

University of Nevada, Reno

**A Phenomenological Study of Cultural Transition and Adjustment of Asian Undergraduate International Students Using Different Cross-Cultural Treatments**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership

by

Tara Elizabeth Madden-Dent

Dr. Rita M. Laden/Dissertation Advisor

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We recommend that the dissertation  
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**TARA E. MADDEN-DENT**

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requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Rita M. Laden, Ed. D., Advisor

Janet Usinger, Ph. D., Committee Member

Patricia K. Miltenberger, Ed. D., Committee Member

John Cannon, Ph. D., Committee Member

Carmelo Urza, Ph. D., Director, USAC, Graduate School Representative

David W. Zeh, Ph. D., Dean, Graduate School

May, 2014

## Abstract

When studying abroad, international students face a series of transitional difficulties impacting academic, social, and professional success. In particular, Eastern Asian international students who comprise over 42% of all international students in the U.S., experience more cross-cultural adaptation distress compared to other international student groups. The purpose of this study was to examine the pre-departure and post-arrival cultural knowledge, transition, and adjustment of Eastern Asian undergraduate international students who completed a pre-departure cultural preparation treatment or received the university's standard international student services at a western U.S. research university. To better understand international students' experiences, this phenomenological study investigated themes discovered within international student narratives by collecting qualitative data including three in-person interviews, seven student written journal reflections, a student survey, and two cultural reports. The findings of this study expand cross-cultural training and international education research by showing that Eastern Asian undergraduate international students gained cultural knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, and competency from a four-week pre-departure cross-cultural treatment to which they applied during their transition and adjustment at a western U.S. research university to better manage cross-cultural differences.

### Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to international students, expatriates, and travelers like my friend Gungoo Lee who transitioned into the U.S. culture. Your exotic contributions make my life fun and colorful, rich and flavorful. Although I may not know your language nor practice your cultural customs, as global citizens we transcendently connect by a loving and peace-seeking spirit. May your journeys be full of laughter, adventure, health, and lifelong learning.

Keep traveling my friends.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

Globalization continues to reshape colleges and universities as college graduates are expected to enter a highly competitive and diverse, global economy. Communication skills and cross-cultural competencies are critical for long term success of college graduates. Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel (2011) argue that intercultural communication skills are more than an asset; they are a requirement since interactions are now, more than ever, so easy and likely between people from different nations and ethnicities.

Twenty-first century educational systems are increasingly expected to bridge diverse cultural gaps and educational leaders are the catalyst to create the conditions where cultural awareness and sensitivity are nurtured in students. One way to accomplish the complex process of intercultural exchange is for the institution to have a vibrant international student program which includes the consideration of how international students successfully transition and adjust into their new culture.

The United States (U.S.) continues its standing as the top study abroad destination for international students (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2013b). International students are recruited for a variety of reasons. They heighten global diversity awareness on campuses (Sahin, 2008; Ward, 2001), produce high quality research (Lynman & Rogers, 1994), and contribute billions of dollars to the U.S. economy (IIE, 2011; NAFSA, 2013).

Significant increases in international student enrollment in the U.S. have been reported annually. Since 2005, the U.S. has experienced an approximate 45% increase in international students (IIE, 2013a). An approximate 9.8% increase occurred just in 2013

from the previous academic year resulting in a record high enrollment of over 250,920 first-time international students studying in the U.S. (IIE, 2012; IIE, 2013a). During the 2012-2013 academic year, there were approximately 820,000 international students studying in the U.S. which is a 7.2% increase from the previous academic year (IIE, 2013a; NAFSA, 2013).

According to the Institute of International Education (2013a), the largest international student population studying in the U.S. comes from China and represents 28.7% of all international students studying in the U.S. Research suggests that this demographic trend will continue to increase (Chow, Gutierrez, Baumgartner, & Sato, 2009). Other Eastern Asian countries send students to the U.S. as well and in the 2012-2013 academic year 42.4% of all international students studying in the U.S. included Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean students (IIE, 2013a).

Despite their increasing enrollment in the U.S. higher education system, Eastern Asian students experience high levels of difficulties during transition and adjustment into the Western culture (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Chen, Leong, & Geist, 1993; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; K.T. Wang et al., 2012; C. D. Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Because of the reported difficulties in transculturation, it is critical for institutions to invest in intercultural and cross-cultural training. Educational leaders need to investigate the unique needs and best practices addressing intercultural and cross-cultural needs to foster communication and cultural competencies appropriate for a multicultural society (Samovar & Porter, 2000).

One practice to address international students' needs is to foster competencies to aid in the cultural transition and adjustment. Studies have demonstrated that cultural competence training contributes to greater intercultural sensitivity (Altshuler, Sussman, & Kachur, 2003) which encourages relational empathy and supports cross-cultural interactions in host cultures (Neill, 2008; Zhu, 2008). Despite the perceived benefits of cultural training, Hser (2005) argued that, due to a variety of confounding variables, higher education institutions provide limited and often inconsistent internationalization efforts to stimulate international education services such as training.

Since international adjustment is a process beginning before departure, early cross-cultural preparation can help international students develop more accurate expectations and establish coping strategies to support transition and adjustment (Pitts, 2009). Most cultural training usually begins after international students arrive to the host campus and during first semester adjustments to new academic responsibilities, social relationships, language barriers, and living transitions, can negatively impact international students' academic, social, and psychological success (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Weng, Cheong, & Cheong, 2010, Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Post-secondary education is challenging enough without additional cross-cultural adaptation stresses, such as learning a new language, new schooling expectations and policies, new living arrangements, and new social behaviors. Additional complications often relate to legal documentation, currency exchanges, transportation and learning to navigate new local resources. International students often experience higher stress levels

during their first semester adjustment into new educational and social environments compared to other students (Mori, 2000).

Chinese international students comprise more than one-fourth of all U.S. international students in the U.S. and an additional 15% are from other Eastern Asian countries (IIE, 2013a). Although acculturative adjustment differs widely across Eastern Asian international students (Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang, 2012), they do experience high levels of social, emotional, and psychological distress and cross-cultural adjustment difficulties (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Ying, & Liese, 1990, 1991, 1994). Early cultural knowledge and preparation is believed to effectively facilitate improved cross-cultural transition and adjustments (Pitts, 2009; Shim & Paprock, 2002; Ying, & Liese, 1990; Zhu, 2008), yet most international higher education cultural training research has focused on post-arrival elements.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the pre-departure and post-arrival cultural knowledge, transition, and adjustment of Eastern Asian undergraduate international students who completed a pre-departure cultural preparation treatment or received the university's standard international student services at a western U.S. research university. This study investigated, through student narratives, their transition from pre-departure preparation through their post-arrival. Through a phenomenological lens, international students' perceptions related to their pre-departure cross-cultural preparation and their post-arrival cultural transitions were captured. The use of a phenomenological perspective allowed for an exploration for the meanings behind the

cross-cultural pre-departure and post-arrival phenomena through participant experiences that demonstrated patterns and relationships of international student adjustment. Themes from student narratives were examined to discover common perceptions, experiences, needs, and recommendations regarding study abroad education.

### **Research Questions**

Cross-cultural adaptation theory and student development theories informed this study. This investigation was guided by six research questions:

1. How did select Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students accepted to a western United States university perceive their cultural knowledge?
2. What factors (e.g., gender, country of birth, educational preparation, exposure to treatment, prior experience, and perceived socioeconomic status) contributed to differences in perceived cultural knowledge by select Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students?
3. What differences in interaction styles were found among entering Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students who were either exposed to a 4-week pre-departure treatment and students who only experienced the standard university treatment?
4. What differences in thinking styles were found among entering Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students who were either exposed to a 4-week pre-departure treatment and students who only experienced the standard university treatment?

5. What differences in sense of self were found among entering Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students who were either exposed to a 4-week pre-departure treatment and students who only experienced the standard university treatment?
6. What were the experiences of entering Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students of their first semester studying abroad at a western, United States research university?

### **Background of the Study**

As research has demonstrated, cross-cultural adaptation impacts not only academic success, but socialization and psychological health (Benjamin, Earnest, Gruenewald, & Arthur, 2007; Chen, 1999; Church, 1982; Dee & Henkin, 1999; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Leong & Chou, 1996; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Sewell & Davidson, 1956; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Wang, 2004; Weng, Cheong, & Cheong, 2010; Ying, & Liese, 1991; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). The connection between cross-cultural adaptation and international student success presupposes that cross-cultural research focusing on bridging cultural gaps to aid in transition and adjustment will continue to be a necessary element for improving international student success in the U.S.

Cross-cultural training (CCT) has been shown to increase cultural knowledge and sensitivity helping travelers manage transition and adjustment stressors (Sandchez, Spector, & Cooper, 2000; Shim & Paprock, 2002), but is more commonly practiced and researched in the business sector demonstrating effective adaptation outcomes with

training expatriates (voluntary and temporary migrant workers residing abroad for specific purposes (Cohen, 1977). Pre-departure cultural knowledge, experience, and preparation has been demonstrated to increase post-arrival adjustments (Shim & Paprock, 2002; Yjng & Liese, 1990, 1991, 1994) but if U.S. colleges and universities provide CCT, it is mostly facilitated after students arrive on campus, thus overlooking pre-departure CCT to prepare international students for transition and adjustment. To build upon the limited pre-departure cross-cultural research in higher education, this study addressed pre-departure specifically in two ways. The first was by investigating cross-cultural experiences of Eastern Asian international students before they arrived in the U.S. in addition to post-arrival experiences during their first fall semester. The second was by investigating how pre-departure cultural training influenced Eastern Asian international students' transition and adjustment in the U.S. culture at a western research university.

### **Significance of the Study**

To address cross-cultural transition and adaptation, it is critical to understand study abroad from the student perspective. This study's phenomenological methods allowed for the collection of undergraduate Eastern Asian international student reflections and perceptions of their cross-cultural experience from pre-departure to post-arrival and throughout their first semester abroad. Following students for five months helped to accumulate their opinions, their challenges, needs, and recommendations about cultural adaptation. Written student reflections, video recorded interviews, student

surveys, and cultural profiles were analyzed to discover themes throughout cultural transition and adaptation.

This study contributes to existing research in four specific ways. First, it expands current literature of international student pre-departure experiences by collecting four weeks of international student reflections while the international students lived in their home country. The pre-departure investigation adds to the current post-arrival research, creating a more robust understanding of the transition of international students from one culture to another. Second, this study provides new research of international student experiences using a pre-departure cross-cultural preparation software called *Cultural Navigator*<sup>TM</sup> that teaches cultural similarities and comparisons. Third, it illuminates international student experiences during their first semester in the U.S., including academic, social, environmental, emotional, financial, and other cultural transition stresses. Fourth, it informs retention related issues of international students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Y.Y. Kim (2001) described cross-cultural adaptation theory as the establishment and maintenance of stable and reciprocal relationships in a host country and noted that each sojourner, or primary mover, is responsible for his or her level of adaptive change; accelerating adaptive efforts maximizes change while little effort produces slower adaptive change. A sojourner is a person who travels from one culture to another for educational purposes (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Host communication competence is central to cross-cultural adaptation because it is the ability to navigate, communicate, and engage in the host countries norms and practices (Y. Y. Kim, 2001).

In order to communicate in accordance with social norms and practices, the sojourner must be culturally competent.

Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, and Taylor-Ritzler (2009) and Wong and Blissett (2007) described cultural competency as the on-going, cyclical process and development of awareness, interaction and communication skills with others having a different cultural background. When living in new environments, international students face a series of transitional difficulties often stemming from cultural interactions that can negatively affect their behavioral and academic adaptations (Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). It is the theoretical perspective of this study that student narratives about their cross-cultural experiences (pre-departure and post-arrival) will provide greater understanding of the issues international students face before and after their relocation to the U.S.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. Acculturation – The process of changes over time to an individual's behavior, values, knowledge, and cultural identity as a result of contact between cultural groups and experiencing a stress-adaptation-growth cycle as they adapt to a new culture (Berry, 2003, 2006; B.S.K. Kim & Abreu, 2001; & Y.Y. Kim, 2001).
2. Cross-Cultural Adaptation – An acculturation process of dynamic unfolding of the natural human tendency to struggle for an internal equilibrium in the face of often adversarial environmental conditions impacted by multiple simultaneous forces influencing the communicative interface between the individual and the host environment impacting changes in behavioral,

cognitive, and emotional norms and underlying assumptions (Y. Y. Kim, 2001).

3. Cross-Cultural Competence – The ability to compare and contrast two cultural groups including culture-specific concepts.
4. Culture – Sets of socially transmitted ways of thinking, feeling, interacting, and communicating through shared value in traditions and customs distinguishing members of one organization from another (Hofstede, 1994; Kluckhohn, 1951; Lustig & Koester, 2003; Wohl, 2012).
5. Cultural Awareness – A means toward gradually increasing a person’s power, energy and freedom of choice in a multicultural world (Pederson, 1998) by developing inner senses of the equality of cultures, increasing an understanding of the individual’s culture, other people’s cultures, and a positive interest in how cultures are similar, interconnected, and differ (Tomlinson, 2001) through “increasing a person’s intentional and purposive decision making ability by accounting for the many ways that culture influences different perceptions of the same situation” (Altay 2005, p. 171).
6. Cultural Competence – The multifaceted, evolving capacity to interact and communicate with others having different cultural backgrounds (Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, & Taylor-Ritzler, 2009; IHEAC, 2008; Wehling, 2008).
7. Cultural Knowledge – The awareness and sensitivity to existing cultural preferences, values, and behaviors interpreted by an individual that generates cross-cultural competencies aiming to decrease transitional emotional

discomfort while increasing respect for other cultures (Hall, 1955, 1959, 1966, 1973; Hofstede, 1980; Pilhofer, 2010; Spradley, 1980; Trompenaars, 1993).

For the purpose of this study, cultural knowledge will include participants' understanding and interpretation of "culture" (see definition above).

8. Cultural Sensitivity – The degree of an individual's psychological ability to deal with cultural differences (Medina-López-Portillo, 2004); and to value and respect these cultural differences (Rew, Becker, Cookston, Khosropour, & Martinez, 2003).
9. *Cultural Navigator*<sup>TM</sup> – An online learning platform providing cross-cultural training that increases cultural awareness and maximizes adjustment after relocation to new cultures.
10. *Cultural Orientations Indicator*<sup>®</sup> (COI) – A web-based, self-reporting tool designed to foster self-awareness and other-awareness to effectively communicate and collaborate in a global team environment (TMC, 2012a).
11. Culture Shock – "A state of disorientation and anxiety that results from not knowing how to behave in an unfamiliar culture" (Deresky, 2011, p.445).
12. Eastern Asian international students – Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean international undergraduate students.
13. Expatriates – Voluntary and temporary migrant workers residing abroad for specific purposes (Cohen, 1977).
14. Globalization – The interconnected economies, societies, communications, technologies, education, politics, religion, militaries, and languages (among

other interdependent variables), increasing the interdependence across geographic boundaries and between businesses, people, languages, and cultures (Bottery, 2006; Litz, 2011; McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999; Mortimore, 2010).

15. Interaction Style – How people tended to communicate and engage with others (TMC, 2012a).
16. Intercultural Communication – The exchange of a message sent from a person from one culture that is processed by a person from a different culture (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2011).
17. Intercultural Competence (ICS) – The knowledge and ability to communicate, and manage interactions between people within different cultural groups while being sensitive to their cultural differences and viewpoints (Straffon, 2003).
18. Intercultural Sensitivity – “The developmental process that dictates the degree of an individual’s psychological ability to deal with cultural differences” (Medina-López-Portillo, 2004, p. 180).
19. International Student – Anyone studying in the U.S. on a non-immigrant, temporary visa that allows for academic coursework. These students include both degree and non-degree students (IIE, 2013a).
20. Intracultural Awareness – Contrasting experiences within one’s own culture (Okech & DeVoe, 2010).
21. Psychological Adjustment – The feelings of wellbeing and satisfaction during cross-cultural transitions (Ward & Kennedy, 1993, 1994, 1999).

22. Sense of Self – How people tended to view identity and motivation (TMC, 2012a).
23. Sociocultural Adjustment – “The ability to ‘fit in’, to acquire culturally appropriate skills and to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment” (Ward & Kennedy, 1999, p. 660-661).
24. Sojourner – A person who travels from one culture to another for educational purposes (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).
25. Stressors – Any environmental, social, or internal demand that causes an individual to adjust his or her behavior (Thoits, 1995).
26. Student Support Services – Any program or initiative with the primary goal of enhancing student success.
27. Thinking Style – How people tended to process information (TMC, 2012a).
28. Treatment Group – This study’s international participants who received the four week online pre-departure cross-cultural treatment.
29. University Group – This study’s international participants who received the university’s standard international student services.
30. Values – The beliefs that relate to desirable end states or behaviors and as such, transcend specific situations and guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events (Maznevski et al., 2002; Schwartz, 1992).

### **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to and rationale for the study. Chapter two provides an overview of

international higher education, discusses how cross-cultural adaptation impacts international students' academic success, and establishes the theoretical underpinnings for the study. This chapter also includes related cultural concepts and existing research. Chapter three describes the methodology of the study. It explains the use of narratives and thematic analysis of the data. Chapter four presents the study's results, and finally, chapter five addresses the research questions and offers conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

This first chapter has introduced the dissertation issue of international higher education and Eastern Asian international students studying abroad in the U.S. including cross-cultural knowledge, transition, and adjustment. It also provided the paper's organizational structure. Chapter II will provide the literature germane to the dissertation issue.

## **Chapter II: Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this study was to examine the pre-departure and post-arrival cultural knowledge, transition, and adjustment of Eastern Asian undergraduate international students who completed two different cultural treatments. This chapter provides a review of the related literature and is divided into five parts. Part one discusses the significance of globalization and international higher education. Part two provides a review of cross-cultural adaptation theory and related cultural knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, and competency research. The third section examines the impacts of cross-cultural adjustment and adaptation on international students' academic success, socialization, psychological health, and communication. The fourth section discusses cross-cultural training and pre-departure cultural preparation. The last section concludes with a discussion of related gaps in the literature. The reader is alerted to the existence of broader studies than the ones presented in this discussion; however, concentrated content will focus primarily on findings and issues associated with international education, cross-cultural training, cross-cultural adaptation, and cross-cultural adjustment impacts on academic success.

### **Globalization and International Higher Education**

“Without international competence, the nation’s standard of living is threatened and its competitive difficulties will increase. Unless today’s students develop the competence to function effectively in a global environment, they are unlikely to succeed in the twenty-first century” (Hayward, 1995, p. 1). Higher educational leaders argue that students must be equipped with competencies to navigate and function in a global

environment or they will be unsuccessful in twenty-first century (American Council on Education, 1995). As globalization and technology trends continue to increase the demand for people to understand complex global processes, the need for college graduates skilled with intercultural communication and adaptation skills will also increase.

Globalization is the interconnection of economies, societies, communication, education, politics, religion, and languages (Bottery, 2006; Litz, 2011; McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999; Mortimore, 2010), which continues to place new pressures on educational institutions to prepare cross-culturally competent graduates for an increasingly competitive workforce. The higher education system is a knowledge-based service industry that produces specialized professionals who are increasingly susceptible to international relocation (Paredes et al., 2008). This vocational transfer and exchange of services presupposes that the professional is skilled to communicate and navigate within various cultures and groups of people. Therefore, globalization is redefining employer expectations of college graduates who can thrive in the international economies among various cultures.

Educational leaders now, more than ever, need to frame their work from a globalization viewpoint to address and predict the matrix of international influences that affect higher education (Bottery, 2006). “With the increase in globalisation and national inter-dependence, cultural awareness and cross-cultural skills are of vital importance for living harmoniously and working effectively in the international environment” (Hurn, 2011, p. 205). Porter (1999) argued that the role of education should be to enhance

universal basic skills enabling competition and survival in a global market economy. Teaching universal skills includes cultural knowledge, intercultural communication, and cross-cultural competencies that bridge cultural differences, avoid misunderstandings, and assist in achieving more harmonious, productive relations (Hurn, 2011; Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2011). “It is imperative, therefore, that school leaders are able to correctly identify global forces and pressures, adapt to and cope with the large scale changes that will inevitably be thrust upon them, and ultimately recognize that globalization is both a complex and multifaceted process” (Litz, 2011, p. 49).

In order to develop college graduates who are prepared for global leadership, members of the academy must first recognize how globalization is transforming the higher education system. One way the U.S. higher education system has been transformed is through the steady increases in international student enrollment. This study defines an international student as anyone studying in the U.S. on a non-immigrant, temporary visa that allows for academic coursework, including both degree and non-degree students. By 2025, more than 8 million students are projected to be studying outside their home country (Chow, Gutierrez, Baumgartner, & Sato, 2009); this trend is expected to continue and the U.S. remain a top destination for both undergraduate and graduate students. International enrollment in the U.S. has increased over the past six years by nearly 7% annually, reaching a record high of approximately 251,000 new foreign-born students within the U.S. higher educational system and accommodating a total of more than 820,000 international students in the 2012-2013 academic year (IIE, 2013a).

This increase has been considered a positive U.S. benefit as international students heighten global diversity awareness on U.S. colleges and university campuses (Brown, 2009; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1999; Ward, 2001), increase cultural awareness and appreciation (Bevis, 2002; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Hayward & Siaya, 2001), contribute to competitive, academic excellence (Lynman & Rogers, 1994; Tomkovick, Al-Katib, & Jones, 1996; Vaughan, 2007), and heighten intercultural competence, self-direction, and personal and professional development (Brown, 2009; Sahin, 2008). In addition, international students contribute billions of dollars annually to the U.S. economy (NASFA, 2013). In 2012 alone, international students contributed \$24.7 billion to the U.S. economy and created or supported more than 313,000 U.S. jobs by their spending in higher education, accommodation, dining, retail, transportation, telecommunications, and health insurance (NAFSA, 2013). Traditionally, the needs of these students have been overlooked within higher education research (Mori, 2000; Zhang & Goodson, 2011b), but currently are becoming more of a priority to U.S. higher education as their enrollment increases and college and university funding resources decrease.

U.S. higher education has been slow to respond to increasing international student enrollment but is now considering the needs of this population as globalization demands that college graduates be skilled with intercultural communication and cultural adaptation skills (Covert, 2011; Hser, 2005). Delayed or inconsistent higher education efforts are due to a variety of variables such as a lack of funding, lack of faculty participation, problems with study abroad programs, international student recruitment (Ellingboe, 1998;

Harari & Reiff, 1993), in addition to valid and reliable assessments measuring international student needs and cultural competence development (Fantini, 2009; Wohl, 2012; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). As international student enrollment increases in the U.S., higher education institutions must respond by developing effective international student services and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the services provided (Deardorff, 2004; Fantini, 2009). There is a need to link higher education student services and international student needs in order to enhance direct communication and facilitate better transition and strengthen student success (Wang, 2004).

### **Culture: Awareness, Sensitivity, Knowledge, Competence, and Adaptation**

The international students' transition into the U.S. culture is a highly complex process involving personal and social factors and requires cultural knowledge, awareness, and skills to navigate the new culture and manage acculturative stress (Berry, 1990; Neill, 2008). Culture is the learned patterned ways of thinking, feeling, interacting, and communicating through attached value in traditions and customs (Kluckhohn, 1951; Lustig & Koester, 2003; Wohl, 2012). In addition to being learned, culture is also a fluid, dynamic concept transmitted intergenerationally and symbolically creating a strong sense of group identity (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2011). Although culture is considered an ambiguous term having varied meaning among different disciplines, people, and time (Smith, 2000), Hunter, White, and Godbey (2006) emphasized that understanding one's own culture is a needed element of any effective international engagement activity.

Cultural awareness is considered to be a gradual development of inner senses of the equality of cultures, an increased understanding of the individual's culture, other

people's cultures, and a positive interest in how cultures are similar, interconnected, and differ (Tomlinson, 2001). Altay (2005) described cultural awareness as "increasing a person's intentional and purposive decision making ability by accounting for the many ways that culture influences different perceptions of the same situation" (p. 171).

Pederson (1998) asserted that "Developing cultural awareness is not an end in itself but rather a means toward increasing a person's power, energy and freedom of choice in a multicultural world" (p. 3). As cultural awareness increases, sensitivity to cultural differences also increases.

Cultural sensitivity is the degree of an individual's psychological ability to deal with cultural differences (Medina-López-Portillo, 2004). "When individuals value and respect these cultural differences, they are said to be culturally sensitive" (Rew, Becker, Cookston, Khosropour, & Martinez, 2003, p. 250). Cultural awareness and sensitivity build's sojourners cultural knowledge, the understanding of existing cultural preferences, values, and behaviors interpreted by the individual that generates cross-cultural competencies aiming to decrease transitional emotional discomfort while increasing respect for other cultures (Hall, 1955, 1959; 1966, 1973; Hofstede, 1980; Pilhofer, 2010; Spradley, 1980; Trompenaars, 1993). The gained cultural knowledge contributes to their cultural competency and skills.

