

Serving the Academic and Co-Curricular Needs of International Students:
A Descriptive, Interview-Based Study at One Private Liberal Arts College

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Abstract

No higher educational institution can aspire to become truly global without an active strategy to recruit, retain, and integrate the highest quality international students (Brustein, 2009). This study examines how one private liberal arts college in the mid-Atlantic area is serving the academic and co-curricular needs of its growing international student population. If the college that acts as the site for this research study is to uphold its commitment to creating globally aware and engaged students, it must consider whether it is doing enough to attract and integrate international students into the life of campus. International students not only inform other students about non-U.S. cultures in the classrooms and dorms, they also contribute significantly to a college or university's financial viability. Through individual interviews, this study strives to elucidate these students' perceptions of the academic and co-curricular support they receive at the college, their general perceptions of whether their needs are being met to satisfaction, and their level of engagement on the college's campus. This study also recommends improvements so the study school can meet its potential to internationalize by serving the academic and co-curricular needs of its growing non-U.S. student population.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The world is becoming flatter, and boundaries between countries are blurring. This shift is due to the rise of the Internet and other global media platforms; the ubiquity of the production, marketing, and delivery of goods and services; the fading power and identity of the nation-state; the increased ease of international travel; and an ongoing social shift toward multicultural societies (Schattle, 2009; Goodman, 2009). If pressing political, economic, social and environmental problems—including climate change, poverty, environmental degradation, militarism, political instability, AIDS, terrorism, and hunger—are going to be addressed, global consciousness and cooperation will be essential (Skelly, 2009; Nolan, 2009).

Within the context of this new global order, students need to gain insights about their native country as they also obtain extensive exposure to the perspectives and practices of other cultures (Schattle, 2009). This global competency is not just imperative for students' personal and professional development, but also for the purposes of peace and prosperity. Understanding something about how the rest of the world lives ought to be the mark of an educated person (Nolan, 2009). Now, more than ever, students must strive for global citizenship.

Globalization in U.S. Higher Education

All higher educators have the mission of preparing the next generation of global citizens (Goodman, 2009). The concept of global citizenship began to emerge in the early 1990s with the political and economic opening of the Soviet Union and its now-former states, the ongoing democratization of countries such as South Africa and South Korea, and rapid advances in technology and telecommunications that have made the world seem “flatter” than ever before (Schattle, 2009). The idea of global citizenship then became a regular feature in colleges' mission

statements as early as the late 1990s. Colleges and universities across the United States began outlining initiatives to inspire students to think and live as global citizens.

Now, in the 21st century, it is nearly accepted as common knowledge that wholly educated people should possess the critical thinking skills, technical expertise, and global awareness that will enable them to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate meaning in an increasingly globalized world (Brockington & Wiedenhoef, 2009). Global competencies include the ability to work effectively in international settings; awareness of and adaptability to diverse cultures, perceptions, and approaches; familiarity with the major currents of global change and the issues they raise; and the capacity for effective communication across cultural and linguistic boundaries (Brustein, 2009; Gillespie, Braskamp, & Dwyer, 2009). Global citizenship allows students to begin to take responsibility for the global common good (Schattle, 2009).

Proponents of study abroad contend that international learning can and should be a cornerstone for an education that prepares students to be engaged and informed citizens in an increasingly globalized world (Hovey & Weinberg, 2009). A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that students who have traveled and studied abroad are much better able to communicate cross-culturally, interact meaningfully in other cultures, and acquire problem-solving strategies for international living. Education abroad offers an ideal setting for students' learning and development because they encounter new places and people, take in new ideas and information, and discover new things about themselves and their potential in the process (Gillespie et al., 2009). As students engage with communities abroad, notions of global citizenship provide them with powerful transformative opportunities to explore their own identity, lifelong commitments, and allegiances (Hovey & Weinberg, 2009). And these important benefits also extend to the

international students and others who live and learn beside them. Study abroad and is mutually beneficial personally and professional for foreign and domestic students alike.

Educating for global citizenship is closely aligned with the mission of liberal arts colleges, which often emphasize international and intercultural experiences both inside and outside the classroom (Gillespie et al., 2009). The purpose of liberal arts colleges is to cultivate minds and to create well-rounded citizens who can contribute to the culture and preserve traditional democratic values (Shirayev & Boyd, 2008). This research study will be conducted at one private liberal arts college, which will be overviewed in Chapter III.

International Students in the United States

U.S. colleges have been attracting the best and brightest students from around the globe since World War II and have provided these young men and women with a world-class education (Brustein, 2009). The perception historically has been that a degree from a U.S. institution gives these students a top-rate education and positions them favorably in the global marketplace. After graduating, many of these students choose to stay in the United States and build successful careers that contribute to the nation. Some go back to their native countries and do the same, while others make lasting impacts on society as a whole.

The United States reaps distinct cultural and economic benefits from international students who choose to study here (McFadden, Maahs-Fladung, & Mallett, 2012). Culturally, international students create a colorful heritage on campus and are central to American diversity (McFadden et al., 2012; Pearce, 2013). As colleges and universities strive to create an environment that reflects today's society and world, international students expose their domestic classmates to information and perspectives they may otherwise have missed and can give first-hand accounts of different cultures, governments, and textbook histories (Pearce, 2013).

Domestic students' boundaries get stretched by the presence of international students. This kind of culturally rich environment prepares students to interact with diverse populations and to develop intercultural proficiency and global competence. This, in turn, enables all students to comprehend world events and develop plans and solutions to address the most pressing international problems.

Less altruistically, the financial benefit international students bring to U.S. colleges and universities also cannot be ignored. Enrollment pressures related to the economic downturn of the last five years have placed American colleges and universities in a precarious financial position as they try to accommodate more students with fewer financial resources from federal and state governments, as well the challenge of dwindling endowment income (Smith & Ota, 2013). International student recruitment has become an important financial strategy for U.S. colleges and universities. American higher education has aggressively focused on recruiting international students (both undergraduate and graduate) and attracting visiting professors or postdoctoral scholars. Colleges and universities benefit significantly from the amount of money these constituencies bring to campuses and the outlying campus communities.

According to the 2013 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange (2013), the number of international students at U.S. colleges and universities increased by seven percent to a record high of 819,644 students in the 2012-13 academic year, with these students contributing about \$25 billion to the U.S. economy. In Maryland, the site for this research study, about 15,500 international students contribute \$463 million to the state's coffers.

In 2012-13, 55,000 more international students enrolled in U.S. higher education than in 2011-12, with most of the growth driven by China and Saudi Arabia (Institute for International Education, 2013). This marks the seventh consecutive year that the Open Doors report showed

higher numbers of international students in U.S. higher education. There are now 40 percent more international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities than a decade ago, and the rate of increase has risen steadily for the past three years. International students now make up just slightly less than four percent of total U.S. student enrollment at the undergraduate and graduate level combined.

International students contribute \$24.7 billion to the U.S. economy through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses, including room and board, books and supplies, transportation, health insurance, support for accompanying family members, and other miscellaneous items (Institute for International Education, 2013). The Open Doors data show that nearly two-thirds of all international students receive the majority of their funds from personal and family sources. When other sources of foreign funding are included, such as assistance from the government or universities in their home country, more than 80 percent of all international undergraduate students' primary funding comes from sources outside of the United States.

Both figuratively and literally, U.S. colleges and universities owe a debt to the hundreds of thousands of international students who choose to further their studies here. By any measure, international students make significant contributions to higher education in the United States.

Statement of the Problem

This researcher is interested in how one private liberal arts college is serving the academic and co-curricular needs of its growing international student population. This study will also examine improvements that should be made to attract and retain these students. Through individual interviews, this study will strive to elucidate students' perceptions of the academic and co-curricular support they receive at the college, their general perceptions of whether their needs are being met to satisfaction, and their level of engagement on the college's campus.

Operational Definitions

International student – an individual who is enrolled for credit at an accredited higher education institution in the United States on a temporary visa, and who is not an immigrant (permanent resident with an I-51 or Green Card), or an undocumented immigrant, or a refugee (UNESCO, 2009).

Retention – (also called persistence in the literature) addresses the number of full-time students who return to a college or university the following year. Typically, it represents the percentage of first-year students who return for sophomore year. It involves many factors, including student abilities, interests, and needs, as well as institutional personnel, policies, and procedures (ACT, 2012).

Engagement – the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities and practices shown to be related to desired educational outcomes (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2013).

Conclusion

No higher educational institution can aspire to become truly global without an active strategy to recruit, retain, and integrate the highest quality international students (Brustein, 2009). If the small mid-Atlantic private college which acts as the site for this research study is to uphold its commitment to creating globally aware and engaged students, it must consider whether it is doing enough to attract and integrate international students into the life of campus. International students not only inform other students about non-U.S. cultures in the classrooms and dorms, they also contribute significantly to a college or university's financial viability. The purpose of this study is to determine whether the study school is meeting its potential to internationalize by serving the academic and co-curricular needs of its growing non-U.S. student population.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adjustment to college life can be difficult for all young men and women. Homesickness and some level of culture shock seem to affect the majority of college students, though some groups seem to be more affected than others – particularly those new to the college system (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Many things make this process difficult, and these difficulties can lead to confusion and discomfort (Tas, 2013). For international students, this already-stressful transition is compounded by the pressures of being in a whole new culture.

International students come to the United States from countries around the world, and their economic, language, and cultural backgrounds may vary greatly from those of their American counterparts and other international students (Jackson, Ray, & Bybell, 2013). However, no matter how prepared international students are academically, how proficient they are in English, or how familiar they are with U.S. cultural norms, they still face special challenges to succeed in a foreign environment away from friends, family, and familiar surroundings (Mamiseishvili, 2012).

This literature review will focus on the experiences international students studying in the United States have. Section one will introduce ideas related to international students' transition. Section two will review acculturation, culture shock, and homesickness. Section three will delve into the effects of student entry characteristics and attitudes. Section four will focus on socialization and student engagement in the transition process. Section five will address English proficiency. Section six will take up the issue of cross-cultural pedagogical differences, and finally, section seven will discuss additional outside stressors affecting the study abroad experience.

International Students' Difficult Transition

Coming to the United States as an international student can be challenging and stressful. When these students arrive, they must manage the logistics of moving to a new environment, securing basic services, getting appropriate documentation, learning to communicate in English, adjusting to a new climate, making new friends, developing a new social system, and navigating an unfamiliar educational system (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013; Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Additionally, international students may experience additional problems based on their country of origin, race, religion, ethnicity, English language proficiency, and whether they come from a collectivist or individualist society—factors that will be discussed in detail later in this literature review (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007; Yakunina et al., 2013). Compared with their domestic counterparts, international students tend to experience greater adjustment difficulties and more stress during their initial transition into college, which can have lasting repercussions during the course of their entire college career (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007; Jackson et al., 2013).

Acculturation, Culture Shock, and Homesickness

The literature emphasizes the challenges international students experience in adapting to a foreign living and learning environment, and the fact that these challenges often trigger feelings of uneasiness, insecurity, and loss (Jackson et al., 2013; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Berry (2008) defined acculturation as the process of cultural and psychological change that involves learning to live in new social and cultural contexts after becoming socialized into an earlier one. The accumulation of the practical, cultural, and social difficulties of adopting a new culture may result in acculturative stress, the disorientating psychological impact that often accompanies cross-cultural transitions (Yakunina et al., 2013; Jackson et al., 2013). Adapting to customs and

mores of American society and campus life may conflict with aspects of international students' personal and cultural identity (Zhao et al., 2005).

Acculturative stress has been associated with and is predictive of psychological distress and depressive symptoms, including loneliness, sadness, fear, homesickness, cultural identity confusion, social withdrawal, depression, isolation, culture shock, loss of status, identity anxiety, and somatic symptoms (Yakunina et al., 2013; Kwon, 2009). Experiencing acculturative stress has a consistently negative and potentially long-term impact on international students' adjustment to the United States and their academic success (Jackson et al., 2013). These students are more likely than their domestic counterparts to report feeling isolated and lonely, which can escalate into severe depression (Zhao et al., 2005). In turn, this may dampen their participation in activities that contribute to important learning and personal development (Zhao et al., 2005). In extreme cases, acculturative stress also can lead to students failing or withdrawing from college (Jackson et al., 2013).

