other students. Because after your survey you may help some improvement in something for them.

I: Well, I am very happy that you agreed. And I hope it still seems somewhat professional to you! (both laugh) (i: 664-687)

I: So you heard me get up and make my little spiel, and I probably talked too fast, and I was nervous and dancing around. What tipped the scales? What made you think, “Oh, yeah, maybe I’ll do this?”

Seth: Yeah, because, I was an international student. And I wanted to personally do something that would help other international students and all. Because now I am in the U.S. I wanted to, you know, doing a study helps you connect with other international students. And I wanted to know others, too, and what they feel. So that’s why, as soon as I heard about it, I was like, “Yeah, this is what I want to do.”

I: Well, I am glad you did! (i: 582-590)

The reader is reminded that my approach to soliciting participation in the study took a variety of forms. Recruitment began in August 2004 with an individual email messages to
each of the 248 prospective international undergraduates identified by the Office of Admissions as likely to matriculate for fall quarter 2004. Disheartened by the limited response to this first attempt, I arranged to be on hand during September 2004’s three new international student orientation sessions to offer a brief overview of the study and answer prospective participants’ questions. In addition, each new international undergraduate received a copy of a recruitment letter in his or her orientation packet. My visits to the orientation sessions were followed up by another email message to those present.

In response, the participants nominated themselves for involvement. As the above excerpts suggest, their reasons for doing so varied. A number viewed the study as a means of quickly establishing what they believed would be a mutually-beneficial relationship with an American. Others reported some familiarity with human-centered research and their sympathy for the plight of the lonely researcher attempting to recruit participants. Those who took this perspective also frequently alluded to an interest in the study and its methods. All the participants expressed their desire to help other, future members of the student sojourner community.

I must admit that I was initially taken aback by this apparent generosity of spirit. Upon reflection, however, it bears repeating that each of the profiled individuals (along with his/her family and other trusted advisors) had spent nearly the entirety of their educational careers preparing for the day when they would be student sojourners themselves. Having been accepted by a major American research university and newly-arrived on campus, the participants had doubtlessly reached a notable milestone in
what—if the reader will pardon the hyperbole—had been their life’s work to date. Not only were they proud of their accomplishments and eager to see them documented, but the participants had similarly come to view themselves as members of a community: contributors whose experiences might prove valuable to others intending to pursue similar paths. This is Rhoads’s reciprocity realized (Rhoads, 1997).

**Reflexivity’s Limits: Challenges to Sense-making During Transition**

Like any transition, however, difficulties were encountered. I have already documented the sense of isolation many of the participants felt despite their eagerness to interact with others and the dynamism of their surroundings. By the second round of interviews it was clear that the participants were attending to the challenges they were facing albeit not yet able to precisely pinpoint what was amiss:

I: You mention, in terms of your adjustment, you feel that something is up, something is happening...

Lee: Right now, actually, I think I am kind of in the slump thing. Because I don't know right now either why I am feeling like this, but I may think that I need some term of rest. Because I am not really having the stuff that I had during autumn quarter. I think I need some of that...

I: And what was that “stuff”?

Lee: You know, about studying and getting into it. Right now it’s like “why do I have to do this?” “I don’t want to do this, I don’t want to do that.” But last quarter it wasn’t like that. It was like, “I have to do this, okay, I’ll do it!” Right now it’s “I have to do this? Oh God, why?” So I think I have the wrong answer for the question right now (ii: 111-121)

Lee’s remarks reflect a familiarity with terminology of the *adjustment curve hypothesis*.50

It is notable that nearly all of the participants joined him in characterizing the period from

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50 See Chapter Two for details.
late November 2004 to mid-February 2005 (three to five months after their arrivals on campus) as particularly challenging. Intriguingly, the participants were not able to clearly delineate what aspects of their experiences were proving to be so unsettling. Instead their descriptions suggest a vague melancholy trigged by constellations of issues and reminiscent of the mid-point trough suggested by the aforementioned adjustment curve hypothesis. To wit:

Aleksia: I think I had a critical period in November, December. But after the training trip I am, it just became a lot easier to fit in and just to be part of the team. It's just, it just seems so natural now.

I: If you're comfortable telling me, can you talk to me a little bit about that critical period?

Aleksia: I think it was because I was homesick, too. And I didn't know if I wanted to stay next year. And I had to make that decision, too. So there were a lot of things going around in my head. So maybe I was, I don't think I was totally confident being here. But after the training trip in December I was sure that I will stay and this is what I like and I want to enjoy it here.

I: Can you tell me a little bit about that homesickness?

Aleksia: It's just sometimes, and it still hits me sometimes, just, I don't know, maybe because you've gotten a bad essay back or a low assignment kind of thing. And it's just “Oh, it's not easy!” And everything...if the practice is going bad and all those things are making you homesick. You just want to go home and stay home (ii: 105-116)

Participant May, for example, only noticed a change was afoot when her family pointed it out to her while she was home over winter break:

I: You also spoke last time a little bit about your father being somewhat hesitant about his eldest daughter going abroad to study

May: Uh-huh (laughs)

I: You saw him over the break, of course. Where does he stand now?
May: I think he is quite happy about that. Because he has seen me grow and he found that maybe the U.S. system suits me better.

I: I’d like to take that answer apart a bit. The growth piece?

May: Like, I was a very dependent girl in Hong Kong. And, like, right now when I went back home I do most of the things myself. And, because, we have maids in Hong Kong. So everything will be done by a maid. And we just don’t have to do anything. And this time when I went back, I washed the dishes after I finished my lunch. And mom was like, “What? What are you doing?” (laughs) And I put back my clothes, I fold them, and I hang them. And they said, “Wow!”

I: A quick change in ten weeks.

May: Yeah. And they can see when I was, when I am doing other things, like when we go out. They can see me arranging my appointments and things. (ii: 40-54)

In a related vein, Ahmad notes his compatriot’s bewilderment that temporarily leaving and then returning to the host environment led to a second round of adjustment difficulties:

I: Ahmad, you had, because of your experience at Stanford, it strikes me that you may have had a better preparation for adjusting to life here than many of the other people I am talking with. But I am still wondering, now that you’ve been here since September, is there anything that stands out to you as a surprise? Something you hadn’t expected?

Ahmad: Surprise. I don’t know what kind of surprise you mean, but, I think I am adjusting pretty well. I mean like as I live here longer it’s getting better. And I am adapting well. Not shocked with anything anymore. Because, like, I came here along with two other best friends of mine. And, um, both of them went back to Indonesia during the winter break. And, uh, a friend of mine who goes to CCAD, he told me that when he got back here, we were talking, and he was, like, it feels funny. It feels like he is starting over again. He still misses...
home. He got the homesickness again. Although it’s shorter and not as bad as the first time. But it’s still like starting over again. So I am glad that I didn’t go back to Indonesia so I am well adjusted and didn’t really make any changes.

I: Did you feel any homesickness last quarter?
Ahmad: Well, a little bit. But then I was prepared for it. I set my mind already that those kind of things will happen, so I was quite aware. So whenever I am homesick, I know that “Well, this is my choice going to school here, I just have to face it.”

I: So you had anticipated it.
Ahmad: Yeah (ii: 89-108)

Ahmad rationalizes his experiences with homesickness as part of the figurative baggage that comes with the decision to be a student sojourner. It is notable that more than a few of his fellow participants echoed Ahmad’s resignation during the second round interviews. I left these conversations concerned about a number of the participants’ abilities to carry on and successfully complete their first year of undergraduate study.

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I: Other things about the first year that stand out?
Markus: Just the transition between living with your parents and not living with them. Living here means it’s the start of your own life. Taking responsibility. I think that’s an important part of this.

I: Are you glad you did it?
Markus: Yeah. I am glad I did it. I think it’s nice for me, because now I know I am more responsible. I have more responsibilities than when I was in high school. I know that I can do. Now I know that I can live by myself. Not depend upon other people. I think that’s a pretty good experience. (iii: 181-187)

Despite my mid-year misgivings, each of the participants did successfully complete their first year of undergraduate study. My analysis of the transcripts from interviews one and two led me to the decision to incorporate a series of questions in the
third (and final) interview intended to elicit the participants’ reflections on their experiences to date. Markus, whose comments open this section of the chapter, marked a familiar refrain among the participants: that with their newfound independence the participants had also learned something about their own abilities and developed new levels of self confidence. Participant Ann—who had previously reported feeling extremely isolated and whose tone in interviews one and two struck me as perhaps the most dire of the group—noted, much to my surprise, that the year had been one of productive learning:

I: How do you think you’ll answer someone 15 years from now who asks you, “What was that first year like?”
Ann: Fun. Yeah because this kind of experience is not very common if you don’t come here to study. My life now compared to my friends in Taiwan, I think it’s different. Because I saw their pictures on their web sites, and they just hangout and sing the whole night. And maybe just always hangout. But I can tell that I came here, and I really learned something and I really study. I didn’t waste my parents’ money.

I: Learn something, do you mean academically or about yourself or both?
Ann: Both. And I can deal with myself better than I could in Taiwan

I: Talk about that a little more, please...
Ann: Like if you want to open an account and you go to the bank and you deal with that person. But when I was at home parents always were there for you. And, like, when you need to get your plane ticket, you need to call by yourself. If you need to do anything, you need to do it by yourself. But when you were in Taiwan you will never know what you should do if you want to do that. Yeah. And if you need to go to grocery, maybe you don’t know what price for those eggs. But since you come here to study and live by yourself, you will know how this works.
I: Do you think your maturity has changed?
Ann: Certainly (iii: 229-246)

Those who study college students’ first year experiences note that students within this cohort regularly remark on the personal growth that comes with their newfound independence from the previously dominant routines of family life. As Markus’s and Ann’s comments attest, student sojourners also take lessons from this experience.