Cultural competence is the multifaceted, evolving capacity to interact and communicate with others having different cultural backgrounds (Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, & Taylor-Ritzler, 2009; IHEAC, 2008; Wehling, 2008). Cultural competence is composed of two types of proficiencies. The first, cross-cultural competence, results

from comparing and contrasting two different cultural groups including culture-specific concepts to become astute to their cultural differences (Straffon, 2003). Building from cross-cultural competence, an individual then practices the second proficiency of cultural competence, intercultural competence, which is the knowledge and ability to communicate and navigate within different cultural groups while being sensitive to cultural differences and viewpoints (Straffon, 2003). Similarly, Rew et al. (2003) described four components that conceptualize cultural competence: cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills. Once culturally aware, sensitive, and competent, the sojourner can more easily adjust within a new cultural environment and adapt to the cross-cultural norms.

Cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) is “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 31). This acculturation process of norms and underlying assumptions is the embodiment of cultural awareness, sensitivities, knowledge, and competencies that contribute to global citizens’ holistic homeostasis (Schein, 1984).

Y. Y. Kim (2001) noted that each sojourner, or primary mover, is responsible for his or her level of adaptive change. Accelerating adaptive efforts maximizes change while little effort produces slower adaptive change. Host communication competence is central to cross-cultural adaptation because it is the ability to navigate, communicate, and

engage in the host countries norms and practices (Y. Y. Kim, 2001). In order to communicate in social norms and practices, the sojourner must be culturally competent.

### **Cross-Cultural Adjustment and Adaptation in U.S. Higher Education**

When studying in a new, non-native language speaking country, international students face a multitude of cross-cultural stressors that impact their academic, professional, and personal successes (Benjamin, Earnest, Gruenewald, & Arthur, 2007; Chen, 1999; Church, 1982; Dee & Henkin, 1999; Gardner, 2007; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Leong & Chou, 1996; Mori, 2000; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Sewell & Davidson, 1956; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Wang, 2004; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). These stressors are any environmental, social, or internal demand that causes an individual to adjust his or her behavior (Thoits, 1995). The introduction to different worldviews produces new stresses that challenge cultural preferences. During a cultural transition, acculturative stress (pressure resulting from life changes in the acculturation process) (Berry, 2006), can negatively impact academics (Weng, Cheong, & Cheong, 2010), sociocultural adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1994), psychological health and well-being (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Tochkov, Levine, & Sanaka, 2010; Yoon, Lee, & Goh, 2008), and communication (Shah, 1991).

Coping abilities with the various stresses during a cultural transition impacts the level of adaptation and adjustment to the new hosting environment (Selmer, 2001). Transitional difficulties often stem from international student expectation gaps (Pitts, 2009) and from conflicting cultural interactions that affect behavioral and academic

adjustment (Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). Weng, Cheong, and Cheong (2010) stated that, “Poor academic performance is often indicative of difficulties in adjusting to university environment and makes dropout more likely” (p. 337). Furthermore, the level of transitional support also influences international students’ decisions to persist in a degree program (Gardner, 2007). These adjustment and adaptation stressors fall into three areas: social adjustment, psychological adjustment, and communication barriers. These stressors are interconnected and impact international students’ academic and personal success during transition into the U.S. higher educational system.

**Social adjustment and adaptation.** Social adaptation encompasses the transition into new campus cultures, classroom expectations, and interpersonal relationships. Social adaptation was described by Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) as behavioral responses related to how effectively an individual links to the new society; behaviors include competence in managing tasks required for daily intercultural living. Socialization assists the sojourner in learning the host country’s national culture and supports the process of becoming a member of that group (Neill, 2008). Zhou (2008) stated that social interactions, coupled with effective communication, produces greater relational empathy (the state of relationship between parties indicating a reciprocal strong rapport, mutual understanding, collaboration, and affinity across cultures). This social practice builds students’ cultural space, a phrase describing a person’s potential to use his or her cross-cultural skills and knowledge to develop relational empathy (Zhou, 2008).

Research has demonstrated that international students’ sense of alienation and being neglected contributes to poor academic achievement and emotional distress (Zhou,

Frey, & Bang, 2011). Zhang and Goodson (2011a) reported that international students' psychosocial adjustment was linked to social connectedness and that social interaction with host nationals mediated adherence to the new culture. Asian international students may struggle with psychosocial adjustment more than other international students demonstrated by more sociocultural difficulties or social stress (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993).

Many international students find the U.S. college or university classroom experience challenging as they are oftentimes much different from the environment in their home country. Classroom learning environments (lectures, seminars, interactive labs, etc.) can be more conducive for some cultures while confining for others. Hofstede (2001) suggested that power distance, a socially accepted power and authority dynamic within a relationship, can impact adjustment to specific environments. Students from cultures that prefer large power distance relationships, may tend to favor having hierarchical roles in the classroom and respond better to strict, one-directional classroom lectures while listening to a professor provide most, if not all, communication. Students from cultures that prefer small power distances within classroom relationships are more apt to prefer discussion forums, group work, and seminar learning environments that encourage interactive communication, debate, and open question/answer engagement between students and the professor. The international student's college experience expands beyond academic parameters (Hull, 1981; Ward, 2001) and a heightened cross-cultural competence can reduce cultural gaps and student frustrations within various settings (Deardorff, 2004, Fantini, 2009).

Outside of the classroom, international students often struggle to socialize with host country nationals and this limited social contact is related to feelings of anxiety, depression, alienation, and culture shock (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Chen, 1999; Hull, 1978; Schram & Lauver, 1988). Heikenheimo and Shute (1986) found that international students who were isolated or had little contact with the host country natives were more likely to face difficulty with cultural, academic, and social adjustment. International students who spent their free time with host country natives reported better cultural adaptation than international students who spent their free time with conationals (Surdam & Collins, 1984). Furthermore, research has found that the frequency of interaction with American host country students was strongly related to international students' self-reported adjustment to the new American lifestyle (Zimmerman, 1995).

Romanello (2007) found that social interactions with diverse people and in diverse settings helped increase students' cultural competence by providing them insight into language and cultural meanings. Exposure to others' experiences (e.g. courses, trips, service-learning, clubs, friendships) has been found to be influential learning experiences for international students who gain meaning from the intercultural interactions by hearing others' stories, observing their behaviors, and making sense of social issues (King, Perez, & Shim, 2013). Additionally, social support has been found to provide powerful coping resources for students experiencing stressful life changes and cultural adjustment (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

The ability to create and develop new peer relationships is only part of the social balance needed to cope with cross-cultural adjustment; the other part is an international student's ability to maintain old ties with home country family and friends (Fontaine, 1986). This variable contributes to academic success and student satisfaction as the home social system (student families and friends from home) provide comfort and stability during the prolonged time of transition (Guiffrida, 2006). These networks are important social relationships that advance the higher education experience in a culturally sensitive manner and the lack of which produces homesickness, which has been found to be the most predictive variable of poor cross-cultural adjustment (Ying & Liese, 1994).

College students perceive their families and home community members as resources for essential cultural support that help students cope with racism, cultural isolation, academic stressors, and other college related hardships (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gonzalez, 2002; Guiffrida, 2005; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Mistra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002). Strayhorn (2012) stated that first-year college students' sense of belonging and persistence decisions were significantly impacted by online social networks including connection with family and friends from home. Additionally, students with higher persistence have been found to have greater family and friend support from their home community (Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). Not only do international students' family and friends from their home country play important roles for student adjustment, but professors, colleagues, student peers, and school staff of the new institution are also important people in the process (Berry, 2006; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011).

Faculty-student interactions have been found to contribute to student academic success and satisfaction (Cokley et al., 2004; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Rosenthal, Folsie, Allerman, Boudreaux, Soper, & Von Bergen, 2000; Zhou, Frey, & Bang; 2011). Le and Gardner (1995) noted that Asian international students had heavy dependence on faculty members compared to peer relationships. Social interactions between a faculty member and student have been shown to have a direct correlation with student perception of his or her autonomy and competence, as well as his or her intrinsic motivations to academically succeed (Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997).

Student-peer interactions also contribute to student academic success (Abrahamowicz, 1988; Astin, 1993; Le & Gardner, 2010; Yang, Makiko, Eichenfield, & Audas, 1994). Lidy and Kahn (2006) found that students who sensed elevated levels of social support and social confidence adjust to college better academically. According to Zhou, Frey and Bang (2011), in-class peer collaboration helped international students greatly improve their academic learning skills. Ying and Liese (1994) similarly found that international students who had extroverted personalities were more active on campus, reported better adjustment, and attempted to build relationships with host country nationals more than introverted students.

There are many academic benefits resulting from cross-cultural social engagement. Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) demonstrated significant increases in the social adjustment of international students through cross-cultural peer programs while Geelhoed, Abe, and Talbot (2003) found that significant cultural awareness and sensitivities increased in host country students who participated in cross-cultural peer

programs. These relationships showcased that both student groups (international student and host student) benefit from cross-cultural engagement.

Westwood and Barker (1990) demonstrated that international students who participated in an eight-month cross-cultural program that partnered them with American students had higher grades and higher retention rates than international students who did not participate. Ward and Kennedy (1994) found that sojourners who identified with host country natives experienced less social difficulty than sojourners who identified with conationals. A relationship has also been found between international graduate students' interaction with American students and their academic program as well as their academic appointment satisfaction levels (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Research indicates relationships between local residents and international students lead to higher overall student satisfaction with their academic and nonacademic experiences abroad (Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Lulat & Altbach, 1985), in addition to increased intercultural learning (Covert, 2011).

When peer relationships are strained or nonexistent, negative social stress can derail academic success and/or cause international students harm. Wang (2004) found that international graduate students often associated their U.S. educational experience with negative social relationships, feelings of isolation, exclusion, and a sense of segregation from U.S. students. Furthermore, Pang (2006) reported that international students perceived U.S. students as uninterested in interacting or speaking with them outside of class, that U.S. students were disconnected from international students, that

U.S. students were unhelpful in clarifying lecture misunderstandings, and that U.S. students often discriminated against international students.

Pang (2006) also noted that more negative perceptions came from international students from cultures very different from the host culture. Zhou, Frey, and Bang (2011) supported this by stating that cross-cultural transition was easier when the culture of the home country of the international student was similar to the host culture. Trice (2004) suggested that international students who were culturally similar to American host country students (including minimal language barriers) established more successful American social networks. For these reasons, Chinese international students are considered at greater risk for experiencing more difficulties in their cross-cultural adjustment process, and thus demonstrate a greater need for pre-departure cross-cultural preparation to foster more accurate expectations of post-arrival experiences and coping strategies to reduce negative study abroad hardships and increase retention and academic success.

***Social theories.*** Three theories help support the significance of international student socialization, and thus international student academic success. Social learning theory describes a process based on experience and observation; in essence, the experienced and observed behaviors shape learning (Bandura, 1977). Appropriate and inappropriate behaviors that are observed demonstrate how an international student can most effectively navigate the host country's normal practices. "When people from one culture interact with those from another culture, they make assumptions and interpretations about specific observed behavior. When these are not understood and are

found to be perhaps ambiguous or even threatening, the breakdown of intercultural communication is most likely to occur, often with serious, negative outcomes” (Hurn, 2011, p. 201). By learning more about cultures through experience and observation, an international student can clarify the misinterpretations, assumptions, and ignorance that can hinder cultural adaptation.

Social capital theory (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) suggests that social interactions provide access to resources and opportunities available within an institutional setting but tend to be unequally utilized by institutional members. These relationships are especially important for international students who need access to information about cultural norms, the native language, campus resources, organizational operations, and classroom etiquette, as well as valuable emotional and moral support. According to Sherry, Bhat, Beaver, and Ling (2004), international students are often less aware of campus support resources and use the services less than domestic students. Social capital (on campus or online interactions) are an important concept according to Bourdieu (1983, 1988) and Coleman (1988, 1990) who stated that social capital is an important indicator of academic success. International students can greatly benefit from a better understanding of available campus resources, when the resources are offered, and how to utilize them.

The student involvement theory states that students who participate in extracurricular activities are less likely to drop out (Astin, 1984). Tinto’s (1975, 1993) student integration and retention models also have demonstrated the significance of social integration on student academic success. Furthermore, Quintrell and Westwood (1994) as well as Westwood and Barker (1990) demonstrated that peer based programs had

positive effects on international students' academic achievement, social adjustment, and use of campus resources. Involvement in campus clubs or organizations with both conationals and host country nationals allow international students to access available resources and learn how to successfully navigate the educational system.

**Psychological adjustment and adaptation.** Psychological adaptation includes the sense of well-being and self-esteem, as well as the physical well-being experienced during a transition (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Black (1988) and Nicholson (1984) described psychological adjustment as the degree of a person's psychological comfort with a variety of aspects of a new environment. International students' psychological adaptation and adjustment during their study abroad experience is often strained by academic and nonacademic pressures. International students' stressors include life stressors (cultural adjustment, language and financial problems, academic concerns, etc.); these stressors are also considered chronic and enduring (Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003) and can create academic problems for international students (Orpeza, Fitzgibbon, & Baron, 1991). The accumulation of acculturation life stressors can not only offset academic progression but directly affect subjective well-being (Yoon, Lee, & Goh, 2008).

Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) stated that international students can experience some psychological issues during transition including stress, depression, homesickness, and loneliness. Johnson and Sandhu (2007) reported that international students often experience homesickness, loneliness, identity confusion, fear, anxiety, stress, depression, and cognitive distress. Furthermore, academic, acculturation, social support, and low

identification with the host culture have often been risk factors for depression, psychological distress, and sociocultural adjustment (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Leong, Mallinckrodt, & Kralj, 1990; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang; 2012; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Ying & Liese, 1990, 1994; Zhang & Goodson, 2011a; Zhang & Goodson, 2011b).

International students are often less aware and less inclined to use campus support resources to cope with challenges compared to domestic students (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Sherry et al., 2004). Nilsson (2004) found that only 2% of international students at an American university sought counseling services within the year sampled and one third of those dropped out after the first treatment. A study at an Australian university not only found that international students underutilized counseling services but believed that counselors lacked the cultural understanding to adequately serve their specific needs (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008). Russell, Thomason, and Rosenthal (2008) found that the international students who did seek counseling services demonstrated higher acculturation scores and that enculturation (international student retention) was predicted by a combination of achievement and the absence of physical/psychological distress (Close & Solberg, 2008).

Chinese students have demonstrated higher trait anxiety, more communication and acculturation difficulties, lower English language competence and lower perceived social support (Chataway & Berry, 1989). Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006) found that high attachment anxiety (excessive need for approval from others and fear of interpersonal rejection) and high attachment avoidance (excessive need for self-reliance

and fear of interpersonal intimacy) were significant predictors for both sociocultural adjustment difficulties as well as psychological distress for Chinese and Taiwanese international students.

Shen and Takeuchi (2001) found links among acculturation, socioeconomic status, and mental health; yet many college student research studies have neglected to measure the additional acculturation stresses international students face (Pang, 2003). Without such consideration, it is difficult to understand how these additional stressors impact their academic standing. More research is needed to better understand how international students' psychological health is linked to cultural adjustment and academic achievement dependent on national orientation and cultural preference.

To contribute to acculturation research, this study focuses on undergraduate Eastern Asian international students' pre-departure and post-arrival cross-cultural adjustments. Eastern Asian international students is used in this study to refer to students from China, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. These groups comprise over one-fourth of all international students in the United States (IIE, 2013a) but experience more cultural adjustment difficulties than other international student groups (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; & Wan, 2001). Vast cultural differences are found between the U.S. and Chinese and Taiwanese cultures, including educational, communication, and social norms that create larger acculturative challenges for Eastern Asian students (Wan, 2001; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

**Communication barriers.** Language barriers impact academic success (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000). Many international students studying in the U.S. must complete general course requirements in addition to simultaneously learning English (including writing, speaking, and listening skills as well as visual/symbolic language underpinnings). These additional textual, phonological, orthographical, and semantics/syntax complexities intensify academic stress and anxiety (Mistra, Crist, & Burant, 2003). Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) demonstrated that the international students who reported greater adjustment strain also had the lowest English proficiency skills. According to Yang and Clum (1994), English language proficiency is more of a determinant for adjustment than age, sex, marital status, or education.

“It [learning English] also means learning to see the world as native English speakers see it, learning the ways in which their language reflects the ideas, customs and behavior of their society, learning to understand their ‘language of the mind’. Learning the English language, in fact, is inseparable from learning its culture” (Yang, 2010, p. 176). Yang (2010) stated that specially-designed language and culture courses can help explain the cultural phenomena characteristic of English. The interdependent relationship between linguistics, literature, and culture suggests that student academic success could be improved with greater cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Communication and social interactions are found to be among the greatest challenges and concerns for international students (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Jandt, 2004; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Wang, 2004; Wong, 2004, Yeh & Inose, 2003). According to Hofstede (2001), miscommunications can occur beyond language differences; these

include power distances, uncertainty avoidance, and high or low contextual preferences. For instance, the power distance between an American professor and an international student can affect how the student communicates and engages in class, with the teacher and with other students. Some cultures regard instructors as the ultimate classroom authority whereas American classrooms are often structured as a seminar or discussion forums encouraging questions, discussion, and debate. This cultural environment difference can give international students the perception that American classrooms are aggressive, unstructured, and disrespectful to the professor. These misinterpretations about U.S. cultural norms and classroom expectations often cause new international students unnecessary stresses.

One example of a cultural miscommunication that impacts student engagement involves Mianzi. “Mianzi translates from Chinese into English as ‘face’ and is a Chinese cultural concept referring to personal dignity, prestige, and status that serves to maintain harmony in social relationships and hierarchies” (Cardon, 2006, p. 439). The loss of “face” means to have been disrespected and may disrupt relationships and harm goodwill. In Chinese business, reprimanding or singling out a worker in front of his or her co-workers is an unacceptable business practice that will lead to damaged professional and personal relationships (Neill, 2008). Chinese culture is highly structured and singling out an individual causes anxiety for the Chinese student, even if it was done to praise or recognize academic achievement. The Association of International Educators (AIE) and the American International Education Foundation (AIEF) have stated that English

language proficiency and U.S. cultural competency are among two of the most common challenges for Chinese students in American colleges and universities (AIEF, 2012).

### **Cross-Cultural Training and Pre-Departure Preparation**

Although cross-cultural training (CCT) has helped business expatriates during their international transition to build more accurate expectations (Neill, 2008; Selmer, 2001) and adjust into a new culture, Furnham and Bochner (1986) have stated that international students have appeared to have more distress and adjustment problems than business expatriates due to the additional life stresses they independently manage. Without the business expatriate's ambassadors, assistants, or liaisons, the international student navigates the new culture and language without prior training or post-arrival assistance.

Like international students, voluntary and temporary migrant workers (expatriates) residing abroad for specific purposes (Cohen, 1977) struggle with cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity, competence, and adaptation into new cultures. Expatriate relationship research, the study of interactions between the expatriate and host country nationals, demonstrates that sensitivity to others of a differing cultural group is not a natural process (Hofstede, 1997). For greater cross-cultural adaptation, it is imperative for the expatriate to identify with host country cultures in every stage of the adjustment process (Sanchez, Spector, & Cooper, 2000) and have expectations, attitudes, and behaviors that accommodate the new culture's norms to increase effectiveness of their adjustment (Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005).

When any international sojourner is not offered cross-cultural education and post-induction cross-cultural adaptation services, cultural challenges and stressors such as culture-shock or depression can often derail his or her international goal; this includes students' academic successes (Neill, 2008). Culture-shock is "a state of disorientation and anxiety that results from not knowing how to behave in an unfamiliar culture" (Deresky, 2011, p. 445). To reduce the degree of culture shock and miscommunication between host country nationals and aid in reducing time required to reach an acceptable level of cultural proficiency (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000; Neill, 2008), cross-cultural training can be used.

Cross-cultural training (CCT) is the process that improves intercultural learning through cognitive, affective, and behavioral development, the essential competencies for successful interaction in diverse cultures (Littrell, Salas, Hess, Paley, & Riedel, 1996). The primary objectives of CCT are to align the expectations of individuals from different cultural backgrounds with the host country's cultural norms, enhance social skills, introduce coping techniques, and develop professional skills while respecting individual culture, personality, and character traits (Neill, 2008). Research has demonstrated that cultural training can improve cultural competence and cross-cultural adaptation (Altshuler, Sussman, & Kachur, 2003; Foster, 2000; Goldstein, & Kim, 2006; Pieter Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002; Ruben, 1976, & Zhu, 2008) and that by practicing open-mindedness, patience, and tolerance, international travelers can help minimize transitional stresses to produce cross-cultural growth (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Hannigan, 1990; Y. Y. Kim, 2001).

Although CCT helps sojourners adjust faster within a new culture (Neill, 2008), higher education has limited research on measuring the development of international student cultural competence (Fantini, 2009; Wohl, 2012; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). There is a need for a greater linkage between higher education student services and international student needs to enhance direct communication that facilitates transition and promotes student success (Wang, 2004). More research is needed to understand how CCT, and in particular pre-departure CCT, can induce cultural awareness, sensitivity, knowledge, and competency in international students in order to foster cross-cultural adaptation at their respective college or university, and thus improve their academic, social, and professional development.

Earlier preparation through cross-cultural training can help reduce unrealistic expectations while fostering greater intercultural and cross-cultural competencies which aids in the adjustment into new cultures (Dekaney, 2008; Neill, 2008). Effective coping strategies can also be taught early to better support cross-cultural adjustment (Selmer, 2001). “Succinctly, we believe that many cross-cultural problems can be resolved or avoided through an awareness and understanding of the components of intercultural communication” (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2011, p. 3).

The more preparation an international student has before study abroad (pre-departure) and the more accurate expectations of their cultural adjustment, the better their cross-cultural adaptation (Chen, 2000; Dekaney, 2008; Ying & Liese, 1994). Altshuler, Sussman, and Kachur (2003) stated that the more introduction to cross-cultural experiences a person has, the greater his or her intercultural sensitivity. By teaching the

host country's value system, international students build expectations and cultural awareness, eliminate stereotypes they had about the host culture, and begin to see their own culture in a new light (Kristjansdottir, 2003).

U.S. colleges and universities are now beginning to incorporate cross-cultural education and training strategies into their international student programs but there is inconsistency in addressing cultural adaptation and competency training (Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). Most cross-cultural competence training is only provided after international students arrive to the host country, leaving them to learn as they struggle during the semester (Wohl, 2012). As significant increases in international student enrollment numbers continue every year (IIE, 2013a), there will also be increasing pressures to develop effective international student services in addition to the evaluation of their effectiveness (Deardorff, 2004; Fantini, 2009). For the purpose of this study, international support services will refer to any campus program or initiative with the primary goal of enhancing student success.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Although study abroad and intercultural assessment is fairly recent (Bolen, 2007; Hoff, 2008; Sutton & Rubin, 2004), research has demonstrated that cross-cultural training is effective to increase adaptation and socialization, and to reduce negative stresses. The majority of research includes post-arrival training and treatments; there is scant literature related to pre-departure preparation to include early cross-cultural adjustment. Filling this gap in the research can assist higher education leaders in identifying international students' cultural needs from pre-departure (before students leave their home country for

the international host country) through repatriation (acclimation back into the home country to live with new paradoxical dual identities after a study abroad experience) (Brown, 2009) to reduce significant negative academic and behavioral issues (Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). Better understanding of country specific cross-cultural needs will help colleges and universities better understand how they can address transitional issues.

Current research suggests that cross-cultural adaptation is directly connected to the academic achievement, social adjustment, and psychological health of international students, yet, cross-cultural adaptation research on international student adjustment is lacking (Chen, 1999; Lewthwaite, 1996; Yoon, 2002; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). Wang (2004) recommended that future research focus on cross-cultural adaptation preparation that identifies how to bridge communication gaps between international students, faculty, host students, and departmental program representatives. Cross-cultural preparation training has shown to improve cultural competence and cross-cultural adaptation (Altshuler, Sussman, & Kachur, 2003; Pieter Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002; Ruben, 1976, Zhu, 2008) but much of the research was tested within the private business sector aiding effective adaptation of expatriates (voluntary and temporary migrant workers residing abroad for specific purposes) (Cohen, 1977), and the socialization of expatriate managers (Black & Mendenhall, 1990).

This chapter has reviewed the literature related to the research topic. It included a discussion of international education in the U.S. higher education system, cultural transition and adjustment, cross-cultural adaptation theory, acculturation stressors and

their impact on academic success, and a discussion of needed research. In Chapter III, the research design and methodology is discussed.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the pre-departure and post-arrival cultural knowledge, transition, and adjustment of Eastern Asian undergraduate international students who completed two different cultural treatments. This chapter describes the research methodology and methods used in this study. The first section focuses on the research design used to answer the research questions. Next, the chapter introduces the participants. This is followed by data sources and data collection methods. The data analysis and management are then explained before this chapter concludes with a summary.

#### **Research Design and Questions**

A phenomenological approach was selected for this study. Phenomenological research “identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 231). This phenomenological study included a narrative research inquiry relying on written and spoken stories about international student cross-cultural experiences before and during their first semester in the U.S. Narrative research is used to “discover regularities in how people tell stories or give speeches” (Bernard, 2000, p. 441) and narrative analysis incorporates first person accounts through life stories emphasizing and making sense of the particular experiences as told by those who lived them (Litchman, 2013). The personal storytelling allowed thematic coding to emerge without hypothesized biographical particulars; authentic regularities were discovered within the data narrated by the participants who lived the cultural phenomenon.