When they arrive in the United States, most international students also report some degree of culture shock, or a greater sense of social difficulty, than do domestic students at the same institutions (Tas, 2013). Although some international students may have had previous opportunities to travel, many have not, and Poyrazli and Grahama (2007) say culture shock stems from confusion about the norms they encounter in the new culture. Disparities between what students expect as compared with what they actually encounter and experience greatly influence their adjustment (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Like acculturative stress, culture shock typically is manifested as stress; anxiety; and feelings of powerlessness, rejection, and isolation (Zhao et al., 2005). Students who experienced greater cultural differences have less social interaction with domestic students, in turn, and lower levels of social interactions with domestic students

intensified culture shock (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Some international students even choose to discontinue their studies when experiencing difficulties associated with extreme culture shock (Tas, 2013).

Homesickness in college students is usually a byproduct of culture shock and is the psychological reaction to the absence of significant others and familiar surroundings (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Because of cultural and language differences, international students often suffer homesickness and have a harder time adjusting to their new environments (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). The effects of homesickness are typically negative and can include loneliness, sadness, alienation, depression, rejection, loss, hopelessness, low self-esteem, and adjustment difficulties for students entering a foreign college environment (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) examined group differences in perceived discrimination and homesickness in a sample of 439 international and domestic college students at two campuses of one university. They found that students who were homesick received lower scores on self-esteem measures and internal locus of control measures, as compared with students who were not homesick (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Their study also found that international students who were homesick had more physical complaints, exhibited poorer mood (i.e., depression and anxiety), and experienced greater cognitive failures (i.e., difficulty with memory and concentration) (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

Entry Characteristics and Student Attitudes

Upon arrival to the new country, individual reactions to the host country and culture may vary. While some students become very much involved in the host country's culture, others may feel negatively and become distant (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Several factors contribute to international students' transition to study abroad in the United States, including region of origin,

English fluency, social support, perceived discrimination, extroversion, and positive approach to forming relationships with Americans (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007; Jackson et al., 2013).

Acculturative stress, homesickness, and culture shock may be more pronounced depending on the students' country of origin. International students from countries with cultures that are somewhat similar to the host culture tend to adapt more quickly and easily than students who come from very different backgrounds (Zhao et al., 2005; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

However, many international students arriving in the United States are from cultures with close family ties and distinct patterns of etiquette, food habits, and religious beliefs that differ greatly from those of most domestic students. A sudden exposure to a free and liberal culture that emphasizes independence may be quite traumatic for international students (Selvadurai, 1991).

Differences in gender roles, religious practices, and moral values also may create tension for international students (McFadden et al., 2012). For example, students who are religiously conservative may be uncomfortable with opposite-gender instructors and coed housing.

Additionally, while students from more individualistic cultures may identify with the U.S. mainstream culture, the ones from more collectivist cultures may feel distant (Ying, 2002).

In particular, European students and non-European students differ in their adaptation, acculturation, and satisfaction with the college experience when studying abroad in the United States (Zhao et al., 2005). European students report less stress from culture shock than do those from Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Kwon, 2009; Ying, 2002).

Asian international students experience greater adjustment difficulties than other ethnic groups. Generally, non-Europeans from rural areas have much greater difficulty in adjusting to Western culture than students from Europe (Kwon, 2009). In terms of gender, female international

students perceive greater problems than males with regard to academic advising, health issues, English proficiency, and social or personal matters (Kwon, 2009).

It is clear that various factors can contribute to international students' transition to life and learning in the United States. These same entry characteristics and attitudes can prevent international students from seeking or accepting help they sorely need. For instance, some cultures attach a stigma to counseling (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). It is essential to make counseling services acceptable and readily available for international students to resolve differences in cultural values they might have and to identify and divert other potential problems that may hinder their transition or threaten their persistence at U.S. colleges and universities (Tas, 2013).

Students who come to the United States with better academic preparation and language skills are more likely to persist than students who lack the language proficiency and academic strength (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). The degree to which English language proficiency plays a role in the college transition will be discussed in greater detail in a later section of this literature review. The determination to earn a degree in the United States seems to ensure that international students will pursue their studies despite the likely challenges of adjusting to a foreign culture and unfamiliar college environment (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Like many international students, those who are academically focused often experience loneliness, acculturative stress, homesickness, and unfair treatment, but their drive to succeed helps them persevere and achieve their goals (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Having a future-oriented perspective and a dedication to their academic goals are strong motivators for international students to overcome the challenges and persist in college (Mamiseishvili, 2012).

Furthermore, students who have more social support also experience less stress (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Maintaining a connection with the home country community has been found to be essential to international students' psychological adjustment in the new environment of a U.S. college (Jackson et al., 2013). This kind of social support plays a significant role in international students' mental health and adjustment.

Socialization and Student Engagement

Even if international students have the support of loved ones at home, they still face the challenge of making new friends, coping with the loss of social support, and developing a new social support system. Loss and lack of social support, in particular, have been found to lead to lower academic achievement and negative psychological experiences, such as tension, confusion, and depression among international students (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007).

Engagement in extracurricular activities has been found to enhance international students' adjustment and results in a lower level of acculturative stress (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). To facilitate this engagement, international students are often counseled to take an active approach and to initiate frequent contact with domestic students. For example, they are encouraged to join on-campus clubs and activities; meet American students; practice their English; and learn about American cultural norms, practices, and traditions (Yakunina et al., 2013). In McFadden et al.'s (2012) quantitative study of 216 international students from 56 countries at a Southern public research university, undergraduate students were specifically concerned about the social atmosphere on campus.

According to the student narratives captured in Andrade's (2008) qualitative study, integration into the campus culture, involvement in spiritual life, engagement in courses, and

involvement in extracurricular activities were among the factors international students frequently reported as contributing to their ability to persist at college.

The friendship networks that form through extracurricular engagement or other social means seem to be a critical factor in how well international students deal with stress. Those who have a strong social support system tend to adjust to college life in their host country more quickly and effectively (Zhao et al., 2005). Students who cultivate friendships with American students tend to adapt and adjust more easily. However, becoming accepted into an affinity group that offers social support is much more difficult for international students if few students are from their country or global region (Zhao et al., 2005).

Ghettoization

As important as it is for international students to socialize with their domestic counterparts and to engage co-curricularly, it proves to be difficult for many to manage. International students indicate a stronger preference for making friends from the same country or students from other nations over students from the host country (Zhao et al., 2005). Acculturative stress often causes international students to turn to other students from their home countries because they need the empathy and understanding from their country's own people. Low numbers of international students on a college campus may additionally contribute to social isolationism (Zhao et al., 2005). Educators have mixed feelings about international students' self-ghettoization. On one hand, same-country groups can offer a safe and sympathetic environment with others who understand their challenges and concerns. On the other, it enables closed sets to form, thereby isolating international students and creating a "ghetto effect" (Fischer, 2011, p. 1A).

This self-ghettoization essentially robs these students of a truly international experience (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007; Bradley, 2002). It also hinders the enriching educational and social experiences that can result when international and domestic students interact (Zhao et al., 2005).

Racism/Discrimination

In addition to acculturative stress, homesickness, and culture shock, some immigrant and international students also experience discrimination based on race, religion, and ethnicity. Some researchers have suggested that both of these groups experience or perceive more discrimination than do non-white U.S. students, although there are differences based on the students' country of origin (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). European students report lower levels of perceived discrimination than do students from other regions. Non-European students perceive more discrimination than do European students (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Asian, African, and South American international students perceive more discrimination than do European international students (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). For students from Third World societies, experiences with discrimination often heighten cultural segregation (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007).

For international students, perceived discrimination leads to lower self-esteem and higher identification with other international students. Under the stress of feeling discriminated against, international students seek out and identify with other international students to counteract the negative effect of discrimination on their self-esteem (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). However, once students start building relationships with people from the host culture, their experiences are more likely to be positive (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007).

In a quantitative study of homesickness conducted with 439 college students, Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found that international students are at greater risk of perceiving or experiencing

discrimination, as compared with their U.S. counterparts. International students may perceive more discrimination because of their non-American status, because they may speak English with an accent, and because they may belong to a visible racial or ethnic minority (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Poyrazli and Lopez also found that international students who spent more time in the United States experienced more discrimination. After a honeymoon stage that includes a sense of excitement and fascination, individuals start experiencing and perceiving negative aspects of a culture (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Moreover, international students' English skills at entry may not be good enough to understand discriminatory verbal behaviors (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

In focus group interviews Poyrazli and Grahama (2007) conducted with 15 international students at a semi-urban university, they found these students had not experienced much discrimination on campus. However, students did speak of subtle discrimination on campus. One reported that some of his project team members were either unkind or did not respond to his ideas (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Two other students got negative responses from other students when they tried to represent a different viewpoint (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

Overt discrimination seemed to be more of a problem off campus for the students in Poyrazli and Grahama's (2007) study. Students of color had problems with such incidents. Subtle incidents included experiences with sales clerks who assumed the student could not understand English and provided rude customer service (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Some students also reported overt acts such as being called names in the aftermath of 9/11 and being treated as potential terrorists (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). A few students also reported being stopped by police and questioned due to their dark complexion (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007).

English Ability

Language is the first barrier international study abroad that students encounter when they arrive in the United States. Although most students are able to pass a standardized proficiency examination in English, many have tremendous difficulty expressing ideas, understanding lectures, and writing reports in the language (Selvadurai, 1991; Fischer, 2011). Proficiency in spoken and written English is the greatest contributing factor toward academic success of international students (Selvadurai, 1991; Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Asian international students, in particular, reported lower levels of English proficiency than European international students (Kwon, 2009). This contributed to Asian international students having higher levels of overall stress in their transition (Kwon, 2009).

Language barriers—lack of English competency or discomfort speaking English—can impede international students' interaction with the new community and can negatively impact their wellbeing and ability to adjust and fulfill the initial needs of their transition, such as making purchases, requesting services, and forming early friendships (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Until adequate communication skills are achieved, many international students withdraw, while others remain frustrated for a long time (Shirayev & Boyd, 2008).

In addition to the importance language skills play in settling into a new environment and beginning to form new social ties, English language proficiency is also vitally important for international students' academic success. Classroom participation in the United States is influenced by multiple factors, such as cultural backgrounds, discussion topics, and peer discussion. International students are easily left out and feel ignored by domestic students and professors in classes where English is spoken (Kwon, 2009). International students appear to be quite silent compared with native speakers, and this might lead to them feeling marginalized and

suffering academic failure. Lack of language fluency often exacerbates students' unwillingness or perceived inability to speak during class (Fischer, 2011). Students who are not yet fluent in or comfortable with English tend not to participate in class discussion, which can lead to international students feeling isolated or lonely (Kwon, 2009).

In a quantitative study of homesickness conducted with 439 college students, Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found that international students with lower levels of English skills had higher levels of homesickness. English skills may be a barrier for international students that reduces the likelihood of them developing relationships and friendships with people from their host country (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

In Mamiseishvili's (2012) quantitative study of 200 international students using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study data set, international students who required remedial English in their first year of college were less likely to persist than international students who did not have to take these classes.

In response to the critical factor English proficiency plays in international students' transition in the United States, a number of colleges have increased English-language support or added extra tutors in their writing centers (Fischer, 2011).

Cross-Cultural Pedagogical Differences

In addition to the challenges international students face with English language barriers, many also find it difficult getting used to teaching and curriculum differences in the United States, such as the expectation for discussion or permission to question the teacher (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Curriculum and teaching procedures, therefore, become another important adjustment concern for international students, including study techniques, test taking, classroom instruction, and oral communication such as class discussion (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007).