**Reflexivity and the Sojourners’ Senses of Self**

Participant involvement in the study appeared to offer them a unique perspective from which to reflect upon their experiences. As our work together came to a close, it was with considerable pleasure that I learned how meaningful involvement in the study had been for the students. Hugh’s and Aleksia’s comments were particularly striking:

I: I have two final questions for you. The first has to do with my readers and me...what lessons do you want us to take away from your contribution?
Hugh: So you want me to talk about what do you learn from me?
I: Yeah, what would you like for us when I talk particularly about you in my write up, because I'll be talking about each person in some detail...what do you want us to learn?
Hugh: Can I say that I want you to learn how me and other international students feel? And how we experience and I want you to let other local Americans know that's how we feel. Those kind of things.
I: And what about the study? Any thoughts about participating in the study?
Hugh: We met once per quarter, right? So that kind of made me, so I can see the development of myself here in the U.S. more clearly. Because of this study. Because, you know, at different times you asked me different questions about my class or something. So that made me, it makes me think. And because of that I kind of understand what I am doing now. And I kind of understand how in the process I changed. Yeah.
I: Great! I am so pleased to hear that.
Hugh: Clearer, you know. Because some of your questions initiated my thinking. So that makes me to think deeper.
I: I am glad!
Hugh: Well, thanks for your questions.
I: A pleasure, believe me! I’m sure you’ll agree with me that I am getting much more out of this than you are...
Hugh: (interrupting) So not even only during the interviews. But outside the interviews I sometimes think about your questions. So that makes me feel, that makes me to think about more things. (iii: 268-291)

I: I’ve been asking each participant to give me an idea of what their contribution is. What can my readers and I attach to you as the lesson from you for being in the study?
Aleksia: What I have learned or...
I: What you want the readers to learn...but you can also answer what you’ve learned...
Aleksia: (unfolds paper upon which she’d prepared a response to this question) I know it’s not a long answer, because...I just want them to know that we just love to be here. I love to be here. And we love to learn and get some experience. And that we really appreciate the Americans’ help. It’s not easy for us sometimes. We don’t understand things or we can’t find things or whatever. That we really appreciate how friendly most people are. And that we also can be homesick. I don’t know what else to say.
I: That sounds like a fine answer. So what did you learn?
Aleksia: I just learned to reflect on my life over the past months. Since September. It makes me think about what I am learning and what I am going through. And how I can use this experience in the next many years.
I: Well, I am glad to hear you say that. A nice outcome.
Aleksia: Yeah (iii: 209-224)
A naysayer might complain that encouraging the participants to strike reflective poses is tantamount to violating the phenomenological emphasis on reportage of “lived” experience. The above comments put such assertions to lie: one’s lived experiences are not embargoed, if you will, by the passing of time. Put differently, lived experience is not static. It is the sharing of experience which illuminates and influences what follows. Thus, it is in the reflections upon and the tellings of their (emerging) stories that the participants begin to draw inferences and ascribe meanings. And these results—the participants’ provisional meanings-makings—offer us insight into the shared essence of these sojourners’ experiences while suggesting areas of inquiry we might take up with other members of the broader student sojourner community.

As a researcher I have been called to listen carefully, ponder, and recycle the participants’ thoughts and my own back to them and to myself. And do this repeatedly. This hermeneutic cycle creates concentric circles—tree rings is the image that comes to mind. And just as a dendroclimatologist would with a tree cutting, one might look at these thoughts in cross section (as if seeing it from above) in an attempt to trace the stories’ mutations over time and tellings. One might just as well ‘rotate’ the data 90° and delve into it via something akin to a core sample. Here with an eye toward identifying and unpacking discrete topics\(^{51}\) of interest. Both perspectives have the potential to offer us insights into phenomena as well as opportunities to learn. As an educator I am gratified to report that my student participants not only came to but also emerged from the study as learners.

\(^{51}\) An artificial construct, to be sure
Chapter Summary

Figuratively speaking, the individuals profiled in this study embarked on their sojourns early in their lives. In taking the decision to follow this route, the sojourners and their families shared remarkably similar perspectives: displeasure with home country educational norms; positive impressions regarding the pedagogies they (or their children) would encounter in the U.S.; and a prevailing peer group outlook which suggested sojourning as the rule rather than the exception. These views coalesced to make the sojourners’ undertakings thinkable. This is a point which bears repeating: the intentionality exhibited by these participants (and their families) is thoughtful, structured, remarkably burdensome, and fundamentally hopeful. That the literature is as of yet silent on the topic of this early planning and the steps prospective sojourners and their families take to realize their goals is stunning. There is much work to be done in this vein.

The importance of the research lies in its potential to offer sojourners and those who interact with them the insight and tools to be thoughtful about the sojourning experiences—both its highlights and its challenges. As to the latter, we have heard from the profiled individuals of their considerable struggles to make meaning of the host environments’ friendship norms. These difficulties are compounded—in the experiences of these sojourners, at least—by a prevailing atmosphere of disinterest in them by the very same American peers whom the sojourners had so long imagined as eager to befriend them.

In addition, these sojourners reported no substantive interaction with their instructors during this first year of study. Can students be academically successful
without such *substantive interaction* with instructors? Undoubtedly. Is this the brand of learning—the receptive and anonymous—the sojourners had in mind when they imagined their study experiences in America? Most certainly not. Might we do better? Assuredly.

Perhaps in response to these limited interactions participants befriended co-nationals, co-culturals, and other non-compatriot sojourners. With their fellow sojourners the participants identified empathetic peers; others whose life experiences also incorporated *cosmopolitan* world views, similar socio-economic statuses, and (to be sure) shared befuddlement with the host culture’s constituents in their midst.

A familiar, albeit inaccurate, term in the literature refers to the phenomenon of sojourners close interaction with other sojourners as ‘ghettoization.’ In listening to and reflecting upon the profiled sojourners’ experiences over the course of this year, I find this term erroneous, suggesting as it does some external, coercive force walling people in. Notions of powerlessness and victimization are implicit. Nothing in the participants’ reflections on their experiences suggests this would be an accurate characterization. Instead, I would offer the notion of *collectivism*, whereby individuals with similar experiences, needs, and goals band together to support one another to make meaning of an unknown. In sharp contrast to ghettoization, here the stance is confident and proactive. The sojourners profiled here have ample evidence by way of their own experiences that they can accomplish nearly anything they set their minds to. Joining others of like backgrounds and similar promise is a savvy move.

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52 I appreciate that referring to a host culture is reductionism at its worst.
Reimag(ining) the Sojourner Experience: An Alternative Chapter Summary

Analysis of the photographic images captured by the participants in the early months of their sojourns has proven to be the most challenging aspect of this study. Broadly speaking, the images collected fall into three thematic categories: *people*, *places*, and *objects*. Each of these themes will be discussed briefly below. In addition, the three images used in the opening of this chapter will be revisited in light of both these thematic explorations as well as the longitudinal perspective afforded by our ability to reflect on this images after having “listened” to the participants’ accounts of their experiences over the study’s duration.

Those photographs falling into the *people* category number a mere ten.\(^5\) Discounting duplicates\(^6\) the number of unique images in this category is six (or 9% of the total images in the collection). But for one, grouping these photos as a theme is straightforward. With the exception of the single outlier, they share certain essentials: pairs or small gatherings of fellow students clearly enjoying one another’s company. Smiling faces and hamming for the camera are evident throughout. As mentioned at the opening of this chapter, the sensations one experiences in looking at these photographs are joy and hopefulness.

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\(^5\) Out of 67 images, amounting to 16% of the total collection.
\(^6\) Images taken by the same participant of the same people during what are identifiably the same “events.”
Those two guys are both international students. And the yellow t-shirt guy is from Argentina and this guy, the other one is a Japanese guy. And he is one of my closest friends. And we took this picture at the beginning of the autumn quarter just for a memory (Hugh, ii: 281-283).

I earlier recounted the sense of *déjà vu* triggered by Hugh’s photograph. One simply cannot help but be charmed by the quiet confidence and eagerness this image exudes. I indicated being moved by the similarity of this image to one I took early in my undergraduate career. We have heard from the participants regarding both the successes they enjoyed and challenges they faced around the notion of friendships. In light of these discussions, a previously unremarkable aspect of this image takes on greater salience. To wit, the young men captured in this photograph are—like the photographer—international student sojourners: One from Argentina, the other from Japan as photographed by a resident of Hong Kong. In contemplating the global diversity represented here (and by extension, on our campus), we have reason to be cheered.

Barring the photo in this series I have characterized as the “outlier,” none of the images in this series capture any American students. Put differently, the images in this
series offer dramatic reinforcement of the study’s findings vis-à-vis the participants’ friendship circles. Image 3/4, it bears repeating, was taken during Hugh’s first week in residence at OSU. When during his third interview late in the school year I asked Hugh how this photo might be different owing to the passing of time and developments in terms of his friendship circle, he responded that he would have been just as likely to have taken this photograph during the final week of his freshman year as during the first. That is, his friendship circle had not grown considerably, nor had it broadened to encompass any of the American classmates he had previously and so eagerly anticipated befriending.

Startlingly, the aforementioned outlier—the single image from this group in which an American student appears—upends not only standard look of the images in this series but also can also be read (in retrospect) as unwittingly foretelling difficulties to come.
1/18 is my friend. He posed a great stereotype, so I wanted to take a picture of him. He is a married 26 year-old American and probably is, like I said, as immature as my 15 year-old friends at home. Doing some of the things that you just don’t want to look at, but on the other hand, he maintains the grown-up sense in a way, too. With his responsible approach and whatnot. And also the way he was, I admit I am pierced up myself, but he just looked a certain profile that I wanted to photograph (Cyrus, ii: 475-480).

This image transmits conflicting notions. Cyrus’s American friend is smiling, clearly enjoying the moment. His gesture can likewise be read as ironic, the sort of “boys being boys” play Cyrus characterizes as at once juvenile albeit harmless. What we learn later in Cyrus’s accounting of his sojourn, unfortunately, is that the “friend” photographed here

55 Note: The face of the individual pictured here has been digitally obscured to protect his identity.
was among those of his peers whose taunting eventually drove Cyrus from campus. Read in this light, the image is a regrettable snapshot of the quality of interaction between members of the host culture and international student sojourners.