This investigation was guided by the following research questions:

1. How did select Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students accepted to a western United States university perceive their cultural knowledge?
2. What factors (e.g., gender, country of birth, educational preparation, exposure to treatment, prior experience, and perceived socioeconomic status) contributed to differences in perceived cultural knowledge by select Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students?
3. What differences in interaction styles were found among entering Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students who were either exposed to a 4-week pre-departure treatment and students who only experienced the standard university treatment?
4. What differences in thinking styles were found among entering Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students who were either exposed to a 4-week pre-departure treatment and students who only experienced the standard university treatment?
5. What differences in sense of self were found among entering Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students who were either exposed to a 4-week pre-departure treatment and students who only experienced the standard university treatment?

6. What were the experiences of entering Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students of their first semester studying abroad at a western, United States research university?

Consistent with Litchman (2013), the selection of this research approach provided a multidimensional examination of international student narratives that described their own cultural preparation, transitions, and adaptation into a western U.S. research university. The methodological approach was driven by the topic selected and the research questions proposed (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000), and was chosen because it allowed for flexible data analysis to account for emergent, complex themes without having pre-established hypotheses about a multidimensional student population (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The descriptive data from a short quantifiable survey and two cultural reports were used in partnership with the qualitative narratives (participant interviews and written reflections) creating a triangulated body of data for collective analysis.

Grounded in the narrative paradigms, this phenomenological study investigated the student experiences of a cross-cultural phenomenon and then analyzed the data using a thematic analysis design. This approach helped identify patterns of student experiences in their stories about their pre-departure preparation and their post-arrival adjustments in addition to discovering regularities in how the participants told their individual stories. Narrative analysis was ideal for examining how this complex student population experienced their preparation for, transition into, and adaptation at a mid-sized U.S. research university as a new undergraduate international student.

Because the purpose of this study was to describe the narratives already held by international students about their cross-cultural experience instead of making explanations through their narrative of why something occurred, this study may be classified as descriptive research compared to explanatory research (Polkinghorne, 1988). Descriptive research renders participants' narratives as the operational process creating significance and meaning from the life events encountered. For this reason, Polkinghorne (1988) supported that narrative research is appropriate to use for research such as what is presented, to discover the meaning behind the operational constructs producing particular significances of the events, before discovering the implications of the meanings, to better understand a human existence and behavior of the individual (i.e. international students).

The narrative paradigm is founded on five assumptions according to Fisher (1984, 1987, 1994): First, people are storytelling animals; second, decisions are made on the basis of good reasons (which vary depending on the communication situation, medium, and genre of philosophical, technical, rhetorical, or artistic basis); third, that history, rationality, biography, culture, and character determine what people consider good reasons; fourth, narrative rationality (determined by the coherence and fidelity of the stories); and lastly, the world is a set of stories from which people choose, and thus constantly re-create their lives.

Fisher (1984, 1987) defined narration as a theory of spoken or performed symbolic actions that have sequential order and purpose for those who live, create, or interpret them. This importance of narrative paradigm established a justifiable method for representing the experiences and meanings of international students' cross-cultural

experiences with a beginning (pre-departure preparation), a middle (initial transition), and an end (post-arrival adjustment at the end of the fall semester).

This study used narrative paradigm to emphasize student stories about their perception of culture, as well as the people and conflicts they experienced after arriving in the U.S. The story covered twenty weeks from early August through the second week of December. Student narratives revealed first-semester preparation in terms of the beginning (four weeks leading up to the start of the semester), the middle (the middle of the semester, including midterms and Thanksgiving/fall breaks), and the end (last few weeks of semester, including final examinations). Stories described students' histories, influential people, and conflicts in their life that impacted preparation, transition, or adjustment.

### **Participants**

This study used purposive sampling to select participants originating from specific international student groups who were believed to experience cross-cultural barriers in U.S. colleges and universities. Purposive sampling can be used when there is specific knowledge of the group to be sampled (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Participants (N = 8) included undergraduate international Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean students who attended a mid-sized public research university during the fall, 2013 semester. Students from these Eastern Asian countries have demonstrated the greatest amount of cross-cultural challenges during study abroad in the U.S. (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993; Wan, 2001; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang, 2012).

There were five qualifying characteristics that participants must have had in order to be considered for this study. The first was that students needed to have been enrolled in the university for the fall, 2013 semester with a valid student visa/passport. The second requirement was that students needed to have been able to read English and speak English at a conversational skill level. This was determined by the student having passed his or her TOEFL, IELTS, or PTE examination (standardized language proficiency tests). The third requirement was that all student participants must have been eighteen years of age or older. The fourth requirement was that the student held an undergraduate status. The last requirement was that their country of origin was from East Asia.

Recruiting participants began eight weeks before the start of the fall semester and was assisted by the staff of the university office responsible for international students and programs (see Appendices A through D). There were two recruitment phases. The first phase was at pre-departure. Letters were emailed by the university office to international students who met the study criteria. Five students responded and all agreed to complete the online four-week pre-departure cross-cultural treatment. The second recruitment phase occurred immediately after international students arrived on campus. The researcher recruited additional students by reading a script at the university's orientation and by sending an email invitation letter to international students who met the criteria. During the second recruitment phase, students who had been recruited pre-departure were asked to continue their participation in the study throughout the semester. Three students agreed. In all, eight students were included in the study.

Of the eight participants, two were male and six were female; seven were between the ages of 19 and 22 and one participant was 34. There were two groups of participants. The first was the Treatment Group (n = 5) who completed the treatment during the pre-departure phase. This group of participants included one Japanese, one Taiwanese, and three Chinese international students; this group consisted of two males and three females. The second group of participants was the University Group (n = 3) who only received the university's standard international student services. University Group participants included two students from Japan and one from South Korea; this group was all female.

### **Data Sources**

Four sources of data were used in this study: *Cultural Orientations Indicator*®; participant reflections; in-person interviews, and a survey. Each source is described below before the collection methods and analysis procedures are provided.

**Cultural Orientations Indicator**®. The *Cultural Orientations Indicator*® (COI) is a psychometrically validated and reliable instrument hosted on the *Cultural Navigator*™ web-based learning platform. The COI is an online, self-assessment cultural preference instrument to synthesize and organize the main dimensions of cultural differences. It was developed by the *Training Management Corporation*© (TMC) in the mid-1980s for the purpose to increase cultural awareness and skill development to enable practical application of cultural understanding in a variety of professional, managerial, and leadership contexts (TMC, 2012a). TMC allowed the use of the COI instrument under the condition that the instrument would not be published.

The COI was available in over ten languages. For the purposes of this study, the COI was administered in the language of the participant's choice. The assessment takes approximately 10 minutes to complete; the statistically reliable and validated online cultural assessment measures a person's work style preferences against 3 dimensions of culture: Interaction Style, Thinking Style, and Sense of Self (TMC, 2013). This psychometric assessment (i.e., psychological measurement through quantification, mathematical, or statistical methodology for the analysis of human differences) (Browne, 2000) identifies and analyzes cultural preferences from 83 items (questions) which participants indicate through a six-point Likert scale from low to high (TMC, 2013). The questions are designed to measure an individual's preference, affinity, or liking for the given cultural orientation that defines each scale.

The COI's four key psychometric/statistical properties include reliability, intercorrelations, factor analysis, and reading level. The assessment's reliability (i.e., precision of measurement) ( $\alpha = 0.75 - 0.95$ ) had a median value of 0.84. Intercorrelations (i.e., measure of the relationship between constructs/scales) were statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Factor analysis (i.e., statistical procedure that reveals the underlying statistical structure) was comprised of a five-factor model. The reading level was based on the Flesh Reading Ease Score (45.9) and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Score (8.6) (TMC, 2012b).

***Cultural Orientations Indicator® reports.*** The aim of using the COI assessment was to provide members of the Treatment Group with their cultural preferences to guide reflection on their cultural styles, increase awareness to cross-cultural differences,

promote realistic expectations of likely cultural barriers, and increase sensitivity to U.S. cultural styles before introducing possible coping strategies. After all participants completed the COI assessment on the *Cultural Navigator*<sup>TM</sup>, the online system generated two reports that organized and analyzed the COI assessment results. The first report was the cultural profile which identified individual cultural styles organized into three cultural style categories (interaction styles, thinking styles, and sense of self styles). The second report was the country cultural comparison report which identified differences between their cultural styles and U.S. cultural styles.

The cultural profile identified individual work styles and cultural preferences in addition to providing recommendations and suggestions for building effective skills and cultural agility (TMC, 2012a). The cultural profile's psychometric properties are based on seventeen cultural continua that are classified within three cultural dimensions. "A cultural dimension is an overall category that contains one or more related continua. A cultural continuum is the spectrum between two opposing cultural orientations. A cultural orientation is a specific, culture-based value" (TMC, 2012b, p. 1). The three cultural dimensions are based on interactions (interaction style), processing information (thinking style), and how people view themselves in their work environment (sense of self).

The country cultural comparison report provided personalized charts and descriptions of the cultural gaps and similarities between the participants' cultural preferences and the U.S. cultural preferences. The report also included suggestions about how participants' cultural preferences may impact their U.S. working environments (e.g.

classrooms), highlighted some challenges the participants may experience, shared possible scenarios of what to expect, and provided supplemental educational resources to help align their expectations for American contexts (TMC, 2012a). All participants completed the COI assessment but only the Treatment Group received their individual cultural reports during the pre-departure phase. The University Group did not receive a personalized report and only received the university's standard pre-departure reading material (see Appendix R).

**Participant reflections.** The second data sources were written participant reflections. During the pre-departure phase, four weekly pre-departure reflections were given to the Treatment Group (see Appendices E through H). Participants were emailed prompted questions to stimulate thought about cultural awareness, sensitivity, and adjustment. Participants used their COI cultural profile and country cultural comparison report to help address the reflection questions.

Participants wrote about a variety of culturally related topics including, but not limited to, how they interpreted culture, what they believed to be influencing factors impacting their cultural knowledge development, how their cultural styles differed from U.S. cultural styles, how they preferred to interact with others, potential cultural challenges they might experience in the U.S., and how they might cope or manage cultural challenges. These reflections included data about participants' preparation experiences before study abroad, their expectations of the upcoming international experience, and how the two reports (cultural profile and country cultural comparison report) were perceived to influence participants' cultural preparation for study abroad.

During the post-arrival phases, all participants (Treatment and University Group) completed three written reflections (see Appendices I through K). Once every two weeks, for the first six weeks, participants responded to questions prompting disclosure about culture, cultural knowledge, cultural preparation, cross-cultural transition, and adjustment experiences.

**In-person interviews.** The third data source consisted of three open-ended, semi-structured student interviews. To understand student development and behavior in context, interviews focused on the environment as perceived by the students inhabiting it (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lewin, 1939). Interviewing can be an essential method to comprehend participants' meaning behind their experiences within particular context (Siedman, 2006).

These interviews were intended to collect participants' thoughts, challenges, experiences, and successes with their pre-departure preparation, initial transition, and cross-cultural adjustment into the U.S. culture. Interviews were structured to elicit information relevant to educational experiences that international students regarded as important and how they made meaning about their experiences. The semi-structured interviews gave participants maximum freedom to identify relevant content, guided by the researcher to cover specific cross-cultural educational experiences through narration.

Three interview protocols were developed (see Appendices L through N). The first interview focused on cultural preparations, initial impressions, and transitional experiences. This initial interview was intended to collect participants' pre-departure and initial post-arrival experiences through their first-hand stories. It helped illuminate

unique student experiences from a retrospective reflection about their pre-departure and relocation journey to the U.S. It also provided real-time stories of their transition to the university, their thoughts and challenges at that time, and their future expectations about the approaching fall semester.

The second interview focused on mid-semester issues related to culture and adjustment. This interview allowed participants to share thoughts and experiences about their post-arrival transition and adjustment experiences during the first eight weeks in the U.S. and on the U.S. university campus. The mid-October timeframe was designed to also collect participants' thoughts and experiences during midterm examinations and project deadlines to elicit feedback about academic adjustment, management, and coping behaviors.

The third interview was a reflection on their fall semester experiences. This interview collected participants' narratives regarding their post-arrival transition experiences up through the first 16 weeks in the U.S. and at the U.S. university. The December time frame was designed to gather participants' thoughts and experiences during final examinations and project deadlines.

**Online survey.** The fourth data source was an online student survey using a Likert-scale system. The survey identified student perceptions of their pre-departure experience, its impact on their cross-cultural awareness and preparation, and what students thought about cross-cultural preparation. All participants completed the short online survey via Survey Monkey. Two versions of the survey were created: one for the Treatment Group that referenced the pre-departure treatment, and a second for the

University Group that referenced the university's standard services (see Appendices O and P). These surveys were designed and developed under the direction of a survey methodologist.

### **Data Collection**

This study was conducted under the auspices of the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix Q). Descriptions of data collection are given for each data source and include during which phase it was collected. The first phase collected four weeks of data (pre-departure phase). The second phase collected data from the beginning of the fall semester through final examinations (post-arrival phase).

**Cultural Orientations Indicator®.** The *Cultural Orientations Indicator®* (COI) was used to collect participants' cultural styles. Half of the participants (Treatment Group) were emailed a username and password during the pre-departure phase to log into their own online *Cultural Navigator™* account to complete the COI cultural style assessment. This group had access to their account and the online software for the entire four weeks during the pre-departure cultural treatment. The other half of participants (University Group) completed the COI cultural assessment during their first in-person interview on the researcher's computer at the university during the post-arrival phase. The University Group had no access to the *Cultural Navigator™* account or any of the COI cultural style results.

After all participants completed the COI assessment, the *Cultural Navigator™* organized the results (interaction styles, thinking styles, sense of self styles) into two reports. The first report was a cultural profile that itemized and described participants'

cultural styles. The second report was a country cultural comparison report that compared the participants' home country cultural styles to U.S. cultural styles. The researcher had access to all participants' online *Cultural Navigator*<sup>TM</sup> accounts to retrieve and save the reports as PDF files to use at a later time in conjunction with other narratives during data analysis.

**Participant reflections.** Participants were emailed all reflection questions and the participants returned their written reflection responses to the same secure university email. All correspondence was conducted in English. The Treatment Group completed one reflection each week, for four weeks during the pre-departure phase. After arrival, all participants (Treatment and University Group) completed one written reflection every two weeks, for the first six weeks during the post-arrival phase. Reflections were recorded and securely stored to use in conjunction with other narrative data.

**In-person interviews.** Three interviews were conducted in this study. The first was conducted during the first two weeks of the fall semester. The second was conducted within a two week timeframe during midterm examinations in October. The final interview was conducted during the last week of the semester around final examinations. The interviews helped collect student experiences about their pre-departure experiences as well as their transition and adjustment experiences. Interviews were an appropriate instrument when participants could not be directly observed and when researchers sought control over the line of questioning (Creswell, 2009).

The semi-structured, in-person 45 minute interviews were conducted on the university campus during mutually agreed upon times. All interviews were conducted in

the same private office on campus. Only the international student and researcher were present in the office during the interview. Interviews were video recorded and immediately transcribed verbatim after each interview. The video interviews helped collect the body language of students as they described their perceptions and experiences about culture, cultural preparation, transition, and adjustment.

**Online survey.** One online survey was conducted during the first in-person interview using Survey Monkey (a web-based survey tool). Each participant completed the short Likert-Scale survey using a prepared laptop open to the survey before the interview began. After participants completed the survey, the data was saved, and the browser was closed. Surveys measured international student perceptions about their pre-departure cross-cultural preparation and experiences. Survey data was used in partnership with other narratives for later analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

A thematic analysis approach was used for coding qualitative data using explicit themes that described and organized raw data while interpreting characteristics of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1988). The unit of analysis used in this study was student narratives, generated from student journal reflections and in-person interviews. The unit of analysis was the “entity on which the interpretation of the study will focus” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 62). Student narratives were used to identify the codes which could be meaningfully addressed and analyzed. This study’s thematic codes were developed inductively through collected data (student narratives) and emerged from their stories. Boyatzis (1998) stated that the benefits to this data-driven approach come from the raw

information, eliminating potential contaminating variables. This was important to fully evaluate the authentic human phenomenon of the group of students whose needs are often overlooked and under recognized (Zhang & Goodson, 2011b).

Five steps were used in this thematic analysis. First, data was reduced to only the raw information and holistically read. It was at this point that the three preliminary themes were identified. Second, the data was re-read, line-by-line, and color coded to identify sub-themes and patterns. Third, themes and sub-themes were re-read and filtered through the research questions. Based on the first three steps, the fourth step identified final themes and sub-themes. Lastly, the trustworthiness of analysis and validity of the themes were determined (Boyatzis, 1998).

**Step I.** According to Boyatzis (1998), the first step in inductively developing a code (i.e. theme) is to read the raw material for each unit of analysis (i.e. student interviews and written reflections) to generate an outline of summarized preliminary themes providing, “close contact and familiarity with the raw information” (p. 45). None of the students spoke English as their first language; all data reflected the verbatim words the students used. No attempt was made to correct grammar, word usage, etc. After organizing the data to include only the raw, original information, the transcripts were read holistically. Three preliminary themes immediately emerged from the narratives. The three preliminary themes included initial transitions, cultural knowledge, and culture impacting adjustment.

**Step II.** The second step included re-reading the data line-by-line, comparing the themed narratives, and uncovering similarities between the preliminary pieces of

information (Boyatzis, 1998). Abbreviations were gradually implemented to note which reflection responses occurred during pre-departure (PD) or post-arrival phases (PA) and were used throughout later analysis steps. Sub-themes within the three themes were inductively identified by comparing the preliminary themes and organized into similar and comparative patterns (Boyatzis, 1998).

**Step III.** The three themes and sub-themes created from steps I and II were isolated and re-read, then filtered through the research questions. Narratives (interviews and written reflections) were then outlined by major research topic and organized into eight categories: (a) code; (b) cultural knowledge; (c) factors influencing cultural knowledge; (d) interaction styles; (e) thinking styles; (f) sense of self; (g) overall experiences; and (h) observations.

“Code” consisted of the student’s identification pseudonym. “Cultural Knowledge” included narrative references related to culture and cultural knowledge. “Interaction Styles” included social interactions or references to host country and home country relationships. “Thinking Styles” included all references related to operational or information processing. “Sense of Self” included all references related to how participants perceived themselves or how they perceived others’ role and identity in the culture. “Overall Experiences” included the repeated patterns of participants’ transition and adjustment experiences. Finally, “Observations” included notes written by the researcher during interviews or excerpts about the narratives. This was important for this study since participants were English second language learners and communication styles

were sometimes supported through body language and gestures elaborating their intended messages.

**Step IV.** Based on Steps I – III, the three preliminary themes were edited, rewritten, and reconstructed into revised themes. The revised themes were stated to maximize the differentiation between the themes, facilitate coding of the raw material, and minimize data exclusions (Boyatzis, 1998) to answer the research questions. Three final themes were identified: “I’m on my Own in a Foreign Land”, “I Wished I had Known More”, and “Thank Goodness I had Friends to Help”.

**Step V.** The trustworthiness of analysis and validity of the themes were ensured during this step. It involved a member-checking procedure to ensure the interpretations of participants’ perceptions were accurate. In order to ensure the interpretation was accurate, researchers had participants confirm accuracy of the data results. In addition, peer debriefing occurred with two other researchers to establish the trustworthiness of the interpretation of the data.

### **Data Management**

Four specific methods were used in this study to organize and manage the data. First, pseudonyms were given to each participant during the first step of analysis to protect identities. Second, all data was noted as a pre-departure or post-arrival reflection response. Third, spelling errors found in the written reflections were noted by the insertion of [*sic*] and words framed in brackets were reproduced in interview and reflection responses. Lastly, a profile was created for each participant to manage his or her individual data.

**Summary**

This chapter has described the study's qualitative research design. It explained the study's participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis used to address the research questions. Chapter IV provides the research findings. Chapter V offers the results of the data analysis, conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

## Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the pre-departure and post-arrival cultural knowledge, transition, and adjustment of Eastern Asian undergraduate international students who completed two different cultural treatments. This chapter summarizes the research findings by describing three themes which emerged from the data. The themes are discussed before addressing individual research questions in Chapter V. The themes that emerged from the data include: I'm on My Own in a Foreign Land, I Wish I had Known More, and Thank Goodness I had Friends to help.

### **“I'm on My Own in a Foreign Land”**

This theme was immediately revealed in the initial set of interviews during the first week of school. “I'm on my own in a Foreign Land” describes the participants' initial transitions into the new U.S culture as they attempted to balance academic, social, and life planning responsibilities. There was an overarching sense of trial and error which was revealed in five distinct ways: transitions, academics, transportation, living arrangements, and communication.

**Trial and error: transitions.** Most participants indicated through interviews and reflections that they underestimated the complexity of international relocation for study abroad. They expressed having difficulties making sense of local cultural customs as they attended classes, established new accommodations, and learned English. As participants transitioned into the U.S. culture, they described survival-like reactions to the new, unexpected foreign challenges. Participants described feeling excited but also drained, overwhelmed, and sometimes scared during their first month in the U.S. Many

of their decisions on where to live, where to buy groceries and school supplies, how to travel around town, how to act, and who to trust were primarily made through the process of trial and error.

All participants expressed that they experienced upsetting, overwhelming, or dangerous trial and error transitional situations. Through their interviews and reflections, participants expressed feeling insecure, awkward, and even afraid as they lived outside of their cultural norms and experienced the U.S. culture. For instance, one participant described her first visit to a neighboring city and the unexpected challenges she experienced,

I went to San Francisco. It was great but there were also some lessons. Like travel lessons, like never be late. Prepare water and cash. I missed the bus because the traffic downtown was terrible. It was so crowded. I took a taxi but still could not make it. I missed the bus so I have to take another one at midnight. I got in some trouble that night. I was sexually harassed that night. There's just me and another Korean girl on the bus. We had that kind of trouble and it took 3 or 4 hours. That black man keep harassing us. It was horrible. The Korean girl told the driver and the driver called the police. The police take the black man away in the police car. Totally a lesson.

As participants' trial and error experiences continued, disappointments occurred and many described forming negative assumptions, generalizations, or stereotypes about their school and local resources based on first impressions. One participant shared at the beginning of the semester that she had two goals: make new friends and watch a box-

office movie without subtitles. She was unaware that the university provided a free weekly movie on campus until one night after leaving the library, she coincidentally walked by the university lawn where an outdoor movie was being shown. Although she wanted to stay and watch the movie, meet other students, and enjoy the event, it was too cold and she was without warm clothing or a blanket. She assumed (incorrectly) that all movies were held outside at night and decided to not attend the event again. It was not until after the semester ended that she learned that all free university movies after the first outdoor showing were held indoors at the university's movie theater with free popcorn and drinks. She was shocked and disappointed to have missed an entire semester of free indoor movies and the opportunities to make new friends.

**Trial and error: academics.** There were five distinct examples of this subtheme: administrative/registration tasks, expectations in classes, class content, class participation, and group work. Once participants arrived on campus, they often discovered a wide array of administrative tasks that needed to be completed before attending fall semester classes. Some participants did not register for fall classes until the week school began. Two participants missed the first or second week of class waiting for prerequisite Accuplacer test scores before gaining enrollment access. One participant, unaware of the required sequence of enrollment operations, had enrolled late into a math class during the second week of the semester due to not having completed the prerequisite Accuplacer test. Another participant said that he found preparing for the Accuplacer test difficult while struggling to find an apartment, buy groceries, collect school supplies, and attend campus events. Although he was highly proficient in mathematics, he earned a poor

Accuplacer test score and was placed in a low level math class. He later shared that he was often bored and unchallenged in his math class.

Reflections indicated that participants were taken aback about actual classroom expectations. For example, one participant had a significant amount of homework that was not submitted for grading. He was surprised that homework was worth such a big part of his final grade. He was also unaware that online submission of his homework did not download successfully. After realizing that he could not earn a passing grade in that class, he emailed his advisor for guidance. His advisor never replied to his email; therefore, he discussed the situation with his professor and was advised to drop the course mid-semester to avoid a failing grade.

In addition to misunderstanding the importance of homework, this participant had received no instruction about navigating the university's online website and assumed he would learn on his own through trial and error. He stated, "After I submitted the homework, it told me that it successfully submitted but when I went back to check, it was not there. For some reason, I don't know." He indicated in his interview and reflection responses that the combination of not knowing how to use the university's online website, his lack of understanding the importance of homework, and having late class advisement contributed to him dropping the class. By dropping the course mid-semester, he avoided a failing grade but discovered that he will need to retake it during the following spring semester.

After experiencing the U.S. classroom, participants often experienced frustrations with class content. One participant who took a theater course had stated,

In this class, I have trouble listening professor's small lecture and other student's questions and stuff. Meanwhile, because my lack knowledge of American culture, I don't know which actor or what show they are talking about. I ask my classmates sometime, but there are too much things that I don't know!!! I 'm not doing good on my exam either, I feel really frustrated.