The U.S. educational culture emphasizes thinking critically, questioning authority, drawing conclusions, and participating actively. These concepts may be strange to foreign students schooled in systems that stress rote memorization and esteem for instructors (Fischer, 2011). Many international students are surprised to learn how different college professors can be in teaching styles, grading policies, and general ways of thinking (Shirayev & Boyd, 2008).

Many international students received their early education based on the model of the British or French systems (Selvadurai, 1991). Such educational systems, in contrast with the U.S. model, emphasize and prepare students for specialization. When such an international student has to face the diversified requirements of a general education (or liberal arts education, in this case), the sudden change in academic life often leads to apprehension, confusion, and stress (Selvadurai, 1991). Most international students are trained to listen to instructors rather than speak in class. Often the more collegial atmosphere in the U.S. college classrooms may seem informal and less structured to international students, thus impeding their comfort and learning process (Selvadurai, 1991). Many international students also arrive with a respect for authority that far surpasses that of their American peers (Selvadurai, 1991).

In focus group interviews Poyrazli and Grahama (2007) conducted with 15 international students at a semi-urban university, these students appreciated small classes, but they found class participation requirements difficult because they were not used to that format. They also hesitated to participate because they feared their accents would prevent them from being understood (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Several interviewees expressed disgust for the way they perceived American students showing disrespect in the classroom, such as by not listening to the professor, not sitting up straight, chewing gum, and acting out behind the professor's back (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007).

International students are also often not accustomed to frequent testing and have more experience taking essay-oriented exams. The quick thinking required by multiple choice and short-answer exams often has been reported as creating psychological barriers and tension among international students (Selvadurai, 1991).

When international students have trouble acclimating and fitting in socially, a common coping mechanism is for them to focus more on academic achievement (Zhao et al., 2005). Zhao, et al. (2005) conducted a quantitative, data-driven study that included 2,780 international students from 317 four-year colleges and universities to compare their engagement in effective educational practices, as compared with domestic students. They found that international students, particularly in their first year of college, devote considerably more time and are significantly more engaged in educationally purposeful activities than American students. They also are more likely to persist at their college than other less motivated international students (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Mamiseishvili's (2012) quantitative study of 200 international students using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study data set found that the academic side of college life is fundamental in first-year international students' retention at U.S. colleges and universities.

Academic Counseling

Interaction with faculty members, such as visiting informally or talking with professors, facilitates greater academic achievement among minority and international students (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Without proper academic counseling, formal or informal, international students have been misguided in many ways. Foreign students need an academic mentor or advisor with knowledge and experience pertaining to the needs of international students, including complying with federal exchange visitor requirement, advising related to employment status, and designing a

course of study related to the students' career needs (Selvadurai, 1991). Inadequate and ineffective faculty guidance has contributed to poor academic performance, bureaucracy-related stress, and changing majors by foreign students (Selvadurai, 1991). It is a major reason international students run a higher risk of not graduating on time (Selvadurai, 1991).

Mamiseishvili (2012) used the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study data set to observe the characteristics of a sample of 200 international students in their first year in college and examined the factors that influenced their persistence in U.S. colleges and universities. The study found that more frequent advisor meetings and study group attendance were associated with higher persistence rates among international students in the United States (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Other results from Mamiseishvili's study showed that if international students successfully integrate into the academic system of a college campus, they are more likely to stay enrolled in the institution. Specifically, the findings highlight the importance of study groups and peer interactions outside of class regarding coursework, assignments, and other academic matters (Mamiseishvili, 2012).

Faculty-Student Interaction

Research shows that academic integration is important for international and American students alike (Mamiseishvili, 2012). However, the literature stresses that interactions with faculty and staff become even more critical for international students as they try to adjust to foreign college standards and construct an American academic identity (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Results from Mamiseishvili's (2012) quantitative study of 200 international students showed that support and validation from faculty members, peers, and staff is critical for international students' adjustment to college. Zhao et al.'s (2005) quantitative study comparing international students' engagement in effective educational practices compared with domestic students' found

that first-year international students show more engagement in academic challenge and student-faculty interactions than American students. Unfortunately, in many cases, international students are unable to develop meaningful relationships with advisors and professors (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). In McFadden et al.'s (2012) study, undergraduate students ranked faculty-student ratio as an important program characteristic. In addition to small class size, they also stated that the friendliness of department staff was very important to them.

Outside Stressors

In addition to acculturation, culture shock, homesickness, lack of English proficiency, and cross-cultural pedagogical differences, findings from the literature also point to other pressing problems that impinge upon international students' experiences in U.S. colleges and universities.

Bradley (2002) reported that a majority of international students report relationship problems, feelings of isolation, homesickness, academic pressures, and finding living accommodations as the biggest stressors. Bradley's research also points to acute stress caused by financial concerns, which often stems from the fact that most international students are not allowed to work in the United States and must depend financially on their families or scholarship funding. A lot of the psychological stress, anxiety, and physical problems that international students have is related to financial pressure, fear of failing subjects, homesickness, and not making friends (Bradley, 2002). In Kwon's (2009) quantitative study of 165 randomly selected international students at an urban university in the mid-Atlantic region, the main fear these students expressed was financial pressures. Sixty percent of the respondents reported their biggest fear was financial pressures; 22 percent said it was fear of failing subjects; and 6 percent cited homesickness (Kwon, 2009). Additionally, deviations in the international money markets

and exchange rates can aggravate international students' financial stability and sense of comfort (Kwon, 2009).

In focus group interviews conducted with 15 international students at a semi-urban university, Poyrazli and Grahama (2007) found these students experienced stress relating to the overwhelming number of bureaucratic requirements, the lack of infrastructure that makes it difficult to settle in and focus on their studies, and the isolation they felt. Their study also revealed that macro-level forces such as the U.S. health care system had an impact on the students' adjustment and may even endanger their health. Understanding the U.S. health care system is a formidable undertaking even for domestic citizens; it is much more so for newcomers who are not well-versed in either English or in U.S. culture (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007).

Conclusion

Despite the difficult transition some international students experience, they do reap significant academic and personal benefits from studying abroad in the United States. In addition, they also bring valuable cultural, educational, and economic benefits to U.S. colleges and universities (Selvadurai, 1991). These students increase American students' cultural sensitivities and global understanding and help equip them with the skills to interact with people from diverse backgrounds in today's global workplace (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Additionally, international students provide revenues to U.S. colleges and universities – and to the nation's economy in general – through tuition, fees, and living expenses (Mamiseishvili, 2012). As institutions of higher education invest more resources in attracting and recruiting increasing numbers of international students, it is in their best interest to retain these students.

Colleges cannot simply recruit a critical mass of international students; they also must be intentional in the academic and co-curricular services and programs they provide so

international and domestic students benefit from one another's presence at all levels of engagement (Zhao et al., 2005). Developing a comprehensive college recruitment and retention plan for international students is not the responsibility of just one department; it is the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in the campus community, including students, alumni, faculty, administrators, trustees, and members of the greater community at large. Each constituency has an investment in the college's success and should be encouraged to participate in international recruitment and retention efforts to facilitate the development of multicultural and intellectual environments on campus (McFadden et al., 2012; Kwon, 2009).

With increasing numbers of students choosing to study abroad, colleges should be aware of the factors that contribute to international students' successful adjustment and academic progress and should offer them as much assistance as possible during their studies (Kwon, 2009). Understanding what factors influence international students' persistence in the United States will help colleges more effectively retain and serve these students (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Finding a way to acculturate these students into communities and campuses will not only enrich their lives, but doing so will also increase the possibility of retaining them as students for their own benefit, as well as for the benefit of domestic students' global competencies and for colleges' financial bottom lines (Tas, 2013).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The study examines how one private liberal arts college is serving the academic and co-curricular needs of its growing international student population. The purpose of this research is to determine whether the study school is meeting its potential to internationalize by attracting and retaining non-U.S. students.

Overview of Research Site

The site where this research study will be carried out is Grover College (pseudonym), a selective, private, coed, liberal arts college in Maryland. The college has a long, distinguished connection to international education, and like many colleges and universities in the United States, it is striving to attract more foreign-born students to serve both its philosophical mission and its financial needs.

The college was founded in 1885 and today has about 1,500 undergraduates and more than 1,200 students in graduate and professional studies. The college offers 33 majors and six interdisciplinary areas for undergraduates and 12 master's degree programs, including two campus-based programs and 10 low-residency, distance-learning programs. The college provides an internationally-based liberal arts and sciences education, and study abroad has been a tradition at the college for more than a quarter of a century. In 2006, Grover became the first college in the nation to require all of its undergraduates to study abroad at least once before graduation.

The college offers more than 60 study abroad programs in 32 countries. Students may fulfill the international study requirement through traditional semester- or academic-yearlong programs, or with a three-week Intensive Course Abroad (ICA) led by the college's faculty. Many of these experiences are preceded by a weekly pre-course that allows students and faculty to engage in in-

depth study of the topic and region. Three-week ICAs are offered during the January break or summer (usually May–June) and typically run in alternate years.

The college’s administrators feel that studying abroad will teach students more than they can learn by simply reading books or attending classes. Faculty and administrators want students to immerse themselves in different languages, culture, and traditions so they can see for themselves how other countries’ politics, history, and technologies affect their lives – and how their lives and learning can make a difference in the broader world. Having the presence of international students on campus also helps to serve this important goal.

Student Population at the Research Site

According to data for the 2012–2013 school year, the most recent information available, the total undergraduate population at the research site is 1,449 students, including both degree- and non-degree-seeking students. Male students (488) make up about 34% of the part- and full-time undergraduate student population, while female students (961) represent about 66%. The majority of students are full-time, degree-seeking candidates. (See Table 1 for general population statistics regarding enrollment and persistence at the research site.)

Table 1

Enrollment and Persistence at the Research Site

	FULL-TIME		PART-TIME		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Undergraduates					
Degree-seeking, first-time freshmen	129	272	0	0	401
Other first-year, degree-seeking	38	38	1	0	77
All other degree-seeking	305	641	12	8	966
<i>Total degree-seeking</i>	472	951	13	8	1,444
All other undergraduates enrolled in credit courses	1	0	2	2	5
<i>Total undergraduates</i>	473	951	15	10	1,449
Graduate					
Degree-seeking, first-time	6	48	12	23	89
All other degree-seeking	33	73	78	222	406
All other graduates enrolled in credit courses		1	27	139	167
<i>Total graduate</i>	39	122	117	384	662
Total all undergraduates				1,449	
Total all graduate				662	
GRAND TOTAL ALL STUDENTS				2,111	

The 2012–2013 data show that among all undergraduates at the research site, 30 students, or 2% of the student population, self-identified as nonresident alien, or international, students. It is also worth noting that 83 students, or nearly six percent, declined to disclose their race or ethnicity. (See Table 2 for a breakdown of the research site’s undergraduate student population by racial and ethnic categories.) An additional 18 students, for a total representing 3% of the student body at the research site, identified with another country of origin, even if they did have U.S. citizenship. The countries of origin of all 48 international/multicultural students are listed in Table 3 below.

Table 2

Student Population by Racial/Ethnic Category at Research Site

	Degree-Seeking First-Time First Year	Degree-Seeking Undergraduates (include first-time first-year)	Total Undergraduates (both degree- and non-degree- seeking)
Nonresident aliens	6	29	30
Hispanic/Latino	31	108	108
Black or African American, non-Hispanic	32	125	127
White, non-Hispanic	280	988	989
American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	1	3	3
Asian, non-Hispanic	17	46	46
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	0	3	3
Two or more races, non-Hispanic	15	60	60
Race and/or ethnicity unknown	19	82	83
TOTAL	401	1,444	1,449

Table 3

Research Site's Multicultural/International Students' Countries of Origin

Country	UG
Afghanistan	1
Argentina	1
Cameroon	1
Canada	1
China	6
Colombia	1
Côte d'Ivoire	1
Dominican Republic	1
Ethiopia	3
Germany	3
Great Britain	1
Hong Kong	1
India	2
Indonesia	1
Iran (Islamic Republ	1
Japan	3
Mexico	2
Morocco	1
Nicaragua	2
Pakistan	1
Panama	1
Singapore	1
South Africa	1
South Korea	6
Tajikistan	1
Venezuela	1
Viet Nam	3

Services for International Students at the Research Site

Although the site of this research study has a relatively small undergraduate population of about 1,500 undergraduate students, its staff, faculty, and administrators provide support through

a broad range of academic and co-curricular student services. The majority of these services are available for the entire student population, while others are targeted primarily for international students. These services and the primary provider or facilitator are described briefly below.