The images I characterize as falling into the places subset display greater variation than those in the people category. These 29 images constitute 42% of the total photographs taken. Taking duplicates into account (e.g. multiple images of Ohio Stadium), we are left with twelve discreet images of the campus and its surrounding neighborhood. Within the group the most-frequent are those such as image 4.6, below, shot inside Ohio Stadium during college football games. And surely these autumn spectacles are, sine qua non, fundamental to the Buckeye experience.

Image 4.6: Photograph 6/5 by Participant Aleksia.
Next most common are images of the Oval, South Oval and Mirror Lake. Likewise touchstones to the entire OSU community. Image 4.7 offers an example of this group.

Image 4.7: Photograph 1/11 by Participant Cyrus

While blurring the distinction between the *people* and *places* themes, when I consider Ahmad’s photograph 5/8 (image 4.8, below) I choose to lean toward the *places* reading insomuch as it is the physical and intellectual environment which draws Brother John and those of his ilk to our campuses.
But this picture, here, is pointing at this man who is standing on the Oval. I didn’t know who he was when I took this, but I just found out last week. My English teacher told me that this man is “Brother John” or something like that. He is this guy who stands there on the Oval and he, I don’t know, gives sermons. But in a very interesting way because he is like, “You bitches, convert!” Something like that. Trying to make people listen to the sermon or whatever. But then I had never seen this kind of thing in my life. Because if you do this in Indonesia people will stone you to death. I mean, like, it was very interesting and very shocking to me. To see how he was so open. It was so, I don’t know how to say it, but it was a pretty weird feeling for me to see this guy. He was shouting “Repent, Repent!” And he was pointing to us...he actually pointed to people who were passing by. I was there, too, and he was looking and me but I moved away and took his picture. And I just found it very interesting. It is not normal in my country. You will get in big trouble for doing such kind of thing. So this is a picture of him from afar. Because I was not brave enough to take his picture from nearby. So I just took it from far away (Ahmad, ii: 240-253).
At the opening of this chapter I asserted that Ahmad’s photo could be read as emblematic of a “remarkable pool of intellectual and cultural diversity untapped” in the form of our international student sojourners. This reading holds true in light of the data presented above. We might take it further, however. And consider this image and how it was framed by the photographer as a larger metaphor for the eagerness and the “outsiderness” of the artist—and by extension, his sojourning peers.

Ahmad tells us that he is inextricably drawn to Brother John and his unorthodox harangue. But Ahmad is wary, not entirely certain of what to make of the situation. Owing to this, he chooses to observe (and photograph) from a safe distance. He is intent on understanding, but not entirely certain of the means by which he might do so or even the safety of posing such queries. This is reminiscent of what I characterize as the friendship problematic encountered by the study’s participants. Having so long prepared for their sojourns, and likewise having anticipated that interaction with Americans would be easy and frequent, the sojourners found themselves stymied by circumstances “on the ground.” Thoughtful individuals, the sojourners diagnosed these difficulties and withdrew a safe distance—if only temporarily—to reflect upon and strategize about how they might overcome these challenges.56 Just as Ahmad withdrew from Brother John’s vicinity to capture this moment, so too did the sojourners step back from interactions with their American peers so as to frame their (mis)understandings. As the participants note, there are short- and long-term implications to their having taken this approach. Just as

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56 Participant Cyrus being the exception, his approach instead to leverage his “foreignness” to his advantage by willfully and knowingly violating expectations and thereby drawing wanted attention to himself. A singularly clever strategy, to be sure.
Ahmad’s photo loses its subject given its depth of field, so too did the sojourners find themselves lacking interaction with members of the host culture for their decision to step aside. On the other hand, Ahmad’s photo might be read as canny and rich in its promise. He knows he is witnessing something unknown and is eager to understand. He will later look to this photo and wonder aloud to himself that anything so “normal” could once have been so surprising and unsettling. The sojourners hold out similar hopes in terms of their interactions with Americans. They are eager to unlock the friendship code and are justifiably confident they will ultimately succeed in doing so. And then, like Ahmad’s reflection on the mystery of Brother John, the inexplicable will become comprehensible. In much the same way, the many places of this place will become the sojourners’ own.

Those images in the objects thematic family are by far the most diverse. Numbering 28 (or 42% of the total images taken by the participants), there are no duplicates in this family of photographs. They vary from commentary, with images

At 10/3 these are my vitamins. And I eat them everyday. A little mixture to make sure I don’t die (laughs) (Genie, ii: 276-277)

Image 4.9: Photograph 10/3 by Participant Genie.
10/4. This is the water supply in my dorm. This is the water pot, in which I can boil water and make tea and noodles. And this is the filtering system. The water filter. I think I took this with the plugs...I put the wire in here to take the photo because those wires are very short. And every time when I cook I need to cook on the floor. Because the plugs are on the floor (Genie, ii: 276-281).

Image 4.10: Photograph 10/4 by Participant Genie.

representing participant Genie’s perspective on the healthfulness of campus dining options and the appliances which constituted her in-room “kitchen.” To the inexplicable:

1/3 is one of those random objects that is a continuous theme throughout this whole photography thing. I don’t understand, (a) why a person would buy something like that, and (b) the whole placement of it is so absurd. I got into my room one day and there was this huge plastic bottle in the middle of the room. And it’s just like, one of those things that I thought was worth a photo. It was so absurd when I got here, but now I have witnessed the best and the worst of similar things. Like huge blow-up Buddhas that move and shake around...(Cyrus, ii: 414-420)

Image 4.11: Photograph 1/3 by Participant Cyrus
Yes, 1/9, there seems to be a constant repetition of random objects lying in the middle of random places within the campus. And this is a shoe in the middle of our front yard. And I am trying to just picture how that shoe just ended up there. Did somebody just take it off and drop it on the ground and walk off? It's just one of those things that is frequent and the frequency was something interesting that I thought I should photograph (Cyrus, ii: 450-454).

What the above comments make clear is that objects—whether they take the form of the familiar or the bizarre—can become powerful symbols as we attempt to make meaning of the world around us. Thus I return to Yoon’s image 9/3. In light of what we have heard from the participants, I choose to “re-read” Yoon’s photograph as a visual metaphor. Yoon herself opened the door on this interpretation of the image when she noted, in response to my question as to whether or not she was a “Buckeye,” that she knew she belonged (in the sense, I gather, of having been accepted to the school and by way of her
on-going academic successes—a sense, we have seen, shared by nearly all of her fellow participants), but had not as of yet come to feel this affiliation.

Image 4.13: Photograph 9/3 by Participant Yoon

Yoon: I noticed, for photograph 9/3, I noticed a lot of American people, they dress really casually and they wear a lot of sweatshirts from, like, Ohio State. I thought that was interesting, so I took it.

i: Do you own this sweatshirt?

Yoon: Yeah, I bought it because I don't have sweatshirts. I have them, but they say ‘Abercrombie’ on them.

i: So this photo is indicative of...

Yoon: Yeah, because I noticed a lot of people wear Ohio State shirts and sweatshirts and stuff...

i: Do you describe yourself as a Buckeye now? Or are you not there yet?

Yoon: Maybe. I don't know. It's like I belong to here, you know, but I don't really feel like I am really in to it or a part of it...(ii: 267-276)
Thus it follows that this simple image—an article of clothing meant to symbolize Yoon’s membership in the group—should instead show said garment not adorning its owner, but rather hanging in a closet with the disconsolate expectation it might someday really fit her/she really fit it.

Over the course of this study the participants expressed great hopefulness: attributing their senses of anomie to their recent arrivals, to the immaturity of their American peers, to the as yet indecipherable cultural norms swirling around them. I have very little doubt that each of these assertions possesses a kernel of truth. I am equally confident that over time the participants will gain experience and confidence maneuvering in their new environments, the opacity of host-culture norms and behaviors will give way to increasing clarity, and perhaps their classmates will develop an interest in broadening their horizons and reach out to the willing informants near at hand. But for the moment at least—and by moment here I mean the ever-so-brief period captured by this study—I find myself singularly moved by this image. What this photograph reminds us is that despite the participants’ dogged efforts and eager hopes to the contrary, the sense of community with their American peers they had so long anticipated unfortunately eluded them during their first year in our midst.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In bringing this study to a close it is my desire to share views from two perspectives: as a researcher seeking to contribute to the academy’s discussion about the place of international students in our institutions, pedagogies and communities, and as a student affairs professional responsible for recruiting, admitting, orienting, advising and retaining international student sojourners for a public university in north central Wisconsin. This chapter aims to contribute to the research literature on undergraduate international student sojourners with an eye toward encouraging others to take an interest of their own in these remarkable young women and men and to broaden the conversation in the time-honored tradition of student affairs scholar-practitioners. Many of our discipline’s most important learnings spring from situations encountered and questions posed by our colleagues. This, in turn, reflects the ethos of care which permeates our work—sharing as we do our observations so that others might use what works and improve the rest in the interest of our students.

57 In June 2005, I moved to the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point as Director of the Foreign Student and English as a Second Language Programs.
Summary of Findings

Figuratively speaking, the individuals profiled in this study embarked on their sojourns early in their lives. In taking the decision to follow this route, the sojourners and their families shared remarkably similar perspectives: displeasure with home country educational norms; positive impressions regarding the pedagogies they (or their children) would encounter in the U.S.; and a prevailing peer group outlook which suggested sojourning as the rule rather than the exception. These views coalesced to make the sojourners’ undertakings thinkable. This is a point which bears repeating: the purposefulness exhibited by these participants (and their families) is thoughtful, structured, remarkably burdensome, and fundamentally hopeful. That the literature is as of yet silent on the topic of this early planning and the steps prospective sojourners and their families take to realize their goals is stunning. There is much work to be done in this vein.