The expectation of participation in the classroom was particularly nerve-wracking. One participant explained that it was uncommon in her home country to require students to give presentations; however, after learning that presentations were a common assignment in the U.S., she expressed, "I haven't give presentation yet. If someday I need to do that, I might feel sooo nervous about it." Another participant stated it clearly as she described her concerns about the U.S. classroom environment,

American students are really passionate to debate with professor. They express their opinion with confidence and it is pretty natural in class. In my home university students are usually shy to talk or the atmosphere of class don't give the students the chance to debate freely. I'm still really shy to, there's no space to take my time, my speaking time. I can catch the timing, but I have no guts to speak. In political science class, I still have a hardship for understanding whole lecture. Furthermore, it usually includes the debate among students or professor. I can't take part in this debate. They speak really fast like ping-pong, ping-pong. I cannot follow their pace of speaking and understanding the lecture. I also worried about the upcoming presentation due to the lack of my English abilities. I already gave a respective presentation, personal, individually. I have more. I don't like it,

I don't like. I really don't like it. In front of international students I like it, but in front of American students I don't like it.

Participants described the group work common within the U.S. classroom and their homework projects. They mentioned that the learning styles were different from what they had expected and were often too shy to contribute in the group setting. One participant stated, "I have worked in groups on a math quiz. I was a little nervous to ask them how to solve problems because others in my groups were keep asking problems they do not know. I did not speak up."

Other participants referenced that student diversity was another common concern in U.S. classrooms. Most of participants came from homogeneous classroom environments and were experiencing a blending of communication styles for their first time. One participant stated, "Biggest cultural difference is just people change. It's really interesting that have people from all over the world. I don't know where they came from but they are different colors and have their own accents. I never get their accent." According to another participant, the diverse U.S. culture impacted her academic success when she stated,

The U.S. consists of a lot of ethnic groups, like Asian, Afrikan [*sic*] American. Therefore, people who live in The U.S. have variety of appearance, such as hair color, eye color, and skin color. They do not care about my skin color and hair color. I feel free in the U.S. Japan has group work but only with Japanese people. Few foreigners. But the United States have a lot of local people come from New York or far from here or like Thailand or Japan. It's different. In Japan, it's only

Japanese people and it's easy for us to participate. But in here, they have accent in English and sometimes it's hard to understand.

**Trial and error: transportation.** Most participants described transportation as one of their greatest post-arrival obstacles; they were unprepared for the mobility challenges of the local U.S. public transportation system. Most participants shared that they came from countries where transportation was easily accessible and convenient. They expressed that before arriving to the U.S, they assumed the U.S. transportation system would be similar to their home country; however, getting around town, particularly for shopping was a challenge. Although fairly common among all participants, one participant summed it up best,

I have a problem about the difference in transportation. America has extended lands, so the most common transportation is cars. Therefore, my activities are quite limited. Even if I really need to buy something from like the store to cook, it's really hard to wait for the bus, take bus, go there, and come back. It will take me one full day to just go shopping. I did not realize that it is such a hard thing to go shopping. I am having troubles to go to buy foods. So my activities are limited because of transportation.

All participants indicated that their limited transportation impacted daily life management including buying weekly groceries, getting to and from school, visiting friends, or having the option to go to restaurants, businesses, or places of interest. Some participants described having to walk long distances from school in freezing temperatures and during midnight hours. One participant shared,

I really despair walking every day for 20 minutes. I am afraid of cold weather. If I don't have class or some appointment, I will not go out at all. One day, I had to walk home at 11 pm. It was the day right after snowing, the snow is really high. It's not easy to forget. Oh it was a tough night.

Transportation challenges placed some students in harm's way. For example, one participant purchased an early morning flight at the nearby airport, and planned on taking the public bus to the airport the evening before her flight and staying up all night in the airport lobby. When asked why she was planning on arriving to the airport so early before her flight, she described that her flight departed before the bus system opened in the morning. She also explained that she thought taxi cabs were closed. Another participant shared about a negative trial and error transportation experience with purchasing a midnight bus ticket at a downtown station in a nearby large metropolitan city. She stated,

The most challenging or difficult experience happened returning back from the big city. Mistakenly, I changed the bus schedule so it was in the midnight, and the bus at midnight is really dangerous. One guy who did marijuana did like kind of sexual harassment to two of us Asian girls. There were only us two girls on the bus. So as the situation became serious. I told the driver and he called the police.

To remedy their dependency on the public transportation systems, many participants inquired about getting a U.S. driver's license. After one participant attempted to get a driver's license at the DMV, she appeared upset as she stated, "I just took writing [driving permit] test today but I failed. Everybody told me it was easy but I

don't think so. I didn't read the whole drivers guide so I need to work on it again. I really need to get it." Many expressed feeling intimidated and afraid of driving in the U.S. because of the differences in street signs and road laws. Most expressed confusion and frustration about which methods were available and most appropriate for them to obtain a license. It was common for participants to describe that they wanted the university to teach them how to drive and how to get a driver's license by providing driving lessons for international students.

**Trial and error: living arrangements.** Perhaps one of the reasons this theme was prominent was because only two participants lived on campus; the remainder lived off campus. During their first month in the U.S, the participants who lived off campus shared many frustrations related to finding housing. This resulted in high levels of stress. Participants described feeling confused and overwhelmed. They used trial and error methods to learn how to navigate the U.S. neighborhoods to find an apartment and often improvised to obtain short term housing. One participant described,

When the semester starts it's very hard to find get an apartment or a living place if you're not apply for the campus living. For like me, I live in downtown hotel for two weeks so it's very important to look for the living place before you arrive. It's very hard to find a place because if you want to find a apartment or place around campus or close by campus, it's very hard."

After settling into a new living arrangement, participants struggled with U.S. cultural norms and life planning skills such as purchasing utilities, cable television, a phone, opening a bank account, getting a post office mailbox, or buying groceries.

Laundry was a mystery for some. One participant indicated that because she was unfamiliar with U.S. laundry products and processes, she had stained all of her clothes after incorrectly washing and drying them. Another participant described how differences in laundry practices kept her from using dryers in the U.S. She stated,

Here most people do laundry- they use a dryer. But in Japan we don't really use dryer unless we need the clothes fast. We wash every day so I came here and was kind of surprised that I need to wash clothes once a week. That way, I need to have a big bag to hold old clothes I use. Since the technology is little different, I thought I should have brought more tools which hang clothes. The one I really like was not sold in the U.S. so I thought I should have brought that tool so I could make my clothes dry faster. And I don't want to use dryers because I'm afraid that my clothes would shrink.

**Trial and error: communication.** Participants expressed in their reflections, interviews, and survey that communication and miscommunication were the primary challenges impacting their transition into the U.S. culture, their academic success, and social relationships. Most participants attended the U.S. university to learn English, western communication styles, and the U.S. culture. Three major communication barriers emerged from participants' responses. The first included that participants expressed feeling too shy or too afraid of making mistakes while interacting with English speaking students. The second was not being able to relate with English speakers because they lacked an understanding of the conversational subjects. Lastly, participants shared not knowing how to initiate friendships with other U.S. students to practice their

English and communication skills. As a result of communication problems, some students gave up trying to interact with U.S. students.

One participant shared late in the semester, “The biggest challenges is communication, we still do not have many American friend, we still do not have many chance to communicate with Americans. Because we are sometimes afraid to talk to them.” Many participants shared feeling too shy or intimidated to communicate with native English speaking students. They expressed fearing that they may make mistakes while speaking. Their reticence extended to their in-class participation during group assignments or classroom discussions and curtailed their communication contributions.

Participants described feeling disconnected to native students and teachers during conversations. Participants more commonly expressed experiencing what they described as awkward silence during their attempts to communicate with natives than experiencing natural, lively conversations with natives. One participant stated, “I think its cultural things impacted too because I don’t know about T.V. or any American culture. So if American people would sit next to me talking about their favorite T.V. or American things, I can’t understand.” Participants often expressed feeling a need to learn about current events and pop-culture in order to relate to English speaking peers, and thus generate more streamlined discussions about common topics for students and teachers.

After many difficult attempts to communicate with other English speaking students, some participants shared that they eventually gave up trying to communicate with local U.S. students. They described feeling too frustrated to continue and that they perceived other students as being uninterested in having conversations with them. One

participant stated, “I found my main problem is communication. I have no idea how to cope with it. I don’t talk that much with Americans.” A different participant’s reflection describes the communication struggle clearly,

One day I spoke to a girl sitting next to me in art class, and we could develop a talk a little at that time. I tried to talk more, but I felt that she did not seem comfortable with talking with me. It should be just my imagination, but I felt that not all Americans like to talk to people who were not good at speaking English. Since I can feel their mind by their faces and gestures, her face, which seemed tired and not motivated to talk to me, made me just shut my mouth up.

Participants expressed that building U.S. relationships was more difficult than they had expected. As indicated in their reflections, interviews, and the student survey, all participants had more international friends than U.S. friends, wanted more U.S. friends, and struggled making U.S. friendships. Their responses suggested that participants believed having U.S. friends would contribute to improved English communication skills. The participants who did have U.S. friendships often described practicing English communication skills more often and believed it contributed to their English speaking and listening skill development.

For example, one participant described feeling afraid to initiate introductions with English speakers but overcame her reticence by intentionally acting more direct and outgoing. She intentionally made new friendships with English speakers to practice her English communication skills. She described that she needed to change her normal

personality from being shy to being direct and believed that by doing so, she was able to cross a cultural gap and connect with the native students.

Although interaction was described as a challenge, participants' responses suggested that campus events, and academic resources helped improve their communication skills by increasing the number of opportunities to practice speaking English, listen to English, learn more about local student behaviors and local customs, and a way to learn about other campus activities. For example, at the beginning of the semester, one participant took the initiative to volunteer as a photographer with the Chinese Student Association. Through the association, he explained learning about an annual campus festival that promoted international culture. He then volunteered to work at the festival's informational booth to share about his home country.

Participants also described that academic resources (e.g. library) increased the number of opportunities for them to practice speaking English, listen to English, learn about U.S. study habits, and observe student behaviors and communication styles. One participant shared that she enjoyed taking classes with American students because the environment provided opportunities to interact with U.S. students and observe their behaviors. She stated, "I can see other American students and how they studying, how they take notes, how they hear the professor, how they communicate with the professor, how they express their opinions."

According to participant narratives, all of the students wanted to make U.S. friends, believed that English speaking friends helped them develop better communication skills, and believed that hanging out with only other international friends

slowed their English development. Over the semester, participants shared that they had little interaction with U.S. English speaking natives. In addition, participants demonstrated less interest in initiating U.S. relationships over time as they became more comfortable and invested within friendships with other international students. Many participants described that they eventually stopped speaking English or engaging in campus events by the end of the semester. One participant who had indicated that her primary motivation to study in the U.S. was to advance her English skills stated,

Just recently, I became familiar with a lot of international and Korean students more and more. For my English, improving English, I think I'm not improve very well. I don't think so. It's quite similar than before. Because I usually hang out with my international friends and their English ability is really similar to me so anyone cannot correct us and we usually talk freely like it doesn't matter if we can't catch the meaning.

Another participant who shared a similar view but practiced English more often, explained having increased English skills. She stated,

Actually, a lot of Chinese students spend a whole year here for English but some of them speak Chinese all the time. So I don't know why they are here. I think it's so weird. It's expensive. And I don't think they learn English at all. They're just wasting time. Some other students I know, they really want to learn English in America, so they try to talk to professor a lot and native Americans a lot and practice their speaking, listening. For me, I just talk and listen to radio and music

and watch movies and talk more. I think that my English is better than it was back in my country.

### **“I Wish I Had Known More”**

This second theme was revealed through participant interviews, reflections, surveys, cultural profiles, and a country culture comparison report. “I Wish I Had Known More” describes participants’ perceptions about their transitional experiences in relationship to what they expressed wishing they had known prior to arriving in the U.S. Participants expressed a relationship between their pre-departure cultural knowledge and their post-arrival transition and adjustment experiences. Unlike the first theme, participant descriptions varied between the Treatment Group and University Group. This theme was revealed in four distinct ways organized in the following sub-themes: preparation, initial transition, academics, and culture. This theme is summarized in the following two participants’ explanations. The first stated, “I think it’s really import to know cultural differences. I think the, knowing culture helps me to understand what I should be in the class, what I have to act or what I have to think about.” The second stated,

Yes, of course international students will do better in school by knowing cultural before they arrive. Because in China, school education we just, we just do works and study just by our own. But in United States, so many good works. We can prepare with other U.S. students and know how to have conversation and communicate and work with them. It’s better for our study.

**I wish I had known more: preparation.** All participants described how they prepared for life in the U.S. culture. Some participants mentioned that they did not prepare at all, as with one who stated, “I prepared nothing. No. I watched movies but not for studying, just for entertainment.” Other participants indicated that they wish they had prepared in different ways. One participant stated wishing to have learned culture and English speaking skills by,

I think, working in Okinoawa, in their air force military base. There are a lot of American people, the U.S. people in Okinoawa. So if I could make a lot of American friends and talked to them. I can prepare speaking skills and listening skills more better than now. I should have worked in the base.

As indicated by participant interviews, reflections, and survey, four main methods were used to gain U.S. cultural knowledge before their study abroad. Methods included listening to friends and family stories, internet searches, watching American movies and television, and using online university provided treatments or materials.

Most participants described that listening to family and friends’ stories about U.S. culture was the most helpful and convenient preparation method used. According to the online survey results, this preparation method was one of the most practiced strategies to learn about U.S. culture before leaving their home country. One participant stated, “Because there are many friends who studied abroad before. So it makes me comfortable to hear their stories.” Participants indicated that the cultural accuracies of their family and friends stories’ varied depending on when and where the stories referenced. A story

preparing the participants about life in New York or Texas was different from the cultural experiences in the participants' U.S. university.

Participants indicated that their internet searches were the least helpful preparation method but they used the internet just as much as listening to stories of family and friends. Searching the internet was described as an unreliable and boring means to learn about U.S. culture. Participants indicated that they were unaware of what to search for to prepare for life in the U.S. They also indicated feeling that the online resources were often selling them products or were unreliable internet sources.

Watching American movies, news, and television was the third most used method to prepare for international relocation and U.S. study. Participants described that this preparation strategy was easy, fun, convenient, and entertaining but were only slightly helpful and often included inaccurate cultural depictions of U.S. culture. One participant stated, "I know about American from internet news and movies, none of my family been to America." Participants referenced that most of the media sources they watched were U.S. reality shows or dramatic fictional Hollywood cinema. Participants shared that the resources helped introduce them to slang phrases but were overly theatrical and not culturally accurate for where their university was located.

Participants indicated that the university's reading materials and treatments were used to prepare but in different capacities. The university's reading materials included a PDF article and the university's website which was available to both University and Treatment Group participants. The university's treatment included the pre-departure cultural treatment which was only available to the Treatment Group.

All participants stated that the university's reading materials were helpful but that they did not use this source much. They indicated that they choose not to read the PDF resource or read the university's website since the activities were boring and optional. They stated that they wished they had read more about the university's and community's culture (e.g. school clubs, housing options, geographic environment, social media, fitness centers, museums, libraries). They also stated that they would have read more if the preparation reading materials were required by the university or were worth academic credit.

As part of this study, Treatment Group participants completed a four week cultural preparation treatment during the pre-departure phase. When asked about the pre-departure cultural preparation treatment, participants explained that it was an important tool for them to prepare for life in the U.S. A participant from China stated,

I think it [pre-departure treatment] is helpful for a lot of international students because we don't have so many chance to know what's different and what's similar about U.S. culture and Chinese culture. This one just tell us what's difference, what we need to prepare, what you will see in U.S. I think it's very helpful. The examples tell you what you need to do in the U.S. culture, what is different, what you need to improve. This one can tell you what to learn how to prepare.

After arrival, the Treatment Group demonstrated in their interviews and reflections an ability to investigate, identify, reflect on, and apply their gained cultural knowledge to bridge cultural gaps. Unlike the University Group, the Treatment Group

described how they could manage cross-cultural conflicts based on what they had learned prior to arriving in the U.S. All participants indicated that cultural knowledge was important and suggested that they wished that they had gained more cultural knowledge before school began. One Treatment Group participant described, “Knowing culture gave me confidence to talk, get involved, and participate.” A University Group participant described, “Knowing culture before coming to U.S. decreases anxiety for adjusting to new country. Just for my culture, I think it’s really mandatory, before.”

Many of the participants mentioned that they would have wanted to have earned college credit for pre-departure cultural studies. They recommended that cultural study include short videos and tutorials about their particular university and community resources, their university’s motto and mascot, the administration and mission of the college, the available majors and general education requirements, teachers’ office hours, classroom sizes, U.S. learning styles, how to buy textbooks, campus clubs, available community resources, and transportation descriptions to help them create better expectations, and thus prepare for the cultural transition.

**I wish I had known more: initial transition.** As indicated through their reflections and interviews, most participants described experiencing difficulties during their travel to and relocation in the U.S. They mentioned feeling stressed, insecure, unprepared, and misguided as they experienced new U.S. cultural activities. After arrival to the U.S., participants discussed that inaccurate pre-departure cultural knowledge had resulted in unrealistic expectations about what they would experience in the U.S. They described that many of their stresses could have been reduced or better managed if their

expectations had been more accurate about U.S. life. Sometimes it was just the little differences that appeared to largely influence participants' stories,

Like I didn't think about how to eat fruit in an American way. In Japan we peel the fruit every time, even the apples or grapes too. I was really shocked when I saw students eat an apple without peeling the skin off. I think culture shock is something that I never think of.

Participants' statements suggested that their limited knowledge about the U.S. environment was a barrier to navigating and adjusting to academic and community systems. One participant described that her first time flying into the U.S. was more challenging than she had expected when she stated, "I flew into Los Angeles. Ya, It's big airport so I can't find departure. So I got lost in airport. Yes, lost my bags. Cause I missed my [connecting] flight. I had to stay in Los Angeles one [extra] night."

Participants often expressed that cultural preparation and cultural knowledge could have helped them transition and adapt faster in the U.S. It appeared that the amount of cultural experience and competence participants had prior to arriving in the U.S. impacted how easily they transitioned into the new culture. They suggested that the more knowledge they had before arriving to the U.S. (i.e. region's geography, weather, transportation system, local customs, traditions, holidays, resources, etc.), the easier they described their transition into the new culture. For instance, one participant stated it clearly,

It's my first time living on my own. I think I'm doing well because I came here before. I already prepare for so many stuff like- I know how to rent a house or

apartment. But for some, a first time they come to here could be difficult. I have a friend, a Chinese girl, her first time here, she said she just stayed in house and didn't go out.

Having attended an international high school in China, one participant had anticipated that his prior experience with multiethnic groups and various accents would help him in the U.S. He stated, "My parents sent me to an international school in Beijing. I don't think there will be much difference in the U.S. since I was in an international school." After he arrived and experienced U.S. classrooms he stated, "It pretty similar to the International School. My English class is like, there's Mexicans, Asians, and stuff. It's pretty much like an International School. The diversity of the students." He explained feeling better prepared for the ethnically mixed classroom because of his prior exposure and experience with heterogeneous environments.

According to participants, the level of their cultural knowledge and previous experience with U.S. cultural systems made them feel more confident while learning English, asking U.S. people for help, or while navigating within the new U.S. systems. For example, one participant shared that it was easier for her to negotiate while buying a car because she had prior knowledge about negotiation practices. She stated, "For me it's (driving) easy. I learned how to drive back in Hawaii and differences in road laws."

One participant stated that her struggles during the initial transition were unnecessary and could have been prevented if she had known more about local accommodations prior to arriving in the U.S. She shared that since she was unfamiliar with local negotiation practices and contract agreements, traditional apartment shopping

practices, and lacked knowledge about the geographic area between available apartments and the university, she had committed to the first apartment offered online. She described regretting her choice because of its long distance from campus and because she did not get along with her roommates. Throughout the semester, she stated that her decision negatively impacted the rest of the semester.

Roommates were a particular challenge. One participant described that her post-arrival experience was different from her pre-departure expectations. She wished she had known more about off-campus living with local U.S. natives and how the relationship would be different from her country's cultural norms. She described her new native U.S. roommates as cold, detached, and uninterested in being her friend. She explained that they were hardly at the apartment and had limited interaction with her when they were. She expressed feeling rejected, isolated, disappointed, and angry. After discovering that her roommates' actions were considered normal behaviors in the U.S. and that other international students had experienced similar cultural interactions, she expressed feeling relieved since she initially took the frustrations personally. She explained she would have chosen to live on-campus or with other international students instead of her current accommodations if she had known more about the cultural differences before moving to the U.S. She expressed that her living conditions negatively impacted her transition into the U.S. and the rest of her first semester.

Those who had roommates described rarely interacting with them. Most participants explained wanting to move as soon as their lease or contract allowed. One female participant who had found her apartment online stated, "I live at a house with one

roommate who is American guy, close to campus. He's old. He's 57. He's busy. I just see him 2 to 3 times a week. He's working at night time. Just roommate, not friend." She eventually moved to a different apartment at the end of the semester.

The participants who described preparing for the U.S. culture had also expressed that they wished they had created more accurate expectations about the specific U.S. city's cultural norms instead of generalizing or assuming what their experiences were going to be like. Many participants attributed their misaligned expectations to inaccuracies in dramatized movies, television, stories, and online resources that they had prepared with. This is demonstrated in one participant's pre-departure and post-arrival reflections comparing her expectations before arriving to the U.S. to her actual experience in the U.S.

*Pre-departure statement:* I know about America from internet news and movies. But movies are more dramatic. Most of families have a big house and more than two kids, more than one car, eat waffle, pancake, bacon and eggs for breakfast. You guys spend most of your time with family members. At Thanks giving and Christmas the whole country was immersed in a festival atmosphere. Some of the kids will be self-centered, not being honest to their friends and partners.

*Post-arrival statement:* But since I just live here for a month, maybe I don't have a precisely experience of American culture, all I have experience is just college life. It's a place where everyone act differently cause they come from different country, which is a diverse place I like. Professors are kind funny, and most of my

classes don't have lecture. We have discussions in groups, do games, watch videos, even Skype while in class time. That's so different from my home country. She later indicated that the news and movies did not provide accurate examples of U.S. cultural norms and college ways of life to build realistic expectations.

**I wish I had known more: academics.** As participants were introduced to the U.S. environment, they referenced how their cultural knowledge impacted their first semester's academics. One Treatment Group participant wrote about how he investigated academic differences between his country's (China) and U.S. classroom cultures. He stated,

I learned online about the U.S. and learned about the U.S. university. In China, the elementary is very difficult. We have so many classes in the elementary school- it's so busy. In the university just everyone have fun and don't study very much. But in the U.S. university is, you need to work hard and graduate. So I search about this so I can prepare. I can prepare, and know how we need to study hard in the U.S. university.

Another participant described her cultural knowledge was inaccurate about the university's classroom environment. Although her high school friends back in Japan had briefly discussed large U.S. university classroom sizes, she was shocked by the size of her first math class having more than two hundred students. She expressed feeling overwhelmed and intimidated in that classroom's climate and wished that a university advisor would have described the classroom culture to her during enrollment. In addition

to her experiencing communication challenges with the teacher and PowerPoint presentations, she explained,

It makes me kind of nervous to speak out. I can't say how many people, but it was really lots of people and it's so big in the big classroom. And the teacher is so small and so far. I can't ask her questions and she can't notice me. I don't have courage to raise my hands in front of so many people in the learning.

After trying to adjust to the large U.S. classroom, she wished she had registered for a smaller class that supported her needs; she eventually dropped the course after three weeks because it was interfering with her academic success. This participant expressed not knowing how to prepare for cultural differences like class size and stated, "I didn't realize that this school has this big class. But it was hard for me to research those things, that information because it's so specific. I can't help it." She expressed feeling like she wasted time and experienced increased academic pressures to catch-up on overdue homework in the new class she transferred to.

Another participant shared about a culturally confusing experience while attempting to use a university computer lab. He explained that he knew computers were available to students but that he was unaware of restricted times during private group reservations. He described feeling embarrassed as he was denied access to a lab and was asked to leave the room because the computer lab was reserved for a private faculty development workshop. He further explained that in his home country, this type of public treatment would have been considered highly insulting and degrading. The participant described leaving the room confused, embarrassed, and upset. He indicated

that he wished he had known more about the university's computer policies and social interactions before attempting to use the computer lab so that he could have avoided the awkward confrontation.

According to the surveys conducted at the end of the fall semester, participant responses indicated that they knew little about campus resources and the university culture. For example, all participants knew about the university's writing center, library, and campus escort/shuttle services but were unaware about the university's free student counseling services or student clubs. Most participants were unaware of the university's free camera and technology equipment rentals for students. Although no participants used the service, half of them were aware of the university's free career/internship counseling service. Overall, participants did not use most of the university's student resources or services. Additionally, survey responses indicated that most participants were unaware about university administration (President, their college Deans) and school mascots.