The Office of Multicultural Student Services

Special programs and activities for international students are sponsored through the Office of Multicultural Student Services, which supports the college's commitment to diverse campus life. Through special events, clubs, mentoring programs, student support, and other initiatives, the office fosters a sense of tolerance, community, and cultural awareness on campus and beyond. The Office of Multicultural Student Services works with faculty; staff; students; and offices such as International Studies, Religious and Spiritual Life, and Hillel to cultivate an environment that is engaged in learning about difference on campus, locally, and abroad. It also aims to foster and sustain a learning environment that is respectful, inclusive, and appreciative of diversity in its many forms.

International Student Association

GISA, Grover's International Student Association, was established to both raise cultural awareness within the college community by organizing various internationally and interculturally themed events and to help eliminate misconceptions and stereotypes by hosting discussions and educational film screenings. The club strives to enrich student life by creating and maintaining intercultural exchange and providing a support system for culturally diverse students.

Multicultural Understanding to Transform Stereotypes (MUTTS)

The student group Multicultural Understanding to Transform Stereotypes (MUTTS) engages in activities that enhance the intercultural understanding and relationships of students at the college where this research was conducted. Members of the MUTTS club work together to

understand different cultural values, traditions, and meaning. The club promotes awareness of how diversity is valued on campus in the community and as a lifelong goal.

Coordinator of International Student Recruitment

The college recently designated an admissions counselor as the coordinator of international student (J. Stober, personal communication, January 29, 2014). This person is responsible for the recruitment, admission, orientation, and ongoing support of international students at the college. This person in this position serves as the college's designee responsible for all communication with international students and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and he coordinates all reporting requirements through SEVIS. Like all admissions counselors, this person interviews prospective students and corresponds with them, their parents, guidance counselors, and others who are important to the college's admissions process.

The Academic Center for Excellence

The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) is a resource center helps students develop self-awareness and autonomy, develop positive habits, take responsibility and ownership for their learning, develop resilience and coping skills, learn and use effective study strategies, and enhance and apply critical and analytical thinking skills. ACE offers study skills workshops and peer-led, content-based supplemental instruction sessions, including math assistance. The center is staffed by professional learning specialists and a trained graduate intern. Academic accommodations are also implemented at the academic center for students with documented disabilities.

The Writing Center

Writing Center tutors help all students, including international students, achieve the college writing proficiency criteria. The entire staff works with students at all stages of the writing process, including brainstorming, formulating a thesis, gathering ideas, outlining paragraphs, organizing a paper, proofreading, identifying mechanical and format errors, and fiction writing. The center also provides students access to numerous resources in its library.

Design

This study uses a descriptive, interview-based methodology. This researcher was interested in finding out whether the research site provided adequate academic and co-curricular support to meet the needs of its international students. This study used interview methodology to provide a more in-depth understanding of the specific challenges international students confront at the college where the research was conducted. The interviews captured first-person perspectives and presented the interviewees' voices, contexts, and emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This methodology highlights these students' perceptions, and the vivid descriptions that result make a valuable contribution to the research literature.

Instrument

This researcher has extensive professional experience with conducting interviews and chose to craft a questionnaire for the select purpose of this research study. (See Appendix A for the complete questionnaire.) The questions outlined in the instrument were posed orally by this researcher and were modified or expanded upon as needed during the interview process.

Procedure

To begin conducting this research, this researcher contacted the Dean of Multicultural Student Services at the research site in late January for recommendations of students to interview

in a one-on-one setting regarding their academic and co-curricular experiences at one private liberal arts college. This researcher received a list of about 60 possible students to contact for inclusion in this research study.

In late January, this researcher sent an email to all recommended students requesting their participation as an interviewee to inform this study (see Appendix B). Of those queried, about 20 students responded. After follow-up, this researcher began scheduling individual interviews in late January/early February with students who responded.

Fourteen interviews were conducted in early February on the campus of the research site. Interviews were conducted one-on-one in a private setting and generally lasted about 30 minutes. Each student either chose or was assigned a pseudonym to maintain privacy. Each student also was informed that he or she could discontinue participation in the interview at any time with no penalty. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. (See Appendix C for an example of an interview transcription.) The transcriptions were stored on this researcher's home computer to ensure the participants' privacy. Each student was sent a copy of the transcription to correct or add to any of the information presented during the initial interview; amendments were made as needed.

Participants

Although the 14 students who participated in this research process self-selected by choosing to respond to and follow through with this researcher's interview request, they represent a broad range of demographics at the research site. It should be noted that of the students who were interviewed, only four were solely citizens of other countries; six were first-generation U.S. citizens through birth, two were citizens through adoption, one was a U.S. resident, and one was a dual citizen.

Twelve of the students were female; two were male. Two students were freshmen, five were sophomores, three were juniors, and four were seniors. The students' majors were biochemistry, biology, biology and Latin American studies, chemistry, environmental studies, international relations and Spanish, psychology, psychology and peace studies, peace studies (three students), political science, and special education; one student had not yet declared a major.

Four students were Asian, four were Black, three were Caucasian, and three were Hispanic. In terms of place of birth, four students were Asian, three were South American, two were either African, Caribbean, or Middle Eastern, and one was European. The countries they represent included Afghanistan, Barbados/Panama, Cambodia/Thailand, Cameroon, China, Indonesia, Jamaica/Haiti, Mexico, Peru, South African, Sudan, Switzerland, Venezuela, and Vietnam (some students identified with two countries because of their parentage). Five students were Catholic, four were Protestants, two were Jewish, two were Muslim, and one was an atheist.

Chapter IV will present the themes that reoccurred during the interview process with these participants. This researcher will use these themes and findings from the literature to present conclusions that can be drawn regarding the academic and co-curricular experiences of international students at one private liberal arts college.

CHAPTERS IV AND V

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this research was to examine how one private liberal arts college is serving the academic and co-curricular needs of its growing international student population. Through individual interviews, this study strived to elucidate students' perceptions of the academic and co-curricular support they receive at the college, their general perceptions of whether their needs are being met to satisfaction, and their level of engagement on the college's campus. This chapter will capture the overriding themes that emerged from the interviews for comparison with the literature so this researcher can recommend improvements that the study site should consider to attract and retain international students.

Discussion of the Data

The 14 students who were interviewed for this research study represented a broad range of the study site's undergraduate population in terms of race, country of origin, religion, academic class, and course of study. Despite the diversity of the study subjects, several common topics emerged as themes among their interviews, including the admissions process, acculturation, culture shock and homesickness, socialization, ghettoization, language barriers, academic experiences, faculty-student interaction, academic interactions with peers, and overall satisfaction with the college experience. The following sections will examine these themes as they relate to international students at Grover College, a pseudonym adopted for the purposes of this research project.

International Admissions Process

The interviewees were asked to discuss their experiences as prospective students of the study site. These students learned about the private liberal arts college through a variety of

sources, including counselor and mentor recommendations, athletic recruiters, the popular college guide *The Colleges That Change Lives* (Pope, 2012), Internet searches, and proximity to Grover alumni and students in the United States and abroad. All of the students said they found the admissions process to be relatively easy, often owing to the fact the study site uses the common application, which allows students to apply to multiple colleges at one time.

A first-generation senior student of Sudanese background commented, “I found the process to be incredibly easy. I knew it was the common app; I didn’t apply to any schools that didn’t use the common app. It was pretty simple, pretty straightforward, and standardized.” A Vietnamese-born junior responded, “The process was not that long. It was fairly easy compared to other schools I applied to. The others required a bunch of essays and second and third processes. Grover was pretty short and to the point.” A Caribbean-American junior was particularly impressed with the research site during the application process: “Grover was great. They waived my application fee. I felt like they were really catering to me as a student, regardless of my race, regardless of my background.” “Very efficient” is how a senior student who was living in South Africa described the process, even though she had to travel back and forth in her country on overnight trips to get the documentation she needed for admission. She especially appreciated that Grover admissions counselors helped her through a glitch with her passport application.

Transitioning to College Life

The literature stresses that coming to the United States as an international student can be challenging and stressful. Compared with their domestic peers, international students tend to experience greater adjustment difficulties and more stress during their initial transition to college, which can have lasting repercussions during the course of their entire college career (Poyrazli &

Grahama, 2007; Jackson et al., 2013). Prior to being accepted and admitted to the research site, many of the students in this study began their transition to college life by visiting the campus one or more times, sometimes on overnight visits. Others arrived from the West Coast or other countries sight unseen. A first-year Mexican-born student was not able to visit the campus because the trip from his home in San Diego was too expensive. He said, "I just got here and started. I didn't know what to expect." When he did arrive, he said, "I thought it was a little like Narnia. I really liked it being in the middle of a forest. And it's a small campus, which I really like." Another student who was unable to tour campus was not as impressed. This Indonesian junior said:

I was a little disappointed because one of the reasons I was attracted to Grover was because I thought it was in a city. But everyone was really helpful. I remember driving in, and everyone was like, 'Hey, hello.' I was like, 'Whoa. This is kind of strange.'

Many students remarked that they found the college to be "beautiful," and others said they were grateful for the small campus and the sense of community they found there.

First impressions regarding on-campus diversity came up frequently in the interviews, but from quite disparate perspectives. Two Hispanic students remarked that they found themselves in the minority for the first time in their personal and academic lives. A Venezuelan junior recalled:

It was strange to be around so many Americans. There were so many people from New Jersey. In Miami, in my high school, it was like 98 percent Hispanic. So it definitely has been much more diverse here for me.

The first-year student from Mexico remarked:

I came from a public high school that is 90 percent Latino. I did go from being in the majority to being in the minority, which was totally fine because people here are really accepting. And even though I come from a low-income family and community, the people who I have met so far have all been really humble, and I appreciate that.

A half-Cambodian, half-Thai student who was adopted by U.S. parents relished the opportunity to be a part of what she thought would be a much more inclusive campus community. She said:

I knew that Grover would be a lot more diverse than my hometown, and I was kind of excited about that because even in my own household my brother and I are the only people of color. I knew that coming to Grover I was going to be able to meet more people with stories similar to mine. ... I knew that I would find my stride and 'my people.'

Other students expressed great disappointment at what they felt was a lack of diversity on campus. The U.S. domestic student of Sudanese parentage said:

I remember thinking there were very few international students who I could identify with my first year. I don't identify as international, but I grew up around so many international people. I was looking for a much less homogenous community.

The Venezuelan junior recalled, "I expected to find more international students here, or maybe for there to be more interactions just for us."

The students also differed in how they viewed the orientation process at the study site. Generally a two-day series of lectures and presentations, orientation is meant to help first-year

and transfer students acclimate to life on campus. In the last few years, the study site has begun offering sessions during fall orientation specifically for international and multicultural students.

The Indonesian junior said:

I remember my first day here and it being rather unhelpful because they were like, ‘This is how you shop. This is how you use a credit card.’ And I knew all that stuff. I had been to the U.S. before.

Other students also seemingly did not receive relevant orientation information. According to the South African senior:

If there had been someone here to help me when I first arrived, that would’ve helped me. ... I had to learn a lot of things on my own. I came here during the spring semester, so orientation was just a one-day thing. I kind of learned things as I got in touch with other people. It wasn’t really hard to figure out, and I’m kind of a reserved person who likes to observe before acting. It took me some time to figure some things out, but then it was easy.