The importance of the research lies in its potential to offer sojourners and those who interact with them the insight and tools to be thoughtful about the sojourning experiences—both its highlights and its challenges. As to the latter, we have heard from the profiled individuals of their considerable struggles to make meaning of the host environments’ friendship norms. These difficulties are compounded—in the experiences of these sojourners, at least—by a prevailing atmosphere of disinterest in them by the very same American peers whom the sojourners had so long imagined as eager to befriend them.
In addition, these sojourners reported *no* substantive interaction with their instructors during this first year of study. Can students be academically successful without such *substantive interaction* with instructors? Undoubtedly. Is this the brand of learning—the receptive and anonymous—the sojourners had in mind when they imagined their study experiences in America? Most certainly not. Might we do better? Assuredly.

Perhaps in response to these limited interactions participants befriended co-nationals, co-culturals, and other non-compatriot sojourners. With their fellow sojourners the participants identified empathetic peers; others whose life experiences also incorporated *cosmopolitan* world views, similar socio-economic statuses, and (to be sure) shared befuddlement with the host culture’s constituents in their midst.

A familiar, albeit inaccurate, term in the literature refers to the phenomenon of sojourners close interaction with other sojourners as ‘ghettoization.’ In listening to and reflecting upon the profiled sojourners’ experiences over the course of this year, I find this term erroneous, suggesting as it does some external, coercive force walling people in. Notions of powerlessness and victimization are implicit. Nothing in the participants’ reflections on their experiences suggests this would be an accurate characterization. Instead, I would offer the notion of *collectivism*, whereby individuals with similar experiences, needs, and goals band together to support one another to make meaning of an unknown. In sharp contrast to ghettoization, here the stance is confident and proactive. The sojourners profiled here have ample evidence by way of their own experiences that

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58 I appreciate that referring to a host culture is reductionism at its worst.
they can accomplish nearly anything they set their minds to. Joining others of like backgrounds and similar promise is a savvy move.

**Methodological Implications**

The phenomenological lens affords us a unique perspective into the lived experiences of research participants. Such inquiry provides researchers the opportunity to render said experiences in a deep and reflective manner. This study uses both text and imagery as a means to identify and explore the lived experiences of a cohort of international student sojourners. This combined use of interviews and images is an emerging method in educational research which—in my estimation—has much promise.

While the dialogue I shared with the participants constitutes a rich vein of data with ample depth for repeated analyses in its own right, the participants’ photographs have a resonance all of their own. We succeed in phenomenological inquiry, according to van Manen (1997), when our readers and we alike experience moments of newfound recognition. At such instances notions previously understood come to the foreground and are cast into a new light. This, in turn, can lead us to assume a pedagogical stance from which we might pause, reflect, and learn. This study opened with a deceptively simple question: what does it mean to be an new international undergraduate sojourner on our campus? As research participants responded with both words and images I found myself contemplating their experiences from new angles and perspectives. This is phenomenology’s promise as pedagogical research manifesting itself and an experience I hope my readers shared as well.
Comparison with the literature

This study’s review of literature opened broadly and drew together multiple strands in the literature on college student development to establish a link with the few studies undertaken on international undergraduate sojourners in the U.S. My readings suggest that the student-centered research literature has become increasingly refined over the course of the last two decades. This is at once a reflection of the maturity of our field as well as a manifestation of our growing understanding of and appreciation for difference within our institutions’ student bodies. This study follows suit, seeking as it does to identify and explore elements of the student sojourner experience which distinguish members of this group from their student peers.

As numerous studies cited above suggest, international student sojourners can reasonably be delimited as a group by certain shared characteristics. These include points of origin outside the United States, their having partaken in primary and secondary schooling in systems and pedagogies unlike those found in the U.S., and (for the vast majority student sojourners) first languages other than English. Other “easy” markers for members of this group include student visa status and institutions’ provision of offices and services in support of and in response to these students’ unique needs. Each of the individuals profiled in this study can be so delimited from their American peers on the basis of these elements.

The participants’ affective responses to their first-year experiences were reminiscent of the storied—albeit frequently challenged—curvilinear adjustment models (Adler, 1975; Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Jacobson, 1963; Lysgaard,
1955; Oberg, 1960; Thomas & Harrell, 1994). The first-round interviews were marked by
nothing less than ebullience, and rightly so. For having matriculated to post-secondary
study in the U.S., the participants could claim to have achieved what each had identified
as a major life goal.

The second-round interviews revealed a clear trough in the participants’
eagerness. Comments as to the inscrutability of local cultural norms—as well as the
locals themselves—were common. Where such observations had earlier been shared with
wonderment and good humor, an attitudinal turn was afoot by the students’ second
quarter of enrollment. A number of the participants went so far as to report having second
thoughts about continuing their sojourns. The prevailing sentiment at this time was one of
quiet resignation: difficulties were to be endured in hopes of happier futures.

By the end of their first year of study, the participants had returned to more
positive stances. Equipped with what each characterized as better understandings of their
environments and those populating said environments, the participants had begun to
renegotiate their interaction patterns as well as locate opportunities to engage in activities
they identified as personally rewarding. Their newly-tempered outlooks at the end of
their first year of study mapped on to what the social cognition adjustment models (Black
& Mendenhall, 1990; Black et al., 1991; Torbiörn, 1994) suggest is afoot with sojourners
as they begin to develop a reflective appreciation for the host culture.

As reflected in this study’s literature review, the most common research in the
sojourner literature examines friendship networks (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Bochner et
al., 1985; Bochner et al., 1977; Gareis, 1995; Pruitt, 1978; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002;
Zimmerman, 1995). Friendship network studies—no less so than this one—spring from an all-too-frequent observation and the same sorry reportage: student sojourners and host-country students rarely mix. Little in the way of explanation has been offered for the chasm between these groups. This study offers two new assertions based on the participants’ relationship-building experiences and explorations thereof while recapitulating previous findings on the nature of sojourner/host-national interaction.

First, we would do well to further scrutinize the relationships which emerge among sojourners of differing cultural backgrounds. Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) treat this topic in passing, emphasizing instead friendships within discrete co-cultural sojourner communities. The participants’ discussions regarding their cross-cultural friendships attest to the salience of these relationships during their first year on campus. None questioned the likelihood of these friendships being maintained in the future. Indeed, the hope so far as I could discern from the participants’ limited comments on this topic, was that these relationships would continue in parallel with future friendships with members of the host culture. More longitudinal work is necessary here: not only to document the nature and function of sojourners’ cross-cultural friendship networks over time, but also whether or not these networks do in fact foster or close opportunities for interaction with host nationals.

Second, if we accept the thesis that student sojourner cosmopolitanism is an accumulation of personal and familial background variables, prior experience, and learning which coalesce to make a student sojourn not only plausible, but possible, then we can likewise agree that this study’s participants share this attribute. This may offer
them an approach to learning about the world which is more nuanced than their less
cosmopolitan peers.

A note of caution is warranted here…for no developmentalist would claim that
significant change is likely to occur in a period as brief as three to five months.
Nevertheless, participant responses to my ‘status inquiries’ in the round two interviews
appear to provide evidence that these individuals are grappling with the myriad
challenges student sojourners face and perhaps even changing if ever-so incrementally.
We might draw a parallel here to the adjustment experiences and consequent meaning-
making research demonstrates as occurring within other “outsider” student groups. I go
one step further when I assert that owing to their experiences with and learnings from
difference, these cosmopolitan young people may very well be ever-so-slightly ahead of
many of their first-year American undergraduate peers in developmental terms.
Observations pertaining to such differences by this study’s participants were voiced with
equal parts bemusement and befuddlement. Developmental psychologists such as Kegan
(1994) and King & Kitchener (1994) suggest that confronting (and perhaps achieving)
some resolution of cognitive dissonance is the means by which adults enhance their
cognitive complexity over time. Even though the participants had prior familiarity with
cross-cultural interaction, by the very act of placing themselves in an alien environment
they implicitly raised the bar on their own prospects for development.

To be sure, developmental theory was not an explanation proposed by the
participants. Nevertheless, and based on reports by the participants here, I believe
comparative study in this vein is warranted. The cosmopolitan sojourners’ shared
experiences of difference would, of course, constitute a point of commonality within this group and a strong basis for the development of friendships…perhaps to the exclusion of those without this shared set of experiences, values, outlooks.

Taking a slightly different tack—one based on years of observation in my work with student sojourners—I cannot help but wonder out loud whether U.S. students who fail to befriend or be befriended by internationals are missing out on networking opportunities which might very well pay lifelong dividends both professionally and personally. Unfortunately—and to be honest, taking the near-term view only—this study comes to the same regrettable conclusions regarding sojourner/host-culture interaction of those studies which came before. Namely, there is a gap between these groups that we have not yet succeeded in bridging.

Staying with cosmopolitanism but shifting our focus to the notion of affluence as central theme in this study, within the context of international undergraduates in the United States writ large, personal and/or familial wealth as the determining factor in college attendance is a relatively recent development (Institute for International Education, 2003a). Until the late 1980s, a variety of programs sponsored by the U.S. government and international organizations made financial assistance available for undergraduate students from the world’s “developing” nations. The existence of these support programs meant that socioeconomic and global diversity were evident in the pool of international undergraduate enrollees. Along with the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the majority of these funding resources dried up, effectively rendering international undergraduate education in the U.S. a personal (or familial) pay-as-you-go
endeavor. Coupled with the Asian economic boom of the early- to mid-1990s, significant changes in international undergraduate enrollee demographics followed (Institute for International Education, 2002, 2003b). While affluence has certainly always played a role in providing for the possibility of one matriculating as an international undergraduate in the U.S., by the mid-1990s it became—with fewer and fewer exceptions—the determining factor in whether such an undertaking was possible.