**I wished I had known more: U.S. culture.** Cultural and cross-cultural issues were common participant topics indicated throughout interviews, reflections, surveys, cultural profiles, and country culture comparison reports. All participants referenced that cultural preparation, or lack thereof, before arriving to the U.S. impacted their academic and non-academic transitions into the new U.S. culture. Some participants (Treatment Group) described preparing for U.S culture more than other participants (University Group), but all indicated that cultural preparation was important for their transition, academics, and non academic needs. Participants indicated that they would have had

better expectations about U.S. campus and community life if they had known more cultural knowledge about the city, college life, and U.S. cultural norms. One participant's statement clearly describes it,

Learning about culture helps international students be better students in the U.S because they can prepare the class to know about this cultural difference and similarities. And they can put together their culture and the U.S. culture. The first time to come to study abroad for international student it necessary to prepare for cultural situation, the cultural understanding before they come to the U.S. I think. Because the first time they come to the U.S, student may have some anxiety. So, ya to remove this anxiety, it is necessary to prepare I think.

Three cultural categories (interaction styles, thinking styles, and sense of self styles) described the impact of culture on participants' transitions and academic success as indicated from participant interviews, reflections, cultural profiles, and the country comparison reports. Participants' cultural profiles and country culture comparison reports illustrated that the largest cultural gap between U.S. cultural preferences and participants' cultural preferences was in interaction style, followed by the sense of self cultural preference, and then thinking styles respectively.

***Interaction style.*** Indicated through participant reflections and cultural profiles, participants' interaction styles described how they preferred to communicate and engage with others (e.g., students, teachers, roommates, community members, home country friends and family). As indicated by the cultural profile and country culture comparison reports, interaction style was the most conflicting cultural preference between U.S.

culture and participants' culture. Out of six cultural continua (Fluid/Fixed, Being/Doing, Indirect/Direct, Expressive/Instrumental, Formal/Informal, Particularistic/Universal) that were measured by the *Cultural Orientations Indicator*<sup>TM</sup> assessment, the greatest difference between the U.S. and the international students' cultural preferences were found between Being (relationship and reflection oriented) and Doing (task, action, and accomplishment oriented); Indirect (implicit communication) and Direct (explicit, one or two-way communication); and Particularistic (emphasizes uniqueness and exceptions) and Universal (emphasizes uniformity of rules and procedures). The least cultural gap was found between Formal (adheres to protocol and customs) and Informal (dispenses with protocol and customs).

Participants' reflections and interview responses suggested they had interaction concerns and insecurities about cultural disparities. In their discussions about interaction, socializing, and communication expectations during study abroad, one participant stated,

Knowing interaction style will help because [I] want to know the difference between [me] and American students. Because in American class it's very different from Chinese class. [I] get prepared and know how to do.

Before arriving to the U.S, a Treatment Group participant wrote how she planned to address likely interaction challenges in academic settings when she stated,

I think the following situations might happen when I study at U.S. If I do college assignment as part of a team with other students, I will try contacting every my team members and building a good relationship with them. However, the U.S students tends to be more result-oriented so they will try doing task fast and

creating a good result assignment. If I face this situation, I have to understand the U.S students' behavior pattern and keep taking my time without confusing.

Participants expressed that having cultural knowledge about interaction styles would help them build better expectations for U.S. life and studies and prepare accordingly. One participant expected she would be challenged by the large cultural differences. "It's not easy to change interaction style. Chinese class is serious and lack of passion and creativity compare to U.S class. All the kids do were listen and do some maths problem." Another participant, while in China, anticipated interaction challenges that he would face in the U.S. and provided a hypothetical example. He stated,

I think there will be some interaction challenges. For example, I might live with a US roommate, he might have some habits that I do not like. I should just talk to him directly, but in our culture we do not tell the person that I don't like your way directly. We might choose just stand that way or tell him by other indirect way. If he could not get my indirect communicate ways, he won't change.

To manage interaction cultural differences, one Treatment Group participant described how he would address the conflicting interaction styles:

To meet U.S. students and teachers, first I need communicate with US classmate and teachers, talk with them, discuss with them, learn their cultures. Second, I should let them know our culture, introduce the way how I do things. Learn from each other, then we can have better communication together. I think there will be many ways are different with our tradition cultures. US has more flexibility

preferences. Americans are more flexible than us, they do not follow the rules and orders all the time. They can be more creative than us.

As another participant prepared for international travel to the U.S, she indicated in her reflections that cultural knowledge helped her better understand herself. She demonstrated this in the following statement,

After reading this result, I realized that I usually work very hard when I am in very competitive environment. I think it [learning U.S. culture] helps me to realize what I have to behave when I am faced in some problems among my human relationship.

After this participant arrived to the U.S, she indicated that her pre-departure cultural knowledge was important for her transition by avoiding unnecessary cultural conflicts. She stated, “I realized the difference between Japanese and U.S. student, the American student. So, it helpful to understand each other without conflicting.”

After arrival, another participant stated that acting more direct was sometimes needed in the U.S. culture. She stated, “But if someone does not respect you and does something that really irritated [*sic*] you, then you should do something to show your power.”

Although the Treatment Group expressed that they gained cultural knowledge about interaction style differences and coping strategies to bridge cultural gaps, they also indicated needing practice applying their new knowledge after arriving in the U.S. One participant explained that he was aware of U.S. interaction styles, but would often choose not to make eye contact or speak directly to U.S. natives. Although he described feeling

more confident to engage with native students because of what he had learned, he still was too shy to fully adopt and immediately practice the new interaction behaviors. He stated,

Ya the cultural study helped. Like, well, I gained something by learning about a bit of difference. And here, I know it, but I still didn't act like it yet. I'm still kinda shy to talk to U.S. students, like most of the U.S. students. I'm still kinda shy. Which the culture profile says like feel free to talk as always. I'm still on my way to practice it. Ya, I have more confidence because of this information.

**Thinking style.** Participants' thinking styles described how they tended to process information at school and off-campus settings in their participant reflections, interviews, cultural profiles, and country cultural comparison reports. Although participants' cultural profiles and country culture comparison reports illustrated that thinking styles had the least cultural gaps between their cultural preferences and the U.S. compared to interaction styles and sense of self styles, most participants differed in two cultural dimension continua: Single-Focus (time and schedule commitment) and Multi-Focus (multiple task focused and relationship focused over schedules) as well as Future (long-term projections and vision focused) and Past (historical focused and value on continuance of traditions). Their reflections and interview statements suggested that their thinking style differences impacted their academic success.

Many participants mentioned that learning about thinking styles and how the two countries' cultural preferences differed before arriving to the U.S., had helped them prepare for study abroad. They indicated that self-reflection and cultural knowledge

helped them identify strategies to cope with cultural disparities in both academic and nonacademic situations. One participant anticipated thinking style challenges in the U.S. university environment. He stated,

I think there will be some challenges in US classroom, the student can think freely, they discuss more, they like share their thoughts with other students. But in our (Chinese) classroom we just set down and listen to teachers most time, student like thinking by himself, do not want share thought with others.

Another participant anticipated thinking style differences when he stated, “Well, I think the main difference between U.S. classroom and my traditional classroom is about multi and singular tasking.” This participant’s home country’s cultural norm was to practice multi-focusing, high-context thinking styles including various meaning and tasks simultaneously. He recognized that the U.S. student thinking style and learning styles would be more direct, low-context, and single-focused tasks carried out in sequenced order. Another participant had explained, “I’m going to find a better way to take notes and trying to think critically, ask more questions instead of sitting and listening. As to listening and speaking, think I will be better after I working on it really hard.”

Another participant, from a homogeneous country culture, reflected on her thinking styles and how her preferences had developed. She suggested her home country’s cultural norms helped shape her thinking styles. She later compared those styles to U.S. thinking style preferences to identify differences and similarities. She stated,

Japan is an island country. Japan is not a multiracial country so it is difficult for Japanese to have opportunity to be exposed to international communication. As Japanese students usually communicate with people who have the same common sense or concept of value, they tend to be similar thinking styles. Actually, I am also one of them. For this reason, I think my thinking style has established because of the specific Japanese environment.

After arriving to the U.S., one participant indicated that his pre-departure cultural knowledge about thinking styles was a helpful way to prepare for study abroad. He described how learning about the differences between China and U.S. cultural norms was helpful when he stated,

Well, the online preparation has pointed out my difference in culture and what people in the U.S. do. Like, it also tells me the basic difference between me and U.S. students. The lifestyle, thinking style and stuff. How they deal with stuff and what they think when they deal with it.

It was recommended by one participant that international students should practice U.S. cultural behaviors and thinking styles to help their adjustment and transition into the new academic setting. She mentioned that by changing how they traditionally processed their academic information, they could better prepare for the cultural differences and succeed in the U.S. classroom.

Treatment Group participants were able to identify their thinking style and how it compared with U.S. thinking styles and then plan to adjust accordingly when needed. For example, one participant mentioned that the U.S. students in his class's group project

thought in a linear, single-focus fashion and that the thinking styles were different from the way he studied and carried out assignments in China. Instead of resisting the differences, he was able to relax and adjust to the group's thinking style once he decided to become more patient with the other student group members. He stated and pre-departure cultural treatment had taught him about what to expect and how to adjust in the U.S. classroom. Compared to University Group participants, Treatment Group participants like this one were able to identify the thinking style gaps between the two cultures and then strategically manage the differences.

All of the Treatment Group participants indicated that the pre-departure cultural treatment helped them better understand their own thinking styles, how the styles developed from their background and home country influences, and how it could impact their study and processing information with other students, teachers, and roommates in the U.S. Treatment Group's participants expressed having more confidence to engage in U.S. classrooms, in group dynamics, and apply their new cultural knowledge to bridge crossing-cultural thinking style gaps.

The Treatment Group demonstrated their thinking styles differently than the University Group; they described how they intentionally practiced processing and analyzing data through U.S. thinking styles commonly found within U.S. classrooms and student behaviors. One common thinking style that the Treatment Group described practicing was to think about homework and class assignments more directly and organized as a single task to achieve one task at a time to produce fast linear results instead of multitasking and covering multiple tasks simultaneously. Another thinking

style difference demonstrated by the Treatment Group that was not apparent in the University Group included their ability to practice creating distinct visions of future results using multiple, creative methods of solving problems instead of only using traditional methods that they had used before.

The University Group, who received no cultural preparation treatment before arriving in the U.S., were able to identify their own thinking style preferences and their frustrations in the U.S. classroom but rarely mentioned how their thinking styles differed from the U.S. culture or how they could remedy the cultural conflicts. These participants demonstrated more passive approaches when thinking styles impacted study skills or group work. For example, one University Group participant mentioned that she disliked group work because one of her group members was lazy. As she described him, the U.S. student's learning style was very different from her own. She began to interpret his actions as a personal reflection on his character and work ethic. She chose to remain passive and quiet until the group project was complete.

*Sense of self.* Participants referenced their sense of self cultural preferences by addressing how they tended to view their identity and motivation in school and off-campus situations. According to cultural profiles and country cultural comparison reports, sense of self cultural preference gaps was second to the number of interaction preference gaps. The reports indicated that participants mostly differed in the Public (prefer close proximity in physical space with permeable boundaries) and Private (prefer more distance between individual physical space with clear boundaries); Equality (prefer minimal levels of power) and Hierarchy (prefer structured power differences);

Individualistic (independence) and Collectivistic (social affiliation and dependence); and Competitive (achievement and assertiveness focused) and Cooperative (relationship and interdependence focused) cultural continua.

Through their reflections and interviews, participants described their role and identity as students. They used the assessment to reflect on their cultural styles as indicated in one participant's statement, "After reading this result, I realized that I usually work very hard when I am in very competitive environment. Therefore, I agree with this description." Participants often referenced how their role and identity compared to U.S. students. Participants described perceiving U.S. students as active members in a team-like classroom setting who contributed personal experience, opinions, and knowledge creating social learning environments.

One participant perceived U.S. students as having an important role in the classroom to make learning more personal. This participant described that U.S. students acted with authority and demonstrated leadership skills in partnership with professors. He commented about how U.S. students communicated to their professors and how it compared to his country's cultural norms, "In U.S. people could talk back to boss or teachers, but in China, boss and teachers should always be right, and none of students or staffs should ever talk back to them." He mentioned that the difference between his cultural hierarchical power distance and U.S. equal power relationships was a challenging adjustment in the classroom.

Another participant compared her sense of self cultural style to the U.S. style as she described how U.S. students acted at school, "I think most of the students are

‘public’. Some of them intend to have strong connection with others.” She used the descriptions in the cultural profile of U.S. sense of self preferences to describe common U.S. student norms. She perceived them as students who preferred to study independently in collaborative settings. She described feeling a need to observe and understand the actions of U.S. students carefully to successfully navigate within their culture.

While in Japan, one Treatment Group participant anticipated differences in U.S. classrooms, their assignments, and learning styles. She discussed having concerns about the academic workload and learning styles. Additionally, she provided a hypothetical example of how she perceived U.S. student motivation and how she would need to adjust in the U.S. culture. She stated,

I think that the way to do some college assignment is different from my country student. Most of Japanese students share the college assignment equally. On the other hands, student of the United States tend to do college assignment individually their own. It is difficult for me to do some college assignments individually my own, so I want to make a study group with the students, especially international students and help each other as much as I can. I think the U.S classroom gives students a lot of college assignments than Japanese classroom. Actually, I rarely have gotten some college assignments for 4 years. Therefore, I really worry about whether I can do these assignments and follow all my classes.

Participants who received the pre-departure treatment expressed in their early written reflections about how they viewed their identity, role, and motivation as students and how that would change in the U.S. classroom, potential cultural challenges that they might experience in the U.S. regarding how they wanted to be perceived by others, and provided examples of coping or management strategies to deal with the sense of self style challenges.

Many of these participants described their sense of self styles were very different to U.S. styles. Unlike the participants who did not receive the pre-departure cultural treatment, the Treatment Group described how cross-cultural differences could create miscommunication in classroom or dormitory situations that might limit their studious potential. For example, one participant explained that U.S. students were more creative in their approach to solving homework problems and that he often operated with more restraint to perform within pre-established boundaries or classroom limitations. He mentioned that the uncertainty and unpredictability was uncomfortable to him but because he had learned about the cultural differences, kept an open mind to entertain and adjust to the new learning style.

All participants acknowledged and experienced difficulty with U.S. classrooms, student expectations, class discussions, student/teacher hierarchy levels, and group projects but the Treatment Group were the only participants who explained in the interviews and reflections why their frustrations were occurring in various learning environments and referenced methods to bridge the cultural differences before they impacted their academics further. For example, one Treatment Group participant

mentioned that she was still adjusting to the differences in sense of self styles during the first couple weeks of school but she had learned about from her pre-departure cultural preparation treatment to be patient with others' behaviors and not take their actions personally. She explained that U.S. students self-identified as independent individuals in their working environments while she self-identified as one interconnected student of an interdependent class group. As she struggled with the cultural differences, she expressed being able to reflect on her gained cultural knowledge and apply it to her academic motivations.

Many participants stated that the U.S. student and teacher relationships were unusually casual compared to their home country's classroom. Unlike University Group participants, the Treatment Group participants identified the major cultural difference being a more equalized hierarchical power distance which helps learners to contribute to the collective knowledge in the course. For example, one Treatment group participant mentioned that the two-way dialog between students and teachers had initially made him uncomfortable and that he thought the learning environment was disrespectful to the teacher. He also described that his pre-departure treatment taught him that the United States permits greater latitude to share in discussions and even challenge those with more power structure. He mentioned that he could cope with the cultural conflict by getting to know the teacher during office hours, introduced himself, and practice calling the teacher by her first name (which she had asked the class to do). He explained that even though he felt uncomfortable, the pre-departure cultural treatment had suggested that this socially

equal relationship was common in the U.S. After a little practice, he described feeling more comfortable and increased engagement with the teacher in class discussions.

All of the Treatment Group participants indicated that the pre-departure cultural treatment helped them better understand their own sense of self styles, how the styles developed from their background and home country influences, and how it could impact their study and processing information with other students, teachers, and roommates in the U.S. This group expressed having better expectations of U.S. classroom dynamics and U.S. student motivations/roles in the class, and the theoretical cultural knowledge to bridge sense of self cultural gaps.

#### **“Thank Goodness I had Friends to Help”**

This final theme was revealed from participant interviews, reflections, and survey resources. All of this study’s participants shared that friends played important roles during their transition into the U.S. culture, in their academic success, and in their daily life. From pre-departure preparation through the end of the fall semester, they indicated that their friends provided academic support (i.e. study partners), clarified cultural differences, introduced campus and community resources, and provided coping outlets for stress management and social anxiety. With the help of friends, participants learned how to navigate the academic system, the public transportation system, and culturally specific differences through storytelling, observation, and group experiences. This theme describes what friendships taught participants, how new international friends supported their transition, and how new U.S. friends uniquely impacted adjustment.

Throughout participants' narratives, friendships and social relationships were described as resources to learn U.S. cultural knowledge resources. After arrival, participants described that their new friends provided language and academic support, encouraged extracurricular engagement, opportunities to explore the community's local landmarks and neighboring cities, and provided means to cope with stress management. One participant stated,

Once I became friends with more people, adjustment became easier because I could ask anything. I could ask about class things but also culture things. Because of the increases in activities, I didn't feel anxiety or fear in the class. Due to my friends, they helped me to be more socialable [*sic*].

Participants' statements suggested that friends helped support their transition into the new U.S. learning environment by introducing them to new study skills, providing opportunities to practice English, teaching them about campus resources, the community, and local transportation systems. New friends were described as the immediate and primary resource for advisement about housing, academic scheduling, shopping, banking, and how to get a drivers' license. Many participants also described that their new friends acted as travel companions to explore local landmarks and tourist destinations. One participant shared, "We went to Lake Tahoe, downtown, on Halloween we went to club just with overage students, and for Thanksgiving I went to San Francisco with my friends." Although new friends were few, participants felt relieved to have had friends who taught them about local bus systems, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and how to drive a car. One participant stated, "At very first I ride bikes travel around the city and

shopping, sometimes I will take bus to shopping, now I made some friends, they have cars, so I just ask them take me to shopping.”

As long as participants perceived a new friend, classmate, or teacher as supportive, patient, and understanding about their needs, participants appeared to eagerly try harder in their studies. Participants shared that their new friend’s patience and support was important to their confidence in the new U.S. culture and that friends increased confidence levels to practice the English language. One participant stated,

I had a tea with one friend I met the other day. I did not know him well, but he listened to me carefully despite the fact that I did not speak English with correct grammar. This is actually important to me, because I would feel like I should not talk anymore if he did not listen to me carefully nor did not pay attention to me.

Another participant shared, “I’m doing a group work for presentation, group presentation for Dance History class. But they [group members] are nice and they understand my feeling so that my English is not good. So it’s easy because they understand my feeling.”

An encouraging U.S. instructor was described as a helpful relationship when a participant stated, “The teacher is so kind that I am feeling a strong support from him. This is giving me some guidance to catch up lectures in his class.”

Contrary to supportive relationships, when participants perceived students or faculty as being unsupportive, participants felt upset, and thus their studies were impacted. A participant appeared frustrated and angry when she stated, “Ya, to student to student, a lot of student don’t understand my feelings.” Another participant was discouraged to attend class and stated,

I have a complaint about my English teacher. So that's why I don't like English class now. I hate it. And some professor, they don't think about international student. So I want them to know my feeling, that we are international and that English is not my first language.

Beyond academics and transportation, friends provided participants with confidence, emotional support, and stress management. For instance, one participant mentioned that the absence of friends reminded her of how important relationships were to her when she stated, "Living by myself always causes me loneliness feelings. However, by living alone, it gives me a notice of the importance of people around me such as friends." Another participant mentioned, "I think communication with a lot of people is the solution to deal with culture shock. Communicate. Making a lot of friends." As one participant struggled to adjust to the new culture, she relied upon friends to help her cope with loneliness and anger management. She stated,

I have a lot of time for myself. And sometimes it could be lonely sometimes. There's one specific time, I am [was] so upset, I don't know why. I don't what to study, I don't want to do anything. I got better, maybe by talk with my friend here and be around with people and I will not even think about it. It makes me feel better to share my feelings.

When participants mentioned missing their home (i.e. friends, family, food, places, events, traditions, etc.), they often described that their friends and family helped them cope. By listening to stories, participants described having nostalgic feelings and relief from homesickness. One participant explained,

Homesickness is, for me, not only for think about family, but also my culture: so food, transportation, nature, places I went, something miss. Something that is not in the U.S. culture. One way to cope is talking to family or talking to friends by Skype. My friends in Japan, I can ask what they are doing right now so I can feel the same feeling again.

Many participants described that when they felt isolated, lonely, sad, powerless, or bored, they would experience feeling homesick more than when their attentions were distracted and they were engaged with projects, conversations, or activities. One student described that he missed home the most during the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday weekend after the university's campus and restaurants closed and most students left town. He was unaware of the campus practices during the holiday season and discovered he was alone over the break. This participant appeared very sad as he told his story about feeling lonely in the dorm but explained that talking with family helped him cope with loneliness and homesickness.

Most participants contacted their home country friends and family several times a week. One participant stated, "When you are under stress, take a break from something you enjoy, keep touch with your family and friends, let them provide support, guidance and love."

**My new international friends.** As indicated in the interviews and reflections, all participants shared that the majority of their new friends were primarily other international students studying at the university. These relationships were considered very important to the participants and provided unique support compared to new U.S.

friendships. Other international friends could relate with the cross-cultural stressors that participants experienced and provided support during the challenges. One participant shared that his new international friends provided guidance and recommendations for him to have an easier transition into the U.S. culture. He found them so helpful that he suggested, “And after they [future international students] come to the U.S. they need to ask some friends. Like cause I’m Chinese, I can ask Chinese friends who came here before and learn their experience and so we can know.”

New international friends often provided extracurricular opportunities for participants to exercise, socialize, and study. One participant stated, “Like sports, so we can play sports with other international students. Like Chinese students, last two months we have soccer, play soccer every two weeks. Sometimes we made some Japanese students who play together.” Other participants described learning about campus resources and exploring off-campus events through their international friends. One participant described, “Most of my friends are international students, we have same class, we throw parties, have dinners on Sunday, went to balloon race, football game and hang out at weekend. They are from Japan, Korean, China, Phillipino, [*sic*] etc.”

The new international friends were described to have provided a type of support that U.S. students could not offer. One participant mentioned, “I think becoming friends with international students are important to live in the U.S. because they are in similar situation, so they can understand what I feel.” Another participant shared, “I have international friends who share the same difficulties as me, which gives me much sense of security rather than talking with natives nervously.”

Participants often suggested that their new international friends provided a relatable connection to their home country culture that helped create a stable support system in the new U.S. environment. Throughout the semester, participants explained that their new international friends clarified U.S. cultural uncertainties while exchanging personal stories about U.S. experiences. Participants shared that their new international friends helped alleviate frustrations regarding cultural miscommunications by verifying if situations or interactions were common or unusual in the U.S. culture. One participant said, “I live with 3 American roommates. We barely talk. Some international students told me about this situation too. Their roommates had bad attitude, they just treat them as someone who share a room with them only.” She felt comforted through her new international friends’ stories about common U.S. roommate behavior.

Participants often expressed feeling supported and encouraged when their new international friends shared common cultural struggles with the local customs and behaviors. One participant shared having only one new friend, an international friend, but because of the connection that relationship provided, she felt supported. Many participants also shared that their new international friends understood their unique situations in the U.S. culture and shared similar feelings during their transition.

Participants expressed in interviews that although their new international friendships were helpful, having mostly international friendships had unintended, counterproductive impacts on their transition and academic success. Many participants said that by hanging out with only home country or international friends, they missed opportunities to learn about the local culture and English skills through U.S.

relationships. For example, one participant mentioned that her main purpose to study in the U.S. was to develop her English skills but felt that she was unsuccessful since she rarely practiced speaking English with native speakers. She stated,

Maybe for English, improving English, I think I'm not improve very well. I don't think so. It's quite similar. Because I usually hang out with my international friends and their English ability is really similar to me so anyone cannot correct us and we usually talk freely like it doesn't matter if we can't catch the meaning.

Another participant described that her new international students were at the university to study English but their skills were not progressing. She also reasoned it was because they primarily hung out with international students and only spoke their native language. Another participant shared that she mainly spoke with home country students and hardly practiced English skills. She stated, "I mean, now I tend to speak Japanese more because roomies, the kitchen sharing people are also Japanese." Some participants shared that they only practiced English skills with their new international friends. One stated, "I talked to my friend to practice English. My friend is International student."

One challenge of having mostly international friends was noted that participants lacked having opportunities to socialize with English speakers, learn western communication skills, and develop their cultural knowledge about the community. They described missing out on local customs, traditions, and events due to being isolated within their international networks. One participant shared, "Ya but we [other Korean friends] are not going outside. We just talk or chill out, hang out."

Furthermore, participants explained that new international friends would often inaccurately define, describe, or advise them about local people, resources, processes, or places as in the case with one participant who was told by her international friends that taxicab rides were too expensive in the U.S. Instead of seeking more knowledge and validating the claim, she chose to not use taxicabs all semester and only depended on public buses. She stated, “I never call a taxicab, I know the number 555-333-3333, so easy. But I heard it's expensive so I never try it.” Another participant described how she was misguided by an international friend to contact a university staff member about transferring to a community college. The participant was confused and frustrated as to why the university staff member could not help before realizing that the staff member only shared a similar first name with the actual person responsible for school transfers in a different department.