A senior who is a dual U.S./Swiss citizen said, “Sometimes you have to seek things out, which is good because it prepares you for later in life. It teaches you life skills; not everything is handed to you.”

A Cameroonian sophomore did not know there were special orientation components for international and multicultural students. He says he does not really see himself as an international student because he has been in the United States since age 12 and feels he has acclimated well. He did add, however, “I think it would be a useful event to help others figure out what’s happening in their new country. It would be good to talk to other international students about

their experiences and share more information.” A sophomore born in China and adopted by U.S. parents also did not recall there being any special orientation for international or multicultural students, though she does agree this kind of programming would be beneficial for these student populations at the study site. She said, “You just had to find people who were like you, or maybe not like you, depending on if you wanted to get out of your comfort zone.”

Culture Shock and Homesickness

Many of the interviewees, particularly those students who had not spent a lot of time in the United States prior to attending college at the study site, found there were cultural differences between them and their domestic-born peers. The literature emphasizes the challenges international students experience in adapting to a foreign living and learning environment, which can trigger feelings of uneasiness, insecurity, and loss (Jackson et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2005). Although some international students have had previous opportunities to travel, many have not, which can manifest as culture shock and confusion with the new culture they encounter (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Adapting to U.S. customs, as well as mores of society and campus life, may additionally conflict with aspects of international students’ personal and cultural identity (Zhao et al., 2005).

In this study, the South African senior was the most vocal in describing differences between her native culture and the one she found herself immersed in at the study site:

In South Africa we assume that you are going to come to the U.S., and it will all be golden streets. And you get here, and you look at the infrastructure, and you realize it isn’t all that. ... One of the things I had to learn, and it’s one of my pet peeves, is that some people here are *really* loud. I’m not used to this. Some people shout when you’re sitting right next to them. ... And sometimes there is this notion that being liberal means

always being outspoken when you stand for something. For me, you don't necessarily have to do that. You can actually look at things from other perspectives and draw your own conclusions.

This student also commented on what she perceived as the lack of courtesy among her U.S. domestic peers. She observed, "My hometown is a very small town, and we all know one another. So when you pass someone, you actually greet them and then move past. Here, people don't want to make eye contact; they avoid your gaze." A Caribbean-American junior felt similarly and remarked:

People who have not ventured outside the U.S. are not as courteous. They don't hold doors. There's not a lot of saying 'excuse me.' I find that stuff very innate. Thank you. Bless you. I learned these things when I was two.

A Peruvian sophomore said she has many commonalities with her U.S. peers, but she believes:

Peruvians values are stricter. I know a lot of my friends don't get along with their parents, or their parents can't be their friends. Or they don't like talking to their parents. I tell my parents mostly everything. We are just very family-oriented, more traditional. I'm very big on tradition. Loyalty and solidarity are really big things for me.

The Vietnamese junior expressed a similar sentiment: "I feel like Americans are a little more distant than Vietnamese. We are more family-oriented; we're closer to each other. Here it's like kids go off to college and are like, 'See you later, parents.'"

A Venezuelan sophomore finds her U.S. peers to be a lot more conservative. She offered, "People from my country are very loud and say what is on their minds. My American friends are

very careful, and people in my culture always hug and kiss on the cheek; here it's a handshake."

The Afghan senior made a similar observation:

I noticed that Americans don't really like to be touched. They're not very touchy. I don't want to be in someone's way, but it is something I observed. We don't have a lot of privacy back home, so I do appreciate that about here. It's great. Back home everyone is in your way and all over you.

As shown in the literature, these kinds of cultural differences can prevent international students from acclimating, causing a longing for life in their native homes. Because of cultural and linguistic differences, international students often experience a psychological reaction to the absence of significant others and familiar surroundings that makes it harder for them to adjust to their new surroundings (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). The South African senior said:

At the beginning, I used to lock myself in my room. I spent the first semester locked in, part of the second semester, too. Then I started coming out more in my sophomore year. I assumed more leadership roles on campus and I joined more clubs. ... Once I started out with that, it kind of forced me out of my shell. I was able to listen to other students talk about being homesick, and I felt like I wasn't the only one.

When asked whether she experienced any homesickness while studying at the study site, the Afghan senior said, "I think if I said no, I lied. I do feel homesickness when I'm frustrated, but it doesn't happen that often. But, yes, it does happen."

Other students who had spent more time in the United States had much less trouble adjusting to the social and co-curricular environment at the campus of the study site. A Caribbean-American first-year student said:

Honestly, I never cried at night. I was actually surprised. I knew I was going to miss my family, but it wasn't like I couldn't function without them. It was actually a good opportunity to get some time away and build myself up.

The Mexican-born first-year student had this to say about homesickness:

You have the power not to be homesick. If you are so busy with doing homework, being involved in the community, you won't have time to think, 'Oh, I miss my parents; I miss my friends.' You're now so busy doing stuff. It's not worth spending time missing people.

Socialization

Despite any perceived differences with their U.S. domestic peers or struggles with homesickness, the vast majority of students who were interviewed for this research project said they were happy with their social lives and personal relationships at the study site. Eight students said they have a mixed group of friends that includes U.S. domestic and international students. The sophomore who is half-Cambodian and half-Thai said her group of friends is a "good combination of both international students and Americans. For me it was really important to have a mixture of both. I wasn't necessarily trying to make this happen, but it did, and I'm glad." Six interviewees said they mostly associate with U.S. domestic students. The Indonesian junior added this caveat, "Most of my friends are definitely U.S. domestic students, but a significant number of them I met through the international club on campus."

Ghettoization

Only one student, the senior with a Sudanese father, said her friends were primarily other international or multicultural students. She revealed:

It's hard to identify with people who haven't had international experiences. It's hard because I don't always find myself understood. ... I choose to cultivate relationships that are more culturally, ethnically diverse because I feel I am more connected to people who identify with more than one culture than those who are more monolithic.

The sophomore who is half-Cambodian and half-Thai recalled:

The thing I was really disappointed was that Grover is advertised as being very community-based. Everyone is friendly, but at the end of the day there are pockets of people who hang out with each other. And sometimes this is based on race, or activities like clubs and teams. For me, I wasn't affiliated with any sports teams, and that is where a lot of multicultural and international students do come from. I didn't quite fit in with them. I'm always sort of in that 'in between' place. I thought campus was going to be a lot more open. ... Honestly, I think this happens everywhere on college campuses, though. There are always going to be pockets of people who form their own cliques.

Most of the interviewees did not comment on feeling marginalized themselves, but some did share observations of international or multicultural students self-isolating out of personal preference. The half-Cambodian, half-Thai student said, "International students have a lot of international friends, and that is what they tend to bond over. I don't think they are forced to isolate, though. They choose to."

Among the subpopulations at the study site, Korean students were most often identified as being on the periphery of campus life. The Vietnamese-born junior said, "I have noticed over the last few years that the Korean people are kind of in a group. I do interact with them sometimes, but I myself feel a little isolated when I'm in a group with them."

The Indonesian junior observed:

After my year there are a lot of students who are Korean or Chinese, and because they are so visible, they are kind of like their own group. And I understand why, because it's a lot easier. And, in general, I feel like there just isn't a lot of support for international students in the beginning. The Koreans and the Chinese are definitely a little marginalized, for sure.

The senior with the Sudanese father offered this insight into why international and multicultural students may self-isolate:

I think there is such a lack of multicultural U.S. citizens that international students choose instead to spend time with one another because there is such a stratified understanding of what it means to be an international student. I think it's easier to have a disconnect. But I also think it's easy to be tokenized when you are a multicultural or international student. ... Grover oftentimes recruits students who are from one or two countries, and you might be an international student, but you are the only one. You are the representative of an entire country. That's a lot of pressure. ... I do think they seek out those who understand their identity in a way that isn't so simplified.

Several other students commented that they believe there is no ghettoization or marginalization of international students on campus. Rather, these students believe, some of their international and multicultural peers simply choose to socialize less out of personal preference. The Mexican first-year student said:

I think it depends a lot on the person. If they want to be out there meeting new people, they'll do so. But if they prefer to be or work by themselves, I guess that's up to them, right? But I feel like people here are accepting enough.

The South African senior offered a similar sentiment, “It depends on the type of person you are. If you like being left alone, then you will be left alone. And sometimes there aren’t many opportunities when international students get to mix with other students.”

The U.S./Swiss dual citizen agreed and added some context to the discussion:

It depends on the person’s personality and the culture from which they are coming.

Different cultures look at education very differently. Some will not choose to participate in anything but academics; others I’ll see all over campus in clubs and other social activities.

Language Barriers

Many researchers have focused on English language ability as the first pressing barrier international students experience when studying abroad in the United States. Not only can a language barrier hinder social interactions, proficiency in spoken and written English is also the greatest contributing factor toward academic success of international students (Selvadurai, 1991; Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007).

During this research study all interviews were conducted in English, and each of the interviewees was understood with no problem. However, some of the international students attending college at the study site did express experiencing difficulty with communicating primarily in English. The Afghan senior said, “I feel like if they were in my own language, my classes would be easy. Besides learning the subject, I also have to learn how to understand English quite a bit. I’m still translating.” The Venezuelan sophomore admitted, “My English classes were hard last year because I wasn’t used to doing research papers and very intense writing. I have problems with structure and grammar.” The Peruvian-born first-year student said

that even though she started learning English in kindergarten and split her childhood between the United States and Peru, one of her English teachers who previously had taught English as a second language was able to determine from her writing that she was not a native English speaker. She joked that, “Living in the U.S. mostly just deteriorates your Spanish.”

Academic Experience

The literature also stresses the difficulties some international students have getting used to teaching and curriculum differences in the U.S. educational system (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). Many international students are surprised to learn how different college professors can be in teaching styles, grading policies, and general ways of thinking, when compared with one another and particularly with instructors from their home countries (Shiraev & Boyd, 2008). The students interviewed for this research did not express any difficulties or disapproval of the academic experience they were having at the study site; they were uniformly positive in their descriptions of academic life and class rigor at the private liberal arts college. The half-Cambodian, half-Thai sophomore highlighted the academic depth of the faculty at the research site:

I have had really amazing professors. They are all very interesting people, and they all come from very different backgrounds, and they all have knowledge in their different subjects. They all have their strengths, which I really enjoy. I think it’s really cool that Grover has a broad range of classes even though we are a small school. All of my professors have been very well-qualified.

The majority of the students described their course loads as “challenging” but focused on the positive impact of being held to high academic standards. The adopted Chinese-born sophomore said, “I had a political science class last semester that kicked my butt, but in a good way.” The student of Sudanese parentage admitted, “It’s been a rollercoaster. I’ve been very

driven and challenged in my classes. But my performance is another story.” The half-Cambodian, half-Thai sophomore stated:

I am being challenged. My classes challenge me, and I’m really enjoying them, though it is a lot of work. ... Coming to college, I wanted to be challenged in different ways. I wanted to develop my critical thinking. Grover has been the perfect adjustment from high school with just the right amount of challenge.

Although the interviewees stressed that classes were challenging, many of these students were motivated to work hard to achieve academically. The Caribbean-American junior recalled, “My classes have been pretty good. I have had my highest GPA yet at Grover. It’s definitely something I really worked for, long hours. I did one all-nighter. It was horrible. I almost died. I need my sleep.” The Cameroonian sophomore believes, “If you do your work, read, you’ll be fine and will succeed.” The South African senior shared a similar sentiment:

There’s no Grover class that’s too easy. If one thinks that, they are mistaken. If you work hard, they aren’t too hard, either. It depends on how much work you are willing to put in and what you are trying to achieve.

Faculty-Student Interaction

Research shows that academic integration is important for all college and university students; however, interactions with faculty and staff become even more critical for international students as they try to adjust to foreign college standards and cultural norms (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Much of the literature shows that international students often are unable to develop meaningful relationships with advisors and professors (Poyrazli & Grahama, 2007). This was not the case with this research, as evidenced by the interviewees’ overwhelmingly positive

impressions of professors at the study site. The Indonesian junior said, “I idolize my professors. They are amazing.” The senior with Sudanese parentage raved, “I admire them. I obsess over them. The ones who I spend my time with, they are mentors and advisors. And I feel profoundly lucky to have them at Grover.” In the same vein, the Afghan senior said, “I really love them. They are great and very helpful.”