The literature on American undergraduates is, of course, rife with examples of the academic and social benefits that accrue to higher socioeconomic status students preparing for and making their way through post-secondary study (see Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005 for a comprehensive review of the recent literature on this topic). Increased access to educational tools and services throughout one’s pre-college ‘educational career,’ inclusion in supportive familial and extra-familial social networks, and broader exposure to the world at large by way of travel are but three of the commonly cited advantages enjoyed by students from wealthier families.

*Cosmopolitanism* again offers a means of capturing these advantages in the context of international undergraduates (Cheah & Robbins, 1998; Fullinwider, 2001; Gunesch, 2004). Socioeconomic status, educational access, personal (as well as familial) social networks, and prior travel are said to coalesce into worldviews in which leaving one’s home culture for an extended academic sojourn is not only a common but very much an expected activity. As the literature on student sojourner cosmopolitanism suggests, frequent international travel and pre-college international sojourns are becoming the norm within the international undergraduate sojourner population. A
common assertion in the literature is that these forays abroad may also provide student
sojourners with cross-cultural ‘adjustment frameworks,’ thereby easing their transitions
into their new campus environments. Only one of the ten participants had not partaken of
considerable international travel prior to matriculating at OSU.

**Major Lessons Drawn from the Data**

*American post-secondary education is perceived as a “value adding” export commodity
and we need to consider it as such, too.*

The raw numbers tell quite a story. Of the 1.4 million student sojourners globally
some 565,000—or 40%—chose the United States as their educational destination in
academic year 2004-2005 (Chin, 2005). The nation hosting the second largest number of
internationally mobile students, the United Kingdom, hosted half as many visitors during
the same period, or approximately 282,000. The American “system” of higher education
enjoys preeminence. However, despite our pre-eminence, we do face serious challenges.
Indeed, the numbers are already telling: the U.S.’s share of internationally mobile
students has decreased 15% since academic year 1997-1998 (Chin, 2005). Evidence
enough that institutions and systems of education around the world are not standing idly
by, happy with their places below us in the hierarchy.

We would do well, then, to consider the participants’ comments pertaining to their
college choice processes. In this vein we find unanimity: the U.S. approach to higher
education is perceived by the profiled sojourners and their familial advisors as nothing
less than world class. A variety of attributes contribute to this appraisal: (1) their sense
that our institutions succeed in balancing theory with practice at the undergraduate level;
(2) the notion that undergraduates are encouraged to be active participants in their learning, rather than “empty vessels to be filled up by their professors’ words” (Cyrus, i: 193); (3) the expected cachet a U.S. degree will bestow upon the sojourner when she or he returns home to begin a career; (4) the sense that entry to graduate study in the United States is less cumbersome for those who took their first degrees here and; (5) the expectation that university study in the U.S. will prove more rigorous and, ultimately, more intellectually rewarding than what one might have found elsewhere. Considered as a group, these notions comprise a remarkable attestation to both the strength of the positive image U.S. schools project around the world as well as the intentionality evident in the participants’ learning goals.

A skeptic might question the role of self-selection in these comments. Certainly, we might expect those who have prepared for an academic sojourn abroad to be less critical than others. I reject this contention for two reasons. First, the participants’ comments showed that they were willing to voice disapproval when they felt conditions warranted. Examples include their lengthy discussions of the challenges and difficulties surrounding relationship building with their American peers as well as their critiques of their home countries’ educational systems. Second, more than a few of the participants talked about their disappointment in finding that some of their expectations had, indeed, been inaccurate, e.g., their discussions pertaining to the lack of interaction in their classes and/or with their instructors. Remarks in these veins are replete with disenchantment. I emerged from my interactions with the participants with the strong sense that very little was being held back for the sake of the listener. And I am pleased this was the case.
Responding to the marketplace and our clientele

So how might student affairs scholars and practitioners use this information? As to the former, the challenges faced and detailed by the participants most assuredly fall under the purview of those interested in students’ first year experiences (FYE). Within the last half-decade there has been a remarkable explosion of research and programming aimed at our campuses’ newest enrollees (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Following a familiar pattern in student affairs research, FYE studies initially lumped all first-year students together as a homogenous community defined solely by their recent arrivals on campus. As the number of FYE studies has increased, so too has their refinement. Disaggregating the FYE cohort affords us keener appreciations for the special needs of unique populations—international student sojourners being but one example. Armed with these more comprehensive renderings of students’ experiences we can further focus our efforts to support them in their learning goals. We can, ultimately, collaborate with our students to ensure happier outcomes early-on and throughout their sojourns while reinforcing the reputation for excellence U.S. institutions of higher education presently enjoy.

These happier outcomes can pay multiple dividends. And here I tread on difficult terrain. There is in academia a deeply ingrained repugnance to the notion of speaking of our noble endeavor as a commercial enterprise. Nevertheless, funding and budgets are perennial issues. State universities like the one where I work are all too keenly aware of the difficulties we confront as state revenues drop in the face of increasing, disparate obligations. One logical response for institutions suffering declines in state support is to
seek alternative revenue streams. Here is the raw truth: nonresident enrollees—be they from Peoria or Penang—are attractive for a variety of educative reasons as well as the nonresident tuition increment they typically pay. That there is a taboo around the last assertion is clear—but it is a restriction not honored in many universities’ business affairs divisions. Where there are hints of dollars to be found, pursuit follows: thus an increasing number of schools are developing and implementing international recruitment strategies. To do so requires faculty and administrators alike to make some semblance of peace with the notion that formalized education and its credentials are indeed commodities. My personal resolution in this regard is to acknowledge this while demanding that my colleagues and I strive to uphold high ethical standards when we wade into the none-too-proverbial educational marketplace.

In my recruitment travel over the last year it has been singularly disarming for me to note how behind the curve I am on this notion of education as a commodity. Despite repeatedly hearing such assertions from the participants—that their families and they had spent considerable time in effort in researching the return on investment that might accrue to the student59 for his or her sojourn—when I go out recruiting I often find myself brought up short by prospective students’ and parents’ pointed inquiries as to just how much, exactly, the student can expect to earn upon completion of his or her chosen degree(s). How telling and quaint it is to observe that for this BA triple major (journalism, history, and English) such a question never intruded on the idyll that was his undergraduate experience. Considering my colleagues, I suspect I am not alone in this

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59 And her or his family, to be sure.
and that in many ways our trepidation about commoditizing the college education springs directly from our ripe and unquestioned privilege.

Framing the student experience in a marketplace metaphor necessarily alters the way we view the goods and services we offer our student sojourners. Inasmuch as international students are subject to arguably the strictest immigration control and reporting requirements of any group of alien visitors to the United States (NAFSA: Association of International Educators & Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, 2003), and that additional institutional support is necessary throughout sojourners’ stays, there are added financial costs to hosting them above and beyond domestic enrollees. Setting aside the potential educational benefits of their presence on our campuses, public institutions willingly assume these costs as they are easily recaptured through the aforementioned nonresident tuition increments. Public and private institutions alike are doubtlessly also swayed by the cash-on-the-barrel nature of international students’ transactions with their bursars, for there is little in the way of conventional financial aid (loans & grants) for international undergraduates on most campuses.

It would be a mistake, however, to calculate the sojourners’ remaining tuition increment as pure profit. And here I mount my soapbox on behalf of my colleagues in international education. Investments should be made in recruitment strategizing and marketing. Scholarship funds ought likewise be set aside to provide for greater socio-economic and geographic diversity in the international students present on campus.

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60 Federal regulations, incidentally, which were promulgated wholly as unfunded mandates.
Lastly, some monies should go for programming to bring sojourners and members of the
host culture together for cross-cultural exchanges. Given such targeted investments we
can improve our campus’ learning environments while demonstrating institutional
commitments to internationalization. In addition, by making these investments and
documenting them wisely, we might succeed in creating positive feedback loops in terms
of both recruitment and retention. As most of today’s sojourners are members of small
communities in their home countries—a cosmopolitan elite—we need to be mindful of
the rapid transmission and salience of individual student’s experiences in supporting or
damaging our institutions’ reputations abroad. These modest investments made,
institutions can still clear a profit on each of the international student sojourners enrolled
and, provided these same investments are shepherded with thought and care, greater
returns are likely owing to prospects for increased international student enrollment.

Expectations surrounding teaching and learning cut both ways and need further
explication

Educational systems around the world differ in many dimensions. The nature of
institutional control, the use of (or resistance to) standardized curricula, and the expected
roles and functions of instructors and students in the classroom are but three examples of
typical variables scholars of comparative education use in their work (Bennett & Bennett,
1994). Those of us who have had the experience of entering a classroom abroad in a
teaching capacity have countless stories to tell about the often bewildering and sometimes
amusing repercussions of attempting to mingle culturally-embedded pedagogical and
learning styles. Suffice to say, certain norms are in place in our classrooms and schools.
And more importantly, international students bring with them deeply embedded behaviors and expectations deriving from their own set of cultural norms.

Recall that in sharing the rationales behind their desires to pursue undergraduate study in the U.S. the participants repeatedly cited the perception that the educational approach on offer here would prove a more comfortable fit to personal learning styles and offer regimes of practice (‘practical’ learning opportunities) better suited to future endeavors (Foucault, 1995/1977). But what of the scripts these students carry with them for their previous engagements with systematized education? Or, for that matter, the less overt but for that no less potent cultural norms swirling around each regarding education, respect for elders, notions of ‘face,’ and the politics of question-asking? Deviations from these can create friction or ‘teachable moments’ (or both!). We educators must never forget is that these norms are not unidirectional. That is to say, they are not solely embodied in the teacher nor the student, but both. By the time our students matriculate university, they have “enjoyed” at a minimum twelve years of discipline within some sort (or sorts) of educational regime(s).