Another participant described feeling frustrated, disappointed, and misguided after underestimating a local driver’s license test. She mentioned, “I just took [DMV] writing test today but I failed. Everybody told me it was easy but I don’t think so. I didn’t read the whole drivers guide so I need to work on it again. I really need to get it.” One participant explained that an international friend told him that all U.S. university food sources were managed by a nationalized welfare program. He stated, “I was told that the U.S. government supports all the university with the food and stuff. That’s what I heard.”

In one case, a participant described that his international friend’s recommendation was the reason why he mistakenly attended the University. He explained that he took his international friend’s advice and applied but after registration, discovered the

recommendation was intended to suggest a different university in the same state. Since he had already completed his application requirements, he continued enrolling in the unintended university.

Although most of their friendships were other international students, participants wanted both, international and U.S. friendships. One participant explained,

I think that both of them having international friends and U.S. friends are important. Ya. Balance. We are learning English so it's important for us to hang out with native speakers, and sometimes it's important for Japanese people to hang out with Japanese people. Because we can share Japanese food, or Japanese culture, or sometimes we complain about American culture.

As indicated from reflections, interviews, and survey responses, all participants shared wanting to and planning on making new U.S. friends. Most participants explained being unaware of how to initiate conversations with U.S. natives, what to talk about with the American students, and struggled overcoming their own cultural barriers (i.e. shyness) keeping them from interacting with U.S. strangers. One stated,

Is it still a kind of change for us [international students]. Because we are sometimes afraid to talk to them [U.S. natives]. We are afraid we will make a mistake. We are shy about a lot of stuff. Like for international students, for Chinese, many Chinese, it's hard for us to make some American friends. Many times, we, Chinese students just hang out with Chinese students cause we cannot make so many American friends. For instance, at parties, making friends is a big

challenge... But the international Chinese students, they are not that open to going to talk to American students. We're embarrassed.

**My new U.S. friends.** According to interviews and survey responses, participants had very few U.S. friendships, if any at all. Participants indicated that U.S. relationships provided many cultural and academic benefits that their new international friends could not. Participants explained that U.S. relationships provided an ethnographic guide to local resources, behaviors, language development and communication skills, networking opportunities, and academic strategies. One participant stated, "So, I think, that I really need to make American people so that I can understand the culture better. I can ask them and they can answer, and they can also take me to some nice places they like." Another participant explained "I need to make American friends and communicate with them, learning their styles, then I can fit into their classroom and learning environments."

According to their interviews and reflections, participants believed that U.S. friends provided localized cultural knowledge about English speaking styles, slang phrases, listening skills, and study strategies. One participant stated, "I was most worried about those slangs words. A lot of slangs, some jokes I can't get, its big problem. I think the only way is talk more with locals." Another participant shared, "Local English is more helpful than just learning English from textbook."

Participants described that they could learn about events, traditions, or local behaviors from native friends. Participants shared that merely observing local student behavior during routine, daily activities had helped them learn how to navigate in the new

culture. For example, one participant explained that her U.S. friend taught her how to pump gas by watching her fill up at a gas station and another participant had opened a local banking account while going with a U.S. friend to deposit a check. Another participant explained that he learned where to get a haircut from his U.S. roommates, and while doing so discovered a popular annual city event.

New U.S. friends often helped answer cultural questions or clarified cultural confusions. One participant described how she originally assumed that the new U.S. city was regularly smoky and overcast since it was cloudy the day she arrived. A U.S. person clarified that the unusual air condition was caused by a neighboring mountain fire and the participant stated, “But there’s a forest fire. Some American friend said she was so embarrassed for the color of the sky and the air. It’s not normal.” She later described experiencing her first earthquake. Since she observed the local U.S. people were not panicked during the earthquake, she too did not panic.

Many participants perceived American students as friends who could help with their adjustment into the university life and culture. One stated, “To learn culture and prepare, I think we have to talk with native. Ya, I think knowing culture makes transition faster and helps students do better.” In addition one participant stated, “Deal with culture shock by spending time with native speakers.” While describing how U.S. friends could help international students cope cross-cultural adaptation.

According to the survey results, participants believed that one of their greatest challenges was making U.S. friendships during study abroad. Participant interviews indicated that the reason why the majority of their new friendships were other

international students was because it was too difficult making U.S. friendships and eventually stopped trying. Most participants explained that they did not study or spend time with U.S. students. All participants explained wanting more U.S. friendships and opportunities to make U.S. friends.

Many participants shared feeling intimidated to approach strangers in the U.S. and were unsure how to initiate U.S. relationships. One stated, “I want to get opportunity to make friends but I don’t know how to so I need like, not party but opportunity.” Another participant stated,

“As to friends, I still have trouble talk to Americans sometimes, but I 'm always try to communicate with them. I don’t know how to make U.S. friends. I’ve never think of it. Just, be honest...I don’t know. I really don’t. I want to join club. Yes, clubs. I don’t know how to find them.”

Beyond introductions, some participants perceived U.S. students and local people as unapproachable or uninterested in becoming friends with them. One participant explained, “Ya I am concerned about making U.S. friends. Sometimes nervous. It depends on the people. Some people are nice but sometimes people are sometimes mean.” Another participant explained,

I don’t talk that much with Americans. Some of them I think they just ignore Asians sometimes. I have this feeling. Too busy and want to stay with themselves. Yeah. Sometimes it’s kind of sad. Ya. I tried talking to them.

Participants described that making U.S. friends was more difficult than making international friends. They most often described that the major barriers keeping them

from making U.S. friends were a lack of local U.S. cultural knowledge, their level of English and communication skills, being aware of opportunities to meet U.S. people, and overcoming innate cultural behaviors like shyness. Many participants contributed their lack of U.S. relationships to their living arrangement choice. They expressed that by living alone or living with only international students, they had missed socialization opportunities with U.S. roommates. One participant shared, “I regret that I lost a lot of opportunities of building community of native people by not choosing dormitory. I could have made more friends and could make a little bit community.”

All participants stated that they had wanted more U.S. friendships and believed that one way to make them was by joining campus clubs. One participant mentioned while in her home country, “The way I am thinking of making friends is to join some club activities or volunteer activities. Joining such activities helps me to make some friends and build a good relationship with not only U.S students but also U.S teachers.” Another participant mentioned that joining clubs was worth the social benefits even if she was not interested in the club topic. She stated, “I think clubs help make friends. So I’m going to participate in some clubs.”

After the semester was over, one participant who had earlier explained, “I can get to know U.S. students here by playing games together, computer games and get to know each other by that. The meeting is every Thursday at the library at 1 pm”, had later stated, “I never actually attended the meeting or event. No. I’m kind of lazy.” By the end of the first semester, not one participant had joined a student club or organization other than clubs specific to their home country.

**Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the study's findings as they were revealed in three themes. It includes I'm on My Own in a Foreign Land, I Wished I Had Known More, and Thank Goodness I had Friends. In Chapter V, the research questions are answered and implications for future practice and recommendations for future research are provided.

## **Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions**

This chapter provides a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusions. The summary of the study is provided before the discussion of the findings answer each of the study's six research questions. The discussion will address the meaning of themes presented in Chapter IV in its relation to current literature. The next sections include implications for practice and recommendations for future research. This chapter finishes with conclusions.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-departure and post-arrival cultural knowledge, transition, and adjustment of eight Eastern Asian undergraduate international students who completed two different cultural treatments. Perceptions of cultural knowledge, factors contributing to cultural knowledge, and differences in three cultural styles (interaction, thinking, and sense of self) were also investigated between participants who received one of two cultural treatments. Four sources of data were used: *Cultural Orientations Indicator*®, seven participant reflections, three in-person interviews, and a survey.

First-person narratives were collected through interviews, written journal reflections, cultural profiles, a survey, and a country cultural comparison report to address the research questions: how participants perceived their cultural knowledge; what factors contributed to differences in their perceived cultural knowledge; the differences in interaction, thinking, and sense of self cultural styles respectively; and what were the

overall experiences before and during their first fall semester. The Eastern Asian participants (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean) were undergraduate international students at a western U.S. research university who were given one of two cultural treatments (i.e. Pre-departure cultural treatment; University standard reading material). Three themes emerged from the data: *I'm on My Own in a Foreign Land*, *I Wish I had Known More*, and *Thank Goodness I had Friends to Help*.

**I'm on my own in a foreign land.** This theme depicted participants' initial transitions into a western U.S culture as they attempted to balance academic, social, and life planning responsibilities. Almost all participants were living independently for their first time. Although excited, these English second language learners experienced high levels of stress during their transition compounded by cultural and academic pressures. They struggled to make sense of local customs, interaction styles, communication styles, transportation systems, and foreign foods while preparing for class and finding new accommodations. Students experienced anxiety, exhaustion, fear, powerlessness, intimidation, and felt overwhelmed during their initial transition. Participants also expressed feeling insecure, shy, awkward, intimidated, angry, frustrated, confused, and even afraid in the classroom, during campus events, and off-campus in neighboring communities as they experienced unforeseen cultural differences with roommates, students, teachers, and community residents.

**I wished I knew more.** This theme described participants' perceptions about their transitional experiences in relationship to what they expressed wishing they had known prior to arriving in the U.S. Findings indicated a relationship between pre-

departure cultural knowledge and post-arrival transition and adjustment. After arrival, all students discovered cross-cultural barriers to their academic, social, and daily life management skills that they perceived being a result of their cultural incompetence.

After experiencing their new U.S. environment, all participants suggested that more cross-cultural education prior to arriving in the U.S. would have helped them become better students by helping them adjust faster to the local culture, thus better navigating the campus and community systems. Although participants wished they had learned more cultural knowledge before arriving to the U.S., many indicated that they did not know how to effectively study U.S. culture. They indicated that if the university had required an online pre-departure cultural bridge course, especially if offered for college credit, they would have eagerly enrolled to have become better prepared.

Participants who received the four-week pre-departure cultural preparation treatment appeared to gain cultural knowledge that aided in their transition and adjustment. These students demonstrated an increased awareness and sensitivity to their own cultural styles (interaction styles, thinking styles, and sense of self styles) and how those styles compared to U.S. cultural styles. Before this group arrived to the U.S., they studied possible cultural incompatibilities creating cultural barriers before identifying coping and management strategies. This study's findings indicated that these students consciously and intentionally applied their new cultural knowledge to bridge cultural gaps with U.S. natives in classes, on campus, at their apartments, and throughout the city. The treatment was perceived to have increased their ability to navigate the new U.S. culture with increased confidence while speaking to U.S. natives.

**Thank goodness I had friends to help.** This final theme described how friendships aided their post-arrival adjustment. From pre-departure preparation through the end of the fall semester, this study's international students indicated that their friends provided academic support (i.e. study partners), clarified cultural differences, introduced campus and community resources, and provided coping outlets for stress management and social anxiety. Participants learned how to navigate the academic system, the public transportation system, and culturally specific differences through storytelling, observation, and group experiences.

Three types of new friendships contributed unique transitional and adjustment support throughout the semester. Family and friends from their home country provided emotional and financial support. Other international students provided support through a shared transcultural experience. New U.S. friendships provided the link to the new culture and cultural mentorship.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

This study sought to provide answers to its six research questions. The first two questions provided insight into how participants perceived cultural knowledge and how their cultural background contributed to their cultural knowledge. The third, fourth, and fifth research questions are treated as one question because together they provided insight into participants' cultural styles and how their preferences influenced the first phase of their study abroad experience. The last research question provided insight into cultural preparation, transition, and adjustment experiences before and during participants' first fall semester in the U.S. after receiving two different cultural treatments.

**Research question 1.** *How did select Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students accepted to a western United States university perceive their cultural knowledge?* “Culture” is an ambiguous term, having an array of diverse meanings for many people and shifts emphasis over time (Apte, 1994; Smith, 2001). In this study, culture was defined as the sets of socially transmitted ways of thinking, feeling, interacting, and communicating through shared value in traditions and customs, distinguishing members of one group from another (adopted from Hofstede, 1994; Kluckhohn, 1951; Lustig & Koester, 2003; Wohl, 2012). “Cultural knowledge” is the awareness and sensitivity to existing cultural preferences, values, and behaviors interpreted by an individual that generates cross-cultural competencies aiming to decrease transitional emotional discomfort while increasing respect for other cultures (adopted from Hall, 1955; 1959, 1966, 1973; Hofstede, 1980; Pilhofer, 2010; Spradley, 1980; Trompenaars, 1993). Based on intercultural training, cultural knowledge is the scientific understanding of cultural dimensions that impact intercultural communication (Pilhofer, 2010). Building on the research of Hall (1959, 1966) and Pilhofer (2010), the mere understanding and interpretation of “culture” could presuppose the type of value one places on and regards given to cultural competencies producing certain behaviors within a new culture.

The work of German researchers Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) was reviewed by Smith (2001) who proposed six definitions of culture: descriptive, historical, normative, psychological, structural, and genetic. Descriptive definitions represent, “a comprehensive totality making up the sum of social life and to list the various fields

making up culture” (p. 2). A historical definition is, “a heritage which is passed on over time through the generations” (p. 3). Normative definitions of culture are framed as, “a way of life that shaped patterns of concrete behavior and action” that emphasize the “role of values” (p. 3). The psychological definition highlighted that culture is, “a problem-solving device, allowing people to communicate, learn, or fulfill material and emotional needs” (p. 3). Structural definitions of culture represent the abstract concepts of the, “organized interrelation of the isolable aspects of culture” (p. 3). Lastly, the genetic definition of culture tends to focus on the origination of culture; “how it came to exist or continued existing” in terms of “intergenerational transmission” (p. 3).

Participants in this study described culture using a combination of Smith’s definitions. Five participants used a combination of descriptive and structural definitions and two used a combination of historical and normative definitions; all included a psychological emphasis. The majority of the participants who defined culture through descriptive and structural frames placed an emphasis on both the practical variables impacting their life in addition to the abstract concepts they perceived to be interrelated elements in their life. These interpretations of culture included such influences as family, friends, religion, finances, politics, education, traditions, art, language, music, and food. This general and comprehensive cultural definition included their belief system, laws, morals, customs, art, habits, and education. They placed a greater emphasis on present-tense factors perceived to influence their daily way of life, social norms and interactions, and modes of learning new knowledge or skills.

This cultural viewpoint influenced how these participants perceived their own culture in relation to their perceptions of U.S. societal values, politics, education, religion, and social relationships. For example, these participants discussed the U.S. culture positively as “free”, “cool”, “young”, “energizing”, and “more flexible”. They indicated that the Western culture would shape their own identity during their U.S. experience. They appeared to approach new ways of interaction, communication, habits, and norms with enthusiasm; describing cultural challenges as opportunities to expand their worldviews, communication and interpersonal skills.

In contrast, two of the participants reflected Smith’s (2001) historical and normative definitions of culture. Descriptions were in the past-tense and heavily incorporated home country specific examples of maintaining traditional behaviors and thinking styles important for social sustainability (e.g., the recognition of and respect for a highly structured community and ancient people). For the most part, these two participants preferred their home culture to embracing the U.S. culture. For instance, these participants thought it was disrespectful to interact or disagree with university instructors in front of other students. They described U.S. students as “disrespectful”, “loud”, “rude”, “inappropriate”, or “inconsiderate”.

Consistent with Apte (1994) who indicated that the meaning of culture can change over time, findings from this study indicated that the Treatment Group’s understanding of culture shifted between pre-departure to the end of the fall semester. This finding supports other research indicating that cross-cultural training (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000; Neill, 2008) and intercultural training (Hall, 1955, 1959, 1966; Black & Mendenhall,

1990; Morris & Robie, 2001; Tung, 1987) increases cultural knowledge, and thus competencies to adjust and succeed in a different culture.

**Research question 2.** *What factors (e.g. country of birth, educational preparation, exposure to treatment, prior experience, and perceived socioeconomic status) contributed to differences in perceived cultural knowledge by select Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students?* Participants indicated that the following factors contributed to their cultural knowledge: their country of origin, family socio-economic status, education and type of schooling, pre-departure cultural treatment, and life experiences.

**Country of origin.** Participants' countries of origin included China, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. According to Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2011), "cultural values are a motivating force behind our behaviors" (p. 14). The home country culture directly impacted how participants defined culture and what value they placed on cultural knowledge. Their home country's political, historical, and religious systems shaped their identity, worldviews, and motivations. Their country's traditions and holidays were described as institutionalizing specific value systems, behaviors, and lifestyles.

**Family socio-economic status.** Participants indicated that their family's socioeconomic status attributed to their cultural knowledge by providing them access to unique resources and learning opportunities. This contributed to their multi-linguistic proficiencies, history and art appreciation, increased networking opportunities with well-traveled bilingual peoples, and higher quality formal education. Many of their parents

had paid for private schooling, international schooling in their home country, private language tutors, and short-term exchange programs. Participants associated their family's financial status with their current English abilities, cultural competency, and educational achievements.

*Education and type of schooling.* Participants described that their home country elementary and high school educational system had a large influence on their cultural knowledge. For example, international high schools provided exposure to a variety of nationalities and languages compared to traditional high schools with homogeneous student bodies. The amount of education and types of schooling (public or private school; international school or international exchange programs) were greatly perceived as contributing factors to participants' cultural knowledge. Participants also perceived that the quality of the schooling they received in their home country provided superior education emphasizing global culture studies and language studies.

Although culture and language studies were very important throughout their education, the educational system's organization, routine, and management was perceived to have shaped their cultural knowledge. Their home country school systems were described as highly structured and uniformed. Participants described their student role as an absorber of knowledge, a follower of instructions, and a complier with authority (teacher, parent, and administrator). Because of a strong focus on exams and competitive student scores during their childhood, participants described that their highly populated classrooms had created high pressure environments and instilled strong competitive natures to produce high performances.

***Pre-departure cultural treatment.*** The four-week, online cultural program was described by the Treatment Group as a factor that increased their confidence and cultural competencies. For the first time in their lives, many participants indicated a shift in their awareness from primarily academic concerns to considering how culture could impact their academic success. The treatment appeared to help participants identify their own cultural preferences, begin questioning how those preferences would be challenged in the U.S. culture, and what they could do to prepare for cross-cultural adjustments. Adopting these strategies proved to be more of a challenge however.

***Life experiences.*** It appeared that many general life experiences (e.g. travel, watching movies, listening to stories, etc.) contributed to their cultural knowledge. Research indicates that the more preparation international students have before studying abroad and the more accurate expectations of their cultural adjustment, the better their cross-cultural adaptation (Dekaney, 2008; Ying & Liese, 1994). Participants in this study, who described more exposure to life experiences, expressed feeling confident about their English skills, asking U.S. people for help, and navigating within the new cultural system. Of note, none of the participants mentioned having completed a structured culture training program other than this study's treatment.

**Research questions 3, 4, & 5.** These three research questions were addressed as one and distinguished differences in interaction styles, thinking styles, and sense of self styles respectively between the Treatment Group and University Group. The three research questions asked, *What differences in interaction styles (RQ3), thinking styles (RQ4), and sense of self styles (RQ5) were found among entering Chinese, Japanese,*

*Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students who were either exposed to a 4-week pre-departure treatment (Treatment Group) and students who only experienced the standard university treatment (University Group)?*

The cultural profiles showed no major differences between participants' cultural styles; this was consistent with research suggesting that some Eastern Asian populations share a similar pattern of cultural preferences (Hall, 1955, 1959, 1966; Hofstede, 2001; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). However, participant interviews and reflection data did distinguish cultural style differences between the two groups as the fall semester progressed. The differences are addressed by participant group and the cultural style below.

***Treatment group.*** The Treatment Group reflected heightened cultural awareness, competency, and sensitivity, as well as strengthened sociocultural adjustment. Participants in this group were acutely aware of the differences between their home culture styles and U.S. cultural styles (interaction, thinking, and sense of self styles). They discussed how cultural styles impacted their study skills, classroom engagement, and communication skills.

Increased cultural competency, the multifaceted, evolving capacity to interact and communicate with others having different cultural backgrounds (Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, & Taylor-Ritzler, 2009; IHEAC, 2008; Wehling, 2008), was also found in the Treatment Group. They described intentionally alternating between their home cultural styles and U.S. cultural styles to interact and communicate with U.S students, teachers, and roommates. Although all participants demonstrated some cultural style shift that

adhered to more U.S. cultural styles throughout the fall semester, the Treatment Group displayed having more conscious choice in their stories about cultural differences and how to manage the cross-cultural situations.

Because they described having gained cultural knowledge about interaction, thinking, and sense of self styles from the treatment, they also referred to methods in managing gaps in U.S. cultural styles amongst their peers and teachers. This confidence appeared to increase their cultural sensitivity, the degree of an individual's psychological ability to deal with cultural differences (Medina-López-Portillo, 2004). This heightened level of psychological ability (confidence) to deal with U.S. cultural differences was said to have originated from the pre-departure treatment.

The Treatment Group was more able to communicate cultural styles and how to switch cultural styles to fit into the appropriate cultural system. What was particularly noteworthy was that the two participants who held Smith's (2001) historical and narrative definitions of culture were in the Treatment Group and preferred their home culture. Although they were aware of and competent in *code switching*, they still demonstrated having inner conflict. They reluctantly chose to practice the U.S. cultural style to bridge communication and interaction gaps, but did so with confidence. These new demonstrated negotiation skills in the U.S. culture strengthened their sociocultural adjustment, "the ability to 'fit in', to acquire culturally appropriate skills and to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment" (Ward & Kennedy, 1999, pp. 660-661).

Participants in the Treatment Group stated that they wanted their U.S. university instructors and peers to think of them as people who treated others equally, who followed

the rules, were flexible with schedules and getting along with a variety of personality types, were strong, cooperative, independent, and loyal. They spoke of strategies to be more active and engaged in the classroom environment and to display those characteristics to their peers. Prior to departure, they anticipated that the U.S. experience would influence their identity over the semester by slowly transforming their time preference to be more flexible, to be more aware of people's personal space, strengthen their bilingual skills, expand their global worldviews, act more directly and forward with others, and to develop specific professional and personal goals.

*University group.* Whereas the Treatment Group demonstrated cultural awareness and competence, the University Group displayed more confidence in themselves. The distinction appeared to be that the University Group had more general life experiences than the Treatment Group. For instance, during the initial interview, the University Group appeared more poised and trusting in their own ability. Of note, this level of confidence evened out between the two groups in subsequent interviews. This difference is supported by other research that found previous experience contributes to heightened levels of comfort and reduced levels of stress during adjustment (Altshuler, Sussman, & Kachur, 2003; Dekaney, 2008; Ying & Liese, 1994).

Because the University Group had no cross-cultural training, they primarily based their post-arrival actions on previous experience but demonstrated having less conscious choice as to how they could manage cross-cultural style gaps to fit the given host environment. They lacked the same cultural knowledge that the Treatment Group demonstrated to have and it appeared to contribute to more cultural confusion and

frustration with U.S. locals during their stories. The University Group's narratives demonstrated less analysis of intentional resolve to mediate cultural differences within the host culture. The University Group described how their cultural styles differed in the classroom and with class group members but lacked mentioning methods to intentionally bridge cross-cultural styles or communication barriers.

**Research question 6.** *What were the experiences of entering Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean undergraduate students during their first semester studying abroad at a western, United States research university?* Overall, it appeared that participants in this study had many positive U.S. cultural experiences, but students also found themselves in unfamiliar cultural situations which they felt compromised their health and safety, academic success, socialization, and overall beliefs about the U.S. and U.S. university system.

**Health and safety: physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.** Participants' transitions reflected a trial and error approach resembling a series of blindly led cultural experiments gone awry. In many cases, their safety was a concern; participants found themselves in various dangerous situations including walking long distances to and from the campus in dangerous neighborhoods, sometimes late at night and in the middle of winter. Two specifically reported sexual harassment requiring police intervention. They stated that they engaged in these unsafe or risky activities because they assumed that the U.S. was as safe as their home country. Their *false* sense of security and confidence to navigate U.S. cultural systems appeared to be the catalyst for many of their negative experiences which resulted in them feeling angry, confused, scared, or fearful.

Depression is also a major concern of international students. Research has indicated that these students under utilize university counseling services to address this challenge, in addition to other feelings of worthlessness, loneliness, and unfriendliness from others (Searle & Ward, 1990; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003; Radloff, 1977).

Not all participants described extreme safety issues, but health concerns were apparent throughout most experiences. Limited cultural knowledge about the community and campus often impacted participants' basic life needs such as nutrition and hygiene. For example, participants struggled with buying groceries (food, clothing, hygiene products) since they were without transportation, unable to transport bulk items on bus systems, and unfamiliar with local stores. One participant described having no food at her apartment for two weeks, living mainly on protein powders throughout the school day and over the weekend. She described having to purchase longer lasting canned foods to minimize the number of grocery items she needed to carry home on the bus from the grocery store. Another participant described that besides taking the bus, she only had one opportunity a week to join other international students on a group shopping trip. If she missed that opportunity, she would need to wait another full week to buy food and groceries.

*Academic success.* Learning how to navigate the campus, classroom cultures, and new student responsibilities took considerable time and energy. Many students started the academic year late and three students dropped a class. Two students seriously considered transferring to other institutions. Lack of cultural knowledge appeared to be a barrier that impacted study skills, class engagement, language development, and course

completion. Due to a lack of campus knowledge, none of the participants accessed the many free campus resources (e.g. tutoring center, career/internship studio, student clubs/organizations, printing and equipment rental). The only exception was that the Treatment Group reported that the pre-departure online cross-cultural training helped manage their academic challenges by reducing cultural ambiguity and clarifying cultural expectations.