In one of the most intense exchanges during the interview process, the Peruvian-born sophomore admitted:

I really enjoy my classes here. I was about to transfer out of here a little while ago, but I stayed because of the professors. They are really good. These teachers could be anywhere, but they choose Grover, so you know it’s a hell of a good school. The professors are really amazing, and not just the way they teach, but also their philosophies. It shows that they are very sincere about wanting to teach their students.

Many of the students interviewed for this research project remarked positively when asked about the faculty members’ academic support and accessibility to students. The Caribbean-American junior stated, “I like my professors a lot. They always answer my emails; I send *tons* of emails. I go to a lot of office hours. They are very encouraging. They really engage with us.” The Cameroonian sophomore said, “They are all really approachable. They are very understanding. You can just go up to them during office hours and talk and get answers.” The U.S./Swiss dual citizen similarly reported:

I have had really great professors here. ... The professors are here to help us. They are great at office hours. I’ve been to a couple of their houses. They are great at building that relationship outside the classroom. They care if you’re not in class. They provide advice on what classes to take. They look out for you and care about how you do.

Only one student expressed any reservation about the quality of the faculty at the research site. The South African senior recalled:

I did have one class that made me uncomfortable culturally because we had to talk about sex a lot. It was an English class; it was an interesting one. We talked a lot about the Catholic Church and sex, and it was uncomfortable for me. In my culture, I cannot talk about sex with someone older than I am. For me, it would be disrespectful to the person sitting on the other side.

Academic Interactions with Peers

During the research interviews, the South African student's discomfort in the classroom was the most extreme example of the disorienting cultural differences that often accompany cross-cultural transitions into academic settings (Yakunina et al., 2013; Jackson et al., 2013). Other students interviewed for this research project mirrored sentiments expressed in other studies reported in the literature. In the focus group interviews Poyrazli and Grahama (2007) conducted with 15 international students at a semi-urban university, for example, several interviewees expressed their disapproval and disgust with the way U.S. born students disrespected their professors, such as by not sitting up straight, chewing gum, and acting disruptive. The negative comments about peer academic behaviors conveyed in this research project generally centered on perceived disrespect from U.S. peers toward professors and what they felt was excessive casualness within the classroom.

The South African senior did not mince words about the differences she sees in her U.S. peers' classroom behavior:

Some students can be downright disrespectful. I feel like when you're in a classroom you really have to think before you speak and really consider the other people's points of view. Some people just start talking without thinking about how what they are saying is going to impact other people that are in the classroom. And just because someone holds an opinion strongly, they don't see the need to consider anyone else.

The Peruvian-born sophomore also focused on her U.S. peers' perceived lack of respect in the classroom:

Respect is a very big thing for me, and I may have higher standards than others. My pet peeve is when students start packing up before the professor is finished conducting class, even if the class has run over for a little bit, I just find it incredibly disrespectful. Students on their phones during class also drive me crazy. I mean, they're paying for this education. It kills me a little bit inside.

The Caribbean-American junior similarly recalled:

Some things happen in class that I think should never occur. Students have their hats on; they're lounging around, not sitting up. They don't have any paper or pencils to take notes. No questions being asked. People being on their cell phones. What are you learning? It's distracting to me.

Some of the interviewees in this research shifted the focus of their feelings of disapproval from their peers to their professors for creating an overly casual learning environment. The Caribbean-American first-year student remarked, "I would never call my professors by their first names because they are professors. It's just not something that I grew up doing, and I think that

distinguishes multicultural or international students.” The Afghan senior also commented on the trend within some U.S. colleges and universities of addressing professors by their first names:

The classrooms are very different than what you would expect back in my country. In one way it’s good because students feel more comfortable with the professors, and sometimes even the professors will write their first name, which isn’t gonna happen in my home country. If you call a professor by their first name, you could get a zero for that crap. It’s like a dictatorship over there. The atmosphere is also very strict and very hard back at my home. Here, it’s so easy. Sometimes you don’t even feel like you’re in a classroom.

Overall International Student Satisfaction

This researcher chose to end every interview with the 14 international and multicultural students who were part of this study by asking them if they would still choose to attend college at the research site even if they could do it all over again. Ten students were effusive in their responses, which included: “Definitely, definitely, definitely.” “Definitely, no question.” “Of course! There’s not even a doubt in my mind.” “I would. Definitely. It would still be my first choice.”

Four students expressed doubts about having chosen to study at the research site. The half-Cambodian, half-Thai sophomore offered a noncommittal response that she “probably” would have attended Grover. The other three each couched their negative response within other positive attributes of the private liberal arts college. The senior of Sudanese parentage said, “My department is the only reason that I decided to stay here. Grover life, administrative policies, the cultural life here, it is not satisfying. But it’s OK because I’ve gotten this incredible academic experience.” The Afghan senior stated, “If I were to start all over again, I probably would have changed schools. Maybe I would’ve gone somewhere with more choices in majors, but I do love

Grover.” The dual U.S./Swiss student said she plans on looking for a bigger university for graduate school, though she added, “I do love the environment at Grover.”

Recommendations for Study Site

As was presented within the preceding discussion of the data, student interview responses show that the study site does appear to be providing many academic and social/co-curricular services to attract and retain international students. During the interview process the 14 international and multicultural student participants also were asked their perspectives about what the study site could do to improve the experiences of prospective international students and the academic and social/co-curricular experiences of admitted, matriculating international students. This section will present the most relevant of these students’ recommendations within the context of the capabilities and potential at the research site, including improved marketing strategy, international student recruitment, tailored orientation processes, and increased co-curricular programming.

Improved Marketing Strategy

Many interviewees cited the research site’s study abroad requirement as a particular draw during their college search process. Even though the Mexican-born student was unable to visit campus before starting as a first-year student, he said, “I just knew that the classes were small, and this is a small college. And of course the study abroad requirement.” The Cameroonian sophomore recalled, “What really interested me the most about Grover was the study abroad program.” The Venezuelan sophomore said, “I think Grover is very enticing because it offers the study abroad program, so it’s very friendly to other cultures.” The Caribbean-American first-year student offered, “I think the study abroad requirement attracts a lot of international and

multicultural students. Grover has an international perspective, and that puts it on the right track. ... Study abroad is a big reason I came here.”

Grover clearly recognizes the uniqueness of study abroad and capitalizes on it in its print and online marketing materials. Living and learning in another country appeals to international and U.S. domestic students alike, and study abroad should continue to be a cornerstone of the college’s print and web marketing efforts.

However, despite the marketing advantage that study abroad plays for the research site, many of the students interviewed believe the college could improve its efforts to attract international and multicultural students through its print materials and online presence. Some of the students felt there was a disingenuousness to the marketing materials, particularly the way they portray racial and ethnic diversity on campus. The half-Cambodian, half-Thai sophomore said, “I really have a problem with the website; when you look at it, they choose specific types of people to appear on the website and in print pieces based on their racial and ethnic appearances. I definitely see a pattern.” The senior of Sudanese background shared a similar sentiment:

To be honest with you, it seemed more diverse than I experienced it to be. So I thought I was coming into a community with niche groups that I could identify with. I guess in that way it was effective, but simultaneously misleading.

This issue will be a tricky one for the college’s marketing team to tackle. Print and online admissions and other marketing materials obviously cannot portray the campus as a place primarily for majority students. Nor should the marketing materials overstate the college’s diversity, only to disappoint international and multicultural students who come to campus and feel exposed and disenchanting because they are in the distinct minority. The half-Cambodian, half-Thai student acknowledged this marketing challenge: “It’s always tough to advertise for

multicultural/international students because you don't want to overdo it or underdo it. It's really hard to find that balance in between." The college's print and online marketing materials should be reasonably aspirational in the way they present diversity, showing campus to be slightly more diverse than it is. This build-it-and-they-will-come marketing strategy will help attract international and multicultural students without frustrating them with a different reality.

The research site also needs to commit to building and maintaining a strong online presence. Like all young people, prospective international students rely on college and universities' websites as a primary source of information. Some students commented that they found Grover's website difficult to navigate during their college search. Since these students began attending the college, its entire website was renovated and redesigned. Many of the interviewees noted the improvement. However, there still may be work to do if the college wants to make attracting international students a priority. As the Afghan senior noted:

The website needs a little bit of work to attract international students. ... For international students there is a lot of stuff that needs to be put on the website. I couldn't find anything about international students, like how many international students there are, like what countries they are from. For an international student, the website is not that convenient.

If its aim is to attract and retain international and multicultural students, the college will need to cater more to their needs in its online strategy. Quicklinks should be added to direct these students to information about the admissions process for international students; visa, **SERVIS**, and **TOEFL** information; campus demographics; and special support services. Additionally, all prospective students are drawn to profiles of peers who are attending the college or university they are considering. International and multicultural students are no exception; they want to see that students who are like them attend the college. Grover needs to make sure online profiles

capture a range of student experiences, including those of international undergraduates. As the Afghan senior put it:

People look for things they have in common. If it was me, and Grover had a website for international students, I would look for an Afghan student and what they have to say. We have more in common, and we would to see how they feel here.

International Student Recruitment

Print and online marketing materials are very important to the student recruitment process. However, prospective students are unlikely to stumble upon any college or university without some awareness or guidance, which is why active student recruitment is also key. Many of the students who were interviewed for this research project believe Grover College could do a much better job of reaching out to international and multicultural prospective students. The Venezuelan sophomore believes the college needs to “send more representatives to other schools. ... Maybe they should send people to other countries to talk about Grover.” The Mexican-born first-year student said, “I’m not sure how they would do it, but they should send people internationally to recruit students.” According to the Indonesian junior, “Grover should go to international schools and do more individual, targeted visits rather than as parts of tours like the *Colleges That Change Lives* tour. That would be good, more effective.” The Chinese-born sophomore observed, “I’ve seen a lot of international students from Asia, but not a lot from South America or Africa or even Europe. ... Reach out to those communities more and make ourselves known.” The Venezuelan sophomore said directly, “Go abroad and recruit. A lot of people in my country want to come to the United States, and they know about the big schools, but they don’t know about the little schools like Grover. Put out more information.” The Cameroonian sophomore summed it up with: “A lot of people just don’t know about us. Make the college more

known.” This idea was also supported by the Vietnamese-born student, who said, “Grover isn’t really well known. I feel like mostly only private schools know about Grover.”

What these students’ responses point to is twofold. First, there is a feeling that even with its study abroad distinction, the college does not stand out from the pack of other four-year colleges and universities. General recruitment efforts need to be enhanced across all student sectors to increase the college’s noteworthiness. Secondly, if Grover is going to try to build its population of international students, recruitment efforts will need to be redoubled to make the college known far from its idyllic, but relatively insular, campus. There is great potential for the return on the investment of international recruiting. Taking the time and making the investment to recruit and retain international students gets easier with each admitted non-U.S. student. As the Caribbean-American junior put it, “It’s hard to be in a community where you don’t see people who look like you.” Purposefully recruiting international students should be a top admissions priority at Grover College.

International Student Orientation

The students who were interviewed for this research project differed in the value they found in their college orientation process. What is evident, however, is that the students believe there should be special sessions that tailor information to international students. The Caribbean-American junior said:

I definitely think there should be an international orientation. ... If they knew there was something here that would cater directly to them, a time when they could come in as a unit and feel like they’re represented on the campus and that they’re wanted.

The Caribbean-American first-year student said, “There should be a booth at orientation, have a presence at the very start of the year so you don’t have to look for people to help you. Be really

up front about the services that offered for international and multicultural students.” The Peruvian sophomore thinks a tailored orientation program could be used to “show how difficult it can be to be an international student. Have something where we are not the ones who feel out of place all of the time. It’s just good to feel completely comfortable in a place.”