The frustrated faculty member or teaching assistant who exclaims to a colleague, “Why don’t those Asian students ever say anything?” may not initially realize that s/he is likely struggling against culturally-embedded differences in classroom expectations and practices. We would do well to advise not only international students but also those who will interact with them to be mindful of the fact that cultural norms create powerful barriers to understanding those whose backgrounds may vary from their own. Such sensitivity could do much to lessen easily avoided difficulties and frustrations. Similarly,
the work and thoughtfulness incumbent in developing and exhibiting such sensitivity
open opportunities for cross-cultural interaction (which we know sojourners eagerly seek)
and consequent learning.

**More transparency with prospective students will benefit learners and institutions alike**

Despite their eagerness and enthusiasm for participating in U.S. higher education,
many participants struggled with the new setting. Their struggles can be attributed to at
least three breakdowns: structural issues and “cultural barriers” re student/teacher
interactions (as previously described) and a lack of nuanced understandings on the part of
the sojourners and their trusted advisors about the circumstances the sojourners were
likely to face in the U.S. higher educational milieu.

And this point is particularly striking when I consider it through my *practitioner*

lens. In the course of my career—first as an English as a Second Language instructor and
more recently as an administrator in international student affairs—I have had the
remarkable opportunity to work with student sojourners from nearly 100 countries and
jurisdictions. My present position finds me regularly circling the globe in search of
prospective undergraduates—individuals who, as this study suggests, quite likely have
been preparing for their entire lives to become student sojourners. The limited
understanding of basic aspects of the American system of higher education, despite the
relative ease by which information can be shared, never ceases to amaze me. In listening
to the participants’ disappointed accounts of their first-year interaction experiences, I am
left to wonder if just a bit more information a bit earlier in their pre-sojourn preparations
could have made a difference.
That one participant cited a television show, NBC’s short-lived *Boston Common*, as her principle source of information about the nature of her future classroom experiences is regrettably telling. There can be no question that authoritative, comparative guides—in prospective students’ native languages and presented in jointly in web and print versions—could assist prospective sojourners and their familial advisors to gain more complete grasps of just what they are getting themselves (or their children) into when they contemplate a post-secondary sojourn in the United States. As previously cited in this study, NAFSA: Association of International Educators offers a model of such initiatives with their *Pre-departure orientation for people in China admitted to a U.S. college or university* website (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2003).

This is an encouraging development. As is the more recent call by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities to affiliated institutions to bring a degree of regularity to their web pages designed for international audiences (Mehaffy, 2006). A shortfall in these efforts, however, comes in the language of presentation. By maintaining an English-only stance, well-intentioned authors often render the information accessible only to the prospective sojourner. This neglects other important stakeholders—namely parents—who have just as much interest in their children’s prospects as do the American mothers and fathers whom we quaintly refer to as *helicopter parents*. We need to meet prospective student sojourners and their trusted advisors where they are and in the language most accessible to them.

Charged as I am with responsibility for my department’s perilously small budget—a lack of resources is a persistent bugbear in international education—I do not...
offer this suggestion lightly. Creating informational content in a single language is demanding of time, money, and personnel. Adding translation increases the costs and complexity of such initiatives considerably. The inevitable tension between offering institution-specific versus broadly generalizable information poses yet another challenge. Confronted by such difficulties we can remain idle and comfort ourselves with the notion that by and large student sojourners arrive, perform, and persist despite the challenges they face. Alternatively, we might look to such initiatives as means by which both institutions and/or international educators more broadly could open long-overdue conversations. In documenting the experiences of this study’s participants I am convinced those of us in the field of international education can and must do better to uphold the educator in the mantle we claim and here is a place we might start.

*Expectations surrounding friendships not realized; hopeful short- and long-term outlooks remain*

Equally as resonant as the sense that the American educational system would offer them something different from and preferable to that which they might have encountered in their home countries was the notion among the participants that their sojourns would feature immediate and substantive friendships with Americans. Of the group, only Cyrus appears to have realized this goal during the period under study. In the main, the participants noted that their first years as student sojourners were marked by a lack of what they considered to be meaningful interaction with members of the host culture. Happily, this did not mean they were friendless. To paraphrase a remark frequently heard over the course of data collection, the participants had not anticipated
making friends from around the world—and yet by year’s end their social circles were to a person veritable global communities.

The participants’ experiences parallel what other researchers have noted about the composition of student sojourners’ social systems. The enigmatic construct I previously referred to as the *friendship problematic* remained elusive to nearly all during their first year on campus. We know this is not as they had intended. We are cheered by the fact that despite these challenges, the sojourners remain patiently committed to broadening their friendship circles so as to one day include more Americans and—by extension—realize a basic goal of their decision to study abroad.

Taking a practitioner’s stance on these findings, a variety of observations and suggestions spring to mind. We simply need to be honest with ourselves and our sojourners. As keen as many of our international students may be to befriend their American peers, this process is going to be challenging and will likely take longer than prospective or newly-arrived sojourners might otherwise expect. Implicitly, cosmopolitanism betokens experience with, learning from, and consequent openness to difference. In effect, the cosmopolitan sojourner has had practice with these behaviors and, as those who argue for the usefulness of this construct assert, brings these lessons to bear on new circumstances. And they quickly find allies among similarly-experienced and likeminded others.

But the key point here is that cosmopolitanism is a product of learning. Developmental psychologists tell us that learning takes time and effort as well as tolerance for new experiences and challenges. They likewise assert that learning is a
change process which occurs along a continuum. Experiences can cumulate, propelling individuals toward greater cognitive complexity and increasingly nuanced perspectives on the world around them.

Miscommunication and misunderstanding are certainly not uncommon when individuals of differing life experiences interact. That those whose lives have afforded them the experiences necessary to develop a cosmopolitan perspective have difficulty finding common ground with others who have lacked similar stimuli should come as no surprise. And here is a possible explanation for what I will characterize as the *friendship gap*: the seemingly irreducible space between many new student sojourners and their “local” peers.

Lest the reader conclude I am taking a ‘provincial versus cosmopolitan’ stance, and in so doing snidely criticizing the former by celebrating the latter, I ask a line or two’s patience while I attempt to follow this strand to a reasonable conclusion. For the advantages the cosmopolitan might enjoy in drawing upon her experiences so as to readily embrace new contexts, the local can more than match with the depth of understanding of his corner of the world. Put the two together and you have the potential for both parties to come away as learners: about the “other” as well as themselves. Such intersections are fraught with challenge and potential. These aspects, of course, are the meat and potatoes of the student affairs practitioner. The trial we face in creating programming which seeks to bring these disparate groups together is in convincing members of both that benefits will accrue for all who partake.
The reader may be shocked to see the following admission in a dissertation, but as I type these words I must admit that how we go about selling this notion is a question I wrestle with frequently and, unfortunately, have not yet answered to my own satisfaction. The participants’ comments regarding friendship aspirations reinforce what I have long heard from other sojourners: they are eager to engage meaningfully with their American peers. And I strongly believe that with proper cultivation, American students would seize opportunities to befriend sojourners. But this study also highlights the less-often mentioned but invariably present difficulties faced by those who attempt to bridge the friendship gap. Namely, that models of friendship are as mediated by culture as are notions of pedagogy, classroom behavior, and educational systems. It takes time, openness, and a degree of self-awareness to contemplate even embarking upon such a learning journey. And the journey is hard work, demanding as it does those engaged in it to open themselves to the scrutiny of another. This—as the participants’ experiences clearly attest—does not happen overnight.

**The “everything else” of the American undergraduate experience**

Time and again I have made reference to the participants’ intentionality in preparing for and undertaking their undergraduate sojourns. In making those preparations, each of the participants struck balances: satisfying not only home-country academic requirements, but also assembling vitas appropriate for admission to at least one major American research university. We have heard from the participants that their considerable efforts in this vein emerged from their perceptions that undertaking post-
secondary study in the U.S. would yield a variety of interrelated personal, academic, and vocational benefits.

Intriguingly, the participants’ accounts of their preparations for their sojourns as well as their first years ‘on the ground’ here in the U.S. suggest something of a disconnect. For as fully formed as the participants opinions might have been/are regarding the above-mentioned meta-level benefits of the academic sojourn, there was among this group what I will characterize as a startling lack of knowledge about co-curricular aspects of the U.S. undergraduate experience. This suggests some consideration ought to be given to culturally-embedded differences vis-à-vis the existence and importance of co-curricular activities in elementary and secondary educational pedagogies and practices around the world. Taking participant Lee (of South Korea) as an example: in the course of the study he revealed that his secondary studies began by 7:30 a.m. six days a week with the start of the regular school day. After the regular school day ended (by late afternoon) he commuted to a private hagwan (“cram school” is the typical translation) where he continued his studies most every night until 9 p.m. Then he traveled home where he completed homework and, finally, got some sleep. Others of the participants shared similar tales. We approach secondary schooling differently here in the U.S., with our brand of multitasking during these years often incorporating schooling during ‘regular business hours,’ a variety of co-curricular activities, as well as part-time employment.

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61 And here I would note that neither the participants nor I can make observations or claims as to the accuracy or inaccuracy of these meta-level expectations for the participants’ studies are still in progress.  
62 Lee remarked that 6 hours of sleep each night would have been generous during this four-year period of his life.
The point here is decidedly not to argue which of these two paths might better prepare prospective matriculants for the academic rigor of undergraduate study. Instead I draw this comparison to make a simple but generally unstated point. Our distinctly American approach to undergraduate education naturally incorporates features which map on to our equally distinct notions of secondary schooling with its associated co-curricular and non-academic undertakings. The quintessential American undergraduate experience is one which combines not only excellence in academic study but also active engagement with student organizations, perhaps some part-time work to help pay the bills, and most certainly considerable time set aside to engage in socializing with one’s peers.