Participants stated that they often avoided interactions with peers and instructors out of fear of making mistakes. They felt anxious about expressing their views and speaking English in front of U.S. students. Many described dreading class presentations and group projects. Often too shy, nervous, and afraid of public embarrassment, participants engaged very little during class discussions, rarely asked questions, and almost never took on leadership roles in group settings.

Perceived as a chaotic sequence of events, the participants described their first couple of weeks as highly stressful. When scheduling issues or placement testing prolonged class registration, participants missed introductory classes and experienced increased levels of academic pressure to make up late homework, learn new U.S. classroom rules and student expectations, and familiarize themselves with the syllabus and semester assignments.

***Beliefs about the U.S. and the U.S. university.*** Many of the participants in this study alluded to adopting and believing in inaccurate details about the U.S. culture and their U.S. institution. If participants had an unpleasant first experience during their transition, they would avoid the activity or person in the future. Afterwards they

accepted their first impression as a truth, and they passed the misconception to other people (e.g. family, friends, prospective international students, etc.). Perpetuated negative stereotypes about U.S., native people and the campus circulated among the participants and their social network. These stereotypes deterred many participants from building relationships or engaging in local activities. For instance, one participant was told by an international student that U.S. taxi cabs were too expensive and without further investigation, the participant never attempted to use one although she greatly struggled to find other means of transportation.

Some participants' false perceptions were about the U.S. campus and its treatment of international students. Feeling that their unique needs were not met during the first semester, two participants had already begun searching for a new U.S. university. Many believed the university's culture was incompatible with their needs, interests, and values. Some of the participants felt that instructors were ill prepared to instruct international students effectively. Participants investigated other institutions that provided smaller classroom sizes, more academic degrees, a cultural bridge program, and more international student services; they also considered attending a community college to take general courses for less expensive tuition.

***Socialization.*** In accordance with student engagement, social capital, and social learning theories (Astin, 1984; Bandura, 1977; Bourdieu, 1983; Bourdieu, 1988; Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Stanton-Salazar, 1997), this study's findings also demonstrate that relationships played significant roles in participants' transition and academic success. This study indicated that socialization helped introduce participants to

local culture, campus resources, language skills, transportation, and introduced local businesses and tourist destinations. This is supported by other research demonstrating the influence peer relationships have on international students' success during study abroad (Quintrell & Westwood, 1994; Westwood & Barker; 1990; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

The participants' new friends were mostly other international students. These relationships provided participants with comfort and support. Most participants had no U.S. native friend and they all stated they had wanted more U.S. friendships. This study's findings illuminated three barriers to making U.S. native friendships. The first barrier included participants' fear of making mistakes while speaking in English to U.S. students. This fear was compounded by their perceptions of U.S. students as being uninterested in communicating with international students, uninterested in learning about other cultures or languages, and avoidant of people who spoke with heavy accents. The second barrier included that the participants did not know what to talk about with U.S. students (e.g. U.S. current events, politics, pop culture, etc.). The awkward silence during attempted conversations created uneasy distance between them and other U.S. students. The last barrier was not knowing how and where to introduce themselves to U.S. students. After a few unsuccessful introductions around campus, most participants eventually stopped trying and decided to hang out with only international friends.

### **Implications for Practice**

Based on this study's findings, implications for practice encourage U.S. higher education institutions to apply pre-departure cross-cultural training and post-arrival cultural services that increase cultural knowledge and aid in Eastern Asian international

student transition and adjustment. Since cross-cultural training research has demonstrated improvement in cultural awareness, sensitivity, competence, cross-cultural adaptation, and cross-cultural socialization (Altshuler, Sussman, & Kachur, 2003; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Cohen, 1977; Kristjansdottir, 2003; Pieter Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002; Ruben, 1976; Zhu, 2008), training could facilitate greater international student success if implemented within pre-departure curriculum and cultural bridge programs. U.S. colleges and universities should consider incorporating similar cross-cultural training instruments similar to the one used in this study (*Cultural Navigator*<sup>TM</sup>) into their international student pre-departure and post-arrival curriculum to support international student cultural knowledge, transition, academic adjustment, campus engagement, and academic success.

Research has shown that cultural knowledge reduces adjustment stress (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994), reduces student frustrations by managing cultural gaps (Deardorff, 2004; Fantini, 2009), clarifies realistic international student expectations and fosters greater intercultural and cross-cultural competencies (Pitts, 2009), while a lack of cultural knowledge is linked to poorer academic engagement (Wang, 2004). These elements impact international students' academic success, sociocultural, social stress, emotional wellbeing, and psychosocial adjustment (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Weng, Cheong, & Cheong, 2010; Ying & Liese, 1990, 1991, 1994; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). This study's findings suggest that U.S. institutions can incorporate pre-departure cross-cultural training into their international student services to increase cultural knowledge. Such

services can include credit based curricular programs that aim to increase international students' academic success, social support, and language development which may strengthen international student retention and recruitment outreach efforts.

This study as well as other research demonstrates that international students have lower awareness about available campus services compared to host country students (Sherry, Bhat, Beaver, & Ling, 2004), thus within pre-departure cultural training, it is important for U.S. colleges and universities to better communicate the available student support resources to international students. This is particularly true in regards to promoting campus counseling services to deal with transitional and adjustment stress. Similar to Mori (2000) who demonstrated that international students typically underutilize campus counseling services, no participant in this study used the campus counseling service and most were unaware of the option to see a counselor. In addition, based on this study's findings, it is also important to clearly communicate on and off campus living accommodations during pre-departure stages if the institution does not provide mandatory on-campus living arrangements.

Based on participants' feedback, one way to communicate campus resources is to increase socialization initiatives to stimulate more interaction between international students and U.S. natives. These relationships could be incorporated into pre-departure and post-arrival cross-cultural training to establish campus connections, practice English skills, teach U.S. study skills, introduce local cultural customs, and initiate usage of student resources. These social connections could increase cultural knowledge for U.S. students and international students, increase international students' communication skills,

and assist better transitional expectations to encourage faster adjustment, academic achievement, and more stable social and emotional support for first-semester international students.

This study's participants believed that early cultural knowledge and cultural reflection contribute to becoming better students having more confidence in the U.S. which is supported by the literature (Ying & Liese, 1990, 1991, 1994; Sahin, 2008). The Treatment Group believed that their gained cultural knowledge from the pre-departure treatment was important for their academic success and therefore should be incorporated into their program of study. All participants indicated that they would have paid for pre-departure cross-cultural training if it was offered as a college credited course. For these reasons, an implication for practice includes offering a longer pre-departure and post-arrival, skills-based cross-cultural training program for academic credit.

Lastly, prospective international students deciding which U.S. college or university to attend should consider institutions that provide pre-departure and post-arrival cross-cultural services that support their academic success and cultural adjustment. Additionally, they may want to investigate if the institution offers credit-based cross-cultural curriculum or cultural bridge programs to facilitate initial transition and post-arrival adjustment.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the transition and adjustment experiences of Eastern Asian international students before and during their first fall semester at a western U.S. research university using two different cultural treatments.

While significant findings emerged in support of earlier cross-cultural training, there were also some limitations. One limitation was that international students needed to volunteer to participate in this study. Students fully engaged in and completed the pre-departure cultural treatment, but it is not safe to assume that the same results would occur if U.S. colleges and universities also provided optional pre-departure cross-cultural training. Therefore, it is recommended that this pre-departure study be replicated without the use of volunteer sign-ups and instead mandate international students to complete the training. Participants gained cultural knowledge in this study even with allowing them to voluntarily sign-up for the additional training which demonstrated their personal desire to learn this cross-cultural information. If international students were mandated to complete the cross-cultural training, they may not have the same motivation level to learn the materials as the participants in this study who were allowed to choose to participate. Commitment fluctuations may depend on how international students perceive the purpose and incentive of the training. Choice versus mandated completion may impact the results in a similar study.

A second limitation involves the caliber of participant reflection. Although this study collected 14-16 hours of in-person interviews, in addition to 34 written journal reflections, the details, lengths, and feedback varied by participant. Some experiences were clearly and extensively detailed while others were more generally discussed. Interviews indicated that language barriers, comfort levels to disclose sensitive thoughts, and the time limits were confining factors keeping participants from sharing their experiences in greater detail. Based on these limitations, it is recommended that future

research also include a variety of sources to collect data (e.g. video recorded interviews, written reflections, surveys, questionnaires, etc.) and fully understand the intended meanings of participants' perceptions when working with non-native speakers from Eastern Asia.

Another recommendation generated from a limitation pertains to this study's pre-departure cross-cultural treatment. Although findings demonstrated gains in cultural knowledge, cross-cultural preparation, and post-arrival application of the gained cultural knowledge, the treatment included the *Cultural Navigator*<sup>TM</sup>, which was originally designed for training expatriates for international work assignments, thus providing nonacademic terminology and coping examples for international students. This difference between a professional working culture and the higher education culture could be a limitation. Therefore, a recommendation would be to replicate this study incorporating the *Cultural Navigator*<sup>TM</sup> online training software redesigned specifically for international student needs by interchanging college culture terminology and academic scenarios. In general, there is a need for a reliable pre-departure, international student-focused instrument designed for online cross-cultural training programs. Building on this study's findings, future studies could address any differences in gained cultural knowledge and post-arrival adjustment using online systems tailored for international student learners preparing to study in the U.S.

Since this study's data collection ended after the first fall semester, it lacks longitudinal data about spring semester cultural adjustment; in particular, how and when (if at all) Treatment Group members applied their gained cultural knowledge during later

adaptation stages. Therefore, a recommendation for future research is to investigate reliable assessments to measure international student cultural competence and proficiency development over the transitional shift from pre-departure through different post-arrival benchmarks, including how international students apply cultural knowledge taught in pre-departure cross-cultural training.

Lastly, while one focus of this study was how a pre-departure cross-cultural treatment influenced Eastern Asian international students' transition and adjustments, it would be advantageous to replicate this pre-departure study with international students arriving from only one national origin instead of including international students from multiple Eastern Asian countries as this study did. Once the unique nuances between each national origin's pre-departure and transitional needs are indentified, future pre-departure studies can investigate the effectiveness of cross-cultural treatments on international students' cultural knowledge, transition, and adjustment from specific nationalities.

## **Conclusions**

The findings of this study expand cross-cultural training and international education research. While previous research showed that cross-cultural training can reduce transitional and adjustment difficulties, previous to this study, there was limited to no data showing how a pre-departure cross-cultural preparation treatment influenced cultural knowledge, transition, and adjustment of Eastern Asian international students studying in the U.S.

This study's findings show that Eastern Asian undergraduate international students gained cultural knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, and competency from the four-week pre-departure cross-cultural treatment which they applied during their transition and adjustment at a western U.S. research university to better manage cross-cultural differences. All of this study's participants, regardless of whether they received the pre-departure cross-cultural treatment, perceived cultural knowledge and pre-departure cultural training as critical elements directly impacting their initial transition, semester adjustments, and academic success.

Because cultural training has been found effective for international student success, but is usually a post-arrival activity, U.S. colleges and universities should consider investing in more online pre-departure cross-cultural preparation like the one presented and analyzed in this study. This research supports the need for U.S. colleges and universities to teach cultural knowledge and bridge cultural differences through earlier cross-cultural training, thus better preparing Eastern Asian international students for first semester success at their institution.

## Appendix A

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSITY SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CONSENT  
TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Asian Undergraduate International Students: A Phenomenological Study of First Semester U.S. Study Abroad Experiences Using Different Cross-Cultural Treatments

**INVESTIGATOR(S):** Dr. Rita Laden; Tara Madden-Dent

**PURPOSE** -You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to collect data regarding international student cross-cultural transition into America.

**PARTICIPANTS** - You are being asked to participate because you are from China, Japan, or Korea, have been accepted and are enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Nevada, Reno for the fall, 2013 semester, have a valid student visa/passport, have basic English proficiency skills (required for UNR enrollment), and are at least 18 years of age.

**PROCEDURES** - If you volunteer to participate, the researchers will assign you to one of two groups. Depending on which group you are assigned to, you will be asked to take a short survey, a short cultural preference assessment, to complete three in-person interviews, and three emailed student journal reflections. If you are assigned to the Post Arrival Group, you will also be given a review summary of your cultural preference assessment.

Once every two weeks, for six weeks, you will be asked to complete emailed student reflection questions. There are three reflections total. The questions will ask about yourself as a student, your reasons for attending a US college, and your thoughts about being a student in the U.S. You'll be asked to think about these questions, answer them in writing, and email your written responses to Tara Madden-Dent. We expect it will take you about 45-90 minutes to complete all three of the reflections.

Three in-person interviews will be with Tara Madden-Dent, the student researcher. The interviews will be video-recorded. The interviews will take place on campus at the University and will last about 30-45 minutes each. The weeks of the interviews are the following: from late August to mid September, October 14-18, and December 9-13. Immediately following the first interview, you'll be asked to complete a short

online survey on a lap top computer that will be provided for you. The online survey will take about 5-10 minutes. We will send you an email to confirm the date, time, and location of the interview.

**DISCOMFORTS, INCONVENIENCES, AND/OR RISKS** - We don't expect any risks or discomforts to you as a result of participation in this research. However, as you learn more about a cross-cultural lifestyle, you may wonder if you are less prepared to for this experience than you had anticipated. If you feel any anxiety related to being new arrival in a foreign country, please contact the office by calling 555-555-6874 or emailing. There may be unknown or unforeseen risks associated with study participation.

**BENEFITS** - There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study except access to a cross-cultural resource in addition to the reflection activities about your international transition. We hope to learn more about international students' thoughts and experiences as they transition into American college cultures.

**CONFIDENTIALITY** - Your identity will be protected to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study.

The Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), other federal agencies as necessary, and the University Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board may inspect your study records. In addition, TMC/Berlitz©, the copyright owner of Cultural Navigator™ will receive a report describing the results of this study.

The study records will be securely stored in locked files in the College of Education, University for one year. To protect the confidentiality of the study records, your name and email will be removed from all correspondence and replaced with a pseudonym. There will be one copy of a master list that contains your real and pretend names. Only Tara Madden-Dent will have access to the master list. The data, master list, and consent forms will be stored separately.

**COSTS/COMPENSATION** - There will be no cost to you for being in the study. To thank you for participating in the study, you will be given a \$20 University bookstore gift card at your final in-person interview with the student investigator.

**RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW** - You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time and still receive all the services from office and the University you would normally receive if you were not in the study. To withdraw,

simply stop participating. If you'd like, you may send an email to the investigators asking them to not send you any more prompts.

If the study design or use of the data is to be changed, you will be so informed and your consent re-obtained. You will be told of any significant new findings developed during the course of this study which may relate to your willingness to continue participation.

QUESTIONS - If you have questions about this study or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact the Principle Investigator, Dr. Rita Laden at [rmladen@unr.edu](mailto:rmladen@unr.edu) or (775) 682-9082; or the student investigator Tara Madden-Dent at [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu) or (775) 530-2674 at any time.

You may ask about your rights as a research subject or you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concerns, or complaints to the University Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number (555) 555-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o Office of Human Research Protection.

#### CLOSING STATEMENT

I have read (  ) this consent form or have had it read to me (  ) **[Check one.]**

The study has been explained to me and all of my questions have been answered. I have been told of the risks or discomforts and possible benefits of the study.

If I do not take part in this study, my refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of rights to which I am entitled. I may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty [or loss of other benefits to which I am entitled].

I have been told my rights as a research participant, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I have been told what the study is about and how and why it is being done. All my questions have been answered.

I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

## Appendix B

### RE-RECRUITMENT PARTICIPANT SCRIPT

September, 2013

Hello. My name is Tara Madden-Dent and I am a researcher with the College of Education. I am asking for your help in a research study about new international students' cultural preferences and transitions. This study is part of an effort to learn about international students' cultural experiences during their first semester in the U.S. By knowing more about your transitional needs, we may improve first year experiences and academic success for students like you.

Participation includes: Three student journal reflections via email, three in-person interviews at UNR in the College of Education (in September, in October, and in December), and one short survey at this week's interview. In addition, five of the ten participants will be asked to take a 5-10 minute cultural assessment. Eligible participants must be from Japan, Korea, or China, must be enrolled as an undergraduate student for this fall semester with a valid student visa/passport, have basic English skills (required for UNR enrollment), and be 18 years of age or older.

Participants will receive a \$20 UNR Wolfshop gift card as a small token of appreciation. In addition, the student reflections and cultural assessment can be helpful activities during the first semester at UNR to review the transition process. There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to participants. The overall time commitment for the entire study ranges from 2.5 to 4.0 hours over the semester.

Your identity will be kept confidential. Only researchers have access to the data. The study results will be released only as summaries in which no individual's answers can be identified.

This study has no affiliation with the Office of International Students & Scholars. Participation in this study is voluntary and deciding not to participate, or discontinuing participation (at any time), will in no way affect the services you receive from the OISS or any other UNR resource. This study has been reviewed by the University IRB ethics board. You can help us very much by participating and completing this important research study.

For more information about this study, I would be happy to speak with you. Please contact me at [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). Thank you very much for helping us with this important study.

Sincerely,

Tara Madden-Dent, Researcher  
PROTOCOL #: 2013S121

## Appendix C

## RE-RECRUITMENT FLIER

**Opportunity to Participate in a Research Study:  
International Students' First Semester.****Study Activities:**

- 3 student journal reflections
- 3 in-person interviews
- 1 short cultural preference assessment
- 1 short survey

**Eligible Participants:**

- 18 years old or older
- Undergraduate Student
- Have Basic English Skills
- From Japan, China, Taiwan, or Korea

**Time Commitment:**

Ranges from 2.5 to 4.0 hours over the semester

**Compensation:**

\$20 University Gift Card

**Benefits:**

An opportunity to reflect and learn about your first semester abroad.

**Risks:**

No reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts

**Disclaimers:**

This study has no affiliation with the Office of International Students & Scholars  
Participation in this study is voluntary  
Your identity will be kept confidential  
For more information contact the researcher, Tara Madden-Dent

## Appendix D

## POST-ARRIVAL RE-RECRUITMENT CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL INSTITUTIONAL  
REVIEW BOARD CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Asian Undergraduate International Students: A Phenomenological Study of First Semester U.S. Study Abroad Experiences Using Different Cross-Cultural Treatments

**INVESTIGATOR(S):** Dr. Rita Laden, (775) 682-9082; Tara Madden-Dent (775) 530-2674

**PROTOCOL #: 2013S121**

---

**PURPOSE**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to collect data regarding international student cross-cultural transition into America.

**PARTICIPANTS**

You are being asked to participate because you are from China, Japan, or Korea, have been accepted and are enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Nevada, Reno for the fall, 2013 semester, have a valid student visa/passport, have basic English proficiency skills (required for UNR enrollment), and are at least 18 years of age.

**PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate, the researchers will assign you to one of two groups. Depending on which group you are assigned to, you will be asked to take a short survey, a short cultural preference assessment, to complete three in-person interviews, and three emailed student journal reflections. If you are assigned to the Post Arrival Group, you will also be given a review summary of your cultural preference assessment.

Once every two weeks, for six weeks, you will be asked to complete emailed student reflection questions. There are three reflections total. The questions will ask about yourself as a student, your reasons for attending a US college, and your thoughts about being a student in the U.S. You'll be asked to think about these questions, answer them in writing, and email your written responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). We expect it will take you about 45-90 minutes to complete all three of the reflections.

Three in-person interviews will be with Tara Madden-Dent, the student researcher. The interviews will be video-recorded. The interviews will take place on campus at the University of Nevada, Reno and will last about 30-45 minutes each. The weeks of the interviews are the following: from late August to mid September, October 14-18, and December 9-13.

Immediately following the first interview, you'll be asked to complete a short online survey on a lap top computer that will be provided for you. The online survey will take about 5-10 minutes.

We will send you an email to confirm the date, time, and location of the interview.

#### DISCOMFORTS, INCONVENIENCES, AND/OR RISKS

We don't expect any risks or discomforts to you as a result of participation in this research. However, as you learn more about a cross-cultural lifestyle, you may wonder if you are less prepared to for this experience than you had anticipated. If you feel any anxiety related to being new arrival in a foreign country, please contact the Office of International Students and Scholars by calling 775-784-6874 or emailing [oiiss@unr.edu](mailto:oiiss@unr.edu). There may be unknown or unforeseen risks associated with study participation.

#### BENEFITS

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study except access to a cross-cultural resource in addition to the reflection activities about your international transition. We hope to learn more about international students' thoughts and experiences as they transition into American college cultures.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Your identity will be protected to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study.

The Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), other federal agencies as necessary, and the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board may inspect your study records. In addition, TMC/Berlitz, the copyright owner of Cultural Navigator 7 will receive a report describing the results of this study.

The study records will be securely stored in locked files in the College of Education, University of Nevada, Reno for one year. To protect the confidentiality of the study records, your name and email will be removed from all correspondence and replaced with a pseudonym. There will be one copy of a master list that contains your real and pretend names. Only Tara Madden-Dent will have access to the master list. The data, master list, and consent forms will be stored separately.

#### COSTS/COMPENSATION

There will be no cost to you for being in the study. To thank you for participating in the study, you will be given a \$20 Nevada Wolfshop bookstore gift card at your final in-person interview with the student investigator.

#### RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW

You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time and still receive all the services from OISS and the University you would normally receive if you were not in the study. To withdraw, simply stop participating. If you'd like, you may send an email to the investigators asking them to not send you any more prompts.

If the study design or use of the data is to be changed, you will be so informed and your consent re-obtained. You will be told of any significant new findings developed during the course of this study which may relate to your willingness to continue participation.

#### QUESTIONS

If you have questions about this study or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact the Principle Investigator, Dr. Rita Laden at [rmladen@unr.edu](mailto:rmladen@unr.edu) or (775) 682-9082; or the student investigator Tara Madden-Dent at [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu) or (775) 530-2674 at any time.

You may ask about your rights as a research subject or you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concerns, or complaints to the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number (775) 327-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o UNR Office of Human Research Protection, 218 Ross Hall / 331, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, Nevada, 89557.

#### CLOSING STATEMENT

I have read ( ) this consent form or have had it read to me ( ) **[Check one.]**

The study has been explained to me and all of my questions have been answered. I have been told of the risks or discomforts and possible benefits of the study.

If I do not take part in this study, my refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of rights to which I am entitled. I may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty [or loss of other benefits to which I am entitled].

I have been told my rights as a research participant, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I have been told what the study is about and how and why it is being done. All my questions have been answered.

I will receive a copy of this consent form.

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Printed Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

Date

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Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

## Appendix E

## FIRST PRE-DEPARTURE REFLECTION PROMPT

July 20, 2013

Student Journal Reflection #1, Week July 22 - July 26, 2013

Thank you for participating in this research study. For this week's student reflection, please complete these following instructions before answering the questions below. Then email your responses to the questions to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu) by Friday night, July 26<sup>th</sup>.

1. Listen to the attached audio podcast (2 minutes)
2. Visit: <https://www.culturalnavigator.com>
3. Enter in your **username:** \_\_\_\_\_ and **password:** \_\_\_\_\_
4. Select your preferred language in the top right of the screen
5. On your Home Page please *click on the "Culture Wheel"* located in the middle left section of your Home Page directly under "Identify Your Cultural Preferences"
6. Complete all of the 3 Dimensions of the COI Assessment
7. Upon completion, *click on "View Report"* at the top of the COI Dialog Box. To download your Full COI Report, please refer to the extreme right side of the page under "My COI" and click on "Download Full COI PDF".

**Reflection Questions** (Refer to the first Cultural Profile dimension: "Interaction")

Interaction Style identifies how a person communicates and engages with others.

1. Do you agree or disagree with the Cultural Profile's description of your Interaction style? Why?
2. What does your Interaction Style suggest about how you prefer to communicate/engage with others?
3. How does your Interaction Style compare to the Interaction Style of United States? Use the Cultural Navigator 7 to help you answer this question by following these instructions:
  - a. In your online Cultural Navigator account, *click on "Country Gap Analysis Report"*
  - b. *Click on the drop down menu and select "United States of America"*
  - c. To view your cultural comparison profile, *click "View Country Gap Analysis Report"*
4. In what ways do you think the U.S. classroom environment will be different from yours?
5. How do you plan adjusting to the new U.S. classroom interactions with peers and teachers?

Email the responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). If you have any questions, anxiety, or concerns, about study abroad email or call 1-555-555-5555. Thank you very much for helping us with this important study. You will receive the second student reflection on Monday via email. Sincerely, Tara Madden-Dent (Researcher)

## Appendix F

## SECOND PRE-DEPARTURE REFLECTION PROMPT

Dear [student],  
 August 6 – August 12, 2013 Student Journal Reflection Prompt 2

Thank you for participating in this study. For this week's student reflection, please answer the questions below and email your responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu) by Monday night, August 12<sup>th</sup>.

Please refer to your downloaded COI Cultural Profile Report and Country Gap Analysis Report to answer the following questions regarding your cultural preference: "*Thinking Style*". *Thinking Style* identifies how a person tends to process information in work situations. (Your Cultural Navigator account should have all reports saved as well).