The dual U.S./Swiss senior emphasized the need for providing practical and cultural information to help international students acclimate to life in a new country:

For some students, a crash course in U.S. culture would help, things like how to do laundry, where stuff is, our customs. Then this wouldn’t distract them from their academics. ... Sometimes students are embarrassed by their questions, and it is stuff they need to know.

Many of the students also stressed that orientation should not be a top-down effort on the part of the administrators and faculty. The Afghan senior said, “It would be good, useful, to get info from other international students who are already here and how they experience Grover.” The Indonesian sophomore found it very useful to receive peer-to-peer information. She said, “I really enjoyed during the orientation that some international students came and talked. ... One thing that would really help would be a mentor program for international students.”

The Indonesian student also recommends that the college have a specific pre-orientation program where international students can come together for a week or so to learn more about the college experience and to get to know other people and make friends. The half-Cambodian, half-Thai sophomore participated in such an event prior to matriculating at Grover. “Expressions of Diversity” is an annual recruitment effort aimed at multicultural students. After participating in the event, which included an overnight stay, this student said:

That's how I knew I was really comfortable here. That is how I met friends and got to know them. They were all really open, and I had a really good time. ... I learned a lot about the multicultural/international student experience at Grover.

If the college wants to attract and retain international students, it needs to help them adjust to the academic and social environment from the very beginning of their undergraduate experience. International student orientation is crucial to their transition and is a significant part of a multifaceted approach to their retention. Grover College needs not only to orient international students, but also prepare them for the issues they may face later on in their academic and co-curricular experiences. By designing and implementing an orientation process meant to ease the transition to college life, Grover shows its international students that the college is concerned with their wellbeing. Not only does this help with retention, it also can serve as an excellent marketing tool if the international students speak well of the college and relay to friends from their countries that Grover is a welcoming place for diverse student populations.

Increased Co-Curricular Programming

When the students who were interviewed for this research project were asked what Grover College could be doing to improve international students' experiences, the most common theme, by far, was the need for more social, co-curricular programming. The Caribbean-American junior said, "I think there should be more clubs, more activities in regards to student night life. There is a divide in terms of events between multicultural and U.S. students on campus. That would foster community." The dual U.S./Swiss student recommended, "We need more programs to bring international and other students together. ... People don't necessarily know about the international students. ... Keep the programming up. ... Have people come together to celebrate and bridge the distances. Build the community." The Caribbean-American

first-year student offered, “There should be additional programs. It would be good to celebrate different holidays from around the world. ... Maybe there could be more clubs to provide more programming.” The Venezuelan sophomore advocated for “having more cultural events that we aren’t forced to go to, just events for everyone to attend.” The Chinese-born sophomore recommended:

There should be more opportunities for us to meet. ... I think there could be more engagement like by having stuff that is for multicultural and international students. ... We need more activities. I haven’t been to any event or activity where we can just share stories about what it means to be an international or multicultural student.

Some students believed the perceived lack of co-curricular clubs and activities or programs for international and multicultural students was due to poor communication on campus. The half-Cambodian, half-Thai student said:

We have a lot of cool programs for multicultural and international students, but advertisement, getting the info out to the student body, as well as to faculty and staff, needs to be worked on to really incorporate that. ... I want us to get more students to attend these events so they can experience these kinds of events.

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Vietnamese-born junior, who is an active member of Lotus, the Asian student association. She said:

The school should give us more notice, more attention, about all the events that we do. And if we could expand the events and trips we do to be more inclusive, that would be good. ... I think there could be more events. ... We do have events, but they’re not very

popular, and not a lot of students attend them. I would like to see more attendance, more popular events.

Often the criticism for the lack of social, co-curricular clubs, activities, and programs was not placed on the international or multicultural students themselves, but rather on key administrative offices. The students interviewed for this research project were asked specifically about the role of the Office of Multicultural Student Services, which supports Grover College's commitment to diverse campus life through special events, clubs, mentoring programs, student support, and other initiatives. A surprisingly frequent response was that many of the international and multicultural students who were interviewed for this research project knew little to nothing about the services the office is charged with providing. The senior of Sudanese parentage said, "I never hear from them officially." The Caribbean-American junior frankly stated, "I don't know where that office is." The Venezuelan sophomore said, "I haven't really used it as a resource." The Chinese-born sophomore admitted, "I have not visited them, and I don't really know they are about." The South African senior offered this insight:

International students don't really know what the Office of Multicultural Student Services is here for. Maybe if they actually give students an idea of what they are supposed to be doing, and how they are supposed to be helping all of the multicultural students on campus, then maybe that office could be used as it should.

It seems there is a disconnect in how Grover College is attempting to engage and retain its international students. The students expressed clear need for interesting, non-academic outlets for sharing and celebrating their experiences as international students, and these opportunities are not being presented to their satisfaction. A campus that designs opportunities for international

students to connect with one another and to interact with students from different backgrounds fosters a sense of campus community and can truly prepare students to work and live in a global community. If Grover College wants to retain its international students, provision of social, co-curricular activities and programs is a must. Additionally, the role and efficacy of the Office of Multicultural Student Services needs to be evaluated and likely modified and/or expanded.

Conclusion

Boundaries between countries are blurring, and in this new global context, colleges and universities must have an active strategy to recruit, retain, and engage international students. This researcher was interested in how one private liberal arts college is serving the academic and co-curricular needs of its burgeoning international student population.

Important themes emerged from individual interviews with 14 students who represented a broad range of the study site's undergraduate population in terms of race, country of origin, religion, academic class, and course of study. The wide majority of these students reported being happy with their academic, co-curricular, and overall experience at the research site. This is not to say, however, that the college should remain static in how it addresses international students' needs. International students need to feel, from the beginning, that they would be a valuable asset to Grover. The college needs to redesign its print and online marketing materials to be inclusive of and attractive to international students. These students need easy access to the information they need to inform their decision about whether to apply, and they need to see proof, such as through student profiles and demographic data, that the college fosters a diverse campus experience. These students also need to be recruited actively, if at all possible. There is a sentiment among the students interviewed for this research project that the college is not well-known enough, despite its unique study abroad requirement. It was expressed that many

international students are attracted to small private liberal arts colleges like the research site, but they only know about large universities, or they believe it is too difficult to attend college in the United States. Admissions counselors can dispel any misconceptions and share information that increases recognition of the college as a place perfectly suited for globally aware and engaged students.

It is not enough to attract international students; they also need to be retained if the college is going to create a learning environment that reflects today's society and world. No matter how proficient international students are in English, or how familiar they are with U.S. cultural norms, they still face special challenges to living and learning in a foreign environment. Grover needs to address these challenges at the very start of international students' college experiences by tailoring the orientation process to their specific needs. This care for their acclimation and academic success also needs to be carried out consistently over the four-year undergraduate experience. The Office of Multicultural Student Services and other key administrative offices need to be more active and more committed to providing these students with needed support services and positive co-curricular experiences.

If Grover College is going to meet its potential to internationalize, its leaders would be wise to follow the recommendations that stem from the evidence presented from the review of literature and from the first-person experiences of interviewees who participated in this study. Meeting the academic and co-curricular needs of international students not only contributes to their overall wellbeing, it also provides rich opportunities for colleges and universities to promote internationalization. Internationalization is no longer just a desirable possibility in higher education; it is an institutional imperative if the college or university wants to prepare students to live and work in a world characterized by growing multiculturalism and diminishing borders.

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Appendix A: Complete Questionnaire

Basic demographic information

- Please say and spell your first and last names
- Nationality
- Hometown
- Class year
- Major/minor
- Religion, if comfortable sharing
- Tell me a little bit about your family and how you grew up, please

Prospective student experience

- How did you find out about Grover?
- Were you recruited by one of our admissions counselors?
- How effective did you find Grover's print marketing materials (brochures, viewbook, catalog, direct mailers, letters/other correspondence, etc.) in terms of international student recruitment?
- How effective did you find Grover's online marketing materials (website, virtual tour, social media platforms) in terms of international student recruitment?
- Were you able to tour or do an overnight visit to campus? If so, what were your impressions?
- As an international student, how did you find the admissions process?
- Were you informed and advised about the student visa process, TOEFL testing, etc.?
- What could Grover do better to help attract more international prospective students?

Transitioning to life at Grover

- How would you describe your attitude about being accepted and deciding to attend Grover as an international student?
- Were you given adequate orientation information that specifically was geared toward international students?
- When you actually got to campus to attend as a student, what were your first impressions?
- Did you experience any culture shock?
- Did you experience any homesickness?
- Did you experience any difficulty with using English as your primary language?

Socialization and co-curricular life at Grover

- Have you been able to make friends here at Grover?
- Are your friends primarily other international students (from your home country or elsewhere), or are they U.S. domestic students?
- What has been your impression of your U.S. peers in terms of social interactions?
- Have you experienced any form of discrimination here at Grover?

- What do you do for fun?
- Do you participate in athletics?
- Do you participate in on-campus clubs?
- Do you visit shops, restaurants, etc. in Towson and/or Baltimore City?
- Socially, would you say you are happy here at Grover?
- Do you feel as if international students are a part of the regular social scene here on campus, or do these students tend to isolate and interact primarily with one another? (If yes to the latter, do students *choose* to isolate or are they marginalized by others?)
- Describe the role the Office of Multicultural Student Services plays in the lives of international students on campus.
- What can Grover do to improve the social and co-curricular experience of its international students?

Academic life at Grover

- How has your academic experience been at Grover so far?
- Are your classes too easy, too hard, or just about right?
- How do your classes here compare to your high school experience in your home country?
- What are your impressions of your professors here at Grover?
- Do you feel as if you get adequate academic support from your professors, both in the classrooms and during office hours or other out-of-class opportunities?
- What has been your impression of your U.S. peers in terms of interactions in the classroom?
- Do you feel as if your academic advisor is able to provide the kind of information international students specifically need?
- Have you taken advantage of academic support services that Grover offers, such as the Academic Center for Excellence, subject-matter tutoring, or the writing center?
- What can Grover do to improve the academic experience of its international students?

Miscellaneous

- If you had to do it all over again, would you choose to come to Grover?
- Is there anything else Grover can do to attract and retain other international students?
- Anything I haven't asked that you would like add?

Appendix B: Request for Participants

From: Pinheiro, Kristen Keener
Sent: Sunday, February 02, 2014 8:05 AM
To: XXXXXXXX
Subject: RE: Interview for Grover Research

On Friday, January 31, 2014, Pinheiro, Kristen Keener wrote:

Good morning,

I'm the director of media relations here at Grover, and like you, I'm also a student here. In the evenings I am working on my master of education. I recently started work on my thesis and was hoping you could help me, please.

I'm researching the academic and co-curricular experiences of our international/multicultural/dual citizen/exchange students. I wanted to see if you would be willing to sit down with me for about 20-30 minutes so I can ask you a few questions (I can send the list of questions, too, if that is helpful). It will be informal, and I will gladly work with your schedule. You'd just have to tell me when and where to meet you.

If you'd be willing to help, I'd be most grateful.