That those who have not been reared with such expectations or practices should find this approach alien should be no more surprising than the comparative peculiarities they note in methods of instruction or notions of acceptable classroom interaction. Not surprisingly, we can find analogues for the resultant alienation in the literature on historically-underrepresented domestic students (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Terenzini et al., 1994; Willie, 2003). In responding to this gap we offer our colleagues and ourselves yet another opportunity for learning. As we unpack (to borrow a timeworn but decidedly serviceable metaphor) the U.S. academic culture knapsack we are likely to gain new perspectives on our ‘understoods.’ By sharing this experience with those of differing backgrounds we not only improve the likelihood of their success as they make their way through their studies, but we also shift and broaden the collective pronoun our to include
these individuals. This brings us closer to the universality boldly claimed in our institutions’ monikers.

**Lessons Drawn from the Process of Conducting this Study**

*The research journal is an invaluable tool*

When I began collecting data for this study my participants numbered eleven. One, unfortunately, withdrew from the project after his first interview. As a result, the total number of interviews conducted with the participants was 31. None of these interviews was shorter than 30 minutes and more than half of them ran beyond 60 minutes. Short or long, these were fantastic conversations. They represented considerable and wholly voluntary sacrifices of time and energy on the part of the participants. The interviews likewise represent—in the form of word-for-word transcriptions, accompanying notes, and later research journal writing—nearly 750 pages of raw text. This, of course, before the participants’ photographic images were considered.

As presumptive dissertators moving through our sequence of research methods courses—and whether we are preparing to do quantitative or qualitative work—we OSU doctoral students are told *ad nauseam* to develop and practice the habit of using a research journal. I found such admonitions tiresome. Not at all convinced of their utility, I nevertheless found myself, as part of one my research sequence courses, having to keep a required research journal while conducting a small pilot study.

‘Doing’ the pilot study itself not a particularly revelatory experience. The research journal—and most notably the feedback I received therein from my instructor—was

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63 I was tempted to title this section *Dr. Baird was right*. But of course that would not be news to anyone.
another matter entirely. Simply put, the document opened a ‘safe’ space for me to
experiment with ideas about and readings of the data that would not have been possible
had not such a venue otherwise been available. Based on this experience I was
determined to deploy a research journal in my dissertation work. This study’s research
journal(s) proved valuable insomuch as they encouraged a modicum of discipline that
would otherwise have been difficult for me to have sustained. Confronted by the quantity
of data collected over the course of this study, to not have had the journals would have
been nothing short of disastrous. Claims as to the quality of this document aside, said
document simply would not exist without the support my research journals provided. And
so the utility of the research journal—in whatever form it takes based on the researcher’s
needs and quirks—qualifies as a critical lesson reinforced for my having conducted this
study.

People are eager to be heard, it takes discipline to listen

Not a particularly garrulous person myself, one of the major concerns I harbored
early in this study centered around my fear that my interactions with the participants
would not yield a sufficient quantity of data with which to work. My worries could not
have been more unfounded. In short, those who participated in this study were eager to
share their experiences, never appearing to struggle with how they might fill the gaps in
our conversations.

There were, undoubtedly, many reasons why was so. Again we must return to the
self-selection afoot here. Each of the participants had his or her own motivations for
engagement with the study. These included the desire to celebrate their accomplishments
in becoming student sojourners; an eagerness to get their experiences down on paper with an eye to assisting others in similar circumstances; the opportunity to engage regularly with a member of the host culture; and, finally, because a few had previous experience conducting their own research, sympathy for the plight of the researcher looking for participants. These were individuals who were confident they had something to contribute and who found a keen listener.

As I prepared for this study I struggled against the temptation to come to the interviews with strict interview protocols. At face value coming to one’s interviews with a rigid outline of questions to be posed and topics to be tapped can be construed as good practice. And it very well might be in some circumstances. We understand, however, that following a checklist approach to interviewing necessarily closes as many avenues of discussion as it opens. This is so for two reasons: first, such interview structures eschew conversation in favor of question and response exchanges. Second, such approaches position interviewers and interviewees in an overt researcher/subject power dynamic, most assuredly influencing the tenor of the exchange. Neither is a criticism, rather observations: said question and response exchanges can be useful given the origin and goals of the research in question.

The constructivist approach, however, asserts that we will learn as much—indeed, likely more—by trusting our participants enough to endeavor to engage with them as co-constructors of the research project. To do so is harrowing, not the least because of the considerable professional and personal investment we have in seeing our projects through to some form of completion. In those quiet moments of panic where I found myself
asking whether or not I was getting what I needed from the participants to move my work forward, my knee-jerk reaction was to generate enumerated lists of questions the participants would, come hell or high water, answer the next time I saw them.

The irony is that the participants very likely would have dutifully answered had I taken this tack. Indeed, it might have been more comfortable for them to have been approached this way, for the work of a co-constructed conversation is heavy lifting for both parties involved. Interestingly, and more than once during the first round interviews, participants stopped the discussions to ask whether the nature of the discussions was not in some way violating the *scientificity* of the study. These concerns were, of course, the product of received notions surrounding the “correct” relationship between the researcher/researched which the constructivist approach willfully subverts. Assured by me that the conversations were both appropriate and fruitful, we continued, settling into exchanges which—if not aligned with the participants’ initial expectations—nevertheless can be said to have been shared, bi-directional, and wide-ranging. In short, co-constructed.

I make this claim with cautious pride. To be sure, a more experienced interview researcher would likely have come such a project with less in the way of formalized interview protocols than I did. They likely would also have been less disconcerted than I when interview topics went sideways owing to participant volition. However, insomuch as this project is equally about my experimenting with and refining research skills as it is about the results, I will claim some success in having done a constructivist study. I make this claim based on the participants’ comments—most notably during their final
interviews—that their engagement with the project had offered them both the
couragement and the opportunity to think differently about their experiences than they
might otherwise have done. I take their words for it: and am gratified by the notion that
something in the way of Rhoads’s *reciprocity* may have been achieved here (Rhoads,
1997).

*The proper tools offer considerable advantages*

During the latter of my qualitative research course sequence I gained something
of a reputation for being the “go to” guy for questions pertaining to recording and
transcription equipment. This was a result of the serendipitous collision of my
longstanding eagerness for new electronic “toys” and my good fortune to have received a
number of small research awards during my doctoral studies. I used some of these funds
to purchase a high quality digital audio recorder, a professional-grade omnidirectional
boundary microphone, and a USB transcription foot pedal/software package which
enabled me to use my PC as a listening station and transcribe directly into a standard
word processing program. While other options existed…I certainly could have used a
standard audiocassette recorder and an analog transcriptionist’s kit…the ability to work
with digital audio files from the moment of data collection, through transcription, and
final archiving of data offered advantages in terms of recording quality, speed of data
transfer, and data integrity/security. Anything that makes transcribing lengthy interviews
easier is a blessing, and this set of tools worked without fault. Put differently: good
recordings make for happier transcription sessions and better transcripts.
I was less successful in my choice of cameras for the participants. Small, lightweight, and affordable, disposable 35mm cameras at first blush seemed the perfect option. Trouble followed. I made the utterly ridiculous mistake of assuming that the operation of the cameras was self-evident. I neglected to provide the participants with adequate instruction on such small but critical points such as the means by which one advances film, protects the lens from smudges and scratches and—most disastrously—uses a manually-triggered flashbulb. I also failed to anticipate the difficulty I was to face with film developers who balked at the notion of processing partially-exposed rolls of film (i.e. 36-exposure rolls with only 8 or 9 snapshots taken). Finally, in these days of ubiquitous camera phones, comments from more than a few of the participants lead me to suspect that my provision of such “old school” photographic apparatus was perceived as quaint if not entirely convincing in terms of the seriousness of the task at hand.

Had I taken the long view, I would have been much better served by providing the participants with low-cost digital cameras or simply asking them to use their own phone/digital cameras. A number of advantages would have followed. First, and as described above in terms of the audio data, digital imagery would have provided for faster and more secure transmission and storage of the photographic data. Second, had the images been digital their migration to print (for use in this document) would have been simpler to effect. Finally, and most critically, the duration of photographic data collection could have been extended beyond the physical limits of the disposable cameras’ film capacity and the necessary film processing time. As collected in this study,

64 As one participant charmingly put it.
the images represent only the first third of the participants’ first year as sojourners. If the spoken data is any indication, much in the way of change over time was lost by setting a hard boundary on the participants’ collection of photographic data. Digital cameras would have obviated said boundaries. Allowing, instead, for parallel longitudinality in both word and image which might very well have revealed more nuance in the participants’ explications of their experiences.

Parting thoughts

I suspect that many fellow readers of *The New Yorker* indulge in the same practice I do each week: looking at all the cartoons first. After reading the rest of the magazine, I sometimes go so far as to cut out a cartoon or two for refrigerator or office display. The single panel comic residing just above and to the right of my computer monitor is by now more than a year old. It is a classic laboratory tableau: caged mice stacked high, white-gowned researcher standing near a colleague who is dutifully taking notes. The punch line comes by way of the note-taker’s accoutrements and remarks, dressed as he is in a gigantic mouse costume while exclaiming, “and most important thing is what I’ve learned about myself” (Twohy, 2005).

This cartoon was published just as I was nearing the end of the third-round of data collection for this study and by that point in time I was already convinced of the transformative nature of this experience. I am fortunate to have identified 11 undergraduate student sojourners so willing to share their experiences with me. Their candor was a remarkable gift of trust. Their thoughtfulness no less than we would expect from individuals who have heretofore demonstrated the wherewithal to navigate two
educational systems, develop college-level proficiency in a foreign language, and
maintain positive attitudes throughout. After spending a year listening to and thinking
about “my” sojourners, I am even more impressed and humbled by them than I was at the
outset of this project. If, as I sincerely hope, those who read this study can join me in
sharing but a glimmer of these sentiments, then this undertaking will have been
worthwhile. For our student sojourners—just as all of our students—have as much to
teach us as we do them. We need only ask…
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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER AND EMAIL MESSAGE
Dear -- recipient --:

Welcome to The Ohio State University!