**Reflection Questions 1 and 2:** Please refer to the first Cultural Profile dimension: "*Thinking Style*".

1. Do you agree or disagree with the Cultural Profile's description of your *Thinking style*? Why?
2. What does your *Thinking Style* suggest about how you prefer to process information?

**Reflection Questions 3 & 4:** Refer to the *Country Comparison Report* for your: "*Thinking Style*".

3. How does your *Thinking Style* compare to the *Thinking Style* of United States?
4. In what ways do you think the U.S. classroom's learning process may differ from the traditional classrooms in your country? Provide an example if you can.

**Reflection Questions 5, 6, and 7:** Answer freely.

5. How has your background and upbringing contributed to your *Thinking Style*?
6. How do you plan on adjusting to the U.S. classroom learning process and learning environment?
7. What are some free student resources at the University of Nevada, Reno that are available to help you? (List all that you are currently aware of).

Email the responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). Keep your Cultural Profile and Country Gap Analysis Report for future student reflections. If you have questions about this activity, email [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). You will receive the third student reflection on Tuesday, August 13 via email. If you have any questions, anxiety, or concerns about

study abroad, email email or call 1-555-555-5555. . Thank you very much for helping with this important study.

Sincerely, Tara Madden-Dent (Researcher)

## Appendix G

## THIRD PRE-DEPARTURE REFLECTION PROMPT

Dear [student],  
 August 13 – August 19, 2013 Student Journal Reflection Prompt 3

Thank you for participating in this important study. For this week's student reflection, please answer the questions below and email your responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu) by Monday night, August 19<sup>th</sup>.

Please refer to your downloaded COI Cultural Profile Report and Country Gap Analysis Report to answer the following questions regarding your cultural preference: "*Sense of Self*". "*Sense of Self*" identifies how a person tends to view identity and motivation in work situations. (Your Cultural Navigator account should also have the reports saved as well).

**Reflection Questions 1, 2, & 3**: Please refer to the first Cultural Profile dimension: "Sense of Self".

1. Do you agree or disagree with COI's description of your *Sense of Self* preference? Why?
2. What does your *Sense of Self* suggest about how you view your identity as a student?
3. What does your *Sense of Self* suggest about your motivation to work as a student?

**Reflection Questions 3 & 4**: Refer to the *Country Comparison Report* for: "Sense of Self".

4. How does your *Sense of Self* compare to the *Sense of Self* of United States?
5. In what ways do you think the U.S. student culture may differ from the traditional student culture in your country? Provide examples if you can.

**Reflection Questions 5, 6, and 7**: Answer freely.

6. How has your background and upbringing contributed to your *Sense of Self*?
7. How would you like other students and teachers to describe you?
8. In what ways do you think your U.S. experience will influence your identity?

Email the responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). Keep your Cultural Profile and Country Gap Analysis Report for the last student reflection. You will receive the last student reflection on Tuesday, August 20 via email. If you have questions about this activity, email [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). If you have any questions, anxiety, or concerns about study abroad, email email or call 1-555-555-5555. Thank you very much for helping with this important study.

Sincerely,

Tara Madden-Dent  
 Researcher

## Appendix H

## PRE-DEPARTURE REFLECTION PROMPT 4

Dear [student],  
August 20 – August 26, 2013 Student Journal Reflection Prompt 4

Thank you for participating in this important study. This is the last student reflection. Please answer the questions below and email your responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu) by Monday night, August 26<sup>th</sup>.

1. What is culture shock and what are some ways that you can manage or cope with it?
2. What is homesickness and what are some ways that you can manage or cope with it?
3. What do you expect will be the biggest challenges while studying in the U.S.?
4. How has your background and upbringing prepared you to study in the U.S. culture?
5. How does learning about your cultural preferences help prepare you for study abroad?
6. How does learning about U.S. cultural preferences prepare you for study abroad in the U.S.?
7. How well do you know English and how do you plan to learn more English skills?
8. When did you arrive in Reno, NV or when do you plan on arriving to Reno, Nevada?
9. Please provide two days and times you are available to interview at UNR for one hour between Monday, August 26 and Friday, August 30<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you for your helpful participation in this important research study. Interviews will start next week. You will receive an email with the time and day of your student interview appointment at the University of Nevada, Reno.

If you have any questions about the study, email [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). If you have any study abroad questions, anxiety, or concerns, email or call 1-555-555-5555. Thank you very much for helping with this important study.

Sincerely,

Tara Madden-Dent  
Researcher

## Appendix I

## FIRST POST-ARRIVAL REFLECTION PROMPT

September 2, 2013

Post Arrival Student Journal Reflection #1  
Week September 2 – September 8, 2013

Dear [Student Name],

Thank you for participating in this research study. For the first post arrival student reflection, please complete the following 5 questions below. Email your responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu) by the evening of Sunday, September 8. Please plan on this activity taking about 15-30 minutes.

1. Visit: <https://www.culturalnavigator.com>
2. Login at the top: *username: unrcoe@gmail.com password: unrstudy1*
3. Select your preferred language: **Click “Welcome Alexander”** at the top and **click “Settings”**. Then **click “Edit”** next to “Preferences”, choose your language, **click “Submit”**.

Complete COI Assessment: **Click “Home”** at the top and **click “Culture Wheel”** located in the middle left section of your Home Page directly under “Identify Your Cultural Preferences”. *Complete all 3 Dimensions of the COI Assessment.* Upon completion, **click on “View Report”** at the top of the COI Dialog Box. Download your Full COI Report at the far right side of the page under “My COI” and **click “Download Full COI PDF”**.

4. Compare Country Norms: *Return to the “Home” page, click “Countries”* under “Compare with”. Scroll all the way down and **click “Add”** next to the “United States of America”. Then **click “Next”**. **Check “Interaction Style”, “Thinking Style”, and “Sense of Self”**. Then **click “Compare”**. *Download the full report: click “Download Full Report”* on the far right side of screen.

**Reflection Questions 1 and 2:** Please refer to the first Cultural Profile dimension: “Interaction Style” that identifies how a person communicates and engages with others.

1. Do you agree or disagree with the Cultural Profile’s description of your Interaction style? Why?
2. What does the description suggest about how you communicate and engage with others?

**Reflection Questions 3 & 4:** Refer to the *Country Comparison Report* for your *Interaction Style*.

3. In what ways do your Interaction Styles compare to U.S. Interaction Styles? How are they similar? How are they different?
4. Can you describe a situation when you might experience cultural interaction challenges at UNR?

**Reflection Questions 5 and 6:** Answer freely.

5. In what ways will interaction be different in U.S. classrooms from the classrooms in your country?

6. What are some ways to meet and interact with U.S. students and with U.S. teachers?

Email the responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). If you have questions about this activity, email [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). If you have any questions, anxiety, or concerns, about study abroad email or call 1-555-555-5555. Thank you very much for helping us with this important study. You will receive the second student reflection on Tuesday, August 6th via email.

Sincerely, Tara Madden-Dent

## Appendix J

## SECOND POST-ARRIVAL REFLECTION PROMPT

Dear [Student Name],

Thank you for participating in this important research study. For this post arrival student reflection, please complete the following questions below. Email your responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu) by the evening of Sunday, September 22. Please plan on this activity taking about 15-30 minutes.

**Reflection Questions 1: New U.S. Culture**

1. Describe the U.S. culture. You may want to discuss how it is different than what you had expected before you arrived, what you like the least about U.S. culture, what you like the most about U.S. culture, the attitudes/behaviors of students and teachers, or describe the city of Reno's culture.

**Reflection Questions 2 & 3: Relationships**

2. Describe your relationships you have here in the U.S. and if you're happy with those relationships.
3. Describe the relationships you have back in your home country and how often you communicate with them while in the U.S.

**Reflection Questions 4: Academics**

4. Describe your classes. You may want to discuss your favorite classes (and why it is your favorite), your least favorite (and why it is your least favorite), your role as a student in the U.S. compared to your role as a student in your country, the level of difficulty with homework, group work, class discussion, or other classroom requirements.

**Reflection Questions 5:**

5. What have been the biggest challenges for you here in the U.S? What have you liked the most in the U.S?

Email the responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). If you have questions about this activity, email [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). If you have any questions, anxiety, or concerns, about study abroad email or call 1-555-555-5555.

Thank you very much for helping us with this important study. Your contribution is extremely helpful and much appreciated. You will receive the last post arrival student reflection on Monday, September 30th via email.

Sincerely, Tara Madden-Dent, (Researcher)

## Appendix K

## THIRD POST-ARRIVAL REFLECTION PROMPT

September 30, 2013

Post Arrival Student Journal Reflection #3  
Week September 30 – October 6, 2013**Dear [Student Name],**

Thank you for participating in this important research study. For the final post arrival student reflection, please complete the following questions below. Email your responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu) by the evening of Sunday, October 6. Please plan on this activity taking about 15-30 minutes. You will receive a scheduling email for your second student interview after we receive your student reflection.

**Reflection Questions 1: New U.S. Culture**

1. Describe the U.S. culture. You may want to discuss how it is different than what you had expected before you arrived, what you like the least about U.S. culture, what you like the most about U.S. culture, the attitudes/behaviors of students and teachers, or describe the city of Reno's culture.

**Reflection Questions 2 & 3: Relationships**

2. Describe your relationships you have here in the U.S. and if you're happy with those relationships.
3. Describe the relationships you have back in your home country and how often you communicate with them while in the U.S.

**Reflection Questions 4: Academics**

4. Describe your classes. You may want to discuss your favorite classes (and why it is your favorite), your least favorite (and why it is your least favorite), your role as a student in the U.S. compared to your role as a student in your country, the level of difficulty with homework, group work, class discussion, or other classroom requirements.

**Reflection Questions 5:**

5. What have been the biggest challenges for you here in the U.S? What have you liked the most in the U.S? interpretation

Email the responses to [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). If you have questions about this activity, email [tmadden@unr.edu](mailto:tmadden@unr.edu). If you have any questions, anxiety, or concerns, about study abroad email or call 1-555-555-5555.

Thank you very much for helping us with this important study. Your contribution is extremely helpful and much appreciated.

Sincerely, Tara Madden-Dent, (Researcher)

## Appendix L

## FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL &amp; QUESTIONS

Student Interviews will be 30-45 minutes. Interviews will be held in the private, Office of Educational Leadership in the College of Education at the University. Mutually agreed upon dates and times will determine when the interviews will be conducted. Interview questions will be emailed to the international students before their scheduled interviews to allow them to reflect on the questions. Interviews will begin with general questions regarding cultural preparation for student abroad before becoming more specific about study research objectives.

**Interview Questions:**

1. What is culture?
2. How important are knowing cultural differences and similarities before studying abroad?
3. What do you think studying in the U.S. culture will be like?
4. How did you prepare for life in the U.S. culture?
5. How has your background experience contributed to your U.S. cultural knowledge?
6. Have you reflected about your own cultural styles? If so, are they different from U.S. cultural styles?
7. In what ways are your culture and U.S. culture similar or different?
8. Do you think that learning about cultural differences and similarities will help you adapt to U.S. culture faster? Why or why not?
9. Do you think that learning about cultural differences and similarities will help you become a better student in the U.S.? Why or why not?
10. How do you prefer to interact with other students?
11. How do you prefer to interact with professors?
12. Do students and teachers in the U.S. interact differently than in your traditional classrooms back home? If so, in what ways?
13. Do you plan on participating in University student clubs, sports, or other organizations? Which ones?
14. Are you concerned with how to make U.S. friends? If so, how do you plan on making U.S. friends?
15. Do you believe that international students can benefit from studying cultural differences between their culture and the U.S. culture before school starts? In what ways?

16. What is Culture Shock?
17. How can UNR international students cope with culture shock?
18. What is homesickness?
19. How can UNR international student cope with homesickness?
20. How do you plan to adapt to life in the U.S.?

## Appendix M

## SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL &amp; QUESTIONS

Student Interviews will be 30-45 minutes. Interviews will be held in the private, Office of Educational Leadership in the College of Education at the University. Mutually agreed upon dates and times will determine when the interviews will be conducted. Interview questions will be emailed to the international students before their scheduled interviews to allow them to reflect on the questions. Interviews will begin with general questions regarding cultural preparation for student abroad before becoming more specific about study research objectives.

**Interview Questions:**

1. How many midterm examinations do you have and how are you studying?
2. Tell me about your living situation and roommates.
3. Tell me about studying in the U.S. culture.
4. How did you prepare for life in the U.S. culture?
5. In what ways are your culture and U.S. culture similar or different?
6. Did learning about cultural differences and similarities before you arrived to the U.S. help you adapt to U.S. culture faster? Why or why not?
7. Do you think that learning about cultural differences and similarities helps you become a better student in the U.S.? Why or why not?
8. How do you prefer to process information at school or when talk with others?
9. How do you prefer to interact with professors?
10. How do students learn differently here than in your traditional classrooms back home?
11. Have you participated in University student clubs, sports, or other organizations? Which ones?
12. Have you made U.S. friends? If so, will you share how you met them and how often you hang out with them?
13. What is Culture Shock and have you experienced culture shock?
14. How can UNR international students cope with culture shock?
15. What is homesickness and have you experienced homesickness?
16. How can UNR international student cope with homesickness?
17. What are some of the most challenging aspects of your experience so far?

## Appendix N

## THIRD INTERVIEW PROTOCOL &amp; QUESTIONS

Student Interviews will be 30-45 minutes. Interviews will be held in the private, Office of Educational Leadership in the College of Education at the University. Mutually agreed upon dates and times will determine when the interviews will be conducted. Interview questions will be emailed to the international students before their scheduled interviews to allow them to reflect on the questions. Interviews will begin with general questions regarding cultural preparation for student abroad before becoming more specific about study research objectives.

**Interview Questions:**

1. How many final examinations do you have and how are you studying?
2. Tell me about your experience studying in the U.S. culture.
3. Tell me about your living situation and roommates.
4. How did you prepare for life in the U.S. culture?
5. In what ways are your culture and U.S. culture similar or different?
6. Did learning about cultural differences and similarities before you arrived to the U.S. help you adapt to U.S. culture faster? Why or why not?
7. Do you think that learning about cultural differences and similarities helps you become a better student in the U.S.? Why or why not?
8. Are you active and participant in the U.S. classroom? If so, how?
9. How do you prefer to interact with other students and professors?
10. How do students learn differently here than in your traditional classrooms back home?
11. How many friends do you have and where are they from (U.S. or international)?
12. Have you participated in University student clubs, sports, or other organizations? Which ones?
13. Have you made U.S. friends? If so, will you share how you met them and how often you hang out with them?
14. What is Culture Shock and have you experienced culture shock?
15. How can UNR international students cope with culture shock?
16. What is homesickness and have you experienced homesickness?
17. How can UNR international student cope with homesickness?
18. What are some of the most challenging aspects of your experience so far?

## Appendix O

## POST-ARRIVAL TREATMENT GROUP SURVEY QUESTIONS

TITLE &amp; LOGO

**Predeparture CN7 Group Questions**[+ Add Page](#)

**1. I consent to participate in this short survey for the College of Education and the Office of International Students and Scholars.**

- True  False

**2. Please indicate your opinion by rating 1 to 5, where 1 represents that you strongly agree with the statement, and 5 represents that you strongly disagree with the statement:**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Cultural Navigator 7 increased my cultural awareness about living in the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural Navigator 7 increased my cultural awareness about my own cultural preferences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Cultural Navigator 7 has prepared me to live in the U.S. culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Cultural Navigator 7 increased my confidence to move to the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Cultural Navigator 7 clarified expectations about living in the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that Cultural Navigator 7 was very important for my cultural preparation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that international students need cultural preparation before they arrive to the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish I had more culture preparation before moving to the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**3. Fill in the bubble to rate the following cross-cultural preparation tools from Very Helpful to Not Helpful.**

	Very Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Not Helpful	N/A
Cultural Navigator 7	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
OISS Reading Material	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Movies/Videos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talking to Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talking to Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**4. Select all cultural preparation activities that you used for preparing to come to the U.S.:**

- Reading Internet Blogs
- Watched Movies
- Talked with Family
- Talked with Friends
- Cultural Navigator 7
- Internet
- OISS Reading Material

Other (please specify)

---

5. Please rate the following from 1 to 5, where 5 is most challenging and 1 is the least challenging: (use each number only once so that all five categories are ranked with a different number):

	1-Least Challenging	2	3	4	5-Most Challenging
Learning about U.S. culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reflecting about my culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Saying goodbye to family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Saying goodbye to friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worry of making U.S. friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Please rate the following predeparture experiences from 1 to 5, where 5 is 'experienced the most' and 1 is 'experienced the least':

	1- Experienced the Least	2	3	4	5- Experienced the Most
Sadness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anxiety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Excitement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Happiness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Appendix P

## POST-ARRIVAL UNIVERSITY GROUP SURVEY QUESTIONS

### Comparison Group Questions

1. I consent to participate in this short survey for the College of Education and the Office of International Students and Scholars.

- True  False

2. Please indicate your opinion by rating 1 to 5, where 1 represents that you strongly agree with the statement, and 5 represents that you strongly disagree with the statement:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The OISS reading material increased my cultural awareness about living in the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The OISS reading material increased my cultural awareness about my own cultural preferences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The OISS reading material has prepared me to live in the U.S. culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The OISS reading material increased my confidence to move to the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The OISS reading material clarified expectations about living in the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that the OISS reading material was very important for my cultural preparation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that international students need cultural preparation before they arrive to the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish I had more culture preparation before moving to the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**3. Fill in the bubble to rate the following cross-cultural preparation tools from Very Helpful to Not Helpful.**

	Very Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Not Helpful	N/A
Cultural Navigator 7	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
OISS Reading Material	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Movies/Videos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talking to Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talking to Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**4. Select all cultural preparation activities that you used for preparing to come to the U.S.:**

- Reading Internet Blogs
- Watched Movies
- Talked with Family
- Talked with Friends
- Cultural Navigator 7
- Internet
- OISS Reading Material

Other (please specify)

5. Please rate the following from 1 to 5, where 5 is most challenging and 1 is the least challenging: (use each number only once so that all five categories are ranked with a different number):

	1 -Least Challenging	2	3	4	5 -Most Challenging
Learning about U.S. culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reflecting about my culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Saying goodbye to family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Saying goodbye to friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worry of making U.S. friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Please rate the following predeparture experiences from 1 to 5, where 5 is 'experienced the most' and 1 is 'experienced the least':

	1 - Experienced the Least	2	3	4	5 - Experienced the Most
Sadness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anxiety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Excitement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Happiness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Appendix Q

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CERTIFICATE



University of Nevada, Reno

Office of Human Research Protection  
 218 Ross Hall / 331, Reno, Nevada 89557  
 775.327.2368 / 775.327.2369 fax  
 www.unr.edu/research-integrity

Certification of Approval for New Protocol: Social Behavioral  
 Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board  
 FWA00002306

Date: July 1, 2013  
 To: Rita M Laden, EdD College of Education  
 Copy: Tara Madden

UNR Protocol Number: 2013S121  
 Protocol Title: Chinese and Japanese Undergraduate International Students' Predeparture  
 Experience with Cultural Navigator 7  
 Sponsor Names: None

Type of Review: Expedited, Categories 6 and 7  
 Meeting/Review Date: June 27, 2013  
 Approval Period: June 27, 2013 to June 26, 2014

**This approval is for:**

Approved number of subjects: 26

Approved documents: IRB Application 06/20/13 (INV Forms), COI Assessment Technical Summary (INV Study Materials), Invite Email English (06/20/13) (INV Recruitment Materials), Cover Letter and Consent Form English (06/20/13) (INV Consent Materials), Enrollment Closed Notice (undated) (INV Recruitment Materials), OISS Cultural Preparation Materials (control group) (INV Study Materials), Letters-Weekly Prompts 1-4, 4 each for predeparture and comparison groups (06/18/13) (INV Study Materials), Schedule Interview Letter (06/18/13) (INV Study Materials), Videotape Consent Form (06/20/13) (Consent Materials), Interview Script and Questions (06/18/13) (INV Study Materials), Online versions of Post-Interview Surveys (one for each group) (MSWord ver) (INV Study Materials), Permission to use Cultural Navigator 7 (dated June 4, 2013)

The above-referenced protocol was reviewed and approved by one of UNR's Institutional Review Boards in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Federal Regulations on the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 50 and 56).

**Problems Researchers Must Report to the Research Integrity Office or IRB Staff***(to be reported as soon as possible, but within 10 business days)*

- New or additional risks: Outcomes that the principal investigator believes are unexpected, related to the research, and suggest the research may place participants or others at greater risk of harm than was previously known or recognized
- Changes to expected harms or benefits: Any report indicating the frequency or magnitude of harms or benefits may be different than initially presented to the IRB
- Privacy: Any invasion of privacy related to an individual's participation in research
- Confidentiality: Any breach of confidentiality involving research data
- FDA Changes: Any change in FDA labeling or approval for a drug, device or biologic used in a research protocol
- Immediate harm: Any change to the protocol to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to a research participant, prior to seeking IRB review and approval

- Prisoner: Any incarceration of a participant in a protocol not approved to enroll prisoners
- Sponsor: Any event that requires prompt reporting to the sponsor
- Sponsor: Any sponsor-imposed suspension for risk
- Protocol change: Any accidental or unintentional change to the IRB approved protocol that harmed participants or others, indicates participants or others may be at increased risk of harm, or has the potential to recur
- Device: Any unanticipated adverse device effect
- Department of Health: Any non-compliance identified by Department of Health audit or monitoring
- Federal agency: Any investigation or report by federal agency related to the research
- Medical license or practice changes: Any loss of license or hospital privileges by any researcher on the study
- Complaints: Any complaints that suggest participants or others may have been harmed or placed at increased risk of harm

#### **PI Responsibilities**

- Maintain an accurate and complete protocol file.
- Submit continuing projects for review and approval prior to the expiration date.
- Submit proposed changes for review and approval prior to initiation, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects. Such exceptions must be reported to the IRB at once.
- Report any unanticipated problems which may increase risks to human subjects or unanticipated adverse events to the IRB within 5 days.
- Submit a closure request 10 days after project completion to the IRB.

Reference the protocol number on all related correspondence with the IRB. If you have any questions, please contact Gwenn Snow at 775.327.2368.

#### **For Veteran's Administration research only**

VA Research: No

Flag VA Medical Record: N/A

NOTE: You are not approved to begin this research until you receive an approval letter from the VASNHCS Associate Chief of Staff for Research stating that your research has been approved by the Research and Development Committee.

## Appendix R

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

**THE AREA:** The city is a safe and beautiful with a population of approximately 450,000, with a mild, dry climate where the sun shines 300 days a year. The region is alpine and semi-arid. The city sits at the base of the Sierra Nevada mountain range; there are numerous outdoor opportunities, including rock-climbing, skiing, snowboarding, sailing, camping, hiking, fishing, and mountain-biking. Amazing Lake Tahoe is only a 40 minute drive, and there are numerous ski areas within an hour's drive – including Squaw Valley, site of the 1960 Winter Olympics!

**WEATHER:** Summers (June through mid-September) are usually hot, dry and sunny. Winters (mid-December through March) are usually cold, but clear and sunny as well. Occasional winter snow storms occur (the main source of precipitation for the mountains) and day time temperatures often remain above freezing throughout the winter season. In the summer season, temperatures range from 35°C during the days to 10°C at night (90° to 50°F), while in winter season, temperatures range from 7°C to -7°C (45°F to 20°F). Students arriving in winter should have a warm coat. Students arriving in the fall or spring should have a light jacket and a sweater.

**CLOTHING:** In the United States, especially on college campuses, most students dress comfortable and casual for classes. T-shirts and jeans or shorts are common attire. Professors and staff may dress more formally, although many dress as casually as the students. There may be occasions which require a dressier look such as a formal dinner, professional meetings, or a music recital. For such occasions, men usually wear slacks with a jacket and tie and women wear dresses or suits. The native dress of your country could be appropriate for many occasions.

**FOOD:** It is quite likely that you will have to make some adjustments in the diet to which you are accustomed. There are several supermarkets and restaurants within walking distance of campus. Citifare buses serve the campus and have many convenient stops to local stores and restaurants. Whether you live on or off campus, you are eligible to purchase a meal card for food service at the dining facilities on-campus. The meal card is economical and convenient. For more information, please contact Residential Life, Housing, and Food Service at 555-555-5555. Some students prefer to prepare their own meals. If you intend to do this, you will need to have an apartment with kitchen facilities.

**WELLNESS CENTER:** Students, faculty, staff, and their immediate family members can join the campus fitness center. Fitness center equipment includes recumbent and upright bicycles, treadmills, rowing machines, complete bodymaster circuit, 6,000 lbs. of free-weights, elliptical trainers, and hammer strength weight equipment. The swimming complex offers both a 25-yard lap pool and a competitive diving tank with one-meter and three-meter diving boards. Students passes cost \$70.00 per semester.

**COUNSELING CENTER FEE:** All students, enrolled in six credits or more, are required to pay \$35.00 fee, which goes toward the Counseling Center.

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