Thanks, and have a nice weekend,

Kristen Pinheiro

Appendix C: Interview Transcript Sample

Basic demographic information

- Please say and spell your first and last names

XXXXXXXXXX

- Nationality

South African

- Hometown

Canton on the Sea, South Africa

- Class year

senior

- Major/minor

Special education major

- Religion, if comfortable sharing

Catholic

- Tell me a little bit about your family and how you grew up, please

I grew up with my mother and my grandmother. I never met my dad. Unfortunately he passed away when I was 10, so I never got to get to know him. I grew up with the two ladies in my life. As I was growing up, I was the only kid in the family. My grandmother has two kids, my mother and my uncle, but he's always away. I got to meet his children along the way. It was always fun to have another kid in the family. And then in 1996, my mother had my middle sister, and then there was second child in the family. By then I was 10 and was taking care of her, assuming the role of the big sister because I already had a full childhood where I could explore things on my own. But it was getting boring, so now I had this human doll that I could play around with. Then in 2004, my mother had my last-born sister. And then in 2010 I had my own kid, a son. He just started preschool. So it's been really fun. He's in South Africa with my family, with everyone. It was hard at the beginning. When I started out, I didn't know it, but I came here pregnant. Then I went back home, took a semester off. And coming back here after that, my son has asthma and was hospitalized at the same time I was coming back. That was the hard part. But as time went by I got comfortable with the back and forth because he is comfortable with it. It can really get frustrating at a certain point because you just want to speak your home language. Nothing else, just your home language. But you get used to it. You find ways around it. After graduation I've considered staying but at the same time I have to consider if what I will do will be for the good of everybody, or if it is just for my own selfish reasons. But I think I'm going back. The original plan was to study and then go back. I still feel like there is a lot I can do in South Africa. Even though some of the schools here still need good teachers, I feel like they have more needs than anywhere else. Went to public school.

Prospective student experience

- How did you find out about Grover?
Grover's education ICA in South African happens in her hometown and in another school. I grew up in two towns. When I went to school, I went to Grahamstown, which is where one of the schools is that is connected to Grover. Then when I did my high schooling, we went to Canton, which is where we are now. And that's how I got to know about Grover. When I was in grade 11, that is when Grover began coming to my school. And then I did grade 12 in 2004 and that is when Dr. Cornish began coming to the school. So from there, I went to Port Elizabeth after graduating high school, but I had to drop out and go back to my community. After a year of working in hospitality, I went back to my school and was working in the admin office as a secretary. And when the opportunity came up that one of our students who wanted to go to Grover could come, I was one of the people they approached. And when the first person wasn't able to come, I was told to apply.
- Were you recruited by one of our admissions counselors?
La Jerne helped, but she was appointed another advisor back home to tutor for me in English. I was working closely with her, and she played a huge role in getting me to come here. From going through the visa process, applying for a passport, having to take the TOEFL test, booking my visits to other towns so I could do the travel plans.
- How effective did you find Grover's print/web marketing materials (brochures, viewbook, catalog, direct mailers, letters/other correspondence, etc.) in terms of international student recruitment?
- Were you able to tour or do an overnight visit to campus? If so, what were your impressions? No.
- As an international student, how did you find the admissions process?
Grover sent me the information I needed, and it was very efficient. All the things I needed to go through for my application, they all got there on time. They sent emails to help me through the questions I had. It wasn't too hard to go through the application process. I filled out the forms. It took me a day or two to do that and get my transcripts. And I had to apply for my passport. There was a glitch there, but Grover helped me expedite my applications. It went smoothly for the most part. They did help me out.
- Were you informed and advised about the student visa process, TOEFL testing, etc.?
- What could Grover do better to help attract more international prospective students
My experience is different than the others. So I'm not sure how Grover recruits other international students. For me, La Jerne was a participant in the whole process; she really helped me out. She met me at the airport and came here with me. I'm not sure how it works for others, but for me, it was a very active recruitment. When I got here, everyone was expecting me. In one way it was really nice that people knew my name and were expecting me; on the other it was also a little strange.

In my community, everyone knows about Grover because at the end of every ICA we do presentations in the community, and when we do the presentations, people ask me how I got here and I walk them through the process. I don't know about other places and how Grover connects to other people and whether Grover gives them hope that they actually can come here. One of the most important things that you can share with someone from a third-world country is that do stand a chance to actually succeed in America, succeed in any society that is completely different from theirs. Maybe that is one thing that we need to emphasize and brighten that hope for everyone. If you try, you might actually get here.

Transitioning to life at Grover

- How would you describe your attitude about being accepted and deciding to attend Grover as an international student?

Had never been to the US. It was mixed emotions. It wasn't my first time leaving home. But those trips were always places where I could be back with an hour or two. This was the first time that I was taking this huge leap and going outside of my country, even outside of my state. It was huge. My first plane ride and all. It was many first on different levels. But I was excited. One of the things that drove me was that I wanted to get educated. This was a goal that I had set for myself, and I was not going to give up. I'm going to do it. It doesn't matter when it gets done, but it will get done. When I got here, I was like: I'm doing this. I don't care how hard it's going to be. I just want to get my degree at the end of the day.

- Were you given adequate orientation information that specifically was geared toward international students?

I had to learn a lot of things on my own. I came here during the spring semester, so orientation was just a one-day thing. I kind of learned things as I got in touch with other people. It wasn't really hard to figure things out. I came here as an adult; I was almost fully grown. And I'm kind of a reserved person who likes to observe before acting. It took me some time to figure out some things, but then it was easy.

- When you actually got to campus to attend as a student, what were your first impressions?
- Did you experience any culture shock?

Many culture shocks. One of the things that we assume in South Africa is that you are going to come to the US and it will be all golden streets. And you get here and you look at the infrastructure and you realize it isn't all that. One of the things I had to learn, and it's one of my pet peeves, and that is that some people are reallllly loud. I'm not used to this. Some people shout when you're sitting right next to them. I had to get used to that. In my hometown, which is a very small town and we all know one another. So when you pass someone, you actually greet them and then move past. But here, people don't want to make eye contact; they avoid your gaze. This is interesting. We are a small college; People like to say that we are nice to one another, but the first step of being nice is greeting the other person.

- Did you experience any homesickness?

At the beginning, I used to lock myself in my room. So I spent the first semester locked in, part of the second semester. And then I started coming out more in my sophomore year. I assumed more leadership roles, joined more clubs. Doing things that I related to. The first semester I didn't know I was pregnant, so that was part of the reason why. And I was just trying to adjust, and it was winter. Then the second semester was when my son was in hospital for three weeks, and I was just like "I don't want to deal with anybody. I want to be left alone." Then I assumed the role of president of the international student association. And once I started out with that, it kind of forced me out of my shell. Then I started going to African drum and dance, and those were things that I could relate to and get me closer to home. And just listening to other students talk about being homesick and feeling that you're not the only one.

- Did you experience any difficulty with using English as your primary language?
I spoke English during the day, most every day at home. I speak fluently Xhosa, English, Zulu. Speaks some of three other languages, including Afrikaans.

Socialization and co-curricular life at Grover

- Have you been able to make friends here at Grover?
I have friends, both American and non-American. It's kind of evenly split. But here's the thing, when I first came here, my friends were all American and they were all upperclassmen. And then as time went by, I met more international students along the way. I still feel like I have a balance of friends on both sides.
- Are your friends primarily other international students (from your home country or elsewhere), or are they U.S. domestic students?
- What has been your impression of your U.S. peers in terms of social interactions?
Some of them are really immature. I sort of feel like it depends on where they grew up. And sometimes there is that notion that being liberal means always being outspoken when you stand for something. For me, you don't necessarily have to do that. You can actually look things from other perspectives and draw your own conclusions. I have had the experience where students here go to South Africa for study abroad and come back and act like they know more about the country than I do. I actually live in South Africa, and things you are describing, from my perspective, they are totally different. But if I can see that the experience is leading them in a positive direction, I will let it be. Otherwise, we can get into heated discussions.
- Have you experienced any form of discrimination here at Grover?
Sometimes. Yeah. It's usually when I don't say that I'm from South Africa, then I'll experience that kind of racial remarks. So I stay away from those people. Once I say that I'm from South Africa, that kind of racism turns into a kind of pity. So for the most part, what most people know about African countries, we are all supposed to be war torn. My country is not like that. I was born into the Apartheid era, but once that was over, it was over. I never had to experience any kind of fighting after that. It doesn't necessarily mean that I have this really, really hard life. Yes, I'm probably one of the poorest students

around on campus, but at the same time, that doesn't mean that my life hasn't been full. You find wealth in many different ways, it doesn't need to be money.

- What do you do for fun?

I write. I do a little bit of poetry, short stories. It depends. It's just something that I have loved as I was growing up.

- Do you participate in athletics? no

- Do you participate in on-campus clubs? Peer listening. Programming Board. I'm an ambassador. A CA. I did a lot of things. I'm also part of Umjoa. There might be other things I'm forgetting.

- Do you visit shops, restaurants, etc. in Towson and/or Baltimore City?

We try to do that. But I do like being in my own environment, having my own space. I like to entertain myself. I don't necessarily think that going out means having fun. As long as I can have my own space, I'm comfortable with that. But I also wanted to outside of my comfort zone and experience other things. So we are trying to go out more before we leave Grover. My friends and I, we have been trying to see other places.

- Socially, would you say you are happy here at Grover?

Yeah.

- Do you feel as if international students are a part of the regular social scene here on campus, or do these students tend to isolate and interact primarily with one another? (If yes to the latter, do students *choose* to isolate or are they marginalized by others?)

It depends on the type of person you are. If you like being left alone, then you will be left alone. And sometimes there aren't that many opportunities when international students get to mix with other students.

- Describe the role the Office of Multicultural Student Services plays in the lives of international students on campus.

At first when I was part of GISA we had this idea to mentor each other along the way. And the office of multicultural student services was supposed to help manage that, and actually draw up what the mentors were supposed to do and find a place where they could interact. But that didn't really happen as planned. There was a breakdown. The office didn't explain to the students why they need to do this, and how it was going to help them. I kind of feel like there was someone who was there to help me when I first arrived, that would've helped me. It's much easier to ask somebody questions and they can help you get out of your comfort zone and get you to do things that can be fun. But there aren't these opportunities. Sometimes we do feel isolated because there isn't someone there to help.

- What can Grover do to improve the social and co-curricular experience of its international students?

Int'l students don't really know what the Office of Multicultural Student Services is here for. Maybe if they actually give students an idea of what they are supposed to be doing, and how they are supposed to be helping all of the multicultural students on campus, then

maybe that office could be used as it should. They should be there to help us learn about Baltimore and America. And I can't remember taking any trips since 2012.

Academic life at Grover

- How has your academic experience been at Grover so far?
For my first semester, it was a shift to having to write so many essays for many different classes.
- Are your classes too easy, too hard, or just about right?
There's no Grover class that's too easy. If one thinks that way, they are mistaken. If you work hard, they also aren't too hard, either. It depends on how much amount of work you are willing to put in and what you are trying to achieve.
- How do your classes here compare to your high school experience in your home country?
- What are your impressions of your professors here at Grover?
They differ. Most of the professors I have had have been really, really nice to me. I hate using that word, but I can't think of a better word to use. I did have one class that made me uncomfortable culturally because we had to talk about sex a lot. It was an English class; it was an interesting one. We talked a lot about the Catholic church. It was uncomfortable. In my culture, I cannot talk about sex with someone older than I am. For me, it would be disrespectful to the person sitting on the other side.
- Do you feel as if you get adequate academic support from your professors, both in the classrooms and during office hours or other out-of-class opportunities?
- What has been your impression of your U.S. peers in terms of interactions in the classroom?
Some can be downright disrespectful. I feel like when you're in the classroom you really have to think before you speak and really consider the other peoples' points of view. Some people just start talking without thinking about how what they are saying is going to impact the other people that are in the classroom. And just because someone holds an opinion strongly, they don't see the need to consider anyone else.
- Do you feel as if your academic advisor is able to provide the kind of information international students specifically need?
- Have you taken advantage of academic support services that Grover offers, such as the Academic Center for Excellence, subject-matter tutoring, or the writing center?
I have never used the writing center here. I try to figure it out on my own, and I'm doing pretty well.
- What can Grover do to improve the academic experience of its international students?
I don't necessarily think it is up to Grover. They provide us with great opportunities to improve our own studies. We have ACE. They are excellent. But I made the choice to use their services. It's up to each and everyone to make their own study and experience to become what they want it to become. If you're here to learn, you do that. I have never felt like I can't succeed here academically.

Miscellaneous

- If you had to do it all over again, would you choose to come to Grover?
Yeah.
- Is there anything else Grover can do to attract and retain other international students?
no
- Anything I haven't asked that you would like add?