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study focusing on international students in American colleges and universities. I wish to learn more about international students' experiences during their first year at Ohio State: your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experiences. I am a third year doctoral student in the College of Education, working with Professor Ada Demb in the School of Educational Policy and Leadership. This study will by my dissertation research.

If you agree to participate, your involvement in this study would include: (1) three individual interviews during the 2004-2005 academic year — one in autumn quarter, one in winter quarter, and the last in spring quarter; and (2) taking photographs in which you capture your impressions of OSU soon after your arrive on campus. I will provide the camera, film and photo development. Each interview should last about 90 minutes.

Your identity and participation in the study will remain confidential. At no time will your name be used in any written report. Your participation is completely voluntary. It has no bearing on your status as a student at OSU, nor does it affect your academic progress. If you begin as a participant in the study and for any reason become uncomfortable, you may withdraw at any time.

Are you interested in being a part of this project? If so, please email me at van-den-elzen.1@osu.edu. Once I receive your reply, I will send additional information and we can discuss arrangements for how to meet after you arrive on campus. If you would like to learn more from Professor Demb, her email is: demb.1@osu.edu.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Brad Van Den Elzen
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Policy & Leadership

Ada Demb
Associate Professor
Educational Policy & Leadership
Dear -- recipient --:

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I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Brad Van Den Elzen  
Doctoral Candidate  
Educational Policy & Leadership

Ada Demb  
Associate Professor  
Educational Policy & Leadership
APPENDIX B

PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION EMAIL MESSAGE
Dear -- recipient --:

Thank you for your interest in joining my dissertation research. I am excited about your willingness to participate. I can only learn about the experience of international undergraduate students at OSU if there is a group that is willing to talk with me. Therefore, I appreciate the chance to talk with you more about your possible participation. The purpose of this message is to reiterate some of the things I mentioned in my earlier message and to provide you with an overview of what comes next.

My goals: Through your participation in this study, I hope to understand your experiences as an international student at OSU. When we meet for interviews, I will ask you to recall specific episodes, situations, or events that you will experience during your first year of study. I hope these interviews will be conversational in tone and help you to learn more from your own experiences. We will meet three times during the year, once each in autumn, winter and spring quarters.

In total, participants should expect to dedicate no more than 8 to 10 hours to this project between September 2004 and May 2005. The information you share with me in the interviews and through your photographs will help me to write my dissertation.

Next steps: It is very important for us to meet soon after your arrival on campus for an information session. This first meeting will include: (1) a more thorough discussion of the study as well as the chance for you to ask any questions you might have; (2) your signing of a standard university consent form; and (3) my providing you with a camera & related materials. During this meeting we will set a time for your first interview.

In order to set up a time for this first meeting, please email me at van-den-elzen.1@osu.edu. If you give me your email address, or a telephone number, I will contact you with suggestions for times.

I value your participation and thank you—in advance—for your commitment of time and energy to this study.

I look forward to meeting you soon!

Sincerely,

Brad Van Den Elzen
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Policy & Leadership
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS
Interview #1 Protocol

The following topics will be addressed during the first interview, to be conducted early Autumn Quarter 2004. Subjects will be invited to elaborate on these issues as well as nominate topics of their own in the course of the interview.

As this interview will be semi-structured, a formal script is eschewed in favor of dialogic interaction.

Anticipated duration: 60-90 minutes

- Consent to Conduct & Record Interview
- Background Details
  - Personal data: name, age, time since arrival, description of experiences thus far
  - Details as to family/friend experiences with higher education in home country & elsewhere (if applicable)
- School Choice Process:
  - Recount decision to pursue higher education in the U.S.
  - How did others respond to this decision?
  - Recount how decision to apply to OSU was made
  - How did others respond to this decision?
  - What sources of information did subject use in coming to this decision?
  - From whom did subject seek advice re this decision?
  - What sort of input did interlocutors offer?
  - What—if anything—was confusing about this school choice/application process?
  - Recount actual application experience
  - Ask subject to describe his/her state of mind during this period
- Admission:
  - Inquire on reaction to news. Ask subject to describe the day she/he learned of admission to OSU.
  - With whom did subject share the news?
  - What sort of reactions/advice did subject receive from those informed?
  - Ask subject to describe his/her state of mind during this period
- Pre-departure Expectations:
  - Ask subject to discuss he/she perceived U.S. institutions would differ from those in country of origin. What were the bases of these perceptions?
  - Ask subject to discuss how she/he perceived U.S. classmates/fellow OSU students would differ from those in country of origin. What were the bases of these perceptions?
  - Ask subject to discuss how she/he pictured life as a student in the U.S. & at OSU. How did he/she come to form this set of expectations? Who and what contributed to the formation of these expectations?
  - What are some of the challenges subject anticipated he or she would face as an international student in the U.S. & at OSU specifically? Discuss.
  - What did subject feel would be easy in new setting? Discuss.
  - What about subject’s experiences during this period stand out to him/her?
Did subject’s thoughts, emotions, and/or expectations re coming to U.S./OSU change prior to departure? If so, how and why?
Did subject seek additional information or counsel based on pre-departure sentiments? If so, from whom? Discuss.
Ask subject to discuss the salience of others’ perceptions during this period
What would subject like others to know about his/her pre-departure experiences and/or sentiments...with an eye to assisting future students in similar circumstances? Things OSU staff should know? Discuss.
Describe the days preceding your departure for the U.S.

- Arrival
  Logistics: Ask subject to describe—in detail—his or her travel to Columbus & activities upon arrival
  Logistics: Ask subject to describe his/her arrival on campus
  What were subject’s initial impressions of Columbus & OSU? Discuss.
  How soon did subject contact home? Whom did he/she contact? How? What did he/she tell them about trip/arrival/setting ... what did they wish to know?
  Ask subject to describe—in detail—his or her first few interactions w/Americans. Who? What? When? Where? Why? Impressions?

- Adjustment
  Describe living arrangements. Discuss in detail and in relationship to expectations.
  Describe academic experiences thus far. Discuss in detail and in relationship to expectations.
  Describe co-curricular experiences thus far. Discuss in detail and in relationship to expectations.
  What activities are occupying subject’s time now? How do these correspond to/deviate from expectations? Sentiments?
  Does subject have questions re academics/co-curricular info? Discuss.
  What academic, co-curricular, and other issues are particularly salient for subject at this time? Discuss.
  Observations about circumstances? How do these contribute to subject’s short- and long-term outlooks?
  What is subject telling family and friends at home about current situation/recent experiences?
  What have they wanted to know?
  Is the subject optimistic about anything? If so, what?
  Is the subject pessimistic about anything? If so, what?
  Is the subject aware of the adjustment U-curve hypothesis? If so, where would he or she place self on U? Explain.

- Participation in study
  Why did subject agree to participate?
  Does subject have any questions regarding study?
  Would subject like to add anything to today’s discussion?

- Reflexive photography component introduced/questions fielded
- Plan for scheduling of next interview (Winter 2005) presented
- Remind subject I am available for questions
Interview #2 Protocol

Anticipated duration: 30-45 minutes

- **Consent to Conduct & Record Interview**
- **Status**
  - Inquire as to subject’s academic/co-curricular progress to date
- **Follow-up**
  - Remind subject of his/her responses to the “adjustment” section of interview #1. Discuss each of her/his earlier responses and inquire as to how he/she might answer differently now
  - What would subject characterize as biggest surprise about being an international student to date? Discuss.
  - What would subject characterize as biggest challenge about being an international student to date? Discuss.
  - What would subject characterize as biggest disappointment about being an international student to date? Discuss.
  - What issues had earlier been a concern to subject that he or she has now worked through (i.e. now looks back on with a sense of having achieved resolution)
  - Reports from SA friends
  - How would you characterize the role/place of internationals within the OSU community? What’s your “job” here? How did you come to this perspective?
- **Reflexive photography**
  - Have subject lead discussion: description of photos taken, what images represent to subject, what themes (or central ideas) does the subject see in the photos (as a set, in smaller groups, or individually).
- **Participation in study**
  - Does subject have any questions regarding study?
  - Would subject like to add anything to today’s discussion?
- **Plan for scheduling of next interview (Spring 2005) presented**
- **Remind subject I am available for questions**
Interview #3 Protocol

The following topics will be addressed during the second interview, to be conducted early Spring Quarter 2005. Subjects will be invited to elaborate on these issues as well as nominate topics of their own in the course of the interview.

As this interview will be semi-structured, a formal script is eschewed in favor of dialogic interaction.

Anticipated duration: 30-45 minutes

- Consent to Conduct & Record Interview
- Status
  - Inquire as to subject’s academic/co-curricular progress to date
- Member check
  - Invite subject to comment on content of researcher’s write up regarding the themes emerging from interaction
- Adjustment recap
  - What activities are occupying subject’s time now? How do these correspond to/deviate from expectations? Sentiments?
  - Comments suggest internationals have a teaching role in the OSU community. Discuss.
  - Reflecting on this experience to date, what does the subject wish he/she had known prior to coming to the U.S./OSU as a student?
  - Is the subject optimistic about anything? If so, what?
  - Is the subject pessimistic about anything? If so, what?
  - Observations about circumstances? How do these contribute to subject’s short- and long-term outlooks?
  - How would you like your life as a student here to change in the future? Explain.
  - If asked to describe the experiences international undergraduates face at OSU, how would the subject do so? Elaborate.
  - What advice would subject offer to future FY international undergrads…those entering this autumn?
- First Year Story
  - What advice would subject offer to future FY international undergrads…those entering this autumn?
- Participation in study
  - What does subject want readers to take away from their participation in the study?
- Thank subject for involvement. Offer copy of final document when available.

end
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in research entitled: **A phenomenological exploration of first-year international undergraduates’ experiences at The Ohio State University.**

Ada Demb, Principal Investigator, or his/her authorized representative Brad Van Den Elzen has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ________________________________ Signed: ________________________________

(Participant)

Signed: ________________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)

Witness: ________________________________

*HS-027E. Consent for Participation in Exempt Research (modified